Jonathan Barkan

Jim: Jonathan Barkan. Are you a witch, weirdo, goblin, or ghoul?

Jonathan Barkan: Um, it's a funny question cuz many people would probably want to associate themselves as a weirdo with those options, but I, I genuinely think I'm more of a goblin . Nice. I think I, I, I kind of fit into, into that. Yeah.

Jim: Mm-hmm. a any, any particular ways that you fit, feel you fit into that more than the others, or,

Jonathan Barkan: yeah, I mean, which I, uh, it's, it's not something that I immediate it immediately.

I know that I don't identify as a witch. It's, it's as easy to eliminate it as it is to kind of hone in, um, go. I, yeah. I don't, that doesn't feel right either. Weirdo, it was really down between weirdo and, and goblin. Mm-hmm. , but goblin, I feel is, is more appropriate just because. of my journey through this industry was kind of s you know, working very, very hard.

Um, but also just kind of managing to find, navigate my way through and kind of sneak here and, and, and weave into there to, to kind of get to where I am. And like I said, it was an enormous amount of, of work, but there definitely were some elements of, of luck and, and relationship building and, you know, not necessarily conniving my way in , but, um, but yeah, definitely, I, I definitely feel that goblin is, is the.

Jim: Mm-hmm. . Yeah. I'm man after my own heart. I, uh, . I also relate to the Goblin more than any of the others. Um, could you tell me a little bit about that weigh in, um, wa was there a kind of moment where you thought like, this is where I want to be and this is what I need to be doing,

Jonathan Barkan: or? Yeah, it's, it's interesting because I've had that feeling several times.

Um, so my entry into the film industry was as a, as a critic, as a journalist. I started out as a writer for Bloody disgusting.com. I was a writer for the music section specifically because I've, I've been a horror fan my entire life, but I've also been a music fan. You know, I was that kid with a really crappy Cassio keyboard, you know, with, you know, battery powered that I would put down on

the floor in front of the family tv, and I would put in a V h S of Ridley Scott's legend, and that, and.

uh, I know that in the UK you've got the Jerry Goldsmith score, but in the United States we had the Tangerine Dream score and that, that music, I've, I've always loved it. And so I would sit there and just kind of by ear play, you know, figure out the melody and learn how to, um, and, and so music was always something that I loved.

And in, so a year, uh, after high school, I graduated 18, took a year off, and then I went to a local community college where I got a certificate in music production and engineering. And I also thought that I would be the guy behind the mixing booth. Mm-hmm. , that's, that seemed really exciting. And one day when I was reading Bloody Disgusting, I saw that they had a, uh, a music video premiere.

And I was like, oh my God, if they're doing music that my worlds have combined mm-hmm. , I need to get into this. And I sent in a, uh, message to the author of that music video premiere article, not knowing that that was the co-owner of the website. Right. And I ex I explained this is who I am. I've loved horror my whole life.

I've been reading Bloody Disgusting for years now. Um, and I have a certificate in music production and engineering. So I would love to write reviews for you guys. And they, uh, they brought me on board saying, you know, two album reviews a month. Great. I contact. every record label I could. And all of them were super receptive cuz they thought to themselves, this is an audience that we haven't really tapped into.

The horror audience. Mm-hmm. . So a lot of rock and metal labels were like, yes, let's, let's get in on this. And I really put in a lot of work, uh, establishing those relationships and building them up. And it was, and then I became the, the editor of the music section. And then I grew and started writing for other sections of the website, you know, video games, comics, tv.

Mm-hmm. new, you know, everyday News. And I really started feeling like this is, this is right, this is, this is what I, what I want to do. And so I was with bloody disgusting for, um, for over seven years, I want to say. Yeah. It was the end of 2016 when I left because I wasn't, I, I left and then I reached out to, uh, , a guy that I worked with a few times in the coming years, his name is Chik, uh, Chik Berenson.

And he was the co-founder and co-owner of Epic Pictures. Mm-hmm. and I, and we'd, we'd spoken a few times and I just said, Hey, do you know of anything I'm looking to, uh, to kind of grow and expand and I'm ready to go wherever, do whatever I need to do. And he said, gimme a week cause I've got something in the works and you would be perfect for it.

