

Interview with Jeremy Kasten, Director of *The Wizard of Gore* | *Fatally Yours*

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Written by Dana R. Davidson

Jeremy Kasten, talented director of such horror films as *The Attic Expeditions* ([review](#)), *The Thirst* ([review](#)), *All Souls Day: Dia de los Muertos*, *Gayosity*, and most recently, *The Wizard of Gore* ([review](#)). Originally hailing from Baltimore, MD Jeremy began his film training at an early age, attending the Baltimore Actors Theater Conservatory through 8th grade then moving onto the Baltimore School for the Arts acting ensemble where he attended with Jada Pinkett Smith and Tupac Shakur, acting in a local kids show called Bumble Bunkers, and, by the time he was seven years old was making super 8 films with titles like, "The Guy Who Killed Because He Was Bored." He continued onto college at Emerson as a film major and history minor. Jeremy has done every job in every department of filmmaking and enjoys being hands on with his process.

This isn't your average internet interview. I didn't email Jeremy the questions, that's just not how I work. This is an old fashioned lunch meeting with a tape recorder amongst two friends later transcribed by me for your reading pleasure. I feel that we as the press, as journalists, as supposed truth seekers, as life explorers need to take the time to actually delve into their world, their mind. This is after all, their time, their words, working as a team to express them, together. With that, I give you a short interview with filmmaker Jeremy Kasten.

Dana Davidson: How long did it take you to make the movie *The Wizard of Gore*?

Jeremy Kasten: From the time we started raising money until now it's been five years, maybe more. We were supposed to shoot it with a different company, it was this company on the Universal lot, the only non-union company that were making movies. They had done like three or four low budget films at Universal and so it seemed like they were real. They are making movies, they had offices, but they were nuts-o. They kept pushing preproduction forward. They weren't paying anybody, they wouldn't release funds. We were three weeks away from shooting and I ended up paying for a bunch of art stuff out of pocket. I was like, well, they are gonna have the money, it's gonna happen. It was a couple thousand dollars. In the end they didn't have any money, totally lied, and we were like two weeks away from supposedly shooting and they took us to a... [Pauses] I know that I'm giving you way more than you asked...

Dana: Tell me! I want to know, the behind the scenes of movie making is interesting!

Jeremy: They took us to a producer who is like notoriously a...you know, a real financier and producer, but not a guy I want to be doing business with. He was just like in the middle of a 200 million dollar lawsuit with Warner Bros. Just a bad man and we came into meet with him and we were already like, this is not a good idea. He said that I would have to sign a three picture deal with him that was exclusive. He was saying it like, oh, I'm so lucky [to be getting the offer]. Ultimately we decided not to do it, even though he could have totally made the movie it wouldn't have been our movie any more. It would have been the beginning of going down a road that wasn't a good idea. So we walked away. It was one of the hardest things I've had to do, to decide not to take money to make a movie. 'Cause halting a train that is moving for a film, it's almost impossible to get it going again. I knew that, but, so, five years about, maybe 10 from the time...when we were still struggling with *Attic Expeditions* we were talking about how we can do this next time cause it isn't easy to

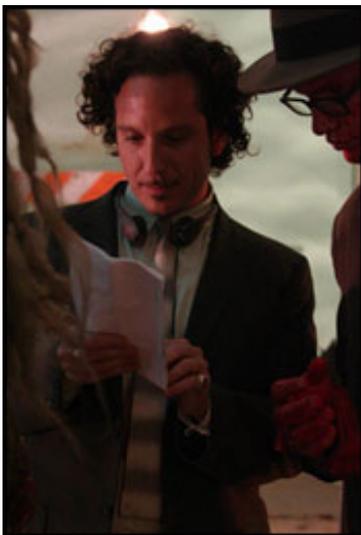
raise money. That's where the idea came from.

Dana: Were you scared about doing a remake?

