

Women in Horror 2013: Danielle Panabaker, Not Just One of the “GIRLS”

Written by Michael Gingold
Friday, 01 February 2013 14:54



Danielle Panabaker has been terrorized on screen by infected maniacs, killer fish and a certain hockey-masked Mr. Voorhees over the past few years, but now she's the one dispensing death in *GIRLS AGAINST BOYS*. The actress discusses her starring role in the vigilante shocker, opening today from Anchor Bay Films, in this exclusive interview.

GIRLS AGAINST BOYS, written and directed by Austin Chick, casts Panabaker as Shae, a Manhattan college student/bartender who suffers repeated emotional and physical abuse at the hands of men, including an older lover (Andrew Howard) who dumps her and a club guy (Michael Stahl-David) who rapes her. With the encouragement and accompaniment of her new friend Lu (Nicole LaLiberte), Shae rebels against the male race in ways that involve pistols and other weapons. It's a decided change of pace from her previous turns in *PIRANHA 3DD*, John Carpenter's *THE WARD* and the remakes of *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and *THE CRAZIES*.

FANGORIA: After playing a number of horror heroines, *GIRLS AGAINST BOYS* is your first genre role as the aggressor. How was that experience for you?

DANIELLE PANABAKER: It was great. What really attracted me to the role initially was that it was nice to see a woman take matters into her own hands and go through that process, and finding out what motivated Shae to take each of those steps.



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FANG: Did you make any contributions to the story or your character?

PANABAKER: I don't recall making any specific contributions. I was impressed with the film just to begin with. Austin had taken such time to create these characters and this world, so from the get-go, I was excited about the project.

FANG: It's interesting to see a male writer/director tackle a project so oriented toward female concerns and sensibilities, especially in this context.

PANABAKER: Absolutely. I remember I went back to check the cover page of the script when I first read it, to make sure it really was written by a man. I thought, "Maybe Austin could be a woman's name?" But I was impressed that he is so sensitive. He has a very European sensibility about his filmmaking, and a lot of the films he suggested I watch while working together, like LILYA 4-EVER, lent themselves to that. He has great respect for women as well.

FANG: Did he have you look at other films about female vigilantes, like THE BRAVE ONE or MS. 45?

PANABAKER: No, he didn't! It's so funny; someone else referenced MS. 45, but I am not familiar with that at all. In fact, my primary focus was more on Shae's emotional journey, rather than the revenge element.

FANG: How was it working with Nicole LaLiberte?

PANABAKER: It was great. I was so excited when Nicole was cast. I couldn't wait to meet her, and she was lovely. We hung out at her house a few times just to get to know each other, and that was very useful as the film went on, because we have such an intimate relationship in the film, and I was grateful that she was so open to working with me.

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FANG: Shae and Lu have kind of an unusual relationship, particularly given what we learn about Lu toward the end. Did you have to keep conscious of that throughout the shoot as you were working with her in character?

PANABAKER: That was probably more a part of my preparation in the beginning, rather than on a daily basis. I spent a lot of time talking to Austin about that, and I had to make a decision very early on about how I was going to view this character. As soon as I did, that informed a lot of my choices.

FANG: How about your male co-stars, some of whom you have a very antagonistic relationship with on screen?

PANABAKER: The irony is that they were all wonderful people. Andrew Howard is such a talent, and so interesting. He was lovely to work with. Michael Stahl-David was also incredible. I felt very lucky to be working with him, because he's so respectful, and we spent a lot of time working through everything so that there would be a safe working environment for us to perform in. It's a tough situation when you're shooting something like that, and I was very fortunate that he was the one I had to go through this traumatic and difficult scene with. And Liam [Aiken] was just delightful. He's so sweet and so earnest. It was a joy when he was on set.

FANG: What were your feelings about working with the guns in the film? Had you ever shot before, or did you have to go through training for it?

PANABAKER: I had shot a gun before. My aunt and uncle had taken me years ago, so I was familiar with it. But I have a deep fear of guns; it's something that scares me, and I have a special reverence for them because of that. So even though it wasn't my first time, it was scary to have a gun on set. There was a whole safety protocol about making sure it was unloaded and that sort of thing, but none of that made the scariness and power of a gun being on set go away for me.

FANG: As an independent production in New York City, was any of the filming done guerilla-style, or did you have permits for everything?

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PANABAKER: There were not permits for everything. I don't want to get anyone in trouble and tell you specifically, but I think most of the locations were obtained legally!

FANG: GIRLS AGAINST BOYS is a smaller film than the genre films you've done previously. Was there anything different about this experience?

PANABAKER: Absolutely. Everything was a little bit more run-and-gun. We were shooting a lot of pages, a lot of material every day. And there weren't a lot of hands on deck. I didn't have the luxury to relax much—not that my character or performance really offered that opportunity anyway. We were constantly moving around, all functioning on not the most sleep, but I'm really proud of the film.

FANG: What are your feelings about working with special FX on films like these?

PANABAKER: It's different! One of the challenges of working on GIRLS AGAINST BOYS was the low budget, so what helps in the final version of the movie is that everything is pretty much off-camera, and left to the viewer's imagination. It's not as gory or gruesome as other films I've been in. I do have to say that fake blood is one of my least favorite things in the world. It's so sticky. It never goes away. I don't recommend it.

FANG: Was there a lot of bloody stuff filmed for GIRLS AGAINST BOYS that didn't wind up in the film, or did you not end up shooting it in the first place?

PANABAKER: No, Austin's intention for the movie was never for it to be particularly bloody or over-the-top, as far as I understand it. What attracted me was the lack of on-camera violence. It's all implied through this tragedy, but you're never assaulted with it, which I really like.

FANG: How was your experience on PIRANHA 3DD? It seems like it must have been a pretty crazy shoot.

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PANABAKER: It was! We were in a beach town in Wilmington, NC, but the cast was really cool, and we had a good time. What can really make or break your experience as an actor is the people you're working with. Matt Bush was wonderful, and Chris Zylka was fascinating to watch on camera. David Hasselhoff was a delight, and Paul Scheer was so funny. That was really fun—the constant revolving door of people we had coming in, especially Christopher Lloyd. I think he was one of the first people I've asked for a photo with, because I was just in awe.

FANG: PIRANHA 3DD has a remarkably short running time. Did you film a lot of stuff that didn't wind up in the final version?

PANABAKER: No. I may get in trouble for saying this, but the script we shot was only 77 pages. So much material kept getting cut before we even filmed it, so quite frankly, I was amazed that they got almost 90 minutes out of it. I know they had reshoots as well, but they took a lot out before we even shot the movie.



FANG: When you did FRIDAY THE 13TH (pictured above) and THE CRAZIES, how familiar were you with the originals? Were you a fan of those films?

PANABAKER: Not familiar at all. I did not grow up watching horror films. I'm very sensitive and affected by those things. I remember watching the original FRIDAY THE 13TH right before I left to go film [the remake]. Quite frankly, I have not seen the original CRAZIES, which I really need to. Breck [Eisner, the new version's director] asked that we not watch it prior to filming.

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FANG: For someone who's not into horror, you've done quite a few of those films. Is that just the way parts have come to you, or did they offer particular challenges that you enjoyed?

PANABAKER: No, I think that's just where our market is these days. Horror and genre films are being made quite frequently, and I'm an actress who likes to work. There's also been quite a variety for me. I've been very lucky in that way. FRIDAY THE 13TH was wildly different from GIRLS AGAINST BOYS, which is drastically different from PIRANHA 3DD. So it has been quite an array and many different experiences for me, which I'm very grateful for.