

Penny Dreadful



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1) Penny Dreadful, looking at the synopsis, seems like a classic horror movie, but the trailer gives more complex hints, an almost supernatural atmosphere. Do you agree with this?

I tend to prefer stories that are anchored in reality as opposed to say monster movies, or those that rely on the supernatural. Stories where ordinary people, (Penny and her therapist in this case), are thrust into horrifying and extraordinary events that find them fighting desperately for their very sanity and survival. Given similar circum-

stances, what happens to Penny and her therapist could happen to anybody, which I feel is one of the reasons people are finding this film to be so frightening. That being said, our antagonist in this film does have a very dark, disturbing, mysterious, and almost "other worldly" quality to their persona and actions, which keeps the audience guessing right up until the end of the film.

2) In this project you are involved as director, scriptwriter and producer. Do you think that this gave you the chance to express yourself more freely in the production of Penny Dreadful?

Absolutely. By taking on all three roles, as well as having my company, Brandes Films International, Inc., finance the film, I was able to maintain creative control, develop the story, cast the actors, and execute the production of the film exactly how I envisioned it.

3) In horror movies history we have already met a dreadful hitchhiker, John Ryder from The Hitcher, the 1986 masterpiece by Robert Harmon. Penny Dreadful's movie poster recalls this movie in some way. What are the essential differences between The Hitcher and Penny Dreadful?

I love "The Hitcher", but our story in "Penny Dreadful" is completely different, with much different lead characters, and it takes place for the most part in a very unique setting that's never been done before. Our hitchhiker is especially much different than John Ryder, not only in their personality, motivation, and actions, but also in a very significant way that I can't divulge here, but that will make itself clear once you've seen the film.

4) Will there be many gore scenes in Penny Dreadful? As we are Splattercontainer, you can imagine how much we care about this question.

Yes, there is plenty of gore in Penny to satisfy fans of the genre, and there is also a very disturbing psychological aspect to it that I think makes it even more compelling and terrifying.

5) How come you chose an "all-women" protagonist cast (Rachel Miner, Mimi Rogers, Liz Davies)?

To best answer this question I think it helps to explain a little bit about the story and lead characters. Penny Dreadful is about an emotionally fragile young woman, Penny, (Rachel Miner), who has developed a severe phobia of cars due to an automobile accident in the mountains where as a young child she witnessed the tragic deaths of both of her parents. Because of her fears and phobia Penny has led a very sheltered and

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timid existence that has made it difficult for her to lead a normal life, so she has sought the help of a therapist, (Mimi Rogers). The relationship between the two has grown beyond a doctor/patient relationship into a friendship with an almost mother/daughter type of bond, so the two women care a great deal about one another, and Penny has become quite dependent on her therapist for support and guidance. The story centers around the road trip the two women take back to the scene of the accident in the mountains to try to help Penny conquer her fears, but when they inadvertently cross paths with a homicidal psychopath what started out as a therapeutic exercise in healing turns into a horrifying life and death struggle for their very survival. I feel there's something inherently more sympathetic, compelling, disturbing, and terrifying about two women in a relationship such as this who are stranded by themselves in the mountains at night with an impending storm headed their way and a mysterious and sinister stranger stalking and tormenting them than it would have been with two men in the same situation. The dynamic is much different overall, the odds of their survival seem greater, and the stakes consequently much higher.

6) How was working with a great actress such as Mimi Rogers?

I very much enjoyed working with Mimi. She's an incredibly talented actress whose work I've always appreciated, and she's really terrific in this film. Once you've seen Penny Dreadful you'll understand what I mean when I say that Mimi takes on a big challenge here. One that would intimidate many other actors, male or female, and she pulls it off amazingly well. She and Rachel Miner, who is also super talented and a real pleasure to work with, were true professionals and the chemistry between them perfect for these roles. Rachel's incredible, heart breaking performance will definitely have people talking. I couldn't imagine anyone else playing these characters. By the way, Mimi's 11 year old daughter, Lucy, actually makes her acting debut in this film and it's obvious she's definitely inherited her mother's enormous talent.

