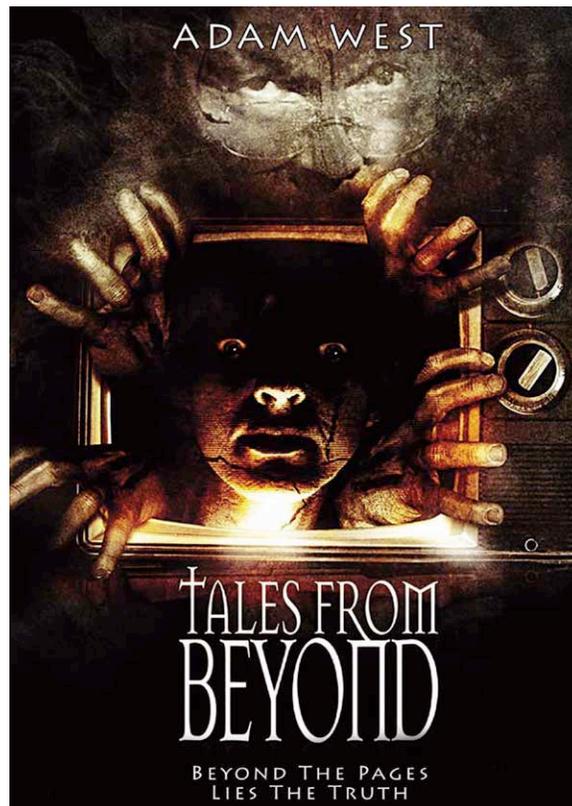


Tales From Behind the Camera

10/19/2006

Posted by **Frosty**

Frosty here. I know Nate through some friends and out of the blue he mentions that his first film is coming out on DVD soon. He was kind of wondering if I could help him plug the release and I agreed, but in exchange I wanted something from him. Nothing crazy or extravagant, I wanted him to write a few words about how the film came together and what it was like to have a DVD coming out. So in exchange for the below article, here is a [link to Amazon](#) for his DVD titled *Tales From Beyond*. Now here is Nate.



By Nate Barlow

Every aspiring filmmaker dreams of winning an Oscar.

Of course, he or she has actually to make a film first. That used to be a major challenge in its own right, but the advent of high-quality, low-cost digital video has made it possible for almost any director to afford to make

his or her first film.

Which leads us to distribution. Getting ones film out there has become the first major hurdle in achieving that Oscar dream. For most, that is where the dream stops. Sure, there are film festivals, and the internet is opening up more options, but whether it's on the big screen (ideally) or on DVD in stores across the country, serious distribution, with the chance of actually seeing some money, remains a major accomplishment.

So you can understand my excitement at having my directorial-debut feature, *Tales From Beyond*, picked up by Anthem Pictures for a DVD release starting October 24th.

Tales From Beyond is a Twilight Zone-esque anthology film by four writer-directors each with his own story inside the greater film. It stars Adam West (TV's *Batman*) as a mysterious bookstore owner, Jay, who leads a young couple into the amazing world of his books. The four stories are: "Abernathy" (directed by Russell Scott), "Nex's Diner" (directed by Eric Manning), "Life Replay" (directed by myself) and "Fighting Spirit" (directed by Josh Austin). All four of us directed the interconnecting segments as a team.

The genesis of *Tales From Beyond* originated in January 2003. Eric (a friend of mind going back to college) asked if I would be interested in working with him, his friend Josh and one of Josh's friends on a series of shorts centered on a theme. Besides showcasing our directing skills, we would all act for each other, thus having the opportunity to play several roles in a short period of time (all of us do play multiple roles in *Tales From Beyond*).

Initially, the plan was for each of us to direct a short per month, and each month we would tackle another genre. Twenty-one months and \$200,000 later, we had a single feature film.

No, it wasn't a case of poor scheduling and total mismanagement of funds. In one of our first meetings after writing the individual shorts, I suggested that we try to find a way to interconnect the stories and create a feature. Shorts are fun, but features are fun that might actually be distributed. Everybody liked the idea. Eric mentioned that he had found a used bookstore that would make for an incredible location. That weekend I went home and cranked out a draft of the bookstore sequence, which, save for rearranging the order of the stories, ended up being almost identical to the final shooting script.

