

## Brett A. Hart on Lance Henriksen, cactus torture and The Pain Clinic

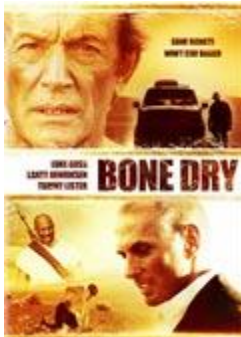
Martin Anderson

**The director of *Bone Dry* and the forthcoming Dan O'Bannon-penned *The Pain Clinic* chats with us...**

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*New director Brett A. Hart has made the geek news lately for his pending collaboration with Alien creator Dan O'Bannon on the forthcoming *The Pain Clinic*. But Hart has already delved into the Alien/sci-fi universe by casting the legendary Lance Henriksen in *Bone Dry*, a desert-set tale of torture and redemption that makes its second airing on Zone Thriller tomorrow.*

*Bone Dry finds Luke Goss pitting his wits against tormentor Lance Henriksen in the searing heat of the Mojave desert...*



### **It took a fair time to get *Bone Dry* made, I hear...?**

Yes, about 5- 6 years. There were numerous reasons for that - first, after the script was completed I moved to L.A. and starved. After that I moved to the Midwest and helped build an advertising agency. Both the president of Skyline Media and I vowed to help each other realize our dreams; he was striving to have a successful advertising agency and I was trying to bring *Bone Dry* to life.

I personally was juggling around 80 hours a week during post of *Bone Dry*. Other reasons it took so long was that I had to work in scouting locations, and meeting our cast during vacation time off from the agency. I also did a lot of experimenting with digital technology before choosing to shoot our feature in hi-def. Then there was the longest time issue... raising the money. So it was around 3 years after that the partners [*Exec. Producers Chad Stalcup, Richard Saied, Prod Greg Hughs and Hart*] decided to join forces and bring our first feature film to completion.

### **What was the appeal of making a film set in the desert?**

I'm a huge fan of the desert. I had a script called *Mojave* sitting on my computer while I was trying to develop some other projects. I tend to be a little bit lazy about jumping on scripts that are sent to me, and this one was an incomplete twenty-page script that I actually read on the plane down to Houston where I went to see the executive producer. By the time the plane had landed I said 'This is what I want to make'. I contacted the writer, Jeff O'Brien, via email and asked him what the ending was going to be like; and I'd guessed the ending, which was going to be an homage to [*Rod*] Serling.

So I saw a project here which had two of my favourite elements - Spielberg's *Duel* with an interesting twist along the lines of *The Twilight Zone*.

**The location shoot looks to have been quite gruelling - how long were you actually out there?**

[*laughs*] We probably spent as much time scouting locations as we spent shooting. It was supposed to be a four-week shoot but ended up being nearly five weeks, due to the heat. We shot in the height of summer in Death Valley and the surrounding deserts. during one of the hottest recorded summers in history. We were losing crew members weekly. Some of the toughest guys I've ever worked with said that this shoot was more difficult than boot-camp. People were constantly passing out. I myself lost 10 lbs. These insane weather conditions caused the shoot to run around a week longer, and to top it all off, we were fighting sand storms, and flash floods. This all occurred during a tropical storm season, resulting in about \$20,000 in lost days and equipment damages.



**How did you cope under that kind of pressure?**

What's interesting is that you really get to see what people are made of in that situation [*laughs*]. We lost a lot of crewmembers, but you saw the dedication of the artists that were involved. The guys and girls that hung out and came with us all the way through the project became like a family. Luke, Lance and I really grew close. I only worked with Dee [*Wallace*] for about two days, but she grew to be family as well. I adore her. I was actually watching her in *The Frighteners* last night, because I'm developing a project called *Dark Passenger*, and it has similar themes to some at the ending of that film. I was watching her performance in awe - she has so much range, so much potential.

The first twenty pages of *Mojave* -as it was at the time - didn't have anything to do with the diner. I suggested opening and closing it with a diner-sequence to Jeff. At that time I didn't know how much money we were going to raise, and if anything we were going to bring in Shelley Duvall [*for the 'top and tail' diner sequences*] - some name that would help the picture with distribution but also help sell the picture as a morality tale. So when Dee's name came about, I was very excited.

**Was the painful cactus-scene in the script 6 years ago? It seems very in line with what's going on in horror and thriller cinema right now...**

It wasn't in Jeff's 20-page script. It was an interesting process, because I actually wrote the script with him by sending him notes over a period of about two and a half months, in a Winter snowstorm. So I never actually spoke to him. It was almost like a Stephen King story called 'Word Processor Of The Gods'. I'd just lost my job, just gotten married...now was 'do or die'; I just had to find the project I wanted to do. When *Bone Dry* came across, it was like Kismet.

