

How to Walk the “MUTILATION MILE”

Written by Tony Timpone

Friday, 14 January 2011 10:44



Underground cinefans know filmmaker Ron Atkins for such gritty, microbudget independent efforts as EYES OF THE CHAMELEON (to be rereleased by Troma this spring on DVD), DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL and two SCHIZOPHRENIAC movies, among other homegrown bloodbaths. Last December saw the release of MUTILATION MILE (see item [here](#)), a true-crime-inspired tale of illegal narcotics and familial revenge, which Atkins wrote and directed in his home city of Las Vegas. The indie auteur spoke to Fango and passed on some exclusive pics from his modern grindhouse effort.

FANGORIA: What inspired this real-life story, and how did you first learn about it?

RON ATKINS: This is stuff that happens every day. So I was really influenced by the drug violence in Vegas, a lot of it going on unnoticed all the time. What I did was lace together a bunch of news I acquired from a clipping here or archived news item there over the years about drugs and the people who deal with them, along with the rampant violence, and turned it into a movie. In my story, the main thing that sets up the violence is the drugs. So MUTILATION MILE is a story of vengeance caused by drugs.

FANG: How close to the actual stories is it?

ATKINS: Well, none of the names are real, but the story has a lot of truth to it. Turn on the news every once in a while and you will see real-life DeGrasso brothers. I mean, look what's going on around the border of California and Mexico! All the situations in MUTILATION MILE happened at one time or another. The names and places may have been changed, but they happened.



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FANG: How did you raise the money?

ATKINS: My wife Jennifer and I self-financed MUTILATION MILE with revenue we made from other films I have done, along with our friend Rebecca Bruns, who came in as an executive producer.

FANG: What made you decide to self-distribute?

ATKINS: I had a lot of offers, but none that I felt would do our pockets right. So I got together with my wife and Rebecca and we decided it was in our best interest to self-release through my company, Atkins Entertainment. But who knows? If there is a good offer, I could still bite.



FANG: Is Vegas still your home base, and do you have everything you need at your disposal while shooting there?

ATKINS: Well, I'm pretty self-contained. Over the years, I have collected enough gear to pretty much do whatever I need to do. I do most of the editing in-house, and I have my 2nd-unit editor, Paul Kessin, who also lives in Vegas.

FANG: How violent did you decide to make the story?

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ATKINS: MUTILATION MILE would have received an NC-17 rating for violence by the MPAA if I decided to get it rated. It's about as violent as you're going to get, but I don't shove it down your throat; every second does not consist of bloodshed. I wanted to tell a good story first. However, when the violence does come, it comes fast, and you're going to see some stuff you have never seen in a film. I don't turn away from the gore, I let you see it for what it is.



FANG: What '70s-style aesthetic did you strive to emulate, and how did you achieve it?

ATKINS: I wanted to take MUTILATION MILE and turn it into THE WILD BUNCH. Open things up. For instance, the beginning plays like a Western in the sense of scope. It is shot real wide and open, making the landscape a character of the film. I was also going for that gritty feel of MEAN STREETS or TAXI DRIVER, mean and dirty, where the characters feel like the real deal. There is nothing pretty about the DeGrasso brothers. Nothing was candy-coated, that's for sure. I would let the camera roll, pull back, keep things simple and let the story play out without a lot of cuts. In a lot of films made today, you cannot even see what's going on because the cuts are so damn quick or the camera is too close to the action. I believe MUTILATION MILE has that '70s exploitation feel, but make no mistake, it is a film for a whole new generation.

FANG: After many years in the indie arena, has making movies gotten any easier for you?

ATKINS: The business side can be a pain, for sure. I mean, it's always hard to find the cash to make a film, but as far as the making itself, I'm learning something new every time I do another movie. I'm learning more and more about what to do and what not to do. So each film I make is only going to get bigger and better.

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FANG: What's next for you?

ATKINS: I've got a lot on my plate. I have two films I just put in the can that will be ready for DVD release soon: *THE CUCKOO CLOCKS OF HELL*, starring Jim VanBebber and John Giancaspro. That film has my character Harry Russo from the *SCHIZOPHRENIAC/NECROMANIAC* series running into the ghost of Terry Hawkins from *LAST HOUSE ON DEAD END STREET* in a postapocalyptic Las Vegas. This is a nice little nod to late great filmmaker and friend Roger Watkins. I have kept *THE CUCKOO CLOCKS OF HELL* pretty hush-hush. I've been editing that film for about three years now. I also have *DEATH RATTLE-LSD*, a psychological horror film that takes you into religion, drugs, moviemaking and madness. I will release all these films through Atkins Entertainment this year. I'm also working on a script for a psychological Western drama called *GONE WEST FOR THE WINTER* that will star VanBebber, [*I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE*'s] Camille Keaton, and I'm hoping to get Edwin Neal and a few more great actors I can't name right now.

FANG: What advice would you give to like-minded guerrilla filmmakers?

ATKINS: Advice is hard. Filmmaking is a rough business where you have to make your own mistakes because that's how you learn. It's a long haul with a lot of disappointment, so stay strong and be ready for it. You have to become more of a businessman nowadays, but the main thing is be positive and try your best to do something original and keep pushing forward, no matter how many doubters you get.

Find out more about Atkins and *MUTILATION MILE* [here](#) and [here](#).

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