

## GREATER TORONTO

Fuelled by passion, low-budget movies make city place to B

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Deep beneath the city streets, a lone detective is hunted by assassins. He has just learned what was behind the murder of a news reporter who was shot to uncover the truth behind the G20 security zone. Is it real? Is it a conspiracy? Maybe it's both.

It's a scene Brian Clement is filming for his forthcoming sci-fi movie, *Project Breakwater*, which fictionalizes the G20 summit by turning it into an *X-Files*-style story with aliens.

Big-budget movies with celebrities get noticed when filming in Toronto, but Clement's flick isn't one of those. It's one of a growing number of low-budget movies being made by independent filmmakers with actors who aren't stars.

"There is a new thriving community of low-cost films being made," says Chris Green, whose *Zombie Werewolves Attack!* was recently picked up for distribution. "New avenues like Internet funding and online distribution are making it easier to get our films made now."

While they hope for critical and financial success, it's a passion for the art that starts it all — not to mention the fact that it's fun.

"I'm a fan of films. I like watching them. I like making them," says Tony Watt, who is writing, directing and acting in *Acid Head: The Buzing Nuts County Slaughter*. "I think it's the top art form, so why not make it with people's heads with it?"

Darryl Shaw, whose *Android Re-Enactment* has been two years in the making, has a "no budget philosophy." That means "the movie has to get done some hell or high water, somehow, some way. If a scene doesn't work, you rewrite it, or you bend the laws of physics to make it work somehow."

Getting his film made means many people have to wear many hats — Shaw himself is writer, director, editor and co-producer. "Also, because we wanted to have a story with a good amount of violence, but knew we would have limited access to acting talent, I wrote about android characters that could be rebuilt and thus 'killed' a few times in the story."

On a small budget, even the seemingly simple aspects of the business can prove a challenge — from distribution to working around unpaid actors' schedules. It's "how can I get that person, who has to leave in five minutes, to stay another half-hour while I squash them down in fake blood?" says Watt.

Jim Munroe, whose latest films are *Infest Wisely* and *Ghosts with S—Jobs*, finds it difficult "getting people with specialized skills, like visual effects, to work for free. We're finding them, but it's a struggle. But when we were in production it was getting locations for free that was the hardest."

As challenging as producing a film is, in many ways that's the easiest part, says Justin McConnell, who has recently completed filming of *The Collapsed*, a post-apocalyptic thriller.

"Selling the film can be a nightmare. The distributors are going to lowball you at every chance," he said. "Then you may end up with distribution and just collecting the money owed to you may be a challenge in itself."

However, doing well on the festival circuit no longer means a theatrical release is likely.

"The films being what they are, independently produced with no money, are a tough sell," says McConnell. "I've seen a few very good genre projects at festivals over the past couple of years that still haven't secured distribution and probably are going to lose a ton of money."

That matters worse, DVDs are dying. "Online is king now ... and



Brian Clement directs *Project Breakwater*, with director of photography Jeff McCormack and actor Sarah Cody.

KEITH BEATY/TORONTO STAR

TORONTO: B MOVIE CAPITAL

For the love of



to scrounge the couch for quarters to buy macaroni, you can make a living off of it," says McConnell.

For actors it's more difficult, since most of the roles available do not pay well, if at all.

"I say the bulk of the work I've done in independent film has been for free," says Jeff Sinasc, who stars as a scientist in *Android Re-Enactment*. "Quite frankly, I'm an actor and a Canadian actor and an unknown Canadian actor at that ... in my reality it's do this project or do no project."

But he wouldn't miss it for the world. "I absolutely adore the stuff," he says. "Getting to go in, it's a great treat — especially on a film like *Android* where it was a 44-day shoot working very collaboratively with other people."

For the viewer, there's a plus side to cheaper cameras and technology.

"You'll see some really edgy stuff turned out that wasn't possible in the past when people were more worried about their massive bottom line," says McConnell.

