



Frazer Lee

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On Edge with Brit Director Frazer Lee

By Calum Robert Waddell

Frazer Lee is the very talented director behind two incredible short films starring Doug 'Pinhead' Bradley. The first of these is On Edge, which is top of this critic's list of contemporary shorts. Telling of a very



deranged dentist (Bradley) who frequents bondage bars and likes to cause his patients the sort of grief unseen since the days of Brain Yuzna. On Edge is a highly recommended little gem. Lee's follow up short, Red Lines, although far lower budgeted and certainly less amusing, is still a cold and claustrophobic little thriller that features Bradley in another outstanding turn. Hoping to finally make the jump to full-length features in the future. Firelight shocks wouldn't bet against Frazer Lee...

My conversation with Frazer began with him telling me about his idea for a new Hellraiser film (Bradley had actually recommended the director to New Line as a writer on Hellraiser 7 but was sadly rebutted). "My concept Lee begins, is to pick up from the end of the first film, ignore the sequels - just rewind, pick the franchise up at the end of the part one. I'd call it Hellraiser: Lament - the important thing for me is the box... the demons can't hurt you unless you play with the box. The demons can't hurt you unless you play with the box. That's what's interesting to me, to centre the movie upon the mystery of the box". With that tantalising tease of what might be, we lead into talking about Red Lines...

Okay - Red Lines was (pauses) it was time for me to make another film; I was pitching a few short scripts. The difficulty, as it always is, was with funding so we shot on digital - we did Red Lines on Digi-Beta. Urban Chillers.com were pestering us about getting On Edge online, but we were actually contractually tied to somewhere else (Brit Shorts) and we had to wait for the contract to run out. At this time Urbanchillers were planning Fear Zone, which was to be a whole bunch of short thrillers, it would be five-minute films in each thirty-minute episode. Horror for the short attention span generation (laughs) - but rather than be daunted I thought "what a challenge!" So I asked them "how much money can we have" and they said "we don't have any money" then I asked "how much time" and they said "early November". Now remember that this is only September! So I sat down, wrote the script to Red Lines in a few hours, sent it to agents, producers - sent it to Doug Bradley, who was in the USA touring theatres with An Evening with Death. It was his wife that showed him the script and Doug said, 'if it's Frazer I must do it' which was very kind of him. We shot all of Doug's stuff in just one day - it was real 'by the seat of your pants' filmmaking! Exactly one month between the start of the film and the finish, which I'm really proud of! I just don't intend to make a habit of it (laughs).

You said that Red Lines had no money behind it - so how much were the final costs?

Well I wasn't going to let lack of funding stop me. On Edge was quite an expensive project; it was shot on 35 mm and in widescreen - it cost about £35,000. I budgeted Red Lines as between three and five grand, and it came in closer to the five - and that was with a lot of favours and people not getting paid. I never get paid for these fucking things (laughs). Compared with On Edge this was a far less expensive piece of work but I don't think that robs it its impact. In fact in many ways the lack of money made us work a lot harder.

UK funding bodies such as Scottish Screen have been criticised for promoting short film schemes. What is your reaction to this?

I think it's important to have these schemes. I'd have to argue on the side of Scottish Screen and their contemporaries. I want to make it clear that I have never received funding from any public bodies due to the nature of my projects but I have seen some of the shorts being made and these directors deserve to make their first mistakes on short films. I think that the schemes set up for short filmmakers are very noble. The only thing I get pissed off about is when they put an age limit on things because I'm banging on a bit now (laughs). I have submitted projects to Scottish Screen and other such funding bodies, but they have all been turned down. But the people who do get the money - well why not? Good for them, I've seen some very good short films and some very bad ones as well.

Doug Bradley also starred in On Edge. Why did you choose to work with him again?



Doug's actually got Polaroid pictures of me with the puzzle box (laughs). When casting *On Edge* Doug was top of my list and Doug had good taste because his agent said "no - these guys don't have any money". Then when we met we got along really well, and I pitched other ideas, which Doug liked. Doug's a champion of the horror genre and also of short films. He finds it diverting from his usual line of work. He's a professional actor

always on cue with his lines and knows what angle to stand in and so forth...all very good stuff. Despite being a very scary guy he's also very funny. If you look at *Red Lines* the final shots were actually suggested by Doug, but not in any big headed way... instead he's just "Oh yeah, this would make for a great shot".

How hard is it for young upcoming directors to make genre films in the UK?

I wouldn't say I'm young anymore...

Oh go on then - how old are you?

