

DEEP INSIDE THE FAMILY TIE: A 'Family' History

The “revenge film” is a familiar premise for any casual moviegoer. From ROBOCOP to KILL BILL, it’s a premise that continues to be made and remade for new generations. While many a-great stories have been written in this vein, Film student Matthew Glasson and fellow film fanatic Scott Greene wanted to take the formula, grab it by the horns and throttle it a bit.

And so was born THE FAMILY TIE, a short featurette about a young man – a “boy with no name” who witnesses the destruction of his family at the hands of John, a psychotic business partner of his father’s. Swearing vengeance, the boy seeks out to destroy John and will stop at nothing to mete out justice, even at the cost of his own sanity.

Sharing writing and producing duties, Glasson and Greene based the script on a short video they made while attending school together. Glasson had come across the never-finished short some years later, hitting upon the idea of expanding it into a feature. “It wasn’t great a great piece by itself, but it had potential,” he said. “Scott’s performance as the maniacal villain was certainly inspired, so I knew we could build on the characters we had sketched out and develop a compelling story out of it.”

As they wrote, the two longtime friends incorporated ideas and half-jokes they had bounced back and forth over the years. Glasson had developed a fascination with Asian cyberpunk cinema and Italian splatter movies, seeking out films that portrayed violence in a far more graphic manner than most mainstream American films dared. “Some of it was hard to take,” said Greene. “He would come up with these really horrible dubs of zombie movies and serial killer flicks, usually by directors like Lucio Fulci or Dario Argento. A lot of it was hard to stomach, but I’ve always found Matt’s writing to be very funny, so I figured it was worth getting involved in. We were going for laughs, so the idea was to try for an EVIL DEAD-type over the top-ness.”

Assuming the role of director, Glasson kept expenses low by shooting in the homes and workplaces of friends and, of course, families and casting many of these same people in various roles.

For the leads, Glasson selected Phil Anzelmo, a co-worker from his day job to portray the vengeance-fueled teen and Greene reprised his role as the villain from the original short. Principal photography took place over several long weekends in '97/'98, but several ambitious FX shots could not be completed before Glasson's move from Chicago to New York.

Both pursued their own artistic projects in the years that followed, but in 2004, Glasson and Greene finally resumed work on the project. With Greene sending Glasson script notes and narration ideas via e-mail while Glasson took on the editing on his Powerbook laptop. "The editing style of FAMILY TIE was something that I knew required a computer to execute, so unfortunately that meant playing the waiting game," Glasson says. "It goes without saying that it's an exciting time for young filmmakers everywhere as the technology to do these things has become more affordable, but I had to wait about 6 years for that 'affordability' to come around for me." After shooting those crucial FX shots and several months of obsessively editing down the 14-plus hours shot into a finished form, Glasson completed the featurette in April of 2007.

The "featurette" is an unusual running time as it doesn't fit in the traditional time slot that a television show or a feature-length film provides. It is a short burst of energy and spectacle, stirring up whoever tries watching it and giving them a good ride along the way. But finding a balance between caustic satire and over-the-top splatter requires a delicate balance of extreme worlds, and THE FAMILY TIE manages to be a sharp and bitter satire while also maintaining a hyperkinetic energy in its violent camp.

THE FAMILY TIE is an ode to grass-roots gore shot within The Windy City and its northwestern suburbs. "Frankly, I wasn't sure it'd ever be done," Greene commented, "but now that it is, I know it was worth it. It's a real joy to hear people gasp and howl during the screenings." Glasson also expresses pleasure with the end result. "We set the bar pretty high for ourselves, but when you're trying to make an epic film on a shoestring budget, things take a bit longer than you would if you had a paid crew and producers to move things along. Even so, seeing my baby finally come to life makes it all worthwhile."