About three years prior to this I had written a Hitchcockian western called 'Bone Dry', and I had the cactus-scene in that.



### **What was your experience of working with Lance Henriksen?**

It was wild. I had never been unemployed before, and during that time my wife must have thought I was insane because all I did was focus on writing, and it was probably the lowest amount of money I've ever made in my life. The only way of escaping that situation was to watch *Millennium* at night. When Jeff and I were writing *Bone Dry*, we thought 'Who would be our favourite choice to play Jimmy?', and it was Lance Henriksen.

### **What was the dynamic between him and Luke Goss on set?**

Luke and I were like brothers, and Lance adores Luke. If you listen to the commentary you'll hear Lance rave about what Luke went through; he was really method acting - falling on jagged rocks...his body was scraped with bruises.

There were other actors who were really interested in working on this project, and other producers who have a nice repertoire of more recognisable names - at the time - than Luke, but I wanted to go with an up and comer - somebody who I really believed could help pull the audience in so that you feel the angst of the twist.

### **They're both pretty good at switching from good guys to bad guys.**

[laughs] The whole film is really about the climax - once you get there, it exceeded all my expectations. We were all very nervous shooting that; we had a tight budget and we shot that climactic scene in two afternoons, and it's supposed to take place as the sun's setting, so it was very fast and furious. Seeing Lance...I've had people tell me they cried when they watched him, and it certainly moves me.



### **Someone said that the commentary reveals a lot about the symbolism behind the film - can you expand on that? [SPOILER IN THIS RESPONSE]**

The shooting star I put in the picture was both a response to Lance's line "Hey Eddie Do you think God really gives a shit what we're doing down here?" as well as an homage to Spielberg's early films, like *Jaws*. It's for the audience to interpret. There's a scene where Luke is opening the trunk of his car in the beginning of the picture. We were implying that the nature of his business in the desert was inside. The entire picture is about appearances and reality. The flashbacks in the pool were meant to mislead the audience into believing they were sensual memories of Eddie's, but in fact they were the haunting dreams of "Jimmy". Every time Jimmy does something awful to Eddie he suffers migraines from a gunshot head wound he received in the back story, implying it's a form of karmic justice.

There's a line in the film mentioning that both characters are like Siamese twins, and near the end of the picture it was our intention to show that "Good & Evil" can't be so easily categorized like Black & White, that the two characters actually become one near the end; Siamese twins. They've both crossed the boundaries of the laws of man and are now living out the law of nature. Also the

fuel gauge at the end of the film being on empty symbolized Lance's character. He was an empty shell after following through with his aberrant agenda. There's nothing left for him to live for.

**Torture's very hot in thrillers and horror right now - is it a significant factor in *Bone Dry*, as it is in *Saw*?**

On the surface, there have been comparisons to *Saw*. I'm not a big fan of *Saw*, and we wrote this before *Saw*. I'm not putting *Saw* down, I'm just not a fan of the execution of it. This picture wasn't about gore or blood-letting, it was about implying and letting the audience fill in the gaps. You might see a man climbing a cactus naked, but you don't see the needles going into his flesh, or anything like that.

There was some symbolism that I attempted from the start, which was to make both the vehicles and Jimmy [*Lance Henriksen*] almost like a ghost. I wanted to build this character where it starts out almost like the boogeyman stalking this character from afar and then as you get near the end he becomes more human; and hopefully by the very end, we see what he's lost.

That was important to me. It's a catch-22 because Lance is our marketing 'name', but I didn't want people to see him for almost 60 minutes of the movie, which was very challenging.

**Is the film intended as a timeless tale or is it intended to obliquely reflect current events?**

I guess you could say that it's timeless. I was inspired by pictures from the 70s as well as the 50s and 60s, all the way up from *Psycho* to *Duel*. Having said that, there was some symbolism in there about the war and the middle-east. That was stuff that just kind of 'happened'. We changed the dialogue up for Lance, to say that he had been in Desert Storm. So that did become a factor, but for me it's more of a throwback to classic pictures...

With the current state of audiences, it's almost like an ADD mentality - they want everything out there right there and then, like a music video. I think that if audiences go back and watch *Psycho* - or even *Duel* - most of today's generation would probably lose interest.

**What do you think of the current state of horror output, which is now grisly and rather bleak after all those years of supernatural thrillers?**

[*laughs*] I don't know if I'm a pessimistic person, but I do like a lot of the stuff from the seventies, because it was a lot more challenging. I'm a big fan of William Friedkin; *The Sorcerer* and *The Exorcist* are films that my taste leans towards.

