





DEADBEAT AT DAWN

CAST

Jim VanBebber as Goose
Paul Harper as Danny
Megan Murphy as Kristie
Marc Pitman as Bone Crusher
Ric Walker as Keith
Charlie Goetz as Dad

CREW

Written and Directed by **Jim VanBebber**
Produced by **Michael King**
Director of Photography **Michael King**
Make-up Effects, Stunt Choreography and Editing by **Jim VanBebber**
Music by **A-OK** and **Ned Folkerth**



CONTENTS

Credits 3

Fire in the Streets: 7

Exploring Jim VanBebber's *Deadbeat at Dawn* (2018)
by Scott Gabbey

Manifesto of Madness: 21

The Cinema of Jim VanBebber (2018)
by Graham Rae

About the Transfer 34



FIRE IN THE STREETS: EXPLORING JIM VANBEBBER'S 'DEADBEAT AT DAWN'

by Scott Gabbey

"If you do not believe in what you do, then your work is pointless. You must believe."
– *Gypsy*, *Deadbeat at Dawn*

Jim VanBebber believes in his work so strongly that he has become a living part of it. After being awarded a full scholarship for his first year in film school, VanBebber dropped out of Wright State University after his second year and used a student loan to create Asmodeus Productions and fund his debut feature-length film, *Deadbeat at Dawn*. The interview with Jim VanBebber for these liner notes was conducted via telephone during the early morning hours of April 5, 2018.

"During the first year at Wright State, we had to make three Super 8 films," VanBebber explains. "I made *Rest in Peace*, *White Trash*, and *Road Trip*. I was looking at the curriculum and who they had there. Nobody knew what was going on. Luckily, the Super 8 professor was a former student who at least knew about shooting Super 8 films, but other than that, they basically wanted to turn everyone into critics. They said shit like, 'You can forget making films, but you can write about them and make a living that way.' I started looking at other schools like Ohio State and Athens, but then, out of nowhere, they hired Jim Klein and Julia Reichert to teach 16mm for second, third, and fourth year students. They were a big deal. They were real filmmakers who had done a bunch of feature-length documentaries and had just been nominated for an Academy Award for *Seeing Red*, a documentary about the American Communist Party of the 1930s. So I went back for that second year to learn 16mm. That's when I met Mike King and Marcelo Games and we made *Doper*. King really directed it. I ran sound and helped cut it. After that, for the third year, I got a student loan and said fuck it! Mike, Marcelo, and I saw *The Evil Dead*, and I said, 'We can do this shit. Let's make an action film.' They stayed in school and got their bachelor's degrees. While they were still in school, they had access to the 16mm cameras and sound gear. I was in Dayton working at, I think, a taco restaurant, I don't know, there were so many restaurants, and we would shoot *Deadbeat at Dawn* on the weekends. At the same time, we also shot *Shattered*, which was Marcelo's feature drama film. From the time we started in 1985, it was three-and-a-half years before *Deadbeat at Dawn* was finished. That seemed like forever. Little did I know what was coming down the road with *The Manson Family*."

As a director, VanBebber yanks you up by the roots and sends you soaring through a degenerate world where killers and junkies run free. You either fight for your life or die like a mongrel in the street. *Deadbeat at Dawn* is a short-fused explosive blast. The credits roll, and without a moment's notice, you're in a Dayton cemetery with The Ravens and The Spydys. VanBebber plays Goose, the leader of The Ravens. Danny, played by Paul Harper, is the leader of The Spydys.

VanBebber continues, "Paul Harper was a couple years ahead of me, Mike, and Marcelo. He had gone through the program and was actually working on campus at the telecommunication center, directing college television, because they had their own channel. I worked there too, and we became friends. I put him in *White Trash*, which was the second Super 8 film that I made during my first year, and I recognized that he was good. He jumped into *Deadbeat at Dawn*, and I think he gives the most consistent performance in the film. His character is what it is and stays that way with no weak spots of bad acting."

The two street gangs size each other up, then duke it out in a brawl that ends in puncture wounds and a hand blown off by gunfire before the cops arrive. Moments later, Goose sanitizes himself with a bottle of booze, while his girlfriend reads from the *Necronomicon* in an attempt to keep him safe. "I don't need any witch routine to take care of Danny," Goose scoffs, before retreating back to the cemetery to train for the next showdown. Two elements that separate *Deadbeat at Dawn* from the average street gang film are the mystical references and the kung-fu style fight sequences. Instead of a gang of cretins swinging aimlessly at one another, we're treated to well-choreographed roundhouses, throwing stars, and flailing nunchucks.