And it turns out that, that was when Epic was in negotiations to acquire Dread central.com. Oh, . Um, and, and so they said, you know, we need someone who has a passport and isn't afraid to use it. And I was like, well, I'm your guy. Like, I have no, I, I love traveling. So I came aboard as a managing editor of Dread Central and immediately was thrown into the world of film acquisitions because that was what they wanted.

They epic. Was known for genre fair, but they were actually generating ma the majority of their revenue through family films and drama. So they wanted to separate that, and that's why they got Dread Central. It was because they could then create a specialty label called Dread Central Presents, which is now just known as Dread.

And that was, and so I became the managing editor of Dread Central and an acquisitions ambassador for Dread Central Presents. So I was going to festivals around the world, meeting with independent filmmakers and convincing them that Epic would be the right home for them, just like every other distributor, you know, does they go there?

Hey, you know, gravitas would be the perfect home for you. It would actually, mm-hmm. Saban would be the perfect home shutter, you know, all of these places. And, uh, and I was pretty successful, like, o in my two and a half years approximately at Dread Central, I, I was part of 20 to 25 acquisitions and assisted with, you know, marketing and distribution.

Um, and then I got the opportunity to shift entirely out of the film journalism world into film industry. Mm-hmm. . And that was with working with Chit, again at his current company, entertainment Squad. And we launched the Horror Collective and our first movie came out a week before the pandemic was announced, and all of our plans for going to events and marketing and branding just went right out the window.

So we, you know, we, we still worked really hard and we did some, some wonderful releases that I'm very, very proud of. But we naturally came to a pause and amicably split mm-hmm. and I just kept going in the film industry world. And it was at a company called Mutiny Pictures, where I acquired

Schmerin. And I think that's probably the, the biggest title obviously, that I've, that I've worked on.

And I think the story there is interesting because people like myself who do film acquisitions, uh, and film distribution. We have to have a very open mind as to where we can find films. We have to think outside of the box. It's not just let's go to film festivals and find something, or wait for filmmakers to email the distribution company.

And then we can, uh, kind of watch the films and decide if it would be right For us. We have to be very active. Uhhuh . So on top of scrolling through IMDB Pro for films that are in post-production, on top of going to the festivals, on top of the networking that we've all done, we do research. So I'm scrolling through Google every day.

Um, , you know, and I, when I say scrolling to Google, you know how they say if you've gone past page one, you're in the, in the depths of the, of the internet. Uhhuh . Yeah. I'm scrolling to page like 10, 15, 20. I didn't know when. Up to double figures. Oh yeah. Depending, depending on what you're looking for. Yeah.

But I, so I have my ways of tailoring the Google search results for what I'm looking for, but I still have to dig deeper and deeper and deeper. And another place that I look at, uh, and where I found Skin Maing is the filmmaking subreddit, uh, R slash I think it's filmmakers. And Kyle posted a trailer that he cut for Skinnier Inc.

And said, Hey, I made this horror film. Um, I'm pretty much done with post-production, but I cut a trailer. What do you all think of it? And I watched and I thought to myself, this is. Unbelievable. Like, this is something that I, I'm so fascinated by this. I want to know more. And so I dmd him and we started talking back and forth.

And, uh, then we entered into negotiations and we had several calls. And I think what was really important for Kyle was that I, I'm, I'm a very honest person. I live by a motto, which is, I'd rather give you the ugly truth than a pretty lie. Mm-hmm. . And so when we were talking about ski rink, I said, look, the, the, the biggest likelihood is that this will be released and it will be too weird and too avantgarde for people and it will be buried.

But there is a chance that we can make this something really big and really exciting because of how different and how unique it is. And we're going to fight

for that. We're not going to take the easy route, we're going to put in the work, but just know that even if we put in a lot of work, it may not land.

And he said, that's, that's fine. So long as you put in the work, that's all that matters. And so, uh, I helped get it into Fantasia for the world premier. Um, I was in touch with a lot of press who were seeking screener links so that they could write it, like for an independent horror film to get, you know, 10 reviews out of its world premiere is, unless it's something that has a lot of buzz.

Mm-hmm. , it's pretty, pretty rare. Skinner Ring got 22 reviews Wow. Out of Fantasia. Wow. And they were, and the lowest score was a mixed positive. Um, and we knew that we had something really, really special on our hands then. Um, and what also really helped us is that, The ex-head of publicity for Shutter. Sean was in attendance at Fantasia and he went and saw skimming.

