

Calgary director gets shot at a succubus

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For a director who first carved out a name for himself doing kid-friendly Nickelodeon TV episodes of Sweet Valley High and even a Power Rangers film, David Winning's career has involved some unsavory characters as of late.

In the past five years or so, the Calgary-born journeyman filmmaker has surrounded himself with potty-mouthed, Satan-batting teens (Todd and the Book of Pure Evil), mutant wasps (Black Swarm), a typically unhinged Bruce Dern (Swamp Devil) and sewer-dwelling monsters (Something Beneath).

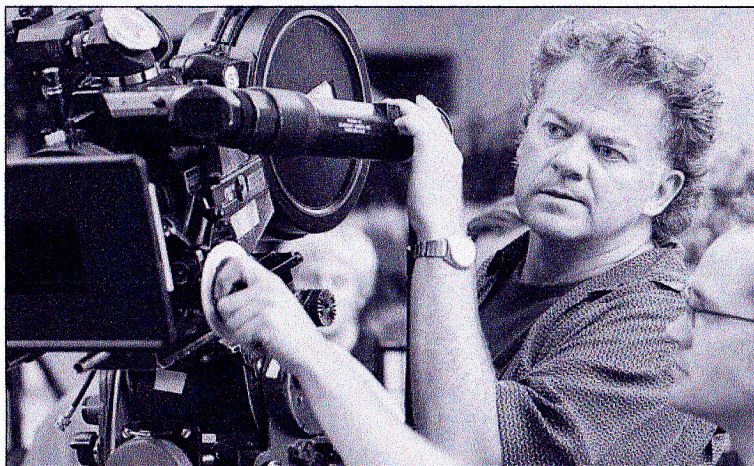
And now, he can add "succubus" to the list: an alluring female demon who feeds off the sexual energy of her prey.

Winning, a veteran helmsman of sci-fi TV shows such as Earth:

SPOTLIGHT Final Conflict, Andromeda and Stargate: Alliance Sunday on Showcase at 10 p.m.

To get the job, however, he had to convince producers that he was on familiar ground. Winning thought he had his bases covered. But they were fairly specific. Vampires? Yes. Zombies? You bet. Killer wasps? They're on the resume. But sex-starved demons who dress in leather?

"What happens with directors is you get pigeonholed," Winning says, in an interview from his office in Los Angeles. "I did Nickelodeon for four years, couldn't get out of that. I flopped right into erotic thrillers for a few years, which was a bit of a whiplash. Then I did a couple of westerns and then fell into science fiction for six years. But they will look at your resume and say, 'We're doing a show about a succubus. Have



Courtesy, David Winning

Calgary native David Winning has directed Sunday's episode of the Showcase hit *Lost Girl*.

you done any succubus stories?" Sunday's episode of *Lost Girl* is presumably Winning's first succubus story. And while the 50-year-old former William Aberhart High School student has made 14 features and worked on 22 TV series, he admits there was added pressure during his 10-minute meeting for *Lost Girl*. Like many, Winning had become hooked on the show. The fantasy sci-fi series follows the sexy and horror-filled adventures of lovable but lethal succubus Bo (Anna Silk) as she deals with an organization of underworld creatures known as the Fae, who are divided into good and evil sects.

"She finds that she keeps waking up with dead lovers because she basically kills people that she has sex with," Winning says. "So the series is about her quest to stop killing people and figure out what her mysterious past is and

which side of right or wrong she is supposed to be on. I just found it to be very original."

Winning's episode is the winter premiere of Season 2 and features guest star Lauren Holly (Dumb and Dumber) as a famous Fae who feeds off the adulation of her fans. Bo is forced to track her down.

As for how Winning landed the gig, he admits it's not a particularly romantic story.

"There's the fantasy of TV directors or movie directors getting the phone calls and saying, 'Well, I don't know if I want to do your series. Send me the script. I'll read (it) and see if I want to do it,'" Winning says. "It's nothing like that. I'm scrounging for jobs like anyone else all the time. I've always got my ear to the ground about new series. I chased Todd down for a year before I could get in there and get an interview.

It's just like being an actor. I've chased down every job I've ever got."

Yet by alternating between television series, made-for-TV films and B-movie horror, Winning has managed to stay busy for nearly 30 years.

That said, his first love is indie film, an area he has wanted to return to since the 1980s but is usually too busy.

Conscientious students of Alberta film history may recall his thriller *Storm*, which he shot over 20 days in 1983 with money his father had, ironically enough, set aside to send him to film school. The thriller, shot in the forests of Bragg Creek with a 10-person crew, ended up screening at Cannes and being picked up for theatrical and video distribution, a rare feat in the 1980s.

"I'm desperate to try and get another movie or couple of low-

budget movies going in Calgary this summer," says Winning. "It's a constant thing with me, but every once and a while it does happen. I remember back in the 1980s once I got *Storm* going how exciting that was. That's when the creative stuff is most exciting, when you are completely in control. Obviously, working in television for three decades, I'm not always in control of things."

But Winning also hopes to direct more episodes of *Lost Girl* and will soon return to the Winnipeg-shot horror-comedy series *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil*, which has earned a loyal cult following. Winning's work on the show won him a Leo Award last year.

Beyond that, there's a number of projects that are in limbo. There's also been a few near misses. For years, Winning was attached to direct the fantasy film *London's Bridge and the Three Keys*. But recent news that Michael Jackson's daughter Paris would star in the film gave it a profile boost and, unfortunately for Winning, a new director.

He's also working on a conspiracy thriller with actor Kevin Sorbo, a friend since they both worked on *Andromeda*, about the secretive Illuminati. He has been pegged to direct a biopic of Indira Gandhi in India, but only if the production can raise the necessary funds.

So for now, he alternates between a home in Calgary, his home base in L.A. and a busy shooting schedule that often takes him to Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver.

It's a hectic life, albeit one that allows him to gather plenty of air miles.

"That's what I do," he says with a laugh. "I shovel snow in Calgary and I come to L.A. for job interviews."