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Interview by Matthew Whool

John R. Hand's *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare* is a modern day experimental masterpiece. He is someone you want to look out for in the future.

**Coroner's Report:** *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare* was a new type of cinematic experience for me. What type of effect (if any) did you plan for *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare* to have on people?

**John R. Hand:** I used to joke with someone that I just wanted to confuse and annoy people with the movie, but really, I wanted to do a little more than that. It's hard to describe exactly, but I wanted to make a kind of experience where the audience was constantly being surprised and never really had a sure footing, either narratively or stylistically. I'm constantly going for this tone that's slightly absurd, slightly serious, slightly bonkers, something that fits the world that these characters are living in. I don't think anyone in the cast and crew reading the tiny 35-page script for *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare* really had any idea of the tone I was going for with the film. They'd read the title, immediately conjure some kind of Universal Studios Frankenstein monster in their heads and that was it. One of the actresses told me that she thought it was "cute." Then again, that script didn't have any of the monster fisting in or anything, but still, barring that it was pretty complete.

**CR:** Is *FBN* a personal film for you? You wrote, produced, directed and starred in the film. It is obvious that you invested a lot of yourself in it.

**JH:** It was definitely a very personal film, though perhaps not by choice. It was hard finding crewmembers and people who could even meet me halfway on the vision of this thing. Most of them had it totally backwards, as I was saying before. I think that's what it takes to make a film. You have to really be prepared to go crazy. Also, for a person like me, it's easy to just get obsessed with this stuff because I don't have many attachments or personal life. This is pretty much all I want to do.

**CR:** You shot *FBN* on a combination of Super-8 film and digital video. What made you make this decision?

**JH:** I've been obsessed with Super-8 ever since I was little kid, reading about *Dead Next Door* and *Darkness*, so when I got to the breakpoint in my life of saying, "Screw it, I've spent three fucking years locked in a room watching two to three films every day and it hasn't gotten me anywhere, I'm making something," it was obvious that I would need to pull out the old Chinon Super-8 gear that I had collected as a kid but never had the money to shoot anything with. The camera I shot most of *FBN* with was horrible - plastic lens, auto focus, just horrible. Anyone in his right mind would be crazy to shoot a long-form project with this camera, but then again, anyone who would want to shoot a long-form project in Super-8 when they could go 16mm is crazy anyway so why not use the Chinon with the gooey rubber eyepiece. It makes perfect sense. Also, Kodak was in the process of discontinuing their flagship bedrock Super-8 stock, Kodachrome, so I felt the need to do some shooting on that before it all died out. The budget for the film was only about \$1,500-2,000, all kind of out-of-pocket, as funds from some of my freelance legal video work would arrive, so I couldn't afford to process the Super-8 in the normal way. I figured out this way to send it through Wal-Mart photo developing which was half off the regular price, \$4.99 versus around \$9.99 plus postage, and it was risking everything but I never lost one roll of film through Wal-Mart. The digital video footage came in both due to a budgetary and artistic need; on one hand, I couldn't afford to shoot everything on film, and there were also some scenes at night where I just didn't have enough lights to satisfy the contrasty, 40 ASA reversal Kodachrome film stock. K40 looks really great when it's exposed properly - all kind of psychedelic greens and blues, but when you underexpose it, the stuff gets really brown and muddy, so digital video really helped with that. Also, I knew I was going to edit the film in video so the format didn't really make a difference.

You know, I've spoke with another guy who recently shot a film on Super-8, James Felix Mckenney and his *Automatons*, and I asked him if he'd shoot a film on Super-8 again and his answer was "definitely, of course," but I'm personally not sure because I had some problems from a technical standpoint. I had problems with finding the frame lines in Super-8, as in the edges of the frame were massively different from the viewfinder to the projector and then the final version transferred to tape. I wanted to do a matted widescreen version of the film but it would've taken too much compromise to get it to work. Also, shooting in Super-8 properly with the right cameras, film stock and processing is almost running at a 16mm-level price these days, so it's not the bargain it once was. I love the portability of Super-8, but I'm personally ready to try out some of the new HD equipment. I hope that doesn't kill some of my credibility, but if it does, oh well.