"In the hyper-realistic, cartoony world that is *Deadbeat at Dawn*, where gangs carry golf clubs and wear Batman masks and jock straps, the whole thing is out there, like a graphic novel, and I wanted Kristie's character to be more than that tough chick from *The Warriors*," VanBebber says. "Instead, I thought, let's make her think she's a witch. And maybe she is. She gives that cross to Goose, and he breaks it, breaks the spell, and fucks up. By having her character into that, it adds a texture to the entire film. And you don't know that she's not a witch, because the black cat shows up, and little things like that are scattered throughout the film."

Deadbeat at Dawn maintains a feeling of walking through quicksand, in the sense that every time Goose tries to take a step in the so-called right direction, he's struck down by tragedy. Much to the dismay of the other gang members, he agrees to quit The Ravens to be a full-time partner with Kristie, deciding to go out for one last score so they can lift





"Stills needs lots more fucking money" – Original Deadbeat at Dawn storyboard page.

themselves out of poverty. It's at this point in the film that we're introduced to the opposing gang members, including Bone Crusher, played by Marc Pitman.

"Meeting Marc Pitman was great," VanBebber recalls. "He came to Wright State when I had just dropped out. He made sure that we met. He wanted to be in the film, so I created that character for him. He brought an eye-opening approach to acting to all of us, as we were all kind of stiff. He was a big Dennis Hopper fan. When you said 'action', the switch was flicked, and he would just throw himself into it. It was impressive, and it taught all of us to just get out there and go for it."

After huffing Rush, Bone Crusher delivers what is now a legendary monologue, boasting his deeply-rooted hatred for all people. "I hate people, man, I don't care, I don't give a shit," he says. The scene is beautifully wrapped up with a close-up of his growling face proclaiming to be, "The baddest motherfucker you ever saw, man!"

VanBebber explains, "The Rush scene wasn't really scripted. I had loosely told him that this is the moment where the audience gets to meet you, and I want you to make a hell of an impression. Do this Rush, let your anger out, and tell everybody that you're the baddest motherfucker on the planet. I let him just run with it, so it's an improvisation on his part. I think we did three takes, and what you see is the last one. I bought the Rush from some porno store. My philosophy as a director is that I'll never ask an actor to do something that I wouldn't do. Pitman says, 'Go do a big blast of that and tell me about it.' So I did. I took a huge blast and had to sit down for like ten minutes. After that, I said, 'There's no way I'm going to ask you to do that,' so it was empty. If he had really done it there's no way he would've been able to give that speech."

While Goose is out wandering past porno theaters and selling crank to a well-groomed businessman, The Spyders visit Kristie, and Goose returns home to her body, savagely mutilated beyond recognition. "We got it all on film before that side of town was cleaned up and shut down," VanBebber remembers. "I mean, Dayton is the original home of *Hustler* magazine and Larry Flynt, which people don't acknowledge. They cut right to Cincinnati in the film adaptation by Miloš Forman. They have him starting out in Cincinnati, which isn't the case. He was a creep in Dayton handing out his greasy, Xerox-printed *Hustler* before he went to Cincinnati and upscaled. People forget that. It was 1985 when the last vestiges of the sleazy 1970s were still around."

Following an emotional funeral involving a trash compactor, and with nowhere left to turn, Goose visits his father. His father, played by Charlie Goetz, is a drug-addled screaming mess of a man. Half-dressed and armed with a Louisville Slugger, Goose's old man welcomes him



Bone Crusher (Marc Pitman) and Goose (Jim VanBebber) square up for the camera



Actor Ric Walker admires the production designers' handiwork

in an alcoholic frenzy, howling and ranting about the war in the streets, and shattering his kitchen in pursuit of a giant rat.

"We held auditions and had contacted agents around Cincinnati and Dayton and had maybe ten different guys," VanBebber points out. "The part for Goose's dad was originally written to be like a William Burroughs sort of junkie, skinny, soft, and cryptic. We saw all of these actors, and none of them were really good. These were guys who did local commercials and dinner theater. But this one guy, Charlie Goetz, just exploded with energy. I was like, 'Well, this isn't the way it's written, but I'll rewrite it and make him this crazy, war-shocked, vet guy who's concerned about his beer and all that shit.' So I threw out the original concept and tailored it to him."

