

## STUDENT LIFE

## Re-issue of "Slime City" takes public by storm

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The VHS boom of the late 80s created a surge in low budget horror production due to distributors' need for content and the tenacity of artists to produce. The current DVD boom has sparked a similar renaissance and is perhaps even better for viewers as it, in conjunction with the internet, allows for greater audience awareness of non-studio films, as well as greater access to such films.

Greg Lamberson is a director who has ridden both of these waves with his 1986 horror/comedy "Slime City." Originally screened as a midnight movie in New York City grindhouse theaters, Slime City found it's way into a wide, yet troubled video distribution deal that rounded out the first phase of it's life cycle. Almost 20 years later, the picture has found a new audience thanks to DVD.

Lamberson was first spurred to pursue filmmaking by childhood fascination with any form of sci-fi / fantasy / horror entertainment, from Ray Harryhausen movies to comic books and Aurora monster model kits.

"Anything that stimulated my imagination, I became obsessed with. When you have that kind of obsession for something, you must become involved with it," remarked Lamberson.

Lamberson chose to attend the New York Institute of Visual Arts as it focused on filmmaking practicum rather than humanities general education, as is the case with many filmmaking programs. At the institute of visual arts Lamberson had the opportunity to be instructed by "filmmakers not film academics" whom he personally admired such as Roy Frumpkes, writer of the acclaimed horror/comedy "Street Trash" and director of the cannon of George Romero documentaries "Document of the Dead."

"There was no discrimination against someone who wanted to do horror instead of art films."

Despite the positive environment of the Institute of Visual Arts, Lamberson quickly grew tired of his surroundings, as is often the case with directors (i.e. Sam Raimi and Michael Moore), and moved on to greener pastures. "I was not impressed with the

Super 8 film shorts being made in film school. I wanted to work on features."

Lamberson had a number of factors working in his favor, among them a keen awareness of the "Video Bubble" that had created a market for content and residence in New York City. The filmmaking community of New York City was particularly fruitful with horror/comedy essentials, such as Frank Henenlotter's "Brain Damage" and James Muro's "Street Trash." This created a working environment that generated a pool of skilled individuals willing to work on each other's films.

Lamberson hatched a plan to produce a feature film with his friend Richard Clarke, and from this partnership "Slime City" was born. After penning the screenplay for "Slime City," both Clarke and Lamberson joined the crew of "I Was A Teenage Zombie."

"We used it as a training ground. We learned a lot from the mistakes that were made on that film, but still made a lot of our own."

Lamberson succeeded in raising \$35,000 to get "Slime City" through rough editing and began shooting in June of 1986.

Looking back on the experience of lensing "Slime City," Lamberson recalls many fond memories.

"I was a kid making a monster movie with lots of effects. It was probably the most exciting thing I've ever done."

Although the shooting of "Slime City" was rapid and efficient, the films completion was a more extended process. "Life tends to get in the way of postproduction" said Lamberson.

After a year of editing, interrupted by other projects that paid the bills and life in general, "Slime City" was complete and ready to run. The film was exhibited over a number of weeks in the summer of 1989 as a midnight movie in the sprawling network of New York City theaters that existed prior to the Guiliani led "Disneyfication" of the city.

"Slime City" reached it's largest audience on VHS through an arrangement that was marked by distinct eccentricities. Twenty-five hundred copies of the film were sold to video stores throughout

the nation by film's video distributor, which duplicated another twenty-five hundred copies that were to be sold. The problem was that the man in charge of the film's video distribution was implicated in some vague organized crime activity, the end result of which yielded the seizure and whole sale off all his property, which included the aforementioned copies of "Slime City."

Lamberson has no hard feelings regarding "Slime City's" video fiasco. The twenty-five hundred copies that were sold equated to a substantial release during the 80s video bubble and to this day, viewers offer up worn VHS editions of the film for Lamberson to autograph.