7) What are the main features a horror movie must have to catch its audience?

Conflict is of course the basis for all good stories. Human vs Human, Human vs Nature, Human vs The System, Human Vs. Monster, Human vs The Supernatural, etc. So, conflict is naturally the first key ingredient for all good horror films. Second for me is the characters. You have to have one or more protagonist(s) that the audience will care about and root for, as well as one or more antagonist(s) that they can love to hate and root against. Put your hero(s) in a life and death situation against a powerful and deadly adversary with seemingly insurmountable odds.

If you can also incorporate a ticking clock that's working against your protagonist, even better. Maybe it's a race to escape from somewhere in addition to fighting off the bad guy, or monster, as the case may be, or it could even be nature itself. In "Penny Dreadful" there's a snow storm approaching that threatens the protagonists' survival in addition to the ruthless killer who's stalking and tormenting them. The storm and dropping temperatures add one more obstacle for our protagonists to deal with and helps to provide something of a ticking clock, or race against time.

A good hook certainly helps with these types of films too. Something unique and fresh that sets it apart. This can many times be rooted either in the characters themselves, the setting, and circumstances, or a combination of all three. The hook in Penny Dreadful, for instance, is very unique and hasn't been seen before, but it isn't something I should disclose here because it catches the audience completely off guard and would spoil a big surprising twist in the film.

Pacing is key too. Horror films need to have a momentum that is driven by unforeseen twists in the plot, as well as what I call those "close your eyes, goose bump" moments of heart pounding suspense and terror.



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Moments that the audience doesn't necessarily see coming and that seemingly stack the odds up more and more against our protagonist(s) and more and more in favor of the antagonist(s), propelling us toward that ultimate showdown between the two at the climax of the film.

Of course most horror films also need some sort of "body count". The victims tend to pile up along the way as horror stories progress and I think fans of this genre have grown to expect that to some degree. Usually, the more clever and creative the killings the better. I think though if you try to get too "creative" and it comes across as being preposterous or forced, you call too much attention to trying to be clever for clever's sake and take the audience out of the story. Sometimes a less is more approach can work well with these sort of films too because you encourage the audience to use their imagination. The trick is knowing how to balance the two and still deliver what is expected. Penny has plenty of gore and the killings are very realistic, which I feel delivers a very disturbing psychological punch in addition to the gore, giving the viewer the unsettling feeling that what happens to these two women and the other victims is very plausible and could happen to anyone under similar circumstances.

Last, but certainly not least, is style. The style you choose can enhance the telling of your story considerably, but it should not get in the way or call too much attention to itself. Because color plays such a crucial role in Penny I created a digital intermediate in post, which allowed me greater creative flexibility. Unfortunately, especially with all of the recent developments in digital technology, a lot of films these days seem to be all about style over substance, and the stories sometimes seem to get compromised or sacrificed along the way. Whatever style one chooses I think it is important to just remember to make sure it serves the best interests of telling your story.

8) We have noticed the presence of Heather Mages (2001 Maniacs, Tamara, Urban Legends: Bloody Mary, Reeker) in the staff, a well known name in the special effects world. What are these effects' role in Penny Dreadful?

Heather is really great at what she does and a joy to work with, both on a professional and personal level. The effects in this film were critical, very important, and pertain primarily to the hitchhiker and the killings, so I didn't want to trust just anyone with that kind of responsibility.

9) Would you like to say anything to our Splatter Maniacs (our Readers) before saying goodbye?

I appreciate the opportunity to share this information about "Penny Dreadful" with your readers. I love this genre and really appreciate the fans out there for this type of film. Horror fans have a dedicated devotion and enormous enthusiasm for the genre that is very unique and quite special. I'm confident you will all feel I served the genre well with "Penny Dreadful" and will find it to be one of the most disturbing and frightening films to come along in quite some time.