And when he got out, he was texting the acquisitions team, Sam and Emily, um, if this isn't on your radar, put it on there right of way. And I didn't know that he sent that text message, but a few hours after he sent that, I'd started collecting all of the reviews and, and getting poll quotes. And I sent all of that to Sam and Emily and I said, Hey, we have this film at World Premier Fantasia, it's getting amazing reviews.

Do you wanna see it? Um, and they emailed back almost immediately saying, yes, send us a link. Mm-hmm. , I sent it and within a few days they said, listen, we love this. We're going to make an offer. We're just talking with our partners at a M c, like I f C, um, about like teaming up to do something bigger. Mm-hmm.

And, and at that point I knew. That the dream of Schmerin being something bigger than, um, than what we had hoped for was going to become a reality. And so, you know, I helped negotiate that deal. Uh, you know, on behalf of Kyle. I definitely asked him, you know, what are the things that you need? What are the kind of the, the main things that you want out of it?

Theatrical was incredibly big for him, and he used, we're all going to the world's fair. Um, as, uh, as kind of the comp he was saying, you know, this got 20 screens. I would love if we could have something like that, that would just be the best. And um, and so we were negotiating for that and Shutter was like, listen, we'll try.

But the most we can promise is like five to 10 screens. and we said, okay, we'll take that if, if you, you've got it in a contract, if it does well, you'll expand it.

That's all that we need. That's what we're looking for. And it started playing a few more festivals that we'd already previously locked down because of the popularity at Fantasia.

And then it played a festival, which I will not name in Europe, and it was part of the virtual portion. And we were promised security, we were promised safety, we were promised to everything. And within 24 hours of it going live, it was on every Torrent website. , so it was, that was a punch to the gut, to put it mildly, because Shudder and, and us, we were talking about some really amazing marketing plans and, you know, ways to distribute this that would kind of lean into the style of movie that it was.

Um, And that got thrown for a lurch because of the piracy. But I will say that because of the piracy, the film started reaching a much wider audience. Now, we don't know if Shudder original way of marketing would've tapped into that audience. It may very well have, there was already a, a substantial word of mouth being generated for this film because of the festivals, because of the reviews.

Um, but it's, but you know, through piracy and through people on TikTok, you know, I wanna say before the film was released theatrically, it had something like 20 to 25 million views on the hashtag. Jesus. It was unbelievable. Yeah, it was, it had grown into something that we couldn't have fathom, but again, we didn't know if that would've happened had it been released legitimately, quote unquote.

Jim: I mean, I work in marketing myself and you gotta pay big money for 20 million on TikTok. Do you know what I mean? So really do for that to happen. Not organically, but you know, it as, you know, power.

Jonathan Barkan: It was organic inside organically. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

It was definitely organic. But, you know, it was a, uh, a very painful organic, um, Kyle was devastated, he was distraught, he was terrified.

You know, we were worried what's gonna happen with the Shudder deal, and bless their hearts, they leaned into it. So, you know, I, I feel comfortable saying this. The original release for Skinamarink was Halloween this year. Um, and they had all sorts of amazing plans to really make it something special and something.

But the piracy happened. The leak happened, and they bumped it up. And the original plan was, Hey, this is getting a ton of attention. Let's put it in 250 theaters because of all this attention that it's getting online. And then the articles started coming out. Rolling Stone LA Times, Chicago Tribune, New York Times Collider AV Club.

Uh, bloody disgusting. You know, everywhere were writing about this and YouTube videos, you know, Skinamarink, the cursed horror film, uh, you know, the movie that's being called the Scariest Film of all time. Uh, all of all of these things were starting to come up and generating a huge amount of traction and, um, and publicity.

And so I F C took the risk and expanded it from 250 screens to an opening weekend of 692 theaters. and it was a holiday weekend and in the four days it made just under $900,000 off of a budget of 15,000 Canadian. So it's something like 11, 12,000 us. Um, and that was unreal. And so then it became, you know, the theatrical indie horror success, the movie that beat All Odds, that was pirated at Infinitum and yet it still did it.

It beat all expectations at the box office. And so they expanded to 802 screens and now the movie has broken 2 million at the box office again on a budget of 15,000 Canadian. It's, listen, it's not, uh, the Blair Witch Project that grossed over a hundred million. It's not paranormal activity, which grossed over a hundred million dollars.

