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GIRL WITH GUN



By Staff

PRODUCERMAG recently sat with Russ Emanuel (director, producer) and Emile Haris (writer), who worked together on various indie-film projects like Mavet, Her Knight and most recently Girl With Gun. Enjoy reading this interesting interview with the talented duo.

RUSS EMANUEL (PRODUCER, DIRECTOR): RE

EMILE HARIS (WRITER): EH

Q: Who came up with the story concept? How many times it took you to come up with the final/shooting draft?

EH: I took the famous quote by Jean-Luc Godard and pretty much ran with it. What if the story was indeed about a girl and a gun? I ran through many structural paradigms from non-linear to pure action and finally settled on the character study.

When doing a short, behind-the-camera logistics pretty much take center stage as to the ultimate approach of the narrative. Also, the character study brings the audience closer to the protagonist and is provided with an intimate glimpse into her world. Here Gwen Hunter, lives out her dichotomy – a “superwoman” in her chosen profession and the bumbling underdog in her personal life. It’s an homage to the classic superhero model found in so many popular comic books.

Most of the drafts I came up with concerned the storytelling approach. Initially, I had a shootout at the beginning with bullets and gunfire. But that got shot down (no pun intended) due to budgetary constraints. Second was the strong visual approach with emphasis on style over substance. An excellent idea if the production was shooting 35mm film, but since the final medium was 24P digital video, that got crossed out also. When I settled with my chosen approach, it was just a matter of working with Russ to tweak and improve the script.

RE: Haris came up with the story concept as well as the script, so all I will say is that it took us 11 revisions, which we worked very closely together

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with, all the way up to the shoot itself. I relied on his expertise and would run any revisions I made by him.

 SUBMIT

Q: The main character has a conflicted character, a certain amount of depth. She is living so many lives (like some of us - smile). What made you decide to give such dimensions to that character?

EH: Since we arrived at the character study approach to telling the story, the main selling point would then be the central figure of Gwen Hunter aka The Nightingale. It's the timeless approach of the flawed Überhuman where the individual is almost infallible at Herculean tasks but completely incompetent at simple ones. In this case, as the Nightingale, Gwen finds little difficulty in dispensing a roomful of armed drug dealers, but is completely inept at sustaining a relationship with her low maintenance beau, Dan.

She often envies her friend Mitzi's regular life and wishes that her life itself would unfold with such exquisite domesticity. Yet, she knows that that is not meant to be and that she is destined for different things. All of us at some point in our lives have always wanted what we cannot have. Do we constantly try to achieve something that is untenable or do we embrace our destiny and live our own lives to its fullest?

Gwen uses the metaphor "chasing rainbows" as the best way to describe how she feels about her life. She knows that rainbows are beautiful but to actually catch one is impossible. It is best to just sit there and appreciate its beauty and accept its unreachable distance as part of that beauty.

RE: Because as you said Ahmer, many of us have that conflicted character. For me as a director and producer, it was the choice made between living a normal 9-5 life that would have been easy for me but ultimately unfulfilling and the strenuous life of a filmmaker with is more grueling yet very fulfilling. Like Gwen Hunter, I had to make a choice as many of us have to do, not just once in our lives but many times.

Conflict is reality. And we wanted to present reality even in a fantastical superhero world like "GWG: Girl With Gun". As much as I like the visual ambience, I am very much honed into the character study. Character conflict has always interested me, a classic example would be Hamlet. Shakespeare let us get into his psyche, his "inner monologue" if you will, to try to understand why he did what he did. To be or not to be . . . this is essentially what Gwen Hunter is contemplating, especially in her voiceovers (her own inner monologue) which are spread throughout the film. This is what makes Gwen Hunter more attainable to the audience, more flawed, more human.

Q: What was the biggest challenge in writing the script?

EH: Budget and locations. When writing a script you plan on shooting yourself, more often than not it's a process of reverse engineering. How do you tailor your script to available resources? You have to reign in your ideas to a manageable level without compromising your vision. I think this develops a certain sense of creative discipline and makes you aware of the resources you are working with. Also, since you're working together with the director, you have the ability to fit the script to coincide with his final vision which helps streamline the process a great deal.

Q: What are your future plans as a writer (Haris) and director (Russ)?

RE, EH: We are a filmmaking team and plan to take our talents into the feature realm. These short films taught us valuable lessons that we can apply to our future projects. We also would like to take our films to film festivals. Just last Sunday (July 31), we got our second film "Mavet" into the Los Angeles International Short Film Festival (LA Shorts Fest) which will be

PAUSE BETWEEN THE CLIMAX AND THE END OF THE FILM. We have already submitted "GWG: Girl With Gun" to certain festivals too and will start knowing if we got in from September onwards.

Q: With the limited budget how did you come up some really cool special effects?

RE, EH: This film was made possible by our filmmaking friends who believed in the project and lent their expertise and equipment to us for free. Without their help, there would have been no way we could have shot and completed it. As an example, our good friend Jeff Scott agreed to lend his stunt/wirework expertise to make it possible to perform the climbing wall sequence during the climatic fight sequence. We couldn't have been happier with the final result on screen and are truly indebted to him.

Q: Did you do storyboarding (Russ)?

RE: Yes I did. I worked with a wonderful storyboard artist named Jeff Reed who took my rough storyboard sketches and created realistic representations of the actors (using their headshots). I was thoroughly impressed with them and it helped during the shoot.

Q: What's your next project?

RE: We've just wrapped principal photography on a horror short called "Perfect Red" which Haris wrote and I helped produce. You can check it out at <http://perfectred.russem.com>

Check back on the Russem Productions website at <http://www.russem.com> for continuous updates (for all our films).

Q: What's your advise to aspiring screenwriters (Haris) and aspiring directors (Russ)?

EH: It's difficult to come up with something new. Even the experts admit it. So find a way to put a novel spin on old ideas and present it in a whole new package. People will never tire from hearing the same stories told over and over again as long as they sound fresh and exciting.

RE: To all of you out there wanting to direct, I say start directing your own low budget shorts and from these you will gain the experience to move up the ladder with bigger budgets and ultimately features. Just remember, persistence and passion is the key, it can be very stressful to create a film but it is ultimately rewarding.

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