Jeremy: Yeah, of course, because so many people are so... Actually I have to say, looking back, I was less scared than I should have been. Now that it's done and I've gotten to read reviews... I just assumed that it was precious because it is **The Wizard of Gore**. I've seen the movie dozens of times, I used to watch it obsessively but it isn't a good film. It's an important film but it's terrible. So I was scared because horror fans are so precious about everything but I think I had no idea how protective they felt over it. I've read reviews a couple times where people have said that this doesn't even come close to being as good as the first movie and I think, the first movie is not good! What are you talking about!? It's not even like the first movie. So, that doesn't really answer your question.

Dana: What was it like getting the rights to it?

Jeremy: A nightmare. An absolute nightmare. It took just over a year from the time we started talking to the person who owns the remake rights to the time we were done. Now, we were trying to make a whole bunch of movies, so we were trying to get a lot of different rights to a lot of different movies and that probably complicated it. There were at least 10 times in that year where Dan Griffiths [producer on **The Wizard of Gore**] and I were ready to give up. You know, we'd like almost be done, the lawyers would be like, ok sign the contract, and then the other guy would come back and be like, "actually," and it would be some totally insane other direction for us to go in to do the deal. So in the end it was just by the perseverance of Dan Gold, who is a producer on the movie, and probably the most important thing he did on this film is not let us give up. He'd be like, you guys, I've got this, I'll go back to him, I'll talk him about it. For a year it was like that. So painful and so lame.



Dana: Did you have to clear what you wanted to do with the movie with the person who owned the rights?

Jeremy: I don't think he cared. I really wanted him to understand how much it was going to be a place of love for me and what my vision was and stuff. I remember going to his house a Saturday afternoon, he's walking around in his bathrobe and kind of, um, very surreal Hollywood experience. He had this house in the hills and I came, like, I really want you to understand that this may be a really important iconic way to approach the movie, as splatter and gore. Blah blah blah. He's one of those people who I feel are impenetrable. Like, I couldn't tell if he cared or if it mattered or what. I don't know to this day how he feels about it or whether it mattered. [He shrugs shoulders]

Dana: You are involved in every part of the film making process, tell me about it.

Jeremy: From the beginning, everything. The only things on this movie that I haven't gotten to do, which is hard 'cause I'm so used to being control freaky about everything, is negotiating the deal with the distributor, creating or being involved in the box art in any way, and being involved in the marketing of the film in any way that matters. I mean I've done some interviews and stuff but it's not like there was any real push from them to establish a way to make people know that the movie was coming out beyond dumping it out there and seeing what happens, and that was hard. Everything else from the commentary track on the DVD to the stills that are on the DVD to selecting the stills that went to the press, all of it. [He did]

Dana: How much of you is in this movie?

Jeremy: I didn't live Downtown [Los Angeles] when I made the film. I didn't really think about how much (of me is in it) when Zack wrote it. Me and my weird collections and my obsession with all

things fetish of different eras. I'm not a guy who wears vintage suits, like that's not me, I didn't even think about it until postproduction, until after making the movie. There were times on set where I'd say, you know, if we don't find a tie I like I'm just gonna bring a tie from home for him [lead character Edmund Bigelow, played by Kip Pardue]. You know, little things, but it never really clicked that it was me, on any level. Now of course I live Downtown, in a loft, surrounded by my fetishistic antiques and all that, but I'm not a trust fund guy, you know, there is a part of that character that is definitely me and a part that is what a bunch of people I know wish they were. I think he is inaccessible character until he really starts to break down, at least to me. In the beginning he is king of hipsters and thinks he is center of the universe and it's not until he starts to fall apart and get lost that I think he starts to be accessible, he is not a guy that you feel instantly connected to, I think that is very unlike me. I think he is sort of charismatic, in a kinda cold way that Kip [Pardue] plays him and that is very much not me.

Wizard is about a guy who lives in a loft downtown surrounded by his art deco fetish antiques, vintage clothes, and he turns out to be the most evil misogynistic man in the world. The first part is me. **The Wizard of Gore** is completely a love letter film to Downtown, it's a love letter to Film Noir, which to me is very much rooted in downtown LA.

Dana: What are some of the things you love about Downtown LA?