Fed up with his father's addiction and abuse, Goose knocks him out, throws him some cash, and goes honky tonkin' in a no-frills dive bar. The bender escalates to monumental proportions, boasting foot-long lines of crank and LSD, climaxing with a suicide attempt that is cut short by his gang-mate, who revives him for no other reason than to use him as a pawn in a robbery. The two gangs have now joined forces, and the job involves an armored truck and a hundred thousand dollars cash. The morning of the robbery, the outlaws run wild in the streets, plow through a parade, and set a mattress on fire in the middle of a busy intersection. Goose rappels down the side of a parking garage, above the armored truck, and takes out a cop with a throwing star the size of a saw blade.

VanBebber says, "The marching band was good fortune. I had the gang all assembled. The scene before the marching band, where everyone is gathered the night before the robbery, we were really staying there during the shoot. That was all shot at night before we went out the next morning and shot the Brink's truck robbery. We were all young, and I don't think anybody really slept much. Somebody was listening to the news and said, 'Hey, there's going to be a parade against drugs down Main Street in Dayton tomorrow morning.' I'm like, 'Let's go get it!' So they're marching along and I tell King, 'Follow these guys!' King was rolling, we just ran in, we busted that shit up, and they just kept on marching. Then we just ran. It was the same thing with lighting that mattress on fire. What amazing recklessness. That's fucking guerilla filmmaking. Rappelling down the side of that parking garage definitely was not sanctioned! We're shooting the scene and I'm fifty feet in the air on some guy's parking garage and he shows up! He's down there screaming up at me, 'You have ten minutes to get off my fucking building!' I'm up there trying to explain that we're shooting a scene, 'Could you give us an hour?' He shouts, 'You've got ten minutes!' So we did it. We shot it out in ten minutes. I didn't get all the shots I wanted, but it was enough to make it work. It's the kind of stuff that you can only accomplish when you're in your early twenties, full of craziness, and with crazy friends that act the way you act at that age."



Shooting the (unsanctioned) rappelling sequence in downtown Dayton, Ohio

During the victory celebration, Goose grabs the bag of cash and takes off. He stops to make a call to Kristie's sister in a local diner, where a grey-haired weirdo orders an extra plate of food for his lord and savior, then berates the waitress when she brushes him off. *Prepare to Meet Thy God*. These five words ring true as the film is elevated to the highest level of action and violence that leaves the viewer filled with excitement and afraid to blink. After having every good intention stomped out of existence, Goose is left with no choice outside of bloodthirsty revenge. He bellows a powerful kiai and takes on the entire entourage alongside a moving train.

"We shot the train scene over a number of weekends," VanBebber explains. "I basically learned the train schedule and we would set up and wait. 'Okay, places!' and it would go by with the conductor looking at us. In the outtakes, you can see that I built this papier-mâché rubber head on the end of a stick, then built a body, and costumed it. It's real quick because we didn't capture it well. But we're sitting there with this thing, the cars are going by on the track, and we shove it under the wheels to crunch the head. Now I'm thinking as an adult, 'Man, I'm glad we didn't derail that train.'"

The finale to *Deadbeat at Dawn* is a gritty, high-voltage joyride that is unsurpassed in terms of raw energy and sheer madness. VanBebber performed his own stunts, including dangling by one arm from the side of a car as it barrels down a claustrophobic alleyway. This is one of the most talked about scenes in the film.

"Hanging out of the car was just like taking a ride," VanBebber insists. "I was holding on to Paul Harper's neck, supported by that window, and it wasn't really that tough. It sells really well. The performance makes it look painful. Now, the crushing up against the wall in the alley was a little dicey. I think we only did one or two takes of that."

Goose's death march at the closing of the film, cut between still shots of Kristie's sister holding the bag of stolen dough, is a beautiful and masterful ending to one of the wildest rides in the history of independent film.

Most people would assume that once the film was completed, the battle was over. However, afterwards, the challenge of having it properly released was like that of a heavyweight ready for a rematch. Remember, the internet wasn't around to help spread the word.

VanBebber remembers, “We had to learn the hard way by working with people who didn’t pan out or would rip us off. There was a distributor in New York where all of our contracts turned to dust. Then there was the VHS deal which was a glimpse into how I would be treated with the next release on DVD, which was a total lack of any business decorum. It was frustrating. *Deadbeat* didn’t get its proper respect until the *Dark Sky* release. I know other people might disagree, but they weren’t on the business end of things. The *Dark Sky* box set brought a newer audience to the film and to me. Chas. Balun really helped get the word out to the zine people and the cult people. It had a small cult success, right off the bat. As far as it being appreciated by newer generations, that is something that has just naturally taken time. The way *Deadbeat at Dawn* is being treated and handled by Arrow totally buries all of the other companies that have dealt with it in the past. They’re treating it like it’s an important film that needs to be respected. After all these years, that’s vindication.”

