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John Skipp has made the jump from co-authoring best-selling horror novels and editing acclaimed anthologies to launching his feature directorial debut, ROSE, and just launched a second Kickstarter campaign to help finance it. The multihyphenate gave us some exclusive comments and pics from the shooting thus far to go with the announcement.

The title character of the 3D horror/musical ROSE, played by Chase McKenna, is a survivor of a zombie apocalypse (and a stay in a mental institution) who stages an on-line/cable-access variety puppet show to keep spirits up as what’s left of humanity battles the undead; go here for details on how to contribute. As we previously reported here, Skipp first took to the crowd-sourcing Kickstarter site earlier this year, and while he and his crew attracted a good-sized following, “We didn’t get anywhere near close [to our goal],” he tells Fango with a laugh. “But what we did was, we alerted a huge amount of people to the project. One of the saddest things is that we didn’t get the viral video edited and on-line until the last week of the campaign. And all of a sudden, a lot of people were interested, but we were out of time. So when the clock ran down, we just told everybody that we’d be back in a little bit with a substantially reduced asking price.”

Skipp’s team also includes producer Jane Hamilton (whose credits include PARASOMNIA), NEVER SLEEP AGAIN’s Andrew Kasch as editor/associate producer and busy makeup FX creator Robert Hall and his Almost Human gang. Together, they’re aiming to present a fresh vision amidst the shuffling mobs of recent undead flicks. “What’s really interesting about zombies to me,” Skipp (pictured below with McKenna and friends) notes, “is that they’re us with all the soul sucked out, all the intelligence, all the humor, all the passion, all the joy—everything except for this lumbering, walking eating machine that used to be someone you knew. To me, that’s the horror at the heart of it, when somebody you love isn’t in there anymore and they’re just rotting and want to eat you—and if they bite or scratch you, you’re going to turn into one of them. It’s such a grim scenario. It doesn’t have the sexiness of vampires or the unbridled id of werewolves—it occupies this very terrestrial, matter-of-fact and horrible reality.

“I think that shit can be very powerful,” he continues. “I still actively love [zombies], and they haven’t lost any luster for me. Because I don’t feel the need to read or watch every single zombie story that comes down the pike—the same way I can listen to Steve Miller play ‘Fly Like an Eagle’ and not hate it because I don’t listen to classic rock radio, so I only hear it once a year. That makes it easy not to get sick of it. And I believe there is still very interesting territory to play in, [even though] everybody and their brother is doing it—they’re strip-mining the mountain, but there’s still a lot of good ore in there.”

Skipp understands this better than most because of the hours he’s logged in zombie fiction. Between editing his “massive” anthologies, the writer has also found a new collaborative partner in Cody Goodfellow, with whom he’s penned the zombie novels SPORE and JAKE’S WAKE for Leisure Books. One of the forefellows of “bizarro” fiction, Goodfellow knows zombies, and knows weirdness even better. And since Skipp has spent much of his literary time in worlds right out of a Basil Woolverton cartoon, their match proved to made in heaven (or hell).

Viral videos featuring the Rose character have already spurred further interest in the project, and should the second Kickstarter campaign realize everyone’s dreams, Skipp’s hope is to go into production on ROSE “between six weeks to two months later. We’ve been doing incredible amounts of preproduction on this thing; almost all of the music has been recorded and the puppets are being built as we speak. It’s largely cast. My DP is breaking down the shots. We’re saddled up and ready to roll. There are more 3D screens than there are movies to accommodate them. And we’ve got a stereo camera, so we will have both a 3D and a 2D cut that will be identical except for the effect. We have a lot of options there.”

While eager zombie fans across the world prepare to open their Paypal accounts, Skipp is focusing on keeping ROSE upright while returning to his very active fiction career, working with the “bizarros” at Eraserhead Press and writing and editing for various publishing houses. “When I went away from that, it was because it was no longer fun and I had a lot of stuff to work out. But when I came back, I was as enthusiastic as ever, and there’s nothing that I’d rather be doing. I rekindled my own capacity for joy and I let it spill out onto everything. I’m writing, I’m making films and I’m getting to introduce the world to new and classic work. And I’m having a blast, man.” Read more about ROSE and Skipp in Fango #306, on sale in August.