**CR:** What was the process for directing the film? How big was the crew and how long did it take to complete?

**JH:** There wasn't much of a "process" beyond just trying to get it done. There was lots of improvisation within the framework of the narrative, complex shots done (and screwed up) in single takes, etc. Most of all, there was lots of following the light, because I think that's one of the most important things to do - just follow the light or try to find the kind of light which can dictate the specific drama of a scene. Sometimes on a no-budget movie, you can't create the light so you usually have to chase after it. Much of the time, the crew was comprised entirely of myself, shooting it, directing it, acting in it, everything. It was probably one too many hats to try acting in it, but toward the end, I thought I'd just started to figure out how actors in film build characters, so at least it was an informative experience for me. Sometimes to figure things out, you just have to leap in and try it. Towards the middle of the shoot, I found a great guy who kind of acted as my cinematographer, 1st AD, guide to the underworld - Brian Hagan. He's a fascinating character. Another great guy is Lemmy Cruz, who held a suspiciously real-looking switchblade to my eyeball in one scene. I'm working with Lemmy a little more on this new film I'm making right now. The film roughly took about a year to complete from start to finish. In the middle of the shoot, there was a hurricane, which totally derailed shooting, and then toward the end, every electronic device I had just died on me, including my car, but I eventually finished film somehow.

**CR:** The music by The Greys perfectly complimented the film's visuals. Is there anything you can tell us about The Greys? Did you have them in mind for music going into *FBN*?

**JH:** I composed all the music by myself using a combination of CS-80, Moog and other analog virtual instruments in a sequencing program. I came up with the name "The Greys" maybe because I couldn't call my group "The Reds" because some had already taken that name with the music for *Manhunter*. I thought the name fit well because I liked the idea of being sonically "grey," somewhere between soundtrack and atmospheric noise, sounding both vintage and modern, analog and electronic. Also, there are the alien connotations, which make sense given the otherworldly nature of some of that sound.

Most of the music was recorded before the scenes were shot, so I would play people the tracks before the scenes were shot - well, I COULD, but I DIDN'T because most of them didn't want to hear it. Again, this was a local horror movie to them. It was never a local horror movie in my mind, so I'd go on and try to direct the scene, but inside me, there was this reservoir of anger because these guys weren't as serious about the whole thing as I was, maybe it was the whole syndrome of wearing too many hats. I guess I handled it well. I didn't place any ridiculous demands on people or waste anyone's time. The thing is, when you're making these little movies by yourself, you've got to soldier on, if that means one take, just do it, fix it later, shoot the close-up next month. I think the thing that makes me really angry is when I see people far more talented than I am who just piss it all away by being lazy or not finishing things.

**CR:** Did any other filmmakers or artists inspire *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare* in anyway? What are some of your own personal favorite directors and/or films?

**JH:** This film was definitely inspired by Joe D'Amato's *Buried Alive*, aka *Buto Omega*. It hurt my feelings that no one ever made the connection between my film and that one until I told everyone, but oh well. There's just some dark magic surrounding *Buto Omega*, which never fails to intrigue me. I find myself getting into the lead character's mind a great deal, also, there's all the demented psychosexual stuff between the housekeeper and the guy.

As for general inspiration from filmmakers, I like all the good guys like Kubrick and Billy Wilder and Ray Dennis Steckler. Steckler really inspired me with his whole "work without a script," from the hip type thing, but one time, I wanted to interview him about some the X-Rated films he made and he yelled at me on the phone. He seems like a mean man, but I still like some of his films. They're difficult to watch though, perhaps as difficult as mine? I don't know. Jean Pierre Melville's a big inspiration to me as well, with his independent approach to filmmaking. Le Samouri is genius. I like Andrei Tarkovsky too, but I think the critics have just ruined his films. The minute I started liking Tarkovsky was the minute that I stopped listening to the scholarly analysis of his work and just watched it. His book, "Sculpting in Time," is a pretty down-to-earth book as well. Jodorowsky - I love that guy. That was like the end of my life when I discovered that guy's film. It was like the bright young accounting major who tries LSD at a frat party one night and his mind is turned to jelly; he'll never be able to count again, that was me in film school with *El Topo* and *Holy Mountain*. I had heard of the films before but actually seeing them totally freaked me out. Jodorowsky's a big inspiration to me.