From its sheer entertainment value to its status as an underground masterpiece, *Deadbeat at Dawn* has resonated with each new generation since its initial release. Arrow’s stunning new edition of *Deadbeat at Dawn* will undoubtedly lead to the continued amazement of genre fans for years to come.

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MANIFESTO OF MADNESS: THE CINEMA OF JIM VANBEBBER

by Graham Rae

"America is not a young land; it is old and dirty and evil before the settlers, before the Indians. The evil is there waiting."

When William S. Burroughs wrote these poetic, accusatory words in *Naked Lunch* in 1959, his haunted tone was not expressly condemnatory; far from it. The human race has always had a prurient, ongoing obsession with extreme violence. The United States is no different, though they have, in a sort of mock, mocking contrition, in the last 30 years, produced a few excellent works of challenging art, examining and vilifying and undermining this gleefully nihilistic strand of their cultural DNA.

1994's brilliant *Natural Born Killers* vomit-splattered a glorious fever-dream mess across the conspiratorial screen, satirically skewering the portrayal of real-life murder and mayhem in the mainstream media. 1999's *Fight Club* addressed the effects of angry, alienated, emasculated machismo in a country where masculinity has become ever more demonised and looked down upon as being supposedly 'toxic' in recent years.

And then we have the works of Jim VanBebber, a native son of the gore-soaked soil of the state of Ohio, which has produced more than its fair share of real-life serial killing horror. He's a murderer of true crime media myths and legends, whilst simultaneously sort-of celebrating the carnage he is eviscerating. A proud, patriotic American, the director often uses Old Glory up front in his films, as if emphasising where the horrifying events in the productions take place. When settling down to watch one of his productions, you know you're getting ready to see a no-holds-barred, graphic All-American Nightmare...

VanBebber was a natural born schlock absorber right from the start. He started making Super 8 short films in Greenville, Ohio when he was just into double digits age-wise, replicating the stuff that he was watching. Inspired by Dayton horror host Dr Creep's show *Shock Theater*, he made spy and horror and surreal and fantasy and science-fiction and thriller and monster movies. Filmmaking was just in his blood. The renaissance child wrote, shot, edited, did the FX for, and acted in his own films, becoming very familiar with filmmaking basics before he even entered his teen years.



Jim VanBebber displays his fondness for exploitation fare, Halloween 1985

He also got familiar early with the exploitation movies that would later become his stock-in-trade. VanBebber would jump out of his bedroom window at night and run down to the local fleapit to see stuff like a 1974 rerun of *The Last House on the Left*. . . at a mere ten years old. He said that that film was hugely traumatic to him at such a tender, impressionable age. The nascent director was allowed to see anything he wanted because his father owned a local jewellery store, and all the merchants in the town knew who he was and left him alone. An echo of the shock of youthful exposure to extreme cinematic violence and sex seems to resonate all the way through his work, seeking to reproduce itself in his audiences with his use of '70s-nihilistic-grindhouse-replicating ultraviolent material.

In high school, VanBebber was an athletic type, into track and field, football and wrestling. His extreme films have been wrestling with their audiences and pinning them to the mat for decades. He took up studying karate for a couple of years, as is evidenced in the earliest of his films included here, 1983's *Into the Black*, made while he was in senior year in high school. The director's life-changing teenage obsession with Bruce Lee (especially 1972's *Way of the Dragon*, which Lee directed himself, as well as wearing writing, acting, and producing hats) is on full display here, as an 18-year-old VanBebber punches, kicks, rips, gouges, tears, stabs, and nunchaku-skullcracks his way through endless teenage waves of wannabe-murderous attackers.

His youthful cinematic protégé leanings and screenings garnered him a scholarship to Ohio's Wright State University in 1983 to learn filmmaking. There he studied under Academy Award-nominated documentarians Jim Klein and Julia Reichert (*Union Maids*, *Seeing Red*). At Wright State he met long-term cinematographer Mike King and Marcelo Games (who worked on sound and sound editing, and who would later play Charlie in *The Manson Family*). 1984 brought a short documentary on druggie and metalhead culture from VanBebber, *Doper*, not included here. It detailed the dazed and confused days and nights of permanently wasted young Dayton stoners as they watched their lives go up in smoke, a subculture that the director clearly had an affinity with. Forming Mercury Films with his two fellow students, VanBebber secured money for a third year in college. He then dropped out and started making *Deadbeat at Dawn* on 16mm in 1985 with the cash, whilst his cinematic partners in true crime stayed on to complete their film degrees.

