

Entertainment

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Hollywood trip takes determination

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

WHAT DOES A TICKET from Detroit to Hollywood cost?

"The bottom line is inner determination," according to Scott Spiegel, graduate of Groves High School in Birmingham, who co-authored the screenplay for Clint Eastwood's latest film "The Rookie," opening Friday throughout the metropolitan area.

Spiegel, who was born in Detroit, spent a year at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills after his 1976 graduation from Groves. "That is," he said, "when I began to take film seriously."

His experience in those years included acting for Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell in their 1979 production "Within the Woods." He also

tolled on special effects for Raimi and Campbell's first well-known effort, "Evil Dead I." As with many other dedicated young Detroit-area filmmakers, he worked at whatever jobs he could in those days. In Spiegel's case that meant clerking at a grocery store while producing short films.

"Cleveland Smith, Bounty Hunter," was a 10-minute parody of "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and "Toro, Toro, Toro" about a runaway grasscutter. Both were 16mm films Spiegel sold to HBO in cable's early days when a nationwide search was underway for any and all programs. The cable system's enormous capacity for material created opportunities for many filmmakers. He also sold "Toro, Toro, Toro" to the U.S. Army.

SPiegel WRVLY remarked, "I think they made a mistake and thought it was 'Tora! Tora! Tora!'"

(a 1970 film about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor).

"I got a lot of mileage out of those two films," Spiegel said. "They were also in a weird compilation, 'Filmhouse Fever,' a vignette piece where a couple of guys go to watch films." Spiegel appeared in Sam Raimi's 1983 production "Crimewave." "The 1 turned 'Cleveland Smith' into the lowest-budget feature ever made, Josh Becker's 'Thou Shall Not Kill' Except..." which Spiegel produced and co-wrote. "It was invaluable hands-on experience in baptism by fire," Spiegel said. "I learned what not to do."

"Then Sam Raimi asked me to write 'Evil Dead II' which was shot in '86 and '87," he said. Another one of Spiegel's shorts, "Attack of the Helping Hand," was a film spoof of the Hamburger Helper commercials. The title describes the plot. "Sam Raimi liked it so much," Spiegel said, "that he dropped it into 'Evil Dead II.'"

"Everyone needs guidance and people to tell you how things are done. But ultimately it's got to come from within," Spiegel said. In 1987, with that inner determination in high gear, he moved to Hollywood where he rewrote scripts for Bill Lustig's low-budget productions including "Hit List" with Jan-Michael Vincent.

NEXT HE MADE "Night Crew" with Charlie Band at Empire Picture. Filmed in two weeks on a \$130,000 budget — "What I shot was what I got." "Night Crew" was sold by Band to Paramount which renamed it "Intruder" and cut it to receive an R rating. "Ironically," Spiegel said, "my \$130,000 feature was marketed under Paramount's \$400,000 computer-generated logo."

Originally intended as an unrated film, "Intruder" is about people trapped in a supermarket and being picked off by a homicidal maniac. The special effects folks were Fangoria people, who featured a severed head from the film on the cover of Gorezone, one of the sci-fi/fantasy horror magazines.

Some of the stores selling Gorezone pulled the magazine from their racks. The negative publicity was heightened when the unrated version, which was selling well in England, got pulled after the distribution company was fined \$500,000.



Scott Spiegel (above), who went to school in Birmingham and Farmington Hills, shares screenwriting credits with Boaz Yakin for "The Rookie," directed by Clint Eastwood.

Why all this interest in horror/slasher stories among young filmmakers like Spiegel, Sam Raimi and so many others? "Ever since I was a kid I saw horror films with my dad," Spiegel said, "and I grew up during the monster craze of the '60s. There was also a lot of comedy in that era — and both comedy and horror are similar."

"They are both structured around a build and a payoff, the punchline of the gags or the special-effects impact of revealed horror," he said.

THE PUBLICITY generated by "Intruder" led Spiegel to working with Boaz Yakin, and the concept for "The Rookie" developed. "We wrote it together, and by this time I was

with his agency," Spiegel said. The script was sold a year-and-a-half ago for \$300,000, and Charlie Sheen was attached to the project. Then it was given to Clint Eastwood who liked it and decided to direct as well as star in the production.

"The Rookie" features Eastwood as a veteran cop whose partner is murdered by a villainous car thief, Strom (Raul Julia), whose bizarre girlfriend, Liesel (Sonia Braga), doubles as Strom's chief hit-person. Eastwood's new partner is David Ackerman (Charlie Sheen), a young man whose mission is to prove his courage and reliability.

The all-star cast features Tom Skerritt as David's father. Spiegel and Yakin met with East-

wood for one major change on the script and a few minor ones. "He is so professional," Spiegel said. "It was a thrilling moment because his knowledge of film is just incredible. He made sure everything was to the letter. He knew exactly what he wanted."

Eastwood allowed both Spiegel and Boaz to appear in the film. Spiegel is a baggage-carrier in the airport scene. Spiegel also worked on "The Rookie" set as a script consultant, although by this time he was directing "The Nutty Nut," which he co-wrote with Sam Raimi and Ron Zang. That's an IVE Caroleo production film featuring Tone Skye, Tracey Lords and Pat Boone.



Clint Eastwood plays a veteran cop and Charlie Sheen is his new partner in "The Rookie."

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