Jeremy: Downtown has a real sense of community, wackiness, where anything can happen. You can go out to get a taco before bed, run into someone, and the next thing you know you've been out till 5am on a school night. That's just the way it happens down here, it always feels like adventure is right around the corner, and also it kinda mirrors a very urban post-apocalyptic thing that I connect deeply to because Baltimore has that in spades. There is a very really real sense of **Night of the Living Dead** in certain neighborhoods of Baltimore that feel like home to me. Downtown has lots of zombie looking things wandering around. I love living in downtown Los Angeles because of the soul of the city, 'cause it's got a really weird broken special soul and I love that.

Dana: What attracts you to a project?

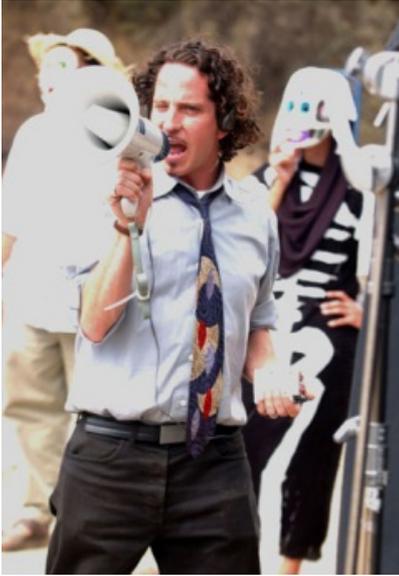
Jeremy: It's really hard to answer that question because it's sort of like, what attracts you to a person. You can come up with a list and say, well, the qualities that I fall in love with in a woman are... but ultimately it's pheromones and you don't really know and it's fate and it's the universe. But I will tell you this, I definitely will go down a road with a movie for a time, just like dating, where you are like, I wonder where this is gonna go, and at some point you realize where it's going. Any movie, at least in my experience, really is with you forever but they take forever to make. They take so long, at least that's been my experience so far, the good ones, the ones I really like of my films. So, there have been a handful of movies where I've gone a year or two prepping them and pushing and trying to come up with cast lists and all that stuff. At some point you let it peter out cause you realize that this movie is not a movie that I can stay married to for another six and a half, seven, eight, nine years. So ultimately what attracts me to a movie is incredibly illusive but there has to be something about it that I can obsess about because you have to be completely obsessed with that film.

Dana: Of the movies that you have made what are your favorite ones?

Jeremy: My first movie, **The Attic Expeditions** and this one, **The Wizard of Gore** are the most, me, movies. I am proud of things in **The Thirst**. I think **The Thirst** is really fun for being... There is a sliver of real in it that I think is really neat. A Silverlake hipster in AA world, it really exists in this world and the idea of putting him up against absolutely ludicrous comic book vampire characters is really fun, I really like that in **The Thirst** and it's really bloody. I love that it's unabashedly, how-much-blood-can-I-spill. Otherwise I think **The Thirst** was fated to be a broken but bittersweet film because it had so many script problems from the beginning. **All Souls Day** is a movie that still, when I go to conventions, people want me to sign the box. I'm so surprised when they are like, I love this movie. I'm absolutely shocked, and I'm starting to realize that more people are liking the movie that I like the least. I think it's probably because it's so accessible and dopey. It's really a dopey ass movie, totally a B-movie. A straight up, duhhh, movie with nothing particularly compelling about it except that

it feels like we had a trunk full of props and sort of made up a movie as we went along, and which is essentially what happened.

Dana: What are your favorite horror movies?



Jeremy: **Suspiria** for purely surreal, just the colors, just the look of that movie, I always say it looks the way nightmares look, and I didn't know that movies, horror movies especially, could look that beautiful. I love the Layne Chaney films, I love **Freaks**, I don't know if that's a horror movie per say but it stays with me, and then, you know everybody loves, **Cannibal, Holocaust**, you know those icky grindhouse movies now, but it seems like nobody had that term until recently. And the arty stuff like **Salo**. I love **Salo**, but I think it's one of the most unpleasant experiences that anyone can live through watching that movie start to finish. I love **Exorcist 3**, I LOVE **Exorcist 3!!** And, of course, **Texas Chainsaw, Psycho**...the important ones. I think my list is probably the sort-of important horror movies. I think more interesting than the list of movies I love are the movies that I don't so much care about, which are the slasher films. I have really no connection to them, not to the **Halloween** films, or even the **Friday 13** and Freddy Krueger films. It's not to say they don't have value, it's not a mean thing, there is nothing in my heart that if they are on TV I feel I have to watch it. I tend to like things that

feel like they achieve something. Slasher movies are entertaining but I don't know that they, to me, feel like they are furthering filmmaking and I know that sounds pretentions but, whatever, I can't help it.

