

Udo Kier is Crazy: On Udo and the Fly

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The first time I actually spoke to Udo Kier, I really couldn't understand what he was saying.

"I vant to keel a fly," he intoned.

What?

"I vant to keel a *fly!*"

Um?

"In deer picture. I vant to keel a fly! I tink it would be ugly, no?"

Though we were officially chatting for the first time, it was not the first time I'd met him. I walked up to him in 1995, likely not too long after he'd moved to Los Angeles. And just after I had. We were in an

antique store. I recognized him immediately. Those eyes.

Mr. Kier. I've loved you so much since I saw Flesh for Frankenstein when I was twelve and I love everything you do and I would so love to see it in 3D as it was intended and do you live here now?

He stared at me blankly, shook my hand and moved along. Of course, he didn't remember this when I reminded him of it when on the phone. But along with Little Richard and The Egg Man from *Pink Flamingos*, it's always been among my favorite celebrity sightings.

Without us even meeting, Udo was cast as Peg Poett in *The Theatre Bizarre* wraparounds that I directed. It often goes that way with "name" talent. I've dealt with my share of intense actors and was nervous about Udo. He has worked with so many directors, and in my experience, sometimes actors can come to a role with an idea that defines the part, and sometimes it is in an opposing direction to the film. It is better to talk that stuff out early on.

Such was my fear with the fly.

Okay, Udo, I'll work on that. Do you want to meet with the movement coach who is working with the automatons so you all move in the same manner?

"No. Eet's fine. I do my own."

"Udo wants to be directed. Just tell him what you want and he's glad to have a voice to listen to, really," my friend Buddy Giovinazzo reassured me. We'd gotten to Udo through Buddy. They'd worked together on several German TV movies.

The next time we talked, I told Udo all about how I saw the character and how the day of shooting should go. He listened patiently and brought up the fly again. Erg. It wasn't in the script and it didn't seem germane to the story.

But Udo Kier wanted to kill a fly in the movie.



Well Udo, (I lied) I've spoken to several digital effects companies and creating a fly to die on camera in your fingers is too expensive for this little film.

"Oh. Haha. We don't need a dee-git-al, just find a dead fly. I act."

Something shifted in me and a pitch in his tone sounded different. He wasn't an actor, he was a partner working to make my movie better and making an effect work for the cost of a dead fly. Because really, that is what a real actor does—selling make-believe.

I wasn't sold on the idea, but I knew better than to show up without a few dead flies. I wanted him to feel listened to. (Directors can be so patronizing, can't they?)

When it came time to shoot the fly, Udo, very much enjoying how quickly we were moving through the material, balked.

"Maybe we don't need to keel da fly. Is it too much?"

When we shot it—Udo squeezing the life out of a long-dead fly—I knew it was a great moment. And I knew I was wrong to have ever wondered if it would be.

So, yes. Udo's idea of “keeling” a fly was crazy. Exactly the kind of crazy the role needed and that enriched what would have been a dry moment in my movie.

Lesson learned:

That IS why you hire a pro actor. Not only for the name and face and body of work, but for their ideas and collaboration. And for the lessons they have in their brain from a lifetime of movie-making.