A nihilistic riff on the glut of '80s mainstream action movies, *Deadbeat* took three-and-a-half years to complete. It's been called "the first punk action film" by Sam Raimi, which is a fair description of it. Inspired by '60s American International Pictures biker blasts like *The Glory Stompers* and *The Wild Angels*, the film tells the story of Goose (played by the director himself), a young member of Dayton gang The Ravens, who is moved into '80s revenge mode when his girlfriend Kristie (Megan Murphy) is killed by rival gang The Spyders. Along

the way throats are torn out, fingers bitten and blown off, lakes of booze guzzled, heroin shot, coke snorted, bodies graphically stabbed repeatedly, and gunshots send geysers of freshly oxygenated blood artery-spraying through the Ohio air.

Whilst the bullet hits may look like squibs, they actually weren't. VanBebber would fill condoms with stage blood and then simply have whoever was the best baseball pitcher in the crew throw it at the person being shot onscreen. Then simply edit out the frames up until the condom hit, spraying its fake human juices, and voila! You have a gory impact that would no doubt have pleased Tom Savini, who had been the director's FX inspiration after he saw *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978.

In 1988 the ambitious young Mercury crew started work on two new films: the short *Roadkill: The Last Days of John Martin* and the full-length *Charlie's Family*, which would eventually become *The Manson Family* upon its legendarily delayed release. Both films were based on American true crime cases; *The Manson Family*, of course, on the Charles Manson case, and *Roadkill* on the notorious Ed Gein necrophilia-murder-cannibalism case from Plainfield, Wisconsin in the 1950s. VanBebber's films often have cemetery-set scenes in them (the cops in *Deadbeat's* cemetery fight scene are real and were unplanned), which may tell you something.

The beautifully poetic Manson feature, the ultimate American underground film, has been amply covered elsewhere, including by myself. The *Roadkill* short was made to try and secure funding for a full-length version of the film. It's a gritty, extremely graphic, uncensored look into the mind of a grave-robbing serial killer who cruises the highways and byways of Ohio. Coming across a couple whose truck has broken down (VanBebber regulars Marc Pitman and Maureen Allisse), he incapacitates them, then takes them back to his Grand Guignol house of horrors. The film so horrified Mark Gillespie, the actor who played the titular murderous inbredneck, that he told VanBebber in no uncertain terms that he wouldn't be available for any potential future extended version.

In some ways, you can't really blame the man. *Roadkill* is a fifteen-minute ride into a totally disgusting, stinking, insane, unsanitary, maggot-swarming spoiled meat hell that seems to be far longer, so mentally and emotionally-gruelling is the material within. Utilising a mix of '70s grindhouse and '80s splatter dice-'em-up hardcore gore techniques, the camera never once strays from the cannibal as he rolls in his own vomit, screams at his face-mask-covered walls, tases his victims, then brings them home and graphically kills and cooks and eats them. The director was suffering for his art – and making his crew suffer too, including Mike King, whose Cincinnati kitchen was strewn with real roadkill collected from the highway, and torn apart during the production.



The world of *Roadkill* is extraordinarily gruesome, even by Jim VanBebber standards