Lamberson kept busy, directing a second feature in 1991 ("New York Vampire") and a third in 1999. Lamberson considers his third feature, "Naked Fear," to be his best. Viewers have had the opportunity to develop their own opinion on "Naked Fear" and many share Lamberson's, as the film is available as a bonus feature on the DVD release of "Slime City."

This current re-issue of "Slime City" includes not only "Naked Fear," but a number of other enhancements as well. The original video release of "Slime City" was presented in the full frame format in which the film was shot. The problem therein was that Lamberson shot the film with the intent of it being cropped to a letterbox format and thus the VHS version did not reflect his vision. This has been resolved for the DVD transfer, which has been properly cropped to conform to Lamberson's original intent.

This time around, "Slime City" also has a more concrete video distributor, that being "Shock-o-Rama" label of Ventura Distribution. Committed to developing a solid catalog and the furthering of horror cinema, Ventura is executing an extensive release schedule of both classic and contemporary horror.

With labels like Ventura working hard to make the DVD bubble a permanent market, the future is bright for directors like Lamberson who pursue a distinct and valuable variety of filmmaking that has finally found a reliable route to audiences.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Repulsive is an understatement for the film "Slime City."

## Phoenix, Witherspoon play legends

By Annie Sevin  
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Most fans only know Johnny Cash as the "Man in Black," but today everyone has the chance to go behind the scenes of he and June Carter's life. "Walk the Line" has opened in theaters across the United States today. Director James Mangold ("Kate & Leopold," and "Girl, Interrupted") told the most dramatic, transformational and unknown part of Cash's story – the years spanning his impoverished boyhood, his rocketing rise to stardom, his fall from grace and his remaking himself as a legend.

Academy Award and Golden Globe nominee Joaquin Phoenix was cast as Cash. From the minute he got the part, Phoenix began carrying a guitar. He immersed himself in Johnny Cash's life and music reading his autobiographies, watching documentary footage of his earliest recorded performances and listening to every Cash recording. "Johnny moved on stage in very specific ways, he had a specific guitar strum that contributed to the energy of his performances," observed Phoenix. "I had to familiarize myself with the guitar

because it was almost like a physical extension of John. It was his best friend, and I think he felt vulnerable whenever he didn't have it in his hands."

Anyone fearing that "Walk the Line" will be nothing more than a lip-synching contest between Phoenix and Golden Globe Nominee Reese Witherspoon (June Carter) will be pleasantly surprised. Both actors were required to take singing lessons to make their roles as authentic as possible. Judging from the movie trailers, it is hard to distinguish between Phoenix's voice and Cash's. This film is not going to be reminiscent of George Clooney's scene in "O Brother Where Art Thou" when he lip-synched "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow."

"[Mangold] wanted a raw approach to capture the intimacy that comes from someone writing a song and then singing it in that moment," said Phoenix. "You can't lip-sync that kind of scene because it's so integral to the character. Music is always part of how John communicates what he's feeling and seeing – and it couldn't be faked."

As for the film's title, Mangold sees the concept of "walking the line" as central to Cash's own struggle. "I think the song 'Walk the Line' means so much to so many different people because it's

about the effort we all have to make in order stay on the path. The song doesn't deny evil or pretend the singer is above temptation. John simply sings his personal truth, the act of being a good man is a job you have to work at every day," Mangold says.

Cash's life was full of struggles and long nights. He had been addicted to various drugs. His addiction to drugs eventually resulted in a famous arrest in El Paso in 1965 for attempting to smuggle amphetamines in his guitar case across the border. With Cash's career and future threatened, June Carter turned his life around, helping him kick his dependency and renew his religious faith. He divorced his wife Vivian in January 1968.

Cash won ten Grammy Awards, including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Country Hall of Fame – becoming the only person other than Elvis Presley to be accept-



Suzanne Tenner/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Phoenix and Witherspoon as Cash and Carter in "Walk the Line."

ed into both. Carter won three Grammy's, including two for her final album "Wildwood Flower." June Carter died in May of 2003 and Johnny Cash followed her in September of the same year.

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