

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau  
Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---



*Independent horror filmmaker David DeCoteau recently cast actor/magician R.J. Cantu in his film SNOW WHITE: DEADLY SUMMER, and took the opportunity to chat with the actor for Fango about his role on the hit MTV series DEATH VALLEY, on which he plays Rico, a hot Latin vampire.*

**FANGORIA:** How did you get hooked up with DEATH VALLEY?

**R.J. CANTU:** It was one of those things that just came out of the blue. I read the script, and as an actor in Hollywood you read so much material that you see a lot of recycled work. When I read DEATH VALLEY, it was something fresh and unique, and I just wanted to be part of it. So I went in for a read, and in a few days got the call from my agent and the rest is history.



**FANG:** You booked it on one audition?

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau

Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---

**CANTU:** Luckily enough, yes; I was really shocked myself. I guess it was just the right connection. You know, there are certain characters you read and just know you can connect with. Rico is definitely a guy I knew exactly how to play and exactly the direction I wanted to go with him. I guess it just worked, and I was so thankful it did.

**FANG:** You came in to audition for one of my previous movies, and I saw you had already had a recurring role on THE SECRET LIFE OF THE AMERICAN TEENAGER, and I thought, “Why is he submitting? He’s already on a hit ABC Family show.” Why would you want to be in a low-budget horror movie?

**CANTU:** I definitely wanted to branch off and try to look at more lead characters. I felt when I read the script and the breakdown that this was a good opportunity to read for the lead for the first time. And I’d always wanted to do a horror film!

**FANG:** And you were great. We couldn’t make it work on that movie, but we kept in touch, and I remember when you showed me your audition tape for DEATH VALLEY, I saw a really cool, dark, likable, hot character. On SECRET LIFE you were this sweet, innocent guy, but there I saw your dark side, and I was so impressed.

**CANTU:** As an actor, you want to go in different directions, and Rico is just that—a darker character I hadn’t had a chance to play. Getting to work with this role has been such a blast, and working with [executive producers] Eric Weinberg and Julie and Austin Reading has been really fun. That’s the thing; with SECRET LIFE, you know what direction [creator] Brenda Hampton was aiming for; it was definitely that ABC Family feel. But with MTV you can go a little bit edgier and darker. That was a fun side to tap into with Rico, and try a different direction with vampires. A lot has been done with TRUE BLOOD and TWILIGHT. It was just about what I could bring differently to this character, and hopefully the audience would connect to that.

**FANG:** How is making DEATH VALLEY different from SECRET LIFE?

**CANTU:** Well, with SECRET LIFE, it’s definitely doing what’s there in the script. But with DEATH VALLEY, it’s a matter of finding the comedy side as well as the horror side, which can be a little tricky with television. It’s been done in films, but I’ve never seen it done on TV before. So it’s tricky to find the right balance. With SECRET LIFE, you follow what the writer has given

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau

Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---

you; on DEATH VALLEY, we have more freedom. You know you can come on set with your ideas. You come with what you want to give to the character, and the rest is just playing and having fun.



**FANG:** The show definitely has horrific moments; there are a lot of people being shot in the head and blood and gore. Yet you have scenes with Brian Callen that are hilarious. How do you find the appropriate balance? Which side are they concerned with more—the humor or the horror?

**CANTU:** Definitely both sides; we do a lot of different takes of each. We know in the end that the editor will do justice to it. We get great direction and just have to run with that. So we try all different takes and do it different ways. That's one of things I love about this show: One minute you've got the blood and guts and the edgy side, and the next there's a hilarious comedy bit. MTV just keeps reinventing itself; first with the JACKASS series and the whole reality-show thing, and now this is one of the top shows in its time slot. You never know what's going to work; we were just trying new things and hoping the audience would enjoy it. MTV has been so good about letting us do what we do. Sometimes, people from the network would show up on set and just be so excited to see what we were doing. Because we were breaking new ground with this show, they just let us do our thing. I know [creator/executive producer] Spider One had a certain vision for the show, and we all just wanted to do it justice as much as we could.

