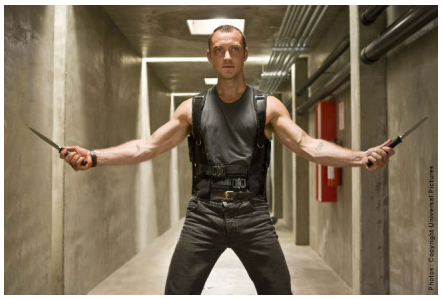
Eric Garcia is the author of the ANONYMOUS REX series, MATCHSTICK MEN and CASSANDRA FRENCH'S FINISHING SCHOOL FOR BOYS. His latest work, REPO MEN, was initially published as THE REPOSSESSION MAMBO last year, but was retitled and rereleased in March to coincide with Universal Pictures' film adaptation hitting theaters March 19.

Directed by Miguel Sapochnick, the movie is set in a near future where artificial organs can be bought on credit, but they can also be taken back…by the Repo Men. Jude Law and Forest Whitaker play Remy and Jake, two of the best Repo Men in the business. But after a job goes wrong, Remy wakes up with an artificial heart, and when he can no longer make his payments, the former Repo Man finds himself on the run.



In this first portion of Fango's chat with Garcia, the writer discusses the story's inception and rather long and unlikely development into a script. "REPO MEN started out as a short story in the late '90s when I was just out of college and thinking, 'I'm gonna make a living writing short stories,' which, after the '50s, wasn't really possible," Garcia laughs. "The story was called 'The Telltale Pancreas.' OK, so that isn't the most original title, but when you take from Edgar Allan Poe, it's legitimate. Anyway, it had the same basic idea [as the eventual book]: The main character is a repossessor of artificial organs who has this artificial heart, which he can hear ticking away in his chest. It reminds him that he's in the same situation as the people he has been hunting down for so long, and that became the basic concept for the book and then the movie.

"When I originally finished the book, ANONYMOUS REX and CASUAL REX had already been published, and so I sent MAMBO to my agent. Her response was, 'It's a good concept, but you have to work on this.' I was on a very big Vonnegut kick when I wrote it: Three sentences here,

two paragraphs there, four pages here, then back to another sentence. It jumped around thematically. The story didn't necessarily follow one timeline. It went all around the lead character's life, which lends to the idea of who he is: He's a guy who has a very difficult time seeing the big picture. It's all about the constituent parts. But my agent said, 'I can't place this anywhere [as it is],' so I showed the book to some friends and got their feedback."

One of those friends was his REPO MEN screenwriting partner Garrett Lerner. "Garrett and I get along real well, and we're both writers and originally from Florida. We actually grew up not far from each other, but we didn't know each other and went to different high schools," Garcia notes. "Anyway, I gave the book to Garrett, whom I respect as a writer, and he said, 'This would make an amazing movie.' "

The two decided to collaborate on a REPO MEN script, but there was one minor hitch. "Garrett has a writing partner, Russel Friend, so I was like the affair!" Garcia chuckles. "I was the other woman whom Garrett was going off and doing this other thing with. But Russel did give his blessing, probably because he thought, 'These guys are never going to get a movie made about a guy who rips organs out of people!' "

By summer 2002, Garcia and Lerner had come up with the first draft of the script. "We went out with it, not in a big, splashy spec way, but we gave it to a couple of producers who we knew and thought might be interested. And they were NOT," Garcia grins. "They said, 'This is cool, and the writing is really good, but it's too weird and no one's ever going to make this.' But there was one producer, Valerie Dean, who saw the potential in it and really helped us. So we started rewriting the script, and after the course of two years, doing other gigs in the meantime off and on, Valerie hooked us up with Miguel. She showed us the short he wrote and directed, 'The Dreamer,' and it was amazing. That was the thing that made us say, 'Visually, this is the world that we want to live in, and this is the guy who can do it.'

“So we met with Miguel and got along really well and realized we all had the same sort of screwed-up minds and thought the same really dark stuff was funny, which is usually a good sign. And then it was ANOTHER couple of years of rewrites. I have all these different versions of the script on my computer: VALERIE DEAN REWRITE #1, VALERIE DEAN REWRITE #2, MIGUEL SAPOCHNIK REWRITE #1, MIGUEL SAPOCHNIK REWRITE #8. That’s what happens in movies—even before production, you rewrite the script 30, 40 times.”

Flash-forward to 2006, when Law agreed to join the project. “I think he and Miguel share the same agency, and they got Jude to read the script and he signed on,” Garcia recalls. “Obviously, once you get a star to sign on, you get a little more play in town. Then we got involved with Scott Stuber, our producer, and Jeff Kirschenbaum, who was our exec at Universal. They really got the script and pushed it to Universal and we made the movie—with 80 million more rewrites! We started shooting REPO MEN in 2007, and I wrote the short story in 1997, so it took 13 years from short story to hitting the screen. That’s a looooong time.

“And that’s the crazy thing about this business, the Hollywood side—you need to have so many things going on. I’m constantly working on multiple projects because one out of every seven, if you’re LUCKY, will become something. In the meantime, you have to keep pushing for absolutely everything, because the more things you juggle, the more chances you have, but the crazier your life becomes and the more attached you get to every single thing. When you’ve been juggling something for 10 years, you really don’t want to drop it. It has that much more emotional weight. I have other projects that I’ve been messing with almost as long, so we’ll see where they go.”

Although Garcia didn’t adapt his novels MATCHSTICK MEN and ANONYMOUS REX, REPO MEN wasn’t his first stab at screenwriting. “It’s just the first one that’s gone to fruition that I’ve gotten credit on,” he says. “MATCHSTICK MEN [based on Garcia’s book] was written by Nicholas and Ted Griffin. I loved the job that they did. I’m a fan of the film. The book is similar to the movie in many ways, but I agree with the stuff that they changed. I learned a lot from that

adaptation, in terms of adapting my own stuff. My very first adaptation of my own stuff was doing ANONYMOUS REX as a TV movie for the Syfy Channel. I did the first couple of drafts on that, which was meant to be a pilot. ANONYMOUS REX was a long process, too. That took five years to get done, which is quite long for TV.

“So I did two or three drafts on ANONYMOUS REX, and at that time I was definitely the prototypical novelist who was adapting his own stuff. Even though I knew how to write and I had done screenwriting before, I had never adapted my own stuff and was way too precious about the material. I was writing a really literal adaptation, which is what many novelists end up doing. So they brought in a showrunner, Joe Menosky, who had been a STAR TREK guy. Joe’s fantastic and such a good person, and he said, ‘Your ANONYMOUS REX adaptation is well written, but it isn’t a proper pilot. You should really do CASUAL REX, the second book in the series.’ So Joe came in and rewrote everything and did a great job. It wasn’t his fault that REX fell down; it was a number of other issues. But anyway, the point being is that it wasn’t my first time writing a script, but this was the first time getting it RIGHT. We had to do multiple things to get it to that point. Each script was a new lesson.”

Look for Part Two of Fango’s chat with Garcia at Fangoria.com later this week, and be sure to check out FANGORIA #292 (on sale this month) for more REPO MEN coverage.

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