I don't think we put nearly enough energy into making the kind of horror movies we made back in the 70's, everyone talks about the movies but no one wants to look at what made them good movies. Characters were serious, the stories were serious, people tried. Nothing in the **Texas Chain Saw Massacre** was like "*Want some head?*" that shit's dumb, and if that's all you expect then you fucking deserve that.

Everybody asks me about **Wizard**, is it funny? Is it funny? And I wanna be like, well if it is, if it's funny, it's not because we stood around the set cracking up at how silly the movie we are making was, it's funny because it's intelligent and interesting and weird. I don't think David Lynch stands around on his set going, let's do something wacky, that just seems lame...

Dana: What got you into horror?

Jeremy: I saw the Layne Chaney horror movies when I was 4. From 4 to 5 I saw **Hunchback of Notre Dame, Phantom of the Opera**, a bunch of those early silent horror films and that set something off in my mind. Something snapped. They scared me so badly, they deeply affected my sleeping. I always had really lucid dreams but suddenly my lucid dreams went from like, yay, lucid dreams to [lowers voice] underground caverns with guys with hideously scarred faces. It really got under my skin.

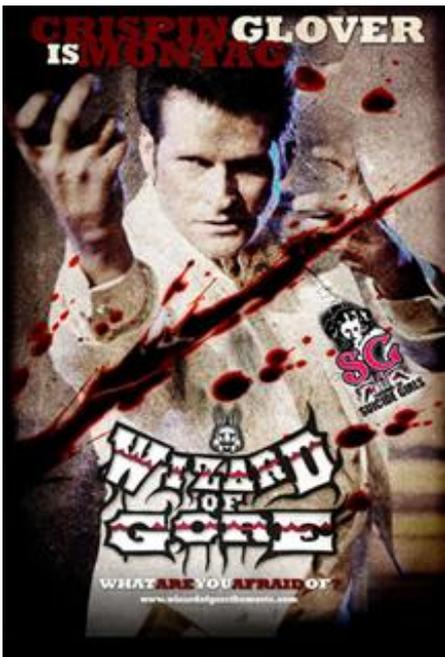
Dana: Do you have anything coming up?

Jeremy: I am hoping to shoot a movie before Christmas but I don't want to say what it is yet until the money is all in the bank. I will say this it will definitely be my first scary horror film, which is really exciting. I don't think my business in horror films has been to make scary movies so far, it's been to make disturbing films, but disturbing and scary are two different things. I think **The Wizard of Gore** is disturbing because ultimately the guy becomes obsessed with this magician dude who does these hideous acts. The horror fans who see **The Wizard of Gore** are seeing it because in their mind they want to see Crispin Glover playing Montag, cutting up Suicide Girls with the guts and the, you know, I can talk for days self promoting that angle on the movie but what's really interesting, to

me, about the film, what's really scary, ugly, and icky in the film is that it turns out that the guy who is obsessed with it in the movie that parallels the audience member is so much ickier, he is so darkly misogynistic and super privileged, to live out this hideous fantasy. This self hating obsession with edifice. All of that. That's what is so interesting to me. It's disturbing to be certain but I don't think there is a moment in that movie where it's scary, necessarily. What I'm hoping to do [with the upcoming movie] is keep making films that feel to me like I'm furthering the genre and I think it defiantly does that but it's scary to.

Dana: Director's cut VS other cut?