**FANG:** Tell us a little bit about your co-stars. Is there a particular actor you have a connection with who's really funny? Or do you connect more with your leading ladies? 'Cause there are a lot of scenes with really hot girls...

**CANTU:** Oh, it was absolutely horrible [*laughs*]; I called my agent a couple of times: “I need to

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau  
Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---

get off this set. Rico is kissing way too many chicks [laughs

]!” We definitely wanted to go edgier with Rico; we wanted him to be a little sexier. Working with Caity Lotz and the other cast, I’ve learned so much. Caity is such a new, fresh face for TV, and she does an amazing job. Bryan Callen has comedic timing that’s hilarious, and the relationships between Charlie Sanders and Bryce Johnson, and Tania Raymonde and Texas Battle, are the best.

**FANG:** What has been your favorite scene to shoot so far?

**CANTU:** I really enjoyed the turning scene. Rico transforms a girl named Claire into a vamp, and doing that, I knew it was going to be something different for television. Because here’s the thing about vampires: There’s a whole exotic side that I love about it. There’s something really cool and exotic about a girl letting a stranger in to take control and manipulate her, and that really excited me about this scene. Because this was the first time Rico was going to showcase his victim to everyone at the party. If you haven’t seen that episode, it’s very funny, edgy and sexy. That really got me excited when I read that script.



**FANG:** The show seems very freeform. Do you follow what’s written exactly, or do they encourage you to go off script?

**CANTU:** It’s a little balance of both. [Writer/executive producer] Eric Weinberg has helped us with that, and giving the show its tone. We certainly try different things. We stick as closely to the script as possible at first, but then, with the comedy side is where things get unleashed, and we can improve. When you have Bryan Callen, Charlie Sanders and Bryce Johnson on set, you know you’re definitely going to want to give them some freedom of improv.

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau

Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---

**FANG:** You wear red contact lenses in the show. Who handles those—is that the makeup FX people, or is there a specialist?

**CANTU:** Definitely the makeup effects crew. I think it's done by Monster FX. From the molding of the teeth and fangs to the lenses and all the zombie effects, they have done an insane job. If you watch the show, there are a ton of creatures involved. Their team is just incredible.

**FANG:** For your fangs, did they have to do a cast of your teeth, or did they just have regular fangs that you put on?

**CANTU:** No, they definitely had to mold my teeth. I went in for a session and they injected this goo in my mouth—and it was quite fun, I must say. It's interesting to have these little fangs that fit right in; the tricky part was trying to get the dialogue down while wearing them. Because I'm supposed to be this hard-ass vampire, and then I slip on these fangs and I get this lisp all of a sudden. You definitely have to get used to it. But by the end of the day, wearing them for eight, nine, 10 hours, you just adapt to them. The lenses are the hardest part, having them in for so many hours, and there's no taking them off when you're eating lunch or going back and forth to the set. They don't come out until you leave for the day. So many hours, and a lot of Visine.

**FANG:** Can you see OK?

**CANTU:** It limits the view a tad. You only have the center pupil to look out of. But you know, after hour four, you adapt. The craziest part is taking them off, because you get this double vision for a while. Then you're driving home like that, which is probably not safe [ *laughs* ]. But you do it for the character and the art, and the lenses add a different dimension for the audience.

**FANG:** You were gracious enough, in the middle of your season on DEATH VALLEY, to come down and do my film SNOW WHITE: DEADLY SUMMER, with Eric Roberts and Maureen McCormick. I thank you for coming in and doing a little guest-star appearance for me.

## R.J. Cantu: Hot Blooded in “DEATH VALLEY”

Written by David DeCoteau

Tuesday, 22 November 2011 18:06

---

**CANTU:** I had so much fun on set, and it was a pleasure. Thank you. And if anyone wants to check out more of my stuff, go to [www.rjcantu.com](http://www.rjcantu.com) and [www.youtube.com/cantumagic](http://www.youtube.com/cantumagic); there are a lot of videos and my work there. Check it out!