

## “FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME”: Tiffany Shepis Plays Doctor, Part One

Written by Tony Timpone

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Best known for a plethora of low-budget direct-to-video scare flicks, scream queen Tiffany Shepis (NYMPHA, NIGHTMARE MAN, THE GHOULS, TROMEO & JULIET, etc.) has now turned a corner in her career where she finds her name attached to genre films of growing quality and intelligence. Movies like the dark drama RULE OF THREE (see feature [here](#)), the Butcher Brothers' 2010 festival hit THE VIOLENT KIND and this year's Arizona-lensed THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME. Shepis spoke to Fango about (and we got exclusive pics from) the latter mad-scientist tale, written and directed by THE GREAT AMERICAN SNUFF FILM's Sean Tretta.

**FANGORIA:** Tell us what THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME is about, and the character you play.

**TIFFANY SHEPIS:** I play Dr. Elizabeth Barnes, who's a molecular biologist. The story involves a group of researchers doing illegal stem-cell research. They were all hired by a guy named Dr. Walton, played by Ed Lauter, to conduct research to see if they can create a regenerative healing serum. And they do, and all hell breaks loose! Kind of that deal of, "Just because you can do it doesn't mean you should." Like people having 16 babies [ *laughs*].



**FANG:** What appealed to you about your character?

**SHEPIS:** She's so different. As far as the B-movie scream-queen world goes, it's not often that you get really interesting characters beyond the college coeds or chicks screaming through the

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woods. So reading the script, it was really smart and very different, and the fact that I had to look up words as I was reading—it felt like, “Oh, shit, this is a challenge.” [ *Laughs*] So it was a role that was impossible to turn down.

**FANG:** Considering the ongoing stem-cell debate, the film is certainly timely.

**SHEPIS:** Absolutely. It’s a huge debate, and I see both sides of it. I certainly wouldn’t want to get into a whole political tract about it. It’s stuff that people deal with every day, whether you read the newspapers or not; everybody has a sick family member whom they would love to have a cure for. This is a thinking man’s horror film. A lot of people can associate with it. We don’t know that many people who have died of good health, so [ *laughs*] everybody can go, “Wow, shit, what if they could do that? Grandpa Fred might still be around.” Except if they turn into the character in our movie... [ *Laughs* ] Then Fred wouldn’t be looking too good.

**FANG:** Besides Mary Shelley’s FRANKENSTEIN, the movie also owes a debt to RE-ANIMATOR, minus the humor.

**SHEPIS:** Yes, very much. Sean definitely paid homage to both. He’s obviously a big fan of Mary Shelley and the original FRANKENSTEIN, and RE-ANIMATOR as well. But there’s definitely not any campiness. There’s certainly some humor thrown into it, but it’s very much a serious movie. I’m curious to see how my fans will look at it compared to THE HAZING or ABOMINABLE, which are just kind of fun, as opposed to this one. Because it’s definitely more on the darker side, more like a medical drama.

**FANG:** You’ve have some of the best dramatic moments of your career in THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME, especially your sparring with Dr. Travelle (Patti Tindall).

**SHEPIS:** Oh yeah, with Patti. That chick, she’s mean! She’s not mean in real life, but that character, she scared the friggin’ shit out of me! [ *Laughs*] Yeah, there were these huge medical-spiel monologues I had to get down. So the movie was nerve-wracking in itself, knowing that I actually had to go out in this thing and know the lines, but also pretend to know what I was talking about. [Our characters] definitely have some all-out battles over whether

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we're going in the right direction with our research.



**FANG:** You're a producer on the movie. What did that involve?

**SHEPIS:** Most of the producing really went to Dustin Lowry, so I really can't take too much credit for anything. It was just nice to have ideas that people actually listened to. I didn't do much more than recommend a bunch of people and see what we could pull together, and kind of giving more producing on the back-end side of helping them find distributors, getting promotion and see where we could go with it next—film festivals, etc. So I didn't do as much hands-on in the initial production as I am *now* for it.

**FANG:** THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME is much better than the usual direct-to-video movie, and definitely a significant step for you career-wise.

**SHEPIS:** Thank you.

**FANG:** What's the current distribution status?

**SHEPIS:** American World Pictures is the sales agent, and they've been taking it to every festival like crazy. And they've been selling it like hotcakes in foreign countries, and they're shopping right now for a U.S. distributor. But the movie really stands on its own, and put into the right hands, it'll have a decent release. We've showed it at a handful of festivals, and the response has been overwhelmingly good. People really enjoyed it; it wasn't one of those things where people were getting popcorn. Once those people sat down to watch that movie, they were glued. And they asked questions after, which was cool to actually have made a

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thought-provoking movie [ *laughs*], where people have questions about it and want to know how things were done by Sean on a very minimal budget. The movie really showcases his talent as a director. If you've seen any of his previous stuff, things were made for a few thousand dollars that got pretty decent distribution, he gets letters about them every day. So there's gotta be some talent there [ *laughs*].

**FANG:** He also went back to the original Shelley novel, including the very talkative creature.

**SHEPIS:** Absolutely. Those are more Sean questions as to why he did it the way he did. Certainly, it's not a movie where if you aren't a fan of Mary Shelley or even FRANKENSTEIN, it's irrelevant. You can still enjoy FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME on its own. But if you happen to have read the original and then see this, you'll go, "Oh, all right. Somebody did a new little spin on this, and they did it justice." A lot of people say that once you attach Mary Shelley's name, you pigeonhole yourself into a genre with only a certain amount of fans, but it goes across the board, fan or not.

**FANG:** I'm also glad that RULE OF THREE finally came out. It's a great sleeper and another strong showcase for your talent.

**SHEPIS:** Thank you. I really love that movie; they did such a good job with it. It's one of those weird, dark, not necessarily a horror film, kind of in the vein of MEMENTO, with it not being linear. It's just a cool little movie. That's another one we premiered with Fango in LA, and it had a great response in every festival it played after that. It had an amazing response, and it was just one of those films where people kept saying, "I can't wait till it comes out on DVD! When's it coming out?" It's the same thing with FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME; the fan response has been overwhelmingly positive. And that's rare to see when you have two movies that don't necessarily cross genres, but they're not straight genre-specific. And it was cool to see that people are willing to embrace a bit of a change. Certainly in my work, when it's like, "Oh, really? You're not naked in this one, and you wear scrubs?" [ *Laughs*] And it's so hard to make scrubs flattering, let me tell you!

**TO BE CONTINUED**

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