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LAST DRINKS: THE SEVÉ SCHELENZ INTERVIEW.

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When your low-budget debut hits big, where to next? Such was the enviable problem for horror auteur Sevé Schelenz, who rattled international festival crowds with his 2011 shocker, *Skew*. For his second feature, the Canadian has crafted a fresh perspective on the 'single-setting' horror film; the gross-out funny, very 'splatter-y' *Peelers* unfolds in a remote titty bar, as infected patrons turn on the survivors. Ahead of its World Premiere at the [Palm Beach International Film Festival](#), Schelenz spoke with SCREEN-SPACE about the origins of his latest work, the learning curve he went through on the shoot and answering the age-old question, "Where would nudity be acceptable?"...



SCREEN-SPACE: After the success of *Skew*, what kind of pressure did you place on yourself and your 'sophomore project'?

Schelenz: I never thought about any "pressure", never thought of it as a "follow-up". I was just ready to make another film and took it from there. The only thing I wanted to do differently was to make a more traditional horror film, (to) work with a DP and compose shots and work with lighting. When we shot *Skew* in 2005, films tried hard to look like big budget films and most fell short. I didn't want to make a film where the audience would be pulled out of the movie because they were thrown off by the look. With the sort of budget we had at the time, POV was the way to go. When we shot *Peelers*, HD was much more accessible. You could also shoot 5K, which allowed you to play with the image more in post, which you couldn't do back in 2005 without image degradation. Actually, the most important thing for me when making any film is to have a good script with twists and great characters. We did that in *Skew*, but some of the twists may have been a little too much for the audience. Screenwriter Lisa DeVita and I came up with something more balanced.

SCREEN-SPACE: What were the origins of the story?

Schelenz: After *Skew's* festival run and distribution, my sales agent asked me, "So, what's next?" I was developing a number of features, mostly comedies, thrillers, or sci-fi. He told me, "No, do another horror." I asked him what he thought would sell and he said, "More blood and more boobs." I was more into anticipation-building and psychological horror but I went away and thought to myself, "I know I can get the blood in there, but what about the nudity?" I just wasn't interested in gratuitous breast shots. I thought, "Where would nudity be acceptable? A strip club!" It turned out there were not a lot of good stripper-horror films, leaving an untapped sub-genre of horror out there. I asked 'Devits' if she would be interested in writing a script with strong female characters who kicked ass, a deft story and some good twists. Her eyes went wide and she told me a story about something that happened to her while she was at a strip club in Las Vegas. From there, *Peelers* was born. (Pictured, above; Schelenz, on-set, with actress Nikki Wallin).



SCREEN-SPACE: The 'single setting' concept carries its own production challenges. How did you address both the limitations and potential of your location?



Schelenz: A single setting can be the kiss of death from an audience point of view. There is a perception that the more locations, the bigger the film, the more the audience will want to see it; my sales agent recommended multiple locations if only to have them in the trailer. But from a production point of view, a single location is the way to go. It is the best answer to the main obstacle of indie filmmaking -

budget. My editing background means I'm always thinking about how scenes transition, which I bring to the script process as well. So, I sort of treated each room in the strip club as a separate location, of giving each one it's own look and feel through production design, lighting and camera angles. Our DP Lindsay George (pictured, left) was an indie filmmaker's dream because she was fast, had a great eye for composition and understood lighting. *Peelers* doesn't feel like it's all in one location, when in fact it pretty much is.

SCREEN-SPACE: There is a great deal of authenticity in the casting, a lot of 'character' in the characters, especially in your lead, Wren Walker, and the girls who play the dancers.

Schelenz: We threw out a wide, open net for the casting to see as many actors as we could. Surprisingly, we had a lot of talented girls show up to auditions. We were worried that actresses would hear "stripper horror" and think ditzy, damsel-in-distress types with gigantic fake boobs, when really we were going for something different, something against type. We wanted characters with brains, women you could sympathize with who come in all shapes and sizes, confident in their own skin. How could actresses know this coming in to cold auditions? We were wrong; ultimately, selecting our female roles was tough due to all the talented options. When it came to the lead character, 'Blue Jean', none of the girls ideally fitted the role. Wren Walker (pictured, above) came in late in the audition process because her boyfriend saw our ad and encouraged her to read and she nailed it. Wren just owned the Blue Jean role right off the bat.



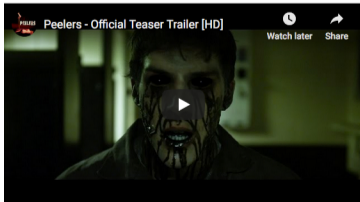
SCREEN-SPACE: Despite the usual tight budget and time constraint issues, did the shoot go to plan? Was it a positive set?

Schelenz: When you make a truly independent feature, you're always worried about running over. I had the experience of shooting *Skew* and we also had great 1st and 2nd ADs on *Peelers*. For the most part, the shoot went according to plan. Another way of staying on schedule is to allow more time in pre-production and rehearsals. The more issues you can encounter and solve before production, the better. This helps the mood on set, as the prep has been done. Of course, you also set the tone of production pretty early on. I got to know most of the cast and crew ahead of time and that made things more enjoyable. It's great to hear cast and crew say, "I had a great time on set, it was so much fun," but it's not the case for the producers or director. Yes, we are pretty pumped to be on set and making a movie but it really is up to us to get the shots needed or there's no film. (Pictured, above; from l-r, Wren Walker, Madison J. Loos, Momona Komagata, Kirsty Peters and Caz Odin Darko).



SCREEN-SPACE: And you pull a Hitchcock, rewarding yourself with a very funny cameo! Plan to spend more time in front of the camera?

Schelenz: (Laughs) I like the idea, (but I'm) not sure I have the acting chops to pull it off. I like to get myself, or my name in there somehow, just for shits and giggles. If you listen carefully, you'll hear my name being paged as Doctor Schelenz in the opening sequence. In *Skew*, my name actually appears on a newspaper as Officer Schelenz. My cameo in *Peelers* is actually part of a bigger story. Everyone in the scene, minus the main actor, is the crew from the film, including the other three producers. It was a fun scene to film because I knew in editing I'd have a chance to get everyone into the movie.



Peelers will premiere April 9 at the [Palm Beach International Film Festival](#), Florida; other territories to follow.

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