

Fast, Cheap Movie Thoughts

Short tidbits from top filmmakers on the art of their craft



Thursday, April 20, 2017

Russ Emanuel on "Occupants"

What was your filmmaking background before making *Occupants*?

RUSS: *Occupants* is my fourth feature film. I started making films in 2002 with *Her Knight* and *Girl with Gun* after studying cinema at the University of Southern California and taking UCLA Extension courses. There, I met my filmmaking partner Emile Haris whom we have worked on all my films since then.

Because of the success of *Girl with Gun*, which got into numerous festivals including San Diego Comic-con, it got the attention of my future producer Howard Nash who had put together a feature film script called *P.J.* which had John Heard and Robert Picardo already attached.

Since then, we worked on the features *Chasing the Green* starring Jeremy London, Ryan Hurst, William Devane, Robert Picardo, *The Legends of Nethiah* starring Robert Picardo, Jeremiah Sayys, Jared Young, *Occupants* starring Briana White, Michael Pugliese, and Robert Picardo, and most recently *The Assassin's Apprentice* starring Tarah Paige, Marina Sirtis, and Robert Picardo, which we shot in early December 2016.



How did you get connected to Julia Camara's script and what was the process for getting the script ready to shoot?

RUSS: It was the producer Howard Nash who optioned her script in February 2014. He then showed me the script and I was immediately hooked.

The process involved getting the funds which we successfully raised on the crowdfunding

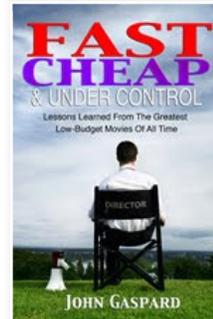


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site Indiegogo (106% raised). Once that happened, we cast the film and hired the crew and turned Julia's wonderful script into a shooting script based on the location we found.



What was your casting process and did you change the script to match your final cast?

RUSS: The casting process involved holding auditions for the main role of Annie Curtis – we had 24 actresses whom we auditioned alongside our lead actor Michael Pugliese (who played Neil Curtis, the husband of Annie).

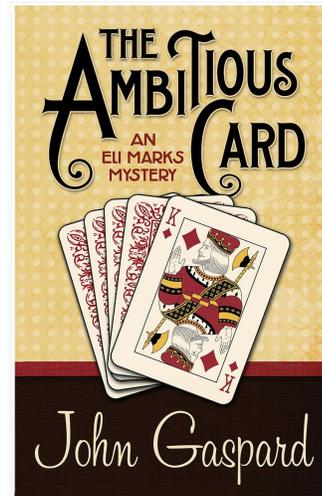
Also, there was our Director of Photography, the aforementioned Emile Haris. Once Michael and Emile and I discussed whom we liked, we called back five actresses and picked Briana White who was a perfect fit for the role.

And yes one role we changed to reflect the actual cast – that was the role of Dr. Alan Peterson of the Peterson Research Institute, played by Robert Picardo (the role was originally for a woman, but was changed because of Julia's love of *Star Trek* and the fact that Howard and I have worked with Robert before on four projects).



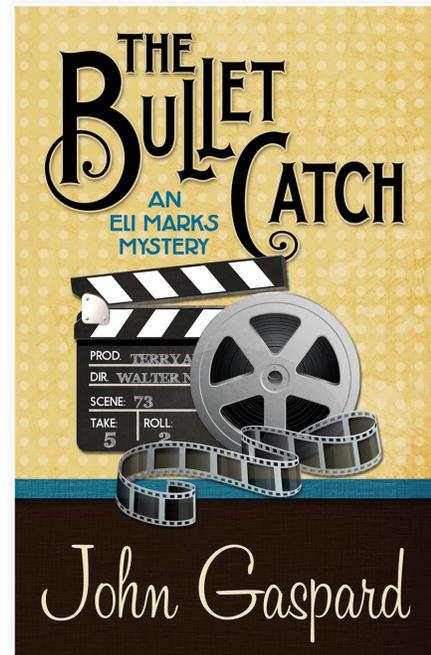
What type of camera(s) did you use and what did you love (and hate) about it?

RUSS: We used the Canon 7D and HVX200 cameras. I loved how they were able to get us the vibrant colors we needed in the film. I really enjoyed shooting with these cameras, even though it was 2K and not 4K.



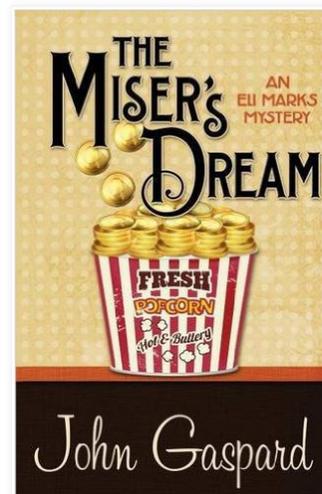
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The Bullet Catch



Second book in the Eli Marks Mystery Series

The Miser's Dream



Did the movie change much in the editing, and if so, why did you make the changes?

