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Behind The Scenes with Wicked Pictures

Director Michael Raven talks about shooting challenges, the difference between sex and love, and the new trend in the adult industry

by Layla Revis

SexHerald: How did you get started?

Michael Raven: Well, I started out as a glamour photographer. I was living in Dallas and, having been a fan of Andrew Blake and Michael Ninn for many years, some friends and I got together, rented a soundstage, and shot our first film in 1997 entitled "Queen's Challenge." We sold it to Sin City and then I moved to LA in the summer of 1998. I worked for Sin City on an exclusive and non-exclusive basis and in 2003 I signed exclusively with Wicked. It'd be a lie to say that I didn't first get involved in the adult industry because I enjoyed watching people have sex, but for me, this job really does offer me an outlet for creative fulfillment.

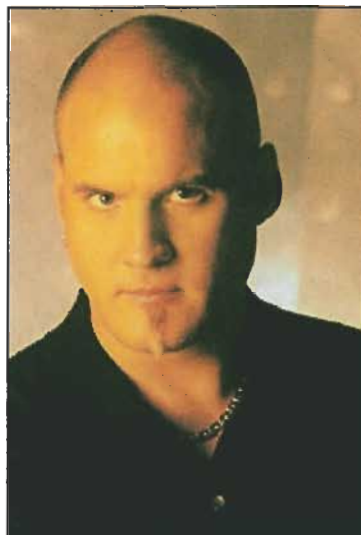
SH: What's a typical day on the job?

Raven: Days start at 8am and end at around midnight. A lot of time is taken setting up lighting shots that might only occupy about five minutes of screen time. We'll also go over the script. Most of the movies we do are fairly large scripts so we like to prepare our actors well. I'm not much of a social butterfly so I'm usually in the editing suites for the rest of my day. I don't go out on the town much. You may see me out at an event here and there, but for the most part, I'm a hermit.

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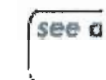
SH: Is your family in the adult video business?

Raven: My wife is a Wicked contract actress and she did the famous ice dildo scene in "Hidden Obsessions." I know that for some people they can't imagine seeing their spouse have sex with someone else, but for me, it has its appeal. It depends on your philosophical outlook on sex and love. They're not



Favorite Actors: Randy Spears, Steven St. Croix
Favorite Actresses: Ava Vincent, Julia Ann
Favorite Scene: Depends

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always synonymous and a lot of people don't see it that way.

SH: What's the Wicked way?

Raven: Wicked isn't afraid to spend money on production value. There are a lot of companies out there that don't really care. Wicked wants their films to be lit properly and styled properly. They want somewhat believable stories and scripts and we take it seriously. This way, we turn out features that are more interesting with a sexual theme. Wicked's policy as a company is condom only whenever a scene involves penetration. It's a positive message in this day and age. We want to have fun, but have fun responsibly. There are common misconceptions about adult material. Every normal person is interested in sex in a healthy way. I think it's healthy to want to watch people have sex in a healthy way. Wicked as a company has tried to make a difference in that area. You're not going to find some double-breasted polyester suit wearing producer having sex in a hotel room with one of the actresses.

There seems to be a not-so healthy trend in the adult industry toward brutal misogyny in the gonzo world. I would never say that the government should step in and stop this, but you have to wonder why that appeals to some people in the first place. I don't know where it's going. It's like Reality TV - one person trying to top the other - and we all know where that goes.

SH: What challenges do you face while shooting?

Raven: Probably the biggest challenge is in the hiring of the talent and believable passionate sex. The stories we tell put demands on the actors to also act well. For people who don't like each other in real life or are not attracted to each other, it's hard to get that chemistry. What we do requires more acting than the standard adult film. The money that adult production houses are willing to spend makes it a more competitive industry. The newer, less experienced actresses sometimes work just with a boyfriend. Before they show up they know who they're working with and they know what kind of acts they'll be doing beforehand. I've never booked scenes without the actors knowing what they're going to do and who they're working with and they always have the right to say they don't want to do it. If that's ever the case, I'll find something else for them to do or put them in another movie. The bottom line is that you want to treat people the way you want to be treated. I have a great deal of respect for what they're doing. It's not easy, that's why you see the same guys over and over again. It's takes a special person who can get an erection in front of fifteen or twenty people with light burning a hole in his ass. It's a lot of pressure. On top of that, you have to have sex with someone that you're not attracted to.

SH: Are you working on any new lines or genres?

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Raven: I've started to produce experimental features. I recently did a film called "Couples." There was no script, no chase scenes, and special effects. I created a scenario of married couples, gave the actors character sketches, and asked them to improvise. It came out nicely and I'd really like to do more of them. Wicked is also getting involved in the Interactive arena, DVD's that give the viewer more options where they can pick the plot twists and even design their own endings.

SH: What are your favorite types of scenes?

I don't know if I have a favorite. I have odd tastes and they vary. One day, I might like a fluffy girl-girl soft scene and on other days they bore me to tears. Whatever the scene dictates at the moment. Sometimes I don't like the multiple men on one woman and then sometimes it turns me on. What appeals to me the most is when, regardless of the set-up, there's some sort of positive energy between the actors. If the energy is negative that comes across and it's as if the actors look like they'd rather have a root canal. It's not enjoyable and you feel like you're having a root canal.

SH: Who are your favorite actors and actresses?

Raven: There have been a few. My two favorite actors are Randy Spears and Steven St. Croix. They have stronger acting abilities than your usual adult film actor, and can actually take a character and make them their own. Ava Vincent and Julia Ann are probably my favorite actresses. Julia Ann was great in "Beautiful," a modern day retelling of Snow White shot in a 1940's noir setting. It won best picture at the AVN Awards last year. Ava was in some of the work I'm most proud of. In many cases, you find actors and actresses that are good at one thing and not at the other. Some actresses are actually talented actresses, but they're not so good at the sex, but more often than not, they're good at the sex and can't act. It's like they're reading off the back of a cereal box.

SH: What's the most expensive way to shoot?

Raven: It depends on the format you're shooting - video, film, hi-def. I've shot on all of them. Currently, film is the most expensive and usually we use Super 16mm. That's probably the only variable cost. A location can run anywhere from \$1,500-\$4,000 a day depending on where you're shooting. Of course, an actor/actress salary can run the gamut and they come with a list of what they will and will not perform, as well as a list of players that they'd prefer to work with and some that they won't work with. We don't want to hire people and put people them together if we know in advance that they don't work well together and can't create a positive chemistry.

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