

# Local filmmakers jump from spoof to serious with 'Mark of the Beast'

By MIKE CHAIKEN  
EDITIONS EDITOR

The local filmmakers behind the horror spoof trilogy "Bikini Bloodbath" and the comedy "London Betty" are at it again. But this time around, things have taken a serious turn.

"Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast" is the latest venture from Plainville High School alumni Thomas Seymour, Plantsville's Jon Gorman, and Sheri Lynn from the New Haven area. This time, however, the trio and their cohorts deliberately set aside the laughs and guffaws that were trademarks of their earlier work.

The Observer caught up with Tom and Sheri to talk about the film, which is in the early stages of editing.

**Q: First of all, is the movie really based on the Kipling short story "Mark of the Beast?" What is it about? How did the idea come about?**

**Sheri:** It was Tom's idea to turn "Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast" into a movie. He wrote the majority of the script then asked me to beef it up, make some edits, etc. The story is about a group of friends hanging out, partying at a cabin in the woods.

**Tom:** The film is about a man who desecrates a shrine, then is cursed by a faceless silver leper. His friends try to exorcise him, but it doesn't work. So they kidnap the leper and torture it until it lifts the curse and in doing so they lose their own humanity. There are a lot of political, religious and moral themes. They wreck themselves morally to save their friend Fleete (played by Phil Hall). The problem is Fleete is not really that great of a guy.

**Sheri:** I like it because it's complex as to who the "villain" really is. It's what



MARK ESPOSITO

Ellen Muth, left, and Debbie Rochon in a scene from 'Rudyard Kipling's 'Mark of the Beast' from local filmmakers Thomas Seymour, Jon Gorman, and Sheri Lynn.

you take out of it. I'm big on the whole "You shouldn't mess with things you don't understand"-thing so that really drew me towards the story.

**Q: How does "Mark of the Beast" compare to your previous work ... production-wise, performance-wise, and artistically?**

**Tom:** We focused more on performance, more takes, less coverage, but with more camera movement. This was very new for me and co-director Jon Gorman because it's our first serious horror film. It was strange because about two days in I realized how much higher the stakes are

when you're shooting horror drama or mystery suspense. There's no wiggle room. Every performance has to be good or else you have a turd because the story is so important. With comedy, you can just cut the bad parts out and as long as people laugh and the story makes sense you've done your job. This was very new for me personally.

**Sheri:** I really liked doing a serious film. We're so used to doing comedy, which I love, so it was a challenge to do something totally straight. Acting-wise, for me, it was a challenge, but I really liked doing something different. The

style that Jon and Tom chose to shoot the film really worked. I like the look and feel of films from the '70s and we really tried to capture that.

**Q: What do you think you learned from your previous work that you were able to bring to the set for "Mark of the Beast?"**

**Tom:** I am way more comfortable talking to my actors about adjusting their performances and more sure of what I want out of the film. Jon and I work great together. We very rarely clash because I think a lot of our sensibilities are similar. I trust my gut more now because I

know what I want and what makes a performance work and I'm going to get what I need to get in order to protect my vision. I required a certain level of performance for my main characters and I didn't accept it if they fell below. So it was probably challenging for them as well.

**Sheri:** With the first "Bikini Bloodbath," it was my first real filmmaking experience... and I wasn't really comfortable asserting myself because I was just feeling my way through everything. "Mark of the Beast" is the fifth feature film I've produced, so I definitely have a handle on what my responsibilities

are and how they should be done. It's almost like second nature at this point.

**Q: Who stars in this? And what are some basic resumes of the cast?**

**Tom:** Ellen Muth (star of "Dead Like Me"—the Showtime and Syfy channel series), "Dead Like Me: Afterlife, the feature), Debbie Rochon (star of "Toxic Avenger IV," "Tromeo and Juliet" and host of Fangoria Radio), Dick Boland ("Welcome to Earth," "Land of College Prophets," "London Betty," "Bikini Bloodbath 2-3"), Phil Hall ("Burial Boys," "Land of College Prophets," "London Betty," "Bikini Bloodbath 2-3"), Margaret Rose Champagne ("Bikini Bloodbath 1-3," "Land of College Prophets," "London Betty"), and Sheri Lynn ("Ghost Hunters," "Bikini Bloodbath 1-3," "London Betty").

**Sheri:** The majority of the cast has appeared in several other movies we've done... Ellen Muth... was the newbie on set. She played "Natalie."

**Q: The filming was done in a short burst of time. What was that experience like and were the challenges of that kind work load?**

**Sheri:** The film was actually shot in 10 days, which falls right in line with the production time frame for all our other movies.

**Tom:** It was a grueling shoot for me personally but I'm told almost everyone had fun.

**Sheri:** It was the first time that most of the cast and crew stayed at the same location for the entire shoot. So it was really fun to have everyone together in one place. As it turned it out, there ended up being a "girls' cabin" and a "boys'

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