Deadbeat's Marc Pitman lends a hand (and a head) on the set of *Roadkill*

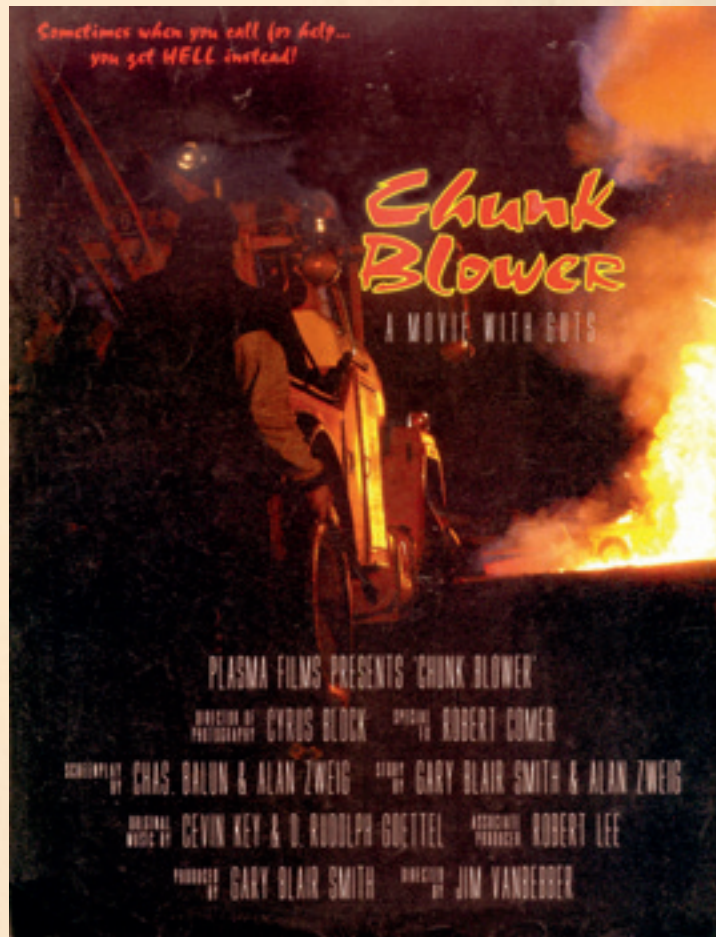
In an interesting aside, the Gein case infamously enraptured Jörg Buttgeriet, who was VanBebber's exact cinematic contemporary during the late '80s/early '90s time frame in which both produced most of their film work thus far. These two men, the most talented underground filmmakers of their generation, almost seem like American and German mirror images of each other: both are inspired by exploitation and horror cinema, and both made/ make uncompromising, true-crime-influenced works that have a lot of moments of strange, visceral poetry and purity threaded through their nauseating running times. And neither lets the camera look away during the heavy, personal-pathology-sparked violence.

Perhaps not altogether unsurprisingly, VanBebber could not get together enough financing for the equivalent of a full-length cinematic Hieronymus Bosch painting, and continued plugging along for the next several years making *The Manson Family*, when he could score some cash here and there to buy some more 16mm film stock (he refuses to shoot on video), and get his actors together to work again on a film that looked increasingly unlikely to see the light of the projector as the years rolled on.

In conjunction with Canadian producer Gary Blair Smith, 1990 saw VanBebber direct material for *Chunk Blower*. The film was to detail the horrific exploits of Claude (Bruce Paisley), a hulking, murderous psychopath who drives a tow truck and murders people at the side of the road when their cars break down. The "unrated and outrageous" (as the tagline put it) film was co-scripted by the legendary Chas. Balun of *Deep Red* magazine fame, an early supporter of VanBebber's work. Extremely graphic, it was to be a million-buck-plus project that would have been the director's first 35mm shoot. But the financing never materialised, and the project fell by the wayside. Some of the footage shot can still be seen in the promo trailer, included on this release.

In 1992, Marcelo Games quit the independent film business and *The Manson Family*, unable to take the struggles of his once-chosen profession. It was a blow. However, almost existentially compensating, in the same year, VanBebber had an epiphany of sorts. He attended the Nothing Shocking horror film festival in Northampton in England on June 26th, 1992, an event which I attended with friends. He was the guest of honour there to show *Deadbeat at Dawn* and *Roadkill*.

The director was surprised and inspired by the rapturous reception he got from the fans there, like myself and my friends (my pal Davie and I got Jim so shitfaced on pints of Beck's he tried to do an overhead karate kick and fell on his back unconscious in front of the confused, bemused crowd when doing the intro to his films), who knew his work through bootleg videotapes, and he went back to America with a new mission in mind: he needed to



The unrealized *Chunk Blower* was to be "A Movie with Guts"



justify, to himself, the belief of his fans and supporters in him. To this end he made the third short included here, *My Sweet Satan*.

Once again, this new film was based on a real-life crime. In Northport, New York, in July 1984, Ricky Kasso, a 17-year-old mentally unbalanced Satanism dabbler, drug dealer and guzzler, brutally stabbed 17-year-old Gary Lauwers to death in some woods over the theft of 10 bags of PCP from Kasso at a party. Proud of the murder, Kasso would take disbelieving people up to show them the body over the next couple of weeks, before being arrested and hanging himself in jail two days later. VanBebber was only three years older than Kasso, graduating high school just the year before the murder, and the material resonated with him.