Jeremy: Through the course of making the movie, when we started there was an understating, with a deal that was never actually papered, there was no contact, the way the money came in, it was my understanding that I was going to be the creative voice of the film and as we got further into making the movie there was a producer who felt like he wanted to be creative to the point where he literally shut down the movie when Crispin Glover came out in the cod piece. He freaked out and he took the movie away from me and he was going to essentially pull the plug. He made like one hundred people go to lunch early, he was like, "Jeremy, I need to know right now if you consider me a creative partner." And I was like, "No I don't, I really don't, I am making this movie, I don't care what you think of the cod piece, honestly, I think it's fine and it's going to be fine." So that was the begging of that situation getting ugly. Then I had to edit the film in that dude's office space. So, you know, four months of intense, like, I'm there 24 hours sleeping on the floor. We learned to deal with each other, it was fine for a time, then after I turned in what was essentially my 2nd cut... First was my editor's cut, then the director's cut, then I was ready to do the producer's cut, even though it seems so weird to cut your own movie but because on my first two movies I worked with great editors that I'm friends with, but in the end I was the one telling them to speed the movie up, showing them how to do it, the effort that it took to express myself, it sounds so crappy cause it's my job to express myself when I'm directing, and I'm perfectly happy to do it but it's sort of like being a racecar driver and you are sitting next to somebody who drives well, but you have to tell them, ok, now put your foot on the gas, ok, now break, ok turn signal, no other turn signal, you know. So my experience was that it was just easier to cut my own movies and that I wasn't being precious about it at all, if a producer said, ok you turned in a two hour cut, now show us this movie at 70 min, I could cut it down to 70 minutes and see how it runs.



So he took the movie away and didn't give me that chance [to edit the producer's cut]. He basically went, "Ok, you did two cuts I wanna see what somebody else can do." They put on this dude who was editing another movie for him, a nice guy, but he was an assistant editor on comedies. Nothing good came from that cut, I was hoping that dramatic bold ideas that I didn't think of [would come from another editor] but that didn't happen. Weird changes happened and special moments got taken out of the movie, and the way you tighten a movie really is not to take out every pause but to take out, although that is a method, um, you look at the movie and say, ok, what scenes don't work, what do I not need, because that is how you are gonna make a movie move faster. Rather than taking out pauses when people are acting, 'cause that's acting.

His cut was the first cut of the movie that I had to go to the film festivals with and towards the end I fought with him over the music, he wouldn't let me give a set of notes on the score, there was lots of music from bands and stuff that I wasn't allowed to even try to get, like the current opening music from the Black

Heart Procession that I feel like was essential to the movie, it's on the main titles, they wouldn't even try. That dude was just like, nope. His famous words were, "Nope. Jeremy stop trying to put gore into this, no one wants gore in this movie, this is a mystery, people are going to be intrigued by the mystery." I was like, MAN! But it's like being in a relationship with somebody who you are realizing

is crazy, but you have to be nice before the divorce goes through to get to see your child. I knew that I would be marginalized further and further by him the more I fought and also my producer Dan Griffiths did a really good job of looking out for me and making sure that I didn't flip out because there were lots of times where I wanted to be like, "Go fuck yourself." Like, where I was just so hideously bent that I just wanted to walk away, it was like, you know what, you ruin it, it's your broken movie now. Stop asking me to take responsibility for the film when you keep breaking it. I've been down that road on other movies. I just don't want to do that.

In the end we sold the film to the Weinstein Company after it premiered at the LA Film Festival. Brilliantly, Dan Griffiths, who is a dude I know from high school and we became friends in college, is my producer, went to the Weinstein Company and said, look we will give you guys, if you are interested, an unrated version of the movie if you just give us time and you don't have to pay for it, just let us go down that road, and they did, they completely got out of the way of that progress for what was essentially a year. Getting the music that I wanted, rescoring it, putting it back the way we wanted. The director's cut is essentially the movie as I left it before with effects shots done and the music composed right by another composer who filled things in and a bunch of music from bands that I wanted in the movie. The other cut is the broken producer cut, it's my cut wiggled around and jangled and made uninteresting with boring music. It's just a slower kind of, for a movie that's already kinda slow, in its own weird way, it needed to be this version [Jeremy's version], in my opinion. It's a little more Crispin and a little less Kip Pardue.

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