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FANGORIA's FrightFest (see previous item here and go to www.fangoriafrightfest.com for more details) is nearing its debut this summer. One of the films yearning for your on-line votes to win theatrical release is the Australian DUEL-esque thriller ROAD KILL (see below for exclusive photos).

Set in the Outback, ROAD KILL (filmed as ROAD TRAIN) follows four promiscuous teenagers out on a long driving trip who run into some big-rig trouble. "On the way to their camping adventure," says director Dean Francis (pictured below), "alpha male Craig [Bob Morley] decides to impress his new girlfriend Nina [Sophie Lowe] by playing chicken with a particularly menacing road train—i.e. a f**ing huge truck—but comes off second best. Our protagonists are violently shunted off the road and their Jeep is wrecked. Nursing serious injuries, the teenagers see that the road train has stopped up ahead, and decide that approaching it for help is their best shot at survival in the scorching heat. When they get there, the road train is empty. They hear gunshots and then see a crazy man running at them with a firearm. Now their only choice is to climb aboard the road train and drive it down the highway to freedom. But the road train seems to have a mind of its own, and before long, it has stranded them in what can only be described as a hell pit. Whatever the kids do, it only seems to make their predicament worse."

The malevolent vehicle is supernaturally driven, as Francis explains: "Essentially, the road train is possessed by some kind of spirit, which makes it able to influence behavior." However, unlike CHRISTINE or MAXIMUM OVERDIVE, ROAD KILL avoids a clear-cut explanation of the vehicle's origins. "It becomes a formidable protagonist, but the film never reveals too much about the 'why' aspect of the road train's existence. We give the audience clues, but there are

multiple interpretations of how the road train came into being, what it wants and so on. I wanted the film to work as a psychological thriller as well as a supernatural one."

Francis, making his feature-length directing debut with ROAD KILL, was compelled to tackle the project by memories of his own encounters with these metal beasts. "When I read the script [by Clive Hopkins]," he recalls, "I thought of the many road trips I had taken from Sydney to Melbourne at night—a 10-hour drive. I had often been tailed very close by massive, menacing trucks, and realized that my survival was literally dependent on some fat truck driver's accelerator foot. These road trains are actually extremely threatening. It's very dangerous because of those drivers, who are up to their eyeballs in narcotics. It's like a crazed sport. So it felt like amongst the supernatural hijinx, there was a fundamental truth at play in the script."

A close relative of Francis, in fact, was involved in just such a scary situation. "My partner's mother was terrorized by two road trains one stormy night as one tailgated her from behind while the other trapped her from the front. She had to keep up with their acceleration in order not to be crushed, and couldn't overtake because she couldn't see in front of her. All this with three sleeping children on her back seat!"

Luckily, assembling the cast and shooting his low-budget chiller was a far less nerve-racking endeavor. Francis beams with pride when he speaks of the talent of his actors. A particular point of pride is Xavier Samuel (also featured in another new Aussie horror flick, THE LOVED ONES), who shot his role as Marcus before making his North American debut in the upcoming TWILIGHT SAGA: ECLIPSE. "Xavier had 'movie star' written all over him the minute he walked into my casting room," the director recalls. "When he told me after wrap that he was trying out for TWILIGHT, we all had no doubt he'd get the role—he was extremely thorough on ROAD KILL, a real perfectionist, great in rehearsal and as a result gives a great performance. Xavier is the real deal, and no doubt he'll be on our screens for many years to come. He's also the perfect sexy vampire!"

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