Once we had committed to the idea of making a feature, shooting down and dirty no longer seemed a viable option. We started planning for a longer shoot, and, of course, this also meant spending more money to do it right.

Over the next four to five months, shooting sporadically on weekends, nights, or whenever else might work, we completed principal photography on the four stories utilizing a constantly revolving crew anchored by our amazing cinematographer, Dale Obert.

But even with the four stories complete, we still had the bookstore with which to contend. Again knowing that doing so would greatly enhance our marketability, we wanted to attach a name actor to one of the three roles in the sequence. So we put a casting notice out via Breakdown Services, the same service used by all the major studios and television networks to distribute casting notices to agent and managers.

We were pretty much hoping against hope that something might click with an agent, since name actors usually only attach themselves to ultra-low-budget productions when they have personal connections to the filmmakers. Rarely does it happen through their representatives, who, since they work off commission, aren't usually motivated to pursue jobs for their name clients on smaller films such as ours.

But we got lucky. Something in the breakdown caught the eye of Adam West's agent and she submitted his headshot. We sent her the script; she liked it. She sent it to Adam, and, better yet, he liked it! Adam would later tell me how much he loved my words—what a thrill!

We had our actor, and we had our location. The bookstore was located in Riverside, part of LA's endless urban sprawl, yet far enough away that we all had to take off work and stay in a hotel for the duration of the shoot. By this time it was autumn, otherwise known in Southern California as fire season. And in the fall of 2003, the fire of the season was in Riverside County.

At first we were afraid that we might have to postpone production, but the fire changed direction just before we were to start shooting. Standing outdoors was absolutely surreal. The clouds and smoke and pollution in the air reflected the light from the flames, bathing everything in an eerie orange glow. A burnt smell perpetually wafted through the air. And it snowed! Ash, that is. Tiny particles of ash rained down upon us almost the entire week, and anyone wearing a dark shirt quickly looked like he or she had the world's worst case of dandruff. It was strangely appropriate for the film. Fortunately for our cast and crew, we were mostly shooting interiors, so they didn't have to deal with this Dali-esque scene constantly.

After the bookstore shoot, we only had a few pick-up scenes to grab before we had all our footage. Not bad for nearly ten months of work. Right?

Enter 2004: Post-production and beyond.

We started the new year in editing. Prior experience had taught us to budget a significant amount of money for post-production. Too many low-budget indies throw all their money into principal photography. With nothing left for post, the filmmakers either never finish their movie or end up doing a really crappy job—a sure distribution killer.

To the extent that we could work on the various elements of post simultaneously, we did. Warren Bowman, our editor, got the ball rolling, constructing a cohesive whole from our countless hours of footage. And as soon as he had cut enough with which the rest of the team could work, in came our masterful sound designers, Michelle Garuik and Sangtar Heer of Grind Music and Sound, and composer, David James Nielsen. By the time we were done we had an amazing 5.1-channel mix that included a full score, much of which was played by an actual orchestra, not a synthesizer—a true rarity for a film of our scale.

Our one-time gaffer, Matthew Talesfore, provided the last piece of the puzzle with his visual effects wizardry. I forget the total number of VFX shots in *Tales From Beyond*, but there were 27 in “Life Replay” alone! When we first planned the film, it was our intention to use cuts and editing to simulate the effects. But our ambition took over, and we decided to go all out and create the magic in frame. As anyone can see from the final product, the expense is well worth it—everything sells so much better when you can really see it happening!

So we finally had a film, but we still had to get it out there. The first and foremost way to promote oneself is the festival circuit, which we attacked with a vengeance. *Tales From Beyond* ended up playing five festivals (Temecula Valley International Film Festival, Great Lakes Film Festival, Big Mini-DV Film Festival, ShockerFest and ShriekFest), winning awards at two of them (Best Fantasy Feature at ShockerFest and Best Science-Fiction Feature at ShriekFest—on the same night, no less!).

With awards in tow, we started meeting with producer’s reps, finally signing with Strategic Film Partners in mid-2005 (2½ years and counting at this point!). It would take almost another year before Strategic could hook us up with Anthem Pictures, an established DVD authoring and manufacturing company relatively new to distributing. A summer of negotiating later, and we finally had a distribution deal, 3¾ years after we started. Appropriately enough, just in time for Halloween.

Step one towards that dream accomplished. Next up, statuette.