

John Skipp Sticks “SICK CHICK FLICKS”

Written by Vivienne Vaughn
Thursday, 15 November 2012 15:52



Author-turned-filmmaker—in addition to editor, actor, musician and screenwriter—John Skipp (pictured) has a history of being entrenched in the horror genre, and this remains true now more than ever.

Well-known for his work in the splatterpunk subgenre, having collaborated on many such novels in the '80s with fellow author Craig Spector, he is also famous amongst horror-lit fans for editing the 1989 anthology *BOOK OF THE DEAD*. In addition, he helped dream up the story for *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5: THE DREAM CHILD* and even appeared as a corpse in Clive Barker's *NIGHTBREED*.

Skipp has now entered an era that he describes as “possibly the most intense time of my entire weird career.” While continuing to toil away on the zombie/puppet musical *ROSE* (which he last discussed with us [here](#)), he recently teamed up with filmmaker Andrew Kasch. Their first short, *STAY AT HOME DAD* (written by Cody Goodfellow), is, as Skipp puts it, currently “splaying its awesome Lovecraftian man-boobs across the festival circuit,” and took the Bronze Audience award at Montreal's Fantasia international film festival.



Skipp also has three books out this fall, including *PSYCHOS* (published by Black Dog & Leventhal), an anthology containing work by Thomas Harris, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Neil Gaiman, Jack Ketchum, Joe R. Lansdale and many others; *THE DARK*, a novel by Scott Bradley and Peter Giglio, published by Skipp's Ravenous Shadows company; and *SICK CHICK FLICKS*, a “twisted triple bill of fem-o-centric horror screenplays” written by Skipp and published by Cemetery Dance, which he discusses with *FANGORIA* below.

FANGORIA: What inspired you to write three horror scripts centered on strong female

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protagonists?

JOHN SKIPP: I’ve always loved writing interesting characters for women, because women are interesting, and I’m a big fan [*laughs*]. But when I got to Hollywood, and started meeting incredible actresses who brought *so much more* talent and potential to the table than the roles they were typically offered, it kind of turned into a personal crusade. *THE LEGEND OF HONEY LOVE* sprang almost entirely from making friends with Emily Procter, in the years just before she became America’s forensic sweetheart on *CSI: MIAMI*. She was such a quick-witted, strong-willed, kind-hearted, luminous kick-ass beauty that it made me want to write characters who were at least half as much fun to be around as she was. Both Honey and Delilah [from *AFTERPARTY*] were inspired by her. Two completely different characters—neither of them her—but both roles that I knew she could totally kill.

Same with *ROSE*, which was inspired by a fantastic comedienne named Rachel Arieff, and then handed over to Chase McKenna, the astonishing actress who now completely inhabits the role. As I transition from novelist to filmmaker, one of my biggest goals is to create as many amazing parts for women as I can, thereby leaving only 50 percent of the amazing ones for men. I hope that doesn’t sound too crazy.

FANG: What were your influences for these screenplays? They’re quite unlike anything else we’ve read—or seen!

SKIPP: Thanks! These are three of my favorite stories that never wound up as novels. I just love how they read as scripts, and would much rather make the films than write the books. So I eventually went, “F**k it! Let’s do it as a book of screenplays!” And fortunately, Cemetery Dance agreed.

AFTERPARTY was inspired by an amazing Malibu estate I location-scouted for another project altogether. From the moment we drove through the gate, the place just knocked me out, and the entire story tracks my walking tour of the mansion and grounds, pretty much in the order they appeared. I spent three hours exploring every inch of the place, taking copious notes, going, “Man, this place is soooooo haunted.” [*Laughs*]

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By the time I got home, the story was pouring out of me, almost too fast to catch. I had it all laid out within 48 hours, and two months later, I had a polished first draft that was 89 percent of what you see in the book. An incredibly pure creative experience, where the location just stepped up and said, “Here’s my story. Go.”

On the other hand: This past New Year’s Eve, I watched Peter Jackson’s MEET THE FEEBLES and DEAD ALIVE as a double bill for the first time since the early ’90s, when I used to screen those puppies in my living room for parties all the time. And as my friend and I were halfway into DEAD ALIVE—’cause I always do FEEBLES first—I suddenly went, “Jesus Christ! You put these two movies together, and that’s the hole that ROSE fell out of! Puppets and zombies. Wow.” Seriously, I had never put that entirely obvious connection together.

FANG: AFTERPARTY in particular has a very unique storyline. Can you expand upon your inspiration for the dichotomy between the two afterlives, as well as the moral-fable element of the story? You mention THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD in the script—was this an inspiration as well?

SKIPP: Not to give too much away or anything, but yeah: As THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD suggests, death is a) not the end, and b) not necessarily the worst thing that can happen. Which is to say, there are things worse than death. I know that totally f**ks with the standard “Oh, no! Don’t kill me!” default position on why horror is scary; I’m not saying dying isn’t scary, ’cause it totally is. But both AFTERPARTY and THE LEGEND OF HONEY LOVE—and actually ROSE, when you get down to it—are all way more concerned with why life matters than with how horrible it is to get killed. And that might be the biggest point of distinction between these stories and most other horror stories making the rounds right now. That said: These scripts are all crawling with horrible death. So it ain’t like I’m slacking off on the hardcore horror end.

FANG: In the AFTERPARTY afterword, Cody Goodfellow compares that script to GHOST, but with “the rules radically changed up.”

SKIPP: GHOST and JACOB’S LADDER were a one-two punch of mainstream success and groundbreaking imagination, respectively, both penned by Bruce Joel Rubin. Both movies I loved, not just because they were great, but also because they surfed the same kinds of waves I’m always surfing. But was I consciously trying to riff on GHOST? No. I was just trying to write a cool ghost movie from the inside.

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FANG: You’ve mentioned before that ROSE was crowd-funded; can you talk a bit about how you were able to get this film financed?

SKIPP: I wish I could announce that ROSE is fully financed. But the successful \$20,000 Kickstarter campaign we threw allowed us to shoot enough zombie and puppet action to attract the closing funds we need. And we’re so close it’s ridiculous. There’s even talk of a TV series, which I would very much encourage.

FANG: ROSE has a lot of surrealistic elements. What are your plans to capture this on camera? Are you primarily using practical FX or CGI?

SKIPP: I’d say the ratio is 95 percent practical, with just a bit of CG icing on the cake. When you’ve got puppets and zombies this cool, you wanna play with ’em by hand [*laughs*].

FANG: Are there plans to make AFTERPARTY or HONEY LOVE into films yet? And if so, will you be producing/directing or passing them over to someone else’s hands?

SKIPP: Andrew and I are prepping a whole slate of films, most definitely including those two. That’s the great thing about having a large body of work; we are not short on material. Right now, the focus is on ROSE and THE LONG LAST CALL, my strip-club horror story for which we just shot an awesome trailer—I wish we could show you guys. But yes, we intend to make those films. And hopefully, SICK CHICK FLICKS will goose that process.