It is a love of movies that keeps these filmmakers going. "Film is in my blood, I live, breathe, sweat, sleep and bleed it," says McConnell. "My goal has been to create film that would sit proudly on my shelf along with other movies I've collected over the years."

"The reality is, I enjoy it all, despite how absolutely soul-crushing the numbers game can be."

ENOUGH WITH THE ZOMBIES!

Brian Clement is trying to veer away from zombies — at least for now.

It's not that zombies haven't been good to him. As a young filmmaker in Victoria, he made a low-budget movie "about cannibal fashion models" called *Bings and Pirges*.

Then in 2003 he made a three-part anthology called *Exhumed*, featuring zombies in different time periods, with a samurai segment, a film noir segment and a futuristic segment.

Then there's *Meat Market*, about cannibalistic zombies. It launched his career and has been his most successful film "in terms of getting my name out there ... which is a little unfortunate, honestly, because it's by far the least skilled thing that I've done."

It earned international distribution, if not any profit. But deep down, there lurks a desire to become the next James Cameron or Steven Spielberg. So he moved to Toronto and hopes to use a feature now in production, *Project Breakwater*, to rebrand his company into one that also does serious science fiction and documentaries.

The film centres on an alien scientist coming to study Earth. The government discovers a UFO is going to land in Toronto and uses the G20 summit as an excuse to fence off downtown to capture him. He plans to finish filming in January.

He hopes to sell it, perhaps to television, and use it to attract financing for a feature film with more polish.

Alex Horkay

MADE IN THE GTA

A selection of new GTA movie productions that are sure to entertain — or possibly melt your eye sockets:

NOW ON TV:

• *Reel Zombies* (2008 comedy/horror)  
A team of zombie-film producers set out to make a movie while real zombies are attacking the production. Several showings on Super Channel until mid-January.  
Trailer: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL2e62\\_B5U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL2e62_B5U)

NOW ON DVD:

• *Franklinpimp* (2009, action/comedy/fantasy/horror)  
Fleemmaker/actor Tony Watt's experiences are reflected in a metropolis filled with extreme horror and sexual deviancy.  
Trailer: [www.imdb.com/title/tt1470822/video/gallery](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1470822/video/gallery)

• *Zombie Werewolves Attack!* (2009, comedy/horror)  
A group of friends enjoying a party barely survive a werewolf attack to learn it has killed most of the people in their town. [www.zombiewerewolvesattack.com](http://www.zombiewerewolvesattack.com)

• *Working Class Rock Star* (2008, documentary/music)  
The lives and careers of Tub Ring, Bloodshyete and 3 Mile Scream, with interviews from players in the heavy music scene. [www.workingclassrockstar.com](http://www.workingclassrockstar.com)

RECENTLY RELEASED:

• *Venus Highway* 2006. It Came From (2010), action/horror/thriller)  
An alien rock star awaits a liver transplant from a psychotic fugitive as an alien tries to collect a past debt.  
Trailer: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ba2VNA3lW](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ba2VNA3lW)

• *You Are Here* (2010, drama/fantasy/sci-fi)  
A reclusive woman searches for meaning in mysterious documents. [www.its-are-here-movie.com](http://www.its-are-here-movie.com)

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the revenue available via online sales is a fraction of what the DVD market used to bring in," McConnell says.

"This means the middle ground of the indie scene is dying, too — you either make a movie for less than \$500K now and make your money back or you make it for over \$1.5 million and use a 'name' cast."

Technology has improved and equipment costs have dropped, which has led to a crowded marketplace. "Since the rise of YouTube, the market has become saturated with videos. Now it has become a tough job of wading through it all to find the great films and ideas amidst the junk," says Green.

In spite of all the difficulties, a dedicated low-budget filmmaker can earn a living.

"As long as you aren't expecting to live in a mansion, and you realize that sometimes you're going to have