But it is a massive success story because Blair Witch Project and paranormal activity are more commercial films in their, in their own way. Skinamarink is not commercial. It is not a movie that you, that you put in 3000 theaters and expect it to do, you know, 30 million opening and break a hundred million.

Sure. And yet it tapped into something and it has been incredibly successful for, for everyone. And yeah, our, our wildest dream not only came true, it was surpassed.

Jim: How does that feel?

Jonathan Barkan: It is, it's an unbelievable feeling. The amount of pride. that I have in Kyle and in what he created is unbeliev. It's, it's off the charts. Um, and listen, I I, I really try to not be a very arrogant person. I will speak about what I feel here and, and I hope it doesn't come across as, uh, arrogance, but, um,

it's not easy, the film acquisitions world, um, because I have to look at movies, not just as a lover of cinema. I have to look at them from a professional standpoint, from a business standpoint. I have to think, okay, this is a fantastic movie. Is it. because I've run into situations where I look at a movie and I go, I love it.

It's amazing. This is brilliant. I, God, I I, I just adore every frame of this movie. There is nothing I can do for it. And it's heartbreaking. It's devastating. And then there are times where I watch a movie and go, oh my God, this is, this is garbage. This is terrible. I can't handle how bad this movie is. It's gonna make a million dollars.

And then there are the movies where I say to myself, you know what? I'm gonna take a risk. I'm gonna do it. And at Mutiny, I had that ability. I was the head of acquisitions. What I said went, you know, obviously I looked to my team and I said, you know, what are your thoughts? I want to hear your opinions.

And, and we have, we had discussions, you know, what is it about this movie? What is it about, uh, this story? What is it about this filmmaker? We're thinking constantly about. every aspect of the film. And what can we do for it? What are our plans? How do we approach this? And and luckily the team at Mutiny was like, Hey, you believe in this and we see that it's different.

Um, we recognize that it's gonna be hard, but let's, let's go for it. Let's, let's give it a shot. And so there is this, there's a lot of pride that I feel with my own kind of ability to spot a movie and say, there's something special here. And even though it's dangerous, even though it's risky, because anytime a movie is acquired, there are a lot of expenses that go into getting a movie out into the world.

Mm-hmm. . Um, and if we can't recoup those expenses, then we eat them. We lose thousands of dollars, if not more. And so, , I, I basically have to take a risk, take a gamble, um, and this one paid off. And so I feel a lot of pride there. And then it's just, you know, being able to say,

I believed in something like this and something different. Horror fans are notorious for sequels, hating remakes, wanting something original. Um, but then you look at the numbers and there's not a lot of support for the original. Uh, and there's a ton of support for the sequels and the remakes and the reboots.

Mm-hmm. . Um, and, and admittedly, you know, it's, it's the, the Fair Weather Horror fans that are driving the, the vast majority of those numbers, the

dedicated horror fans are definitely seeking out, um, what is original, what is unique, but then ag, but realistically, There's not enough of them to make a huge impact, so I have to weigh all of these things, and Skinamarink was a very risky move that paid off the way that we wanted.

And so I'm just very, very proud and, and excited for all parties involved, myself included.

Jim: What is it about Skinamarink that, because you said that there was something special about it, but also that you think it would tap into something or it, what was it about the film that made you feel that?

Jonathan Barkan: So right away, Skinamarink was unlike really anything that I've. Ever seen not since. You know, the early films of David Lynch I think is, are is a good comparison. Um, and you know, there's so many times when audiences watch a movie and they need a story spelled out, they need inf, they need exposition, they need a clear plot, and Skinamarink has a clear plot.

It's just not really told in a traditional manner. It's not done to traditional exposition. A lot of it is left to the, the audience to place themselves in that film and to place themselves in that story. And. I think what really drew me to Skinamarink is the fact that I'm a very, I try to be a very empathetic person.

I really try to place myself in the position of a lot of the characters in the films that I'm watching. And horror is a genre that demands empathy. Here are people that are fighting for even five more seconds of life, um, and there's, and if we can't empathize with them, then it, it doesn't have the same impact.

And Skinamarink taps into childhood. Fears in a way that is very primal. And as we get older, our fears become far more nuanced. They become far more complicated. You know, when we're kids, we're scared of the dark, we're scared of the shadow in the closet, we're scared of, uh, you know, the monster in the woods, you know, the creature under our bed.