**CR:** What are your goals with filmmaking? It is obvious that you have a lot to express and a lot of years of filmmaking ahead of you.

**JH:** I just want to get to a point where I can continue to make films and continue to grow, so with each film, I'm trying to kind of raise the stakes as far as visuals and sound quality, the whole experience of it all. As far as goals, I don't know. There are always the dream projects in your head but who knows if they'll ever get made. I think my main goal is to continue to make films that no one else could make, films with that little spark of weirdness.

**CR:** It's good to see a director that takes the horror film artistically seriously. What influenced you to do a horror film?

**JH:** I guess it was just bubbling up inside me from being obsessed with horror films as a kid. There's no easy answer to why.

**CR:** What would you like see happen in the underground film industry? Do you see any type of movement developing in the future?

**JH:** I'm not sure what kind of underground film there is anymore. Today, it's underground film - sponsored by Audi. It's real "underground." All I know is my film is so underground that it's hard to notice, but I'm working on going farther underground with this next one I'm making. It's hard for me to pinpoint any kind of "movement" because the whole game has changed about twenty times since I left film school in 2000. Those were some halcyon days back then, before all this terrorist crap and the dot-com bust. I remember that I did my rough cut of my final film project on 27 gigabytes of hard drive space and got a copy of it on VHS. My god, in a few years there's going to be kids who have no idea what VHS is. That kind of scares me.

**CR:** Is there any particular film movement or genre that you don't like? Why?

**JH:** I really enjoy almost every film, besides the ones made by Rob Zombie that is. You can't say that I haven't given the guy a chance, though, because I've seen every film he's made theatrically, at least twice, except for *Halloween* where it's almost a moral issue - I can't give money to support something like this. Why did I watch them multiple times? Because my god, everyone's ranting and raving so much about these films that I feel like I've missed something, but for me, this guy's work is repellent. It's not that I dislike his style - he has no style. He has no unique voice, no voice, nothing. His cinematographer (I don't want to repeat his name and incriminate him) should be put in movie jail for conspiring to create such bland imagery. Michael Bay makes films that are more personal and in-depth. Rob Zombie is like the Spencer's Gifts of modern film. He also strikes me as a filmmaker without any spine, like he would do anything if the paycheck was large enough and he thought he could get away with it, like if someone wanted him to remake *9 to 5* or *The Eternal Jew*, he'd be more than happy to do it. I used to listen to *White Zombie*, really, but even their music videos had the same listless quality to them.

Sometimes I've thought that perhaps it's not such a cute thing, that perhaps these movies are having a negative effect on filmgoers. It would be really funny if Rob Zombie really was the anti-christ or something wouldn't it? Who would suspect that the guy with a ridiculous name like "Rob Zombie" would really be some evil character? It's reverse psychology, hiding in plain sight. Brilliant. Don't blame me that I didn't warn you when his body splits open and the winged demon shoots out of his head like Michael York in *Omega Code Part II*.

**CR:** Uneathed Films distributes *Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare*. Are you a fan of Uneathed and the films they distribute?

**JH:** Uneathed was probably my first choice to distribute the film because those guys are crazy. I've had some problems with the way that *FBN* wasn't really supported by Uneathed, no advertising and such, but I still really believe in the company and I'm glad they released it and didn't ask me to change anything. The original DVD release was a little bright for some reason. Also, I think the other distributor Uneathed was working through really disliked the movie, and they tried to take my 5.1 audio track and do a stereo version, but they screwed up and now there's basically two 5.1 Dolby digital tracks on the DVD. I hope the new DVD release from Uneathed through TLA Releasing sells a few more copies.

**CR:** Anything else that you would like to say?

**JH:** Simply that I hope we could do this again sometime. It was a lot of fun.