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“GIRL WITH GUN” (2005)

Starring: Tracy O’Connor, Michelle Lee, Michelle Martin, Erick Holloway, Matteo Ribaud & David Neff

Written by Emile Haris

Directed by Russ Emanuel

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“All you need to make a movie is a girl and a gun”
- Jean-Luc Godard

At the end of Russ Emanuel’s “Girl with Gun” I was mad. Not because he took a political stance that offended me or because he forced me to see images I didn’t care to see. This was actually a good kind of mad. I was mad the film was over so fast. I wanted to see the rest of the movie.

Written and edited by Emile Haris and directed by Emanuel, this is one hell of a short. The \$30,000



Dead Line

project runs 15 minutes and in that time period we get good character development, a kick ass fight scene, some humor and a few moments of sweetness. The story centers around Gwen Hunter (Tracy O'Connor), a seemingly normal woman living an ordinary life. She is the Nightingale aka "Girl with Gun" that "rushes in where justice fears to tread." She squeezes in breakfast and a dinner date in between taking care of bad guys.

Photographed by Aasulv Wolf Austad, "Girl with Gun" is loaded with closes-ups from start to finish that really help draw you in. The first image we see is a smoking gun. Nightingale is putting the finishing touches on the destruction of a drug lab. After everyone is dead she rushes off to meet with her friend with Mitzi (Michelle Martin), who is essentially a representation of the life Gwen has given up to fight crime. Mitzi appears happily married with a young child and is also pregnant. Gwen on the other hand, has trouble keeping boyfriends. It's not that there is anything wrong with her. She just comes off extremely avoidant and aloof. During her date with Dan (Erick Holloway), just before he attempts to open his heart to her, she has to excuse herself to the back alley to try and kill a seemingly solo-flying Mob Boss (David Neff). Instead of finding a helpless don she can quickly shoot in the head to get back to her desert, Gwen is greeted by a bad ass Ninja Girl (Michelle Lee) in a purple bandanna that seemed straight out of the eighties. It is very "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," which is a huge positive in my book. Anyway, during the highly impressive fight scene, punches and kicks seem as though they are coming right at the camera, really putting you into the action. We also get some wire stunts that are just enough to add to the scene, but not done to the point of becoming hokey like in "The Matrix" films. Almost as quick as she appeared the "kooky girl with a bandanna" disappears and Gwen goes back to her date as if nothing happened. Her hair is a mess, she's battered, bruised, bleeding from the nose and covered in dirt. Needless to say, the scene plays extremely well in the laughs department.

Haris and Emanuel are on to something here with their little film they shot in five days. Sure there are a lot of bad girls kicking ass films lately. But the truth is most of them suck. "Kill Bill" and "Underworld" worked, but there's a long list since those that are ridiculously bad and a bit too digitally enhanced. Here there are no CGI effects and we get a really good balance of a video game and comic book feeling mixed with cinema action and reality. Tracy O'Connor seems to pull the role off with quite a bit of ease, going from tom girl to the feminine and vulnerable girl next door like Franka Potente in "Run Lola Run" or Anne Parillaud in "La Femme Nakita." She also fills out a skin tight black leather suit nicely. Ironically, a male super hero was the most influential on the character.

“I would definitely say ‘Batman,’” Emanuel said. “Gwen Hunter is a female version of him. She has a dual existence. She is human just like Batman, which is his weakness. That means she can get hurt, both physically and mentally.”

The inspiration for the Ninja Girl comes from the video game character Chun-Li of “Street Fighter II.” Chun-Li was the first female character in a fighting game and is known for her quickness. Ninja Girl definitely got the best of Nightingale in their meeting with a rapid attack, so I definitely see the similiarities.

Emanuel used a boom lift attached to a wooden support that was connected to the roof of the Thai restaurant in order to work some of the magic in the cat fight scene. “We had three wire pullers,” Emanuel said.

“They would pull on the wires on one end and the actress was attached with a wirework vest she wore underneath her costume. When she jumped, the wire pullers pulled and viola! Well, after several takes, viola!



“I thought both actresses did a superb job. Both were real great sports. They also did a great job practicing two to three times per week for two months preparing for the fight scene. But more so, I am impressed with Tracy because not only did she have to do that, she also rehearsed with me several times a week.”

Before the short’s end, Gwen is seen looking through the telephone pages, calling a number and asking if “classes to kick ninja butt” are offered. Now in a feature version, Nightingale would of course train and then have to face Ninja Girl again in the finale and take her down. The good news is there is a feature script in the works. Is “Girl with Gun” the basically the first 14 pages of the screenplay? I have no idea. All I know is Nightingale could make for a really fun action movie in the future.

Born in San Francisco, Emanuel spent time as a child both in Japan and the United States. He began making films at a fairly early age and would design sets out of shoe boxes and use characters made out of legos as his stars in stop-motion movies. Later, he put together a "Star Trek: Deep Space 9" film focusing on the characters of Julian Bashir and Jadzia Dax. It was done as a high school senior project in Kobe, Japan at the international private school Canadian Academy, which is taught in English. Emanuel said it took the whole school year to complete his masterpiece.

The Southern California graduate then founded his Los Angeles production company Russem Productions in 2002 to showcase some of his filmmaking skills. Since then he has directed two shorts and produced six. Many of his projects have made a number of film festivals. "Girl with Gun" won the Silver Medal of Excellence in January at the Park City Film Music Festival and won the Bronze Telly Award in April. His short film will also be at Comic-Con on July 20 and the FAIF International Film Festival and the Independent Film Festival of North Texas in October.

"These films are my demo reel," Emanuel said. "Hopefully someone sees I have what it takes and have confidence in me for feature projects."

- CCF, June 2006

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