I think the independent films are a lot more interesting than the current studio pictures coming out. I just watched *The Orphanage* last night, and I was pleasantly surprised.

With the current evolution in technology I think we're going to discover a lot more brave independent film-makers, and hopefully they'll eventually become part of the Hollywood system and we'll start to see that quality emerging in Hollywood films as well.

**How's your work with Dan O'Bannon going on *The Pain Clinic*?**

That's going well - Dan has been finishing up work on a novel called *Necronomicon*, so he's just gotten back to *Pain Clinic*. We had a draft where the third act was still being worked on. They called me up and asked me to come and visit with them, and I read the script and immediately drew up to their house and loved it. It has the paranoia feel of 70s pictures like *Rosemary's Baby* or *Coma*. [O'Bannon] says he'll be wrapping it up in the next couple of weeks.

I'm balancing several projects up at one time. *Dark Passenger* is a project that I'm working on with John Henry Roberts, Ross Brown and Clifford De Spencer. It's supposed to be shot in South Africa and it's something that I've been immersing my mind in for the last four to six weeks. The third act is something that we really want to focus on because it has so much potential that it's something that we want to have a huge pay-off. The synopsis is that Jenny Ackler only has six days to live - the last before her twenty-fifth birthday. That said, the twenty-fifth birthday aspect is not the core of it; we'll find the right actress and tailor the age to suit her.

**Are you looking to establish yourself in the thriller/horror genre, or to use it as a point of departure for other types of movie?**

My personal taste is for thrillers. Once I feel I've achieved the best results that I can in that genre, then maybe I'd want to experiment and move on, perhaps to romance or comedy; but right now, thrillers are my love. I'm into dark pictures, but thrillers more than horror. That said, this particular one is a supernatural thriller, a ghost story in a way. I've been wanting to do one of those for a long time, and I'm glad that they've brought it to me and delighted to be a part of that.

I do a lot of advertising and have noticed that once I've reached a point when both the client and I are happy with the results, I attempt to challenge myself by doing further commercials with a different approach, both thematically and in the execution of them. But honestly the one factor that I truly believe I'd like in all my work is a bitter sweet quality, and - like *The Twilight Zone* series - this can be applied to fantasy, sci-fi, and my favourite genre - thrillers.

All the projects I'm working on have something dark in them; *Promised Land* is something that Niall Browne of the UK is helping me to write; it's a post-9/11 tragic love story in the vein of *The Parallax View*. That one is not going to be immediate because it will need a bigger budget - hopefully some of these other projects will make good money, [laughs] which will justify somebody putting bigger money into me.

*Caesar* is a project that Jeff O'Brien and I are working on, and it's one I'm tailor-making for Dee. We're also interested in Kristin Kreuk from *Smallville* for that. *Caesar* is a two-handed thriller in a desolate mansion. I'm from the Mid-West, St. Louis, and I'm trying to find locations that haven't been over-shot, so there'll be something more interesting. The story's about a blind grandmother whose seeing-eye dog turns on her; his name's Caesar and he's a white shepherd who becomes master of the domain. Eventually he kills her off and things become even more interesting when her grand-daughter Scarlet comes to the house to sit for the weekend. My mentor [Richard Franklin] directed *Psycho II* and *Link*, and it's in the vein of *Link*, *Misery*, *The Birds*, *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Beauty And The Beast*.

Another project we looked into was a reworking, a contemporary version of *One Eyed Jacks*, which Rod Serling had a hand in writing. I mentioned that I'd like to do this to Lance on the set of *Bone Dry* and he said [husky Henriksen-style voice] 'That's one of my favourites, Brett' [laughs]. We found out that it was supposedly available to public domain but then we found that somebody else owns it, so that's sort of on hold.



**Like me you're obviously a huge Rod Serling fan. What's the continuing appeal of his work? Is it the morality, the twists and shocks or just general great writing?**

It was all the above. I personally think that it was a huge loss that he left so early - the man had so much soul. It was so much more moving than the other attempts, like *Tales From The Crypt*. That's why I like Alan Brennert's, Harlan Ellison's and Philip DeGuere's work on the 80s *Twilight Zone*, as opposed to the latest one. They still maintained that torch of 'messages with soul'.

I also do like the 'twist', which is difficult to translate into feature films...but not just his work on *The Twilight Zone*, but stuff like *Planet Of The Apes*. I think he was just an incredible film-maker.

*Bone Dry* is on Zone Thriller [tomorrow](#) (Saturday 8th November) at 10pm. Many thanks to Jon Moxey at Zone Thriller for arranging this chat.

*Interview with Dan O'Bannon*  
*Interview with Dee Wallace*