As we get older, our fears become significantly more grounded. I'm scared of getting into a car accident. And what will, and, you know, what will my medical expenses look like? Again, you're American, so, you know, broken, broken healthcare system. Um, you know, I'm, I'm married, I'm scared. You know what, if something happens to my wife, uh, you know, these are fears that are rooted in reality, whereas the fears of childhood are rooted in the abstract.

In the unknown because we don't know a lot. You know, when we're young, we're ignorant. And ignorance is not a bad thing. It's, uh, you know, we, we learn and we grow as we age, as we evolve. That's, that's the journey of life. And with Skinamarink, because I can, I try to empathize. I, I sort of regressed. I allowed myself to regress to a younger state, to when I was a child and when there were these big unknowable fears that seemed so large and all encompassing and, and it got under my skin and it scared me.

And I knew that if others would allow themselves to feel like that, then, then they would feel that fear too. And so I think that's what really stood out to me was that here was a horror film that demanded so much of the audience, but if you were willing to play by the film's rules, you would experience something that you may not have felt in a very long time.

Hmm.

Jim: So I'd seen a lot of, um, people saying on Twitter, like, you know, maybe don't go in expecting this, or, you know, don't watch it with your buddies, you know, when you're having some beers or, uh, you know, maybe watch it with headphones on your laptop by yourself in the dark room when you're home alone.

And I definitely get that. So me, me and my partner watched it on the sofa one, one evening. Um, uh, we had it on the TV in the lounge, and. , I, I can see where the benefit of watching it with headphones on the laptop close to the screen would've been, um, did, did Kyle, when he sent you the, the link, did, did Kyle give you any kind of, um, advice on how to watch the film?

Was that something that he had kind of had in mind when he was making it? Do you know? Or did he kind of just give you the link and say, go for it?

Jonathan Barkan: He gave me the link and said, go for it. Um, Kyle is a, is a, is a fascinating individual. You know, every time I speak with him, I, I learn something new. And I think for him it's, I mean, you think of the story of his YouTube channel, you know, bite-size nightmares.

It, it was built on making short films. Centered around the childhood fears of his audience. He was asking his audience what scared you as a child? Hmm. What was your, what were your childhood nightmares like? And then he did his own recreations of them. But as he got more and more and more information, he started noticing the patterns.

He noticed the, the common fears. And so I think by, and this is my own assumption, so Kyle, if you're listening and I'm wrong, I'm sorry, . Um, but I think through having all of that information and being a creator, being someone who is very creative centered, he tapped into the fact that if a lot of people are having this fear, if a lot of people are experiencing this shared terror, I don't really have to tell anyone how to engage with this because there is a chance that they will very naturally just fall into the proper experience.

So, you know, you think, is this something that is great at home in the dark with your headphones? Absolutely. There is also something to be said about being in a dark theater where the sound is all encompassing and you are surrounded by people who will either share in that experience with you or who will not get it.

You know, I saw as many tweets people saying, you know, the whole theater was like, what the hell did I just watch? Mm-hmm. . But then I would see an O, you know, other tweets saying the whole theater sat there and stunned silence when the movie was over and they waited for the lights to come back on before they felt comfortable standing up and leaving.

So, You know, I'm well aware of how divisive this film is, and I, and I love that because I think it is a wonderful way of understanding something about who's watching it. Again, some of us, when we were kids, we were terrified of, you know, the closet door being just slightly a jar or that basket of laundry when in the dark.

It's a shadow of something. Um, and, and Kyle really tapped into that for some other people that never scared them, what scared them is something that Skinamarink doesn't tap into, and that's fine. So I learn about the people who watch Skinamarink just by knowing what the reaction. . Mm-hmm. .

Jim: Yeah, that makes sense.

And I think, you know, it is probably good to have strong re strong reactions no matter what side of the aisle they're kind of on rather than people being ambivalent, you know? Yeah. Um, one question on the trailer that Kyle had posted to Reddit. Uh, because I, I'd watched the trailer that was, um, that was released on YouTube, uh, I think late last year, and I think it's the first trailer I've watched that actually scared me because the, some trailers, you know, can have jump scares.