RUSS: The movie did change during the editing and that was to reflect some videos that Robert Picardo's character sent to Annie and Neil Curtis to show they aren't the only ones experiencing the parallel universe phenomena that was seen in the film.

Originally in the script, it just mentioned "some video." So during post-production, we actually created an official Peterson Research Institute video with actor Chris Winters as the representative and shooting various people around the world who recorded their sightings. You can actually see them at this site: <http://www.pri-research.info/>

**Can you talk about your distribution plan for recouping costs?**

RUSS: We got distribution through ITN Distribution headed by Stuart Alson who is busy going to various markets including Berlinale and selling the film. In order for him to be able to do that, we got the film into thirty-plus film festivals all over the United States, Canada, and Russia.

We also won awards such as the "Best Sci-Fi Feature" award at Shriekfest, one of the top horror festivals in the United States, seven awards at the Dazed 4 Horror Film Festival, and just last week the "Best Director" and "Audience Choice" award at the SoCal Film Festival To date, we won 19 awards and have been nominated for 12 more.

**What was the smartest thing you did during production? The dumbest?**

RUSS: The smartest thing we did during production was finding our location through Air BnB. This was a suggestion by the producer Howard Nash and I was so relieved when we found the house we shot at.

Since we technically "owned" the place for 12 days, I was able to stay there for the duration of the shoot. We were also able to leave the equipment there for each of the days, which helped with set-up times. It made for an efficient 10-day shoot.

The dumbest thing was not getting a professional hair-dye job for our lead actress Briana White when she transformed from real Annie Curtis to parallel Annie Curtis on Day 8. It took our makeup artist Alisha Baijounas 3 tries because the over-the-counter hair dye job turned our actresses' hair from blonde to gray (and not brunette as we wanted). We ended up using a permanent dye and paying for her to turn it back to blonde after production wrapped. Basically, we tried to save money but ended up spending way more.

Third book in the Eli Marks Mystery Series

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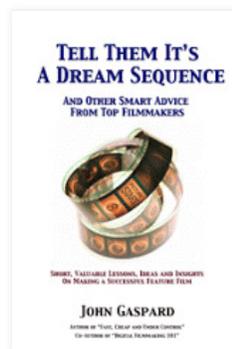
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And, finally, what did you learn from making this feature that you will take to other projects?

RUSS: Always have a preparation day that helps with setting up equipment and production design and giving the actors a chance to see the set during pre-production so they can prepare for their roles. I was glad we were able to do this and it helped tremendously.



Posted by John Gaspard at 3:16 AM
Labels: "Occupants", Russ Emanuel

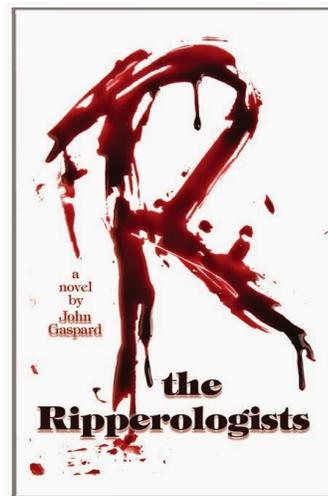
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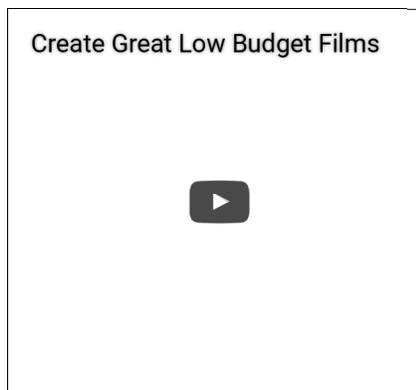
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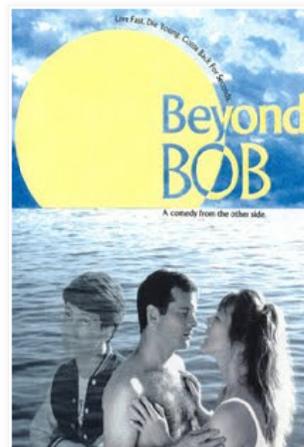
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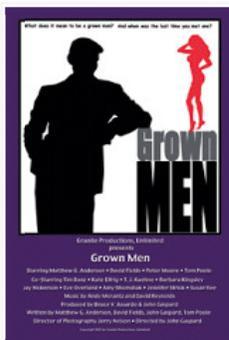


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