I'm actually only 32...I'm jesting, I'd say that making genre films in the UK is as difficult as making any film that strays from the norm. Let's face it one of the reasons we love horror movies is because they stray from the norm. You have experimental horror movies right up to mainstream horror films and I think of us as making mainstream movies with a bit of an experimental twist. We formed Robber Baron back in 1998 and we pitched endlessly, so it's easy to say, "I can't get my film made because it's horror and there is some of that. For example recently I met investors and they were really interested in funding a production and then they found out it's going to be a horror movie and suddenly they had cold feet. But then look at how well these films do - they have a guaranteed target audience that is always looking for something new. They'll find that out in time of course.....

What convinced you that Doug Bradley would be ideal for the role of a maniacal dentist On Edge?

I was sitting in bed reading *On Edge* by Chris Fowler... it was in one of his short story collections - and this story just leapt out at me. It was ten pages long and what struck me was the black humour of it, and from day one I could hear Doug Bradley's voice. I had seen Doug presenting his show *The Man Behind the Mask* and I was sitting watching in the back quietly. I remember thinking this is going to sound cheesy, 'I'm going to work with that guy one day'. After *Hellraiser* and *Nightbreed* I also thought to myself 'you just wouldn't mess with this guy'.

Did On Edge spring from any genuine fears that you have about the dentist?

(Pauses) Actually no- but I've heard from so many people that audience members have just got up and walked out during it. Some girls in a screening of the film in Portugal, they walked out and I laughed and thought 'Yes! I've cracked it'. Most people I know have a fear of the dentist 90% of the world's population can relate to it... but I have had nothing but good experiences at the dentist. In fact, I love the equipment, the smells and the slightly surgical costumes. I love all that. I am what you call a 'self professed dental pervert' (laughs). I guess *On Edge* was my attempt at making up for never having had a

bad experience at the dentist, never having even had a filling.

You've never even had a filling? Don't you drink Coke?

Diet Coke actually (laughs). One day, one day I will have one... I'm quite romantic about the dentist. Most things medical I have quite a fascination with. I originally thought about making the victim a female - but changed my mind. I thought it was too obvious, and I wanted to stay true to the short story. I'm a big fan of Chris Fowler's writing and he let me have the story for free so I felt indebted to him. One change I did make was that in the original story the dentist is younger and the patient is older, but it made sense to me to have the older guy in the position of power...

What about your plans to make a full-length feature?

Soon after On Edge I wrote a screenplay called Urbane. It basically started out as an occult thriller set in London's Soho district. Fast forward to 2003 and I'm on the eighth draft. It still has it's roots in occult horror but it's become more of a pyscho, surgical, medical school horror. More along the lines of H.P.Lovecraft meets The Faculty, not that I've seen The Faculty, it's just what I've been told...

It's a good film.

Well I can live with that H.P.Lovecraft is on the edge and The Faculty is more my mainstream sensibilities. The major studios have rejected it, but a couple of guys have called to see further drafts. I think draft eight is the film that I'd like to make and to try and please possible financiers I've adapted draft eight into a graphic novel. Shane Oakley, who did Limbo by Alan Moore, he's working on it. The comic book is hopefully going to hit the shelves at the end of this year. It's my attempt to do a director's cut of the film in graphic novel form. My intention is to put the graphic novel and the short films on DVD. I think if the graphic novel lands and DVD lands on the right desk one day then it could lead to me making a feature.

Any other icons of the genre that you would like to work with?

Oh yes.... unfortunately some of them are dead. My ultimate living dead movie would be to resurrect Vincent Price. Donald Pleasance and Peter Cushing... I just worshipped these guys. Christopher Lee I'd like to work with. I know it's a bit of an obvious thing to say but hey... I'd really just like to carry on working with amazing people I'm sure a lot of filmmakers dream of working with people and then they do. I was happy to read that Christopher Lee dreamed of making Lord of the Rings all his life and then, of course, he did. It's good to know that even the big guys have dreams too. Some have joked that Doug is my Peter Cushing or my Bela Lugosi. Although I hope to God I'm not Ed Wood! Mind you I did do some cross-dressing in my youth...

Should I print that?

You can print what the fuck you like. But I mean (for Red Lines) I was a bit influenced by the role of Peter Cushing plays in Fear in the Night. This bespectacled schoolteacher that has gone horribly wrong... and I always visualised Doug in the role. I just see him as such an icon of the genre. I hope he won't get big headed but I think I am working with one of the greats of the genre.

from Eye On An Independent, Firelight Shocks Magazine, August 2003