They can be gory or something. Mm-hmm. . But this was the first trailer where I was like, oh fuck. Like something. So, you know, you, you kind of get the chill . Was was that the trailer that Kyle had posted or was it like It was that one?

Yeah,

Jonathan Barkan: that was the one. It's, it's all Kyle.

Jim: Yeah. So that, that's amazing because we so at, at the London Horror Society, we have a discord with our members and we have a thread on, um, sound design and things like that.

And we were, a couple of us spent like a little while had we downloaded the audio from YouTube. Send it through like an AI to clean it up and stuff like that. And we spent a good few hours trying to slice it up, reverse certain bits, speed certain bits up, uh, slow certain bits down just to see if we could kind of figure out what was being said or if there was any kind of message.

And it got a little bit like, you know, the Pepe Sylvia thing in. Um, it's always sunny,

uh, weather.

Jonathan Barkan: I've actually, I actually haven't watched, it's always sunny. Okay. I apologize . But yeah, we, but it, it, it reminds me of the people that are like, uh, there was, there's this upcoming Silent Hill game. Yeah. Um, I mean, one of the, one of the many, and I, um, town fall, I think is the one, and people were downloading the audio from that trailer.

Yeah. And they were running it through everything, and they found that there was actually like an image in the audio web file and everything. Like, like, I love this. I love that you're, that you're doing this. Yeah. This is so fascinating. Yeah,

Jim: it was. I think I did f I think we did find a little, someone saying like, help me, or something like that.

But it's something that if I, if I ever meet Kyle or get to speak to Kyle, I, I will ask him if, if, uh, if they can share the, uh, the, uh, the stems from, from the record. Cause I'm just I'm so curious to see how it was all cut up. Uh, so I'm always kind of fascinated to like learning about a sound design and how things are, how things are cut up, and it's, it is always fun when something stumps you

because it, it's fun to work things out when you go, oh, I think it was done like this. But it's even more fun when you go, I can't work it out.

I can't figure out. Um, so yeah, that, that trailer was just outstanding through and through, um, so enjoyable and really didn't give anything away. And, you know, you, you can see how and why people were excited to go and see Skinamarink because, um, you know, it is, it's super, super interesting.

Jonathan Barkan: Yeah. And that, I remember that Reddit post where I first saw the trailer people were, Loving it.

They were like, this is incredible. Like, the sound design is great, the presentation is amazing. Like this actually is scary. Like, what, what is this? And, and I even asked, you know, is this a feature? And Kyle was like, yeah, this is, this is a feature length film. And I was like, give it, give me, please give sis this.

I I want this. So, um, yeah, he, he was involved in pretty much every single aspect of, of that movie. So it's impossible to separate Skinamarink from Kyle. It is an extension of him and all of his efforts and all of his training and, and all his experimentations. It's, it is him. So, yeah.

Jim: Yeah. No, it's, it's a, it is a beautiful piece of work and I'm so happy that it's had the kind of attention that it has.

I think. When we look back on this period of time, um, you know, I, I think people will see that 2022 and 23 are quite pivotal moments in global horror. Um, you know, and I, and I think Skinamarink is gonna be part of the conversation when, you know, for, for years to come with, uh, with this kind of period. Um, but yeah.

How

exciting.

Jonathan Barkan: Yeah, no, I, I completely agree. I think, I think there will be studies on the impact of piracy with independent film, but also when it's something that is different and unique cuz you think if, uh, you know, there were other films that were pirated from that festival. There were several other films that were pirated.

They don't have the same, they didn't have the same reaction. They didn't have the same story. Um, Skinamarink really stood out. It was something that people were actively seeking and talking about. I don't know why. I mean, I, I have my own theories obviously, but I don't know the exact reason why

um, but yeah, I think there will be some really interesting studies and, and hypotheses and, and articles about Skinamarink. Just like, you know, when I was at Dread Central, I wrote an article on why I felt that the marketing for the Blair Witch Project to this day, is one of the most effective and fascinating, uh, bits of film marketing ever.

Mm-hmm. . Um, and I think there will be, there is someone out there right now who in 10, 15, 20 years will write an article about Skinamarink in its release.

Jim: Yeah, I think so. And it'll be nice to revisit. Yeah. Um, yeah, yeah. I am, I am looking forward to watching it again. I think I need to give it a little bit more time in between viewings, cuz I did, I did nearly watch it last night, but in, in preparation for, for today.