The director played fast and loose with the film's timeframe, not wanting to make a period piece, giving it a Dayton 1993 feel. The subterranean druggie scene of the mid-'80s had moved on into more extreme drug dabbling and tattooing and body piercing realms. *My Sweet Satan* reflects that, including real nipple piercing and tattooing scenes during the 19-minute running time. However, stabbing and eyeball gouging hadn't moved on in the nine years since the real murder, so they are, of course, displayed in super-graphic, unflinching mode here. Amusingly, the end credits run backwards, mocking the ludicrous '80s heavy metal 'backmasking' phenomenon, and character names include 'Albert Q. Ellesdee' and 'Dewayne Cracker.' The film ended up winning the award for Best Narrative at the New York Underground Film Festival in 1993.

VanBebber himself essayed the part of Ricky 'Kasslin.' At 28, he was 11 years older than the murderous burnout he was playing, but for the method actor it works anyway. He cuts a striking, frightening figure, with a toned physique, asymmetrical haircut, pierced nipples, tats, and dangerous, drug-glittering psychotic eyes. The director often casts himself as the head of alternate extended families (gangs, drug and alcohol subcultures) or as a member high up a cult hierarchy; a great way to get drugs and pussy, after all. The films are a brutal, hateful scream against white middle-class America and the nuclear family unit (not for nothing is the father in *Deadbeat* portrayed as an insane junkie) and against small town ennui in general.

In *Deadbeat*, tellingly, Goose stands in a graveyard practicing his nunchakus and screaming "YOU MOTHERFUCKERS!" out at Dayton. In *Satan*, VanBebber sardonically opens the film with a montage of aerial shots of the city, and a sign welcoming people to the place, interspersed with scenes of Kasslin setting up his blanket noose and hanging himself. It's like a tourist film from Hell. All the films are, really, coming from the same place of pain and rage and nihilistic violence.



My Sweet Satan actor Mike Moore was glad to have a double for the head-stomping sequence



The *My Sweet Satan* crew take a break from the bloodshed

There is an examination of the flesh and all its terms and limitations in the works. They display a self-flagellating, jock-gone-wrong, exultation-cum-despising of the flesh felt by those who are truly aware of every ounce and pound of their bodies, like anorexics or fat or muscular people. VanBebber wants to simultaneously embrace the body and destroy it, to violently pick the lock to the existential bone cage and see in which celluloid shapes the mutilated spirit flies out, into self-congratulation or self-annihilation, all or nothing. A self-destructive anti-hero interested in the extremes of human behaviour, be they individual or communal, he works through his screaming demons on celluloid without holding back, and we get to watch all this devastatingly play out in reel time. He's also a thespian gunslinger-for-hire, appearing over the years in the films of other indie and underground directors who see him as a kindred spirit. He has played everything from a biker (*Zombie Cult Massacre*) to a rock star (*No Second Chances*) to cult horror director Terry Hawkins from *Last House on Dead End Street* (*The Cuckoo Clocks of Hell*).

In 1998, VanBebber moved to Los Angeles. There he sustained himself by directing videos for top flight bands like Pantera, Necrophagia, and Superjoint Ritual. Several examples of his work can be seen here. The music videos he directs are one with his cinematic work. The trademarks are all there: scratchy lysergic visuals, psychotropic madness, extreme gore and sex, alcohol and drug abuse. In 2003, 15 years after it was first started, the critically lauded *The Manson Family* got a release, a career high for VanBebber. But the faux-rarified, poser-deoxygenated air of Los Angeles was never going to truly be for the Ohio native, so he moved down to Florida, where he had holidayed as a child.

The humid, muggy Sunshine State air galvanised VanBebber, and he set to work on a new project. *Gator Green* (originally entitled *Scales*) was partly based on the horrific real-life Joe Ball case. A bootlegger and serial killer who ran a bar in Texas, Ball is believed to have killed up to twenty women, feeding their bodies to several alligators in a pool he built. When the police went to question Ball, he shot himself. Seeing some prime cinematic swampland territory up for grabs, VanBebber wrote a full-length script and did a successful 2013 Kickstarter to raise enough money to shoot a 16-minute segment of the full-length 16mm feature he hoped would find funding later.

