

indie corner

SUMMER 2006

by Glenn Andreiev

Darryl F. Zanuck, the legendary head of 20th Century Fox, wanted to be the first producer to release a film about World War II. So, in the Spring of 1942, just a few months after the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor, his SECRET AGENT OF JAPAN started a wave of patriotic war films that lasted for decades. Why has it taken us four years to finally address the horrors of 9/11 with a cinematic voice?

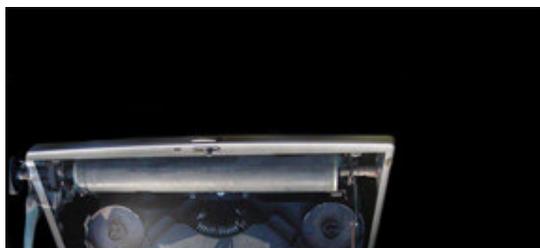


Paul Greenglass' independently produced UNITED 93, which tells, in real time, the confrontation between terrorists and the passengers of a hijacked plane has millions of Multiplex goers debating the film's message over lattes and web-blogs. UNITED 93 avoids the Hollywood route. The film's heroes are ordinary common Americans played out by unrecognizable unknown actors. No Tom Cruise or Matt Damon here! On the flip side, we have Dylan Avery, a 22-year old college student and his film, LOOSE CHANGE, which was made entirely on his laptop from chunks of computer graphics and found news footage. Using "scientific data" and comparisons to other air disasters and building fires, Avery suggests Bin Ladin had nothing to do with 9/11, that 9/11 may have been the work of our own government! He suggests a missile, not a plane, hit the Pentagon, and that hidden dynamite charges helped the hi-jacked planes take down the Twin Towers. LOOSE

CHANGE also spells out another disturbing thought - a film made from internet scraps, with no need for cinematographers, art directors, directors or acting talent. LOOSE CHANGE may be the cinematic equivalent of a Stepford Wife!

THE GIRL WITH A GUN is a well paced short action-thriller about a harmless looking woman who sneaks into the dark of night as a deadly street vigilante known as "The Nightingale" It's a technically well constructed mini-dynamo by film-maker Russ Emmanuel. It's fascinating to see this experimental indie short take a routine Hollywood plot-line (witness the recent DOMINO and AEON FLUX), toss out the big budget clichés, and replace them with fascinating quirks.

THE SUICIDE NOTES was, for me, even more engrossing. This is a crisp salute to those forties film noirs we all know and love. Elijah Kent, a seemingly happy lawyer, commits suicide by jumping from a roof. Elijah's pretty and determined fiancée, Farrah, believes foul play



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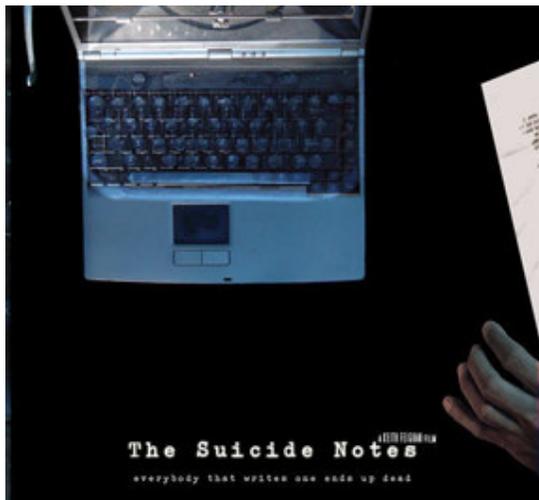
is at hand. A hard-boiled detective enters the scene, peering into Elijah's past. Sounds too much like a flick best suited for Dana Andrews or Humphrey Bogart? Well, director/writer Keith Feighan gives the film a more hypnotic, dreamlike feel. Think David Lynch meets Sam Spade!

I was happy to see that SLIME CITY, a hyper-gory exploitation horror film made by fellow School of Visual Arts student Gregory Lamberson back in 1988, is now getting a DVD release. This urban saga of NYC kooks turning into slime, getting decapitated and enduring the terrors of loud neighbors was made in a pre-Guilliani New York where men drove big boat cars, gals wore big hair, and wandering into any New York City vacant lot would get you surrounded by knife-wielding gangs. SLIME CITY's star, the often shocked Robert Sabin, made me recall Julien West, the doe-eyed male lead from Carl Dreyer's VAMPYR. Both men wander a metropolis of the dead! This film looks and sounds gory, and it's clearly from a bygone era. It was just nice to see a film like this get a re-birth on DVD. It made me wonder if other indie films sitting on shelves for many years enjoy such a re-deaux. Gregory Lamberson's linear notes for the SLIME CITY DVD package are a fascinating read. It recalls those fabulous 1980's when low budget horror worked in film (usually in 16mm) and theatrical release was a major venue for your film. Today, if you're lucky, it's the video store and the Internet.

We jump from pools of city slime, away from suicides and dames with guns, to finding that right girl! ONLY IN NEW YORK is a romantic comedy expertly produced and directed on a modest budget by Long Island's Nalin Goonetilleke. Being something like a Bollywood Woody Allen, Mr. Goonetilleke presents us the world of immigrant Indians surviving in New York while seeking female companionship. The unique way these Indian characters move around the city - getting excited over buying a mattress, or smoking pot for the first time, trying to find flowers in the city when no florists are around - churns this film forward with charm. Ali Raza Williams and Roshan Pilapitiya have spunk as the males here. Udeshika Abeysena and Shawna Bermender are their very real, funny female targets.

To me, "modest budget" is something like a filmic truth serum. The artificial facades of expensive Hollywood sets and computer imaging are gone. The "modest budget" gives us the look, sound, the clutter of real locations. In all these film's cases, less is more.

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