But I thought it's too soon. I need to give it, give it some more breathing room. And I, I wanna go in kind of more, uh, fresh. How, how many times have you seen it outta curiosity?

Jonathan Barkan: I mean, I, I've seen it several times because when Kyle sent me, uh, skier, it actually wasn't the finished version. Um, he was still making some slight edits.

He was asking me for some thoughts. He was, you know, you know, what would you, what would you do here? I had very, very, very few notes. I don't even remember what they were cuz this was a year and some months ago more, um mm-hmm. , so. I, you know, we were kind of talking back and forth, but I watched a few different versions of the film and, you know, obviously have revisited it since.

Um, so yeah, I've, I've watched it at least a handful of times. Mm-hmm. .

Jim: Great. Is there, has there been anything like that you've noticed with each additional, additional watch? Like, anything that's kind of stood out to you that maybe you hadn't picked up on the, uh, before?

Jonathan Barkan: You know, it's not really, uh, it's more, I, I really want to just immerse myself in the atmosphere of the film.

I, I still get scared. Mm-hmm. fight, and I think that's probably one of the biggest compliments I can give it. Um, because, you know, I'm, I'm a lifelong horror fan. I've seen thousands upon thousands upon thousands of horror films. Mm-hmm. and there have been some films that have genuinely frightened me and I.

Love that feeling. So I want to get it and, and revisit that. So I, you know, will rewatch movies and I notice that my level of fear kind of begins to wane. Mm-hmm. . Um, you know, here's an example, and this may get me excommunicated from the horror community for some people. Um, event Horizon. First time I watched Event Horizon, terrified.

Absolutely terrified, loved it. Um, I'm of the mindset now that that movie just has not aged well. I revisit it and I'm just, I'm no longer scared. Sure. And I, and there are times when I'm watching it and I think to myself, you know, I, this, this particular scene drags or you know, this, I'm just not feeling this, this, this is this, this is that.

Um, and admittedly, event Horizon has. Decades, uh, for me to work through that. And Skinamarink is, is not at that point yet. Mm-hmm. . Um, so we'll see, you know, how does ski Miri fare in 10 years time? In 20 years time? But I think why I think Skinamarink will always scare me, even, even if it wanes it will always scare me a little bit, is because it really does tap into the child inside of me, my inner child, and what scared me then.

And that will never change.

Jim: Yeah. It's

kind of experiential in a way, isn't it? Yeah. Um, you know, had you like, could you even have imagined that it became this much of an event, this much of a talking.

Jonathan Barkan: No, no, no. It was in our wildest dreams. I mean, sure. The other ep, the other, my, the other EP that I'm credited with, uh, Josh Doak, he, uh, was part of the team at Mutiny and we were working on this together and he was the first one to say, man, wouldn't it be awesome if it did a limited release?

Like, you know, your 5, 10, 15 theaters and then it just grew paranormal activity style. Mm-hmm. . And I was like, I mean, that would be amazing. I don't know if that's possible, but like, that would be astonishing. And he, he hit the nail on

the head. Mm-hmm. , he did like what he, what he saw happened. Um, and so, you know, we, we still are talking about it and texting about it.

Um, you know, we just had a call the other day and we were asked, you know, it was with a few other people cuz we're looking to the future, you know, what is, what is next for sure, for all of us, you know, not just Kyle, but you know ourselves as well. And we were asked, you know, about Skinamarink and, and that question always comes up, could you, , could you ever have envisioned Yeah.

That Skinamarink would be what it is now. And in inevitably, you know, we're both like, no, we, we, we hoped our answers all was the same. We hoped with the wildest of dreams. Mm-hmm. , but we never could have anticipated this and and it,

it did it.

Jim: It's amazing, isn't it? Like Yeah. I mean the horror, horror community really came through and, uh, they did a lot.

A lot of people are fighting for it passionately, which is um, which is great, even if they didn't particularly enjoy it, you know, which is, uh, which is really good. Um,

Jonathan Barkan: I think horror fans just love seeing the underdogs succeed. Exactly. Exactly. The biggest thing for them Yeah. Is, is seeing horror get that kind of recognition and attention that it deserves.