The segment of *Gator Green* we get introduces us to Captain Jack Andrew (played by VanBebber himself), a Joe Ball-like 'Nam vet who owns The Gator Hooch, a giant reptile-shaped duck-and-dive bar. Here he pulls shady druggie freewheeling double-dealings with two of his Second Indochina War sergeant buddies, Harry (Troy Grant) and Bobby (Rogan Marshall), killing anybody who gets in his violent dipsomaniac way and throwing them into his croc pit to be eaten by nature's most efficient body disposal experts. Limbs are hacked off, drugs and booze are consumed, dead bodies (or "gook food," to quote the insane bar owner)



are unpleasantly torn apart by real alligators...and the follicle forest of one of the bushiest pussies this side of '70s porn peeks round a bound-and-gagged woman's soiled underwear. But, as so often was the unfortunate case with VanBebber, final full feature financing never came through, and the short remains a tantalising, part-realised glimpse into what might have been. His career is full of woulda-coulda-shoulda-beens, with rumours and whispers about everything from a biker film to a neo-Nazi action film to a film about a syphilitic Al Capone. Scripts for all these films exist, and who knows what may yet surface? This is a man influenced in equal parts by Richard Kern, Orson Welles, Martin Scorsese, and Federico Fellini, so you just never know what's coming up next.

Jim VanBebber is back living in Ohio now, just outside Dayton, the prodigal cinematic son returning to the gory scene of his youthful violent celluloid crimes. He's back to the land of his birth – or maybe his artistic rebirth. The man's career has been one of ups and downs, whispered hissing static, film promises and no compromises. He's made his films his way, letting nobody and nothing stop him, which has both hurt and helped him. He has a purebred cinematic body of work that some would envy, small as it is. What you see up there on the screen is his, and nobody else's. He has never homogenised himself or bought the sterile big dollar paycheck ruse. The rugged loner on the celluloid representation trail, he has stayed true to his artistic roots, and hit the perfect expression target a number of times. It's more than most ever do, and he may yet surprise us and come out with some sort of new narrow-eyed obsessive project, spilling blood and poetry and confident auteur art in all insurrectionary directions. Only time and financing will tell.

Thanks to Fraser Philip for research help.

Graham Rae has been writing about weird and wonderfueled cinematic oddities for 30 years. He started off writing for the legendary Deep Red magazine, and since then has been bounced like a human pinball around such venues as Film Threat, American Cinematographer, Cinetantastique, Realitystudio.org and Diabolique. A selection of his genre writings is available at www.facebook.com/raewrites, and he runs a Mad Foxes page on Facebook too. You have been warned.

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Deadbeat at Dawn has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.37:1 with mono audio.

The original 16mm AB reversal film was scanned in 2K resolution at OCN Digital Labs, CT. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London. Some instances of damage remain, in keeping with the condition of the original materials. The mono audio was remastered from the original magnetic reels.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films
R3Store Studios: Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson, Jenny Collins
OCN Digital Labs: Joe Rubin

ABOUT THE SHORT FILMS

Into the Black was sourced from the original tape-spliced 8mm film. The original soundtrack was comprised of uncleared rock music, so for the purposes of this release a new score was composed by Nate Seacourt, with the blessing of Jim VanBebber.

Roadkill: The Last Days of John Martin was sourced from the original 16mm raw footage positive (reversal film). The audio was sourced from Digital Betacam.

My Sweet Satan was sourced from the original 16mm raw footage negative. The audio was sourced from Digital Betacam.

Gator Green was supplied as a ProRes file by the filmmaker, with additional grading work carried out by Arrow Films.

All scanning, grading and restoration was performed at R3Store Studios, London.

All restoration work was carried out under the supervision of, and has been approved by filmmaker Jim VanBebber. Arrow Films extends a huge thanks to Jim VanBebber for his generous participation in this project.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**
Blu-ray Mastering **David Mackenzie**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Peter Strain**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Phil Anselmo, Victor Bonacore, Michael Brooke, Scott Gabbey,
Charlie Goetz, Cody Lee Hardin, Paul Harper...
and last but by no means least, the original *Deadbeat* himself, Jim VanBebber.

HE QUIT THE GANGS. THEY KILLED HIS GIRL.
HE BECAME...

★★★★—Hits like a jackboot to the groin.
CHRIS BALLIN
DEEP RED MAGAZINE

DEADBEAT AT DAWN

Van Bibber looks like a young version of Chuck Norris.
JIM DEBROSSE
THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

All pure, raw energy.
Deadbeat at Dawn has about twice the impact of most
films of its kind.
TERRY LAWSON
THE TOP DAILY NEWS



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