

Filmmaker talks “BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW”

Written by Max Weinstein
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By 1984, *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* had definitively drawn the clear (now often clichéd) delineation between dreams and nightmares. But what of the year that preceded it? In the 1983 of writer/director Panos Cosmatos' *BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW*, any pre-existing dichotomy of the subconscious is blurred and obscured (if it had at all existed to begin with). Fango spoke with Cosmatos about his feature debut, a vibrant hallucinogenic hybrid with twinges of all horrific sorts, which recently came off its premiere stint at the Tribeca Film Festival.

The design of Cosmatos' contemplative thriller first took root in deep-seated personal sentiment: “[*BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW*] was something that had been simmering in my mind for many years in various forms, but I was driven to look more intensely at my past after the death of my father [*RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II* director George Pan Cosmatos],” he tells Fango. “This is the shape it ended up being born in. I wrote the early drafts in a pretty stream-of-consciousness, collage-based way. Whatever felt right to me, I allowed into the script. Then I reshaped and fine-tuned it in later drafts. The movie is kind of a kaleidoscope of memories, emotions and fascinations, past and present.”



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Aboria, RAINBOW’s dystopian test facility, acts as the nucleus that foregrounds said present moments through Cosmatos’ ominous, experimental approach. “One of my primary goals was for the film to be a fluid audiovisual experience,” he explains. “A kind of immersive dreamscape. Every decision I made had that goal in mind, ultimately. I think of movies as total sensory experiences. Not just sound and vision, but also the sense memories they can trigger like emotions, smells and flavors. The texture and feeling of a movie is very important to me.”

As for pulling from the past, the decision for the era in which to set his journey stemmed from a variety of instincts—some nostalgic, others ironic. “1983 is at the core of the time period in my past that inspired this film,” Cosmatos says. “It’s also the year before the more iconic and cited year of 1984, which makes me laugh. It’s one less than 11.”

1983 additionally offered a window with which to channel Barry Nyle (played by HELLRAISER: HELLSEEKER’s Michael Rogers)—RAINBOW’s deviant egomaniac, and a surrealist extension of vintage horror icons from whom the film’s final act takes its slash-happy cues. “I was looking for a glimmer of the unexpected,” Cosmatos says of Rogers’ casting. “When I was a kid, I suffered from chronic nightmares of being pursued by Jason, Freddy and Leatherface, so as I was writing, those memories were among the things that were on my mind.”

Cosmatos is keeping the details of his follow-up project as cloaked in ambiguity as the labyrinths of RAINBOW. Quoting the late Jean Cocteau, he describes the creative process that might fuel his next as “a petrified fountain of thought.” In the meantime, he’ll let his musical allusions do the talking. “If this movie is a Pink Floyd album,” he says, “the next one might be a cinematic Slayer record.”

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