Mm-hmm. and, and Yeah. Um, you know, films like, like this. Come rarely where it becomes such a part of the cultural zeitgeist. Sure, yeah. I mean, I do, I do the Vulture crossword every day, vulture.com, they have a crossword every day I do it. And last week, uh, or you know, a week and a half ago or so, there was a clue, uh, you know, with 22 down, the director of Skinamarink, and I was like, are you, he's now a crossword clue.

Like . That's unbelievable.

Jim: That's when

you know you've made it. Yeah, hundred percent. Like that's . That, that's great. Um, you know, speaking of the, uh, kind of horror, um, climate in the moment and there's, and the current zeitgeist and, and the underdog. I think Skinamarink

is one of three films kind of at the moment, you know, all wildly, wildly different.

Um, but. Underdog wise, I kind of think of Winnie the Poo, blood and honey. And Uher too from last year. Yep. And they have had similar things. So I, I spoke to Michael Levy, uh, co-producer on Terrifier too.

And we spoke to Vince Knight, d o p, for, um, for Winnie the Poo Blood and Honey and, you know, it was the same kind of thing for them. Limited release. Um, he thought maybe it'll live on streaming if we're lucky. And, you know, we'll send the links out to, uh, to a few friends. Same, same with Jed as well. Uh, Jed Shepherds like Host was gonna maybe live.

Shudder and then maybe some people would see it, you know? Um, but particularly the three films, including Skinamarink that I just mentioned, like they've all kind of gone gangbusters. And what, why do you think that that is, and what, what do you think is kind of going on with the horror climate at the moment?

Jonathan Barkan: So, Terrifier two, it's interesting because I was part of the team that was on Terra one that was a dread, a dread Central presents release.

And I was there when, uh, when Steve brought it, he fought for it. Uh, he was like, no, this is gonna be amazing. You know, so much of Terra's success is owed to, to Steve, to Steve Barton, who is producer on Terra two, and. With Terra Fier one, we knew that it was doing gangbusters for, for us it was absolutely incredible.

Uh, and you know, when I was at Dread Central, we were going to horror conventions around the country and everywhere we went there were bootleg t-shirts, posters, paintings, action figures, everything for Art Clown. Um, and we were like, this is like, this has exploded. This is so big. Doesn't. And so terrier too, it made sense cuz there was an audience that was built in.

Plus Terrifier is known for being gratuitous and over the top and, and so gory and so violent. Um, and I love horror with all my heart in all of its different incarnations. I will say that horror lately for a lot of the community has been. Safe in terms of gore. There hasn't been, you know, some big gory movies happening.

Um, you know, you don't have your Friday the 13th in theaters. You don't have your nightmare in Elm Streets and theaters. You don't have something where a

lot of practical effects and a lot of gore are at the forefront. And Terrifier 2 came and said, um, fuck that. Let's unleash the gates. Let's just go balls to the wall.

We're going to give you, you want gore? We're going to give you gore. And horror fans crave that. And it became notorious because a lot of the younger generation hadn't seen something like that in theaters, just literally because of age. Um, . So I understand Terrifier Two's success without a doubt, and Winnie the Poo Blood and Honey is because it's such an absurdity and that that's not a, a negative, that's not a mm-hmm.

criticism. It's because everyone knows Winnie the Poo as this heartwarming cartoon, as this heartwarming character. You know, there's that story that circulates Reddit and, and Twitter every once in a while about how the guy who does the voice for Winnie the poo will call children's hospitals and speak to children in the Winnie the Poo voice.

It's so wholesome, it's so loving, it's so wonderful, and now he's a fucking murderer. What? It's, it's a complete 180, and because of that, you've got built-in audience who knows about this character because Winnie the poo is, is ubiquitous. It's so hard to not know. Okay. Winnie the Poo, even if you've never read a book or watched him show Sure.

Or anything. So you've got that built in audience and that makes sense. Um, and then, you know, you've got the design of Winnie the Poo, which is creepy and weird. Uh, listen, as, as a, uh, as an ex film critic, as, you know, someone who's done film acquisitions, as someone who now does distribution, as a producer, as a director, um, I, I see Winnie the Poo Blood and Honey, and I immediately, I become the, uh, the Fox in the Old Looney Tunes cartoons where my eyes turn into dollar signs and just start, you know, spinning round and round.

Sure. I, it's, it's such a genius idea. Um, regardless of the final product, I'll say that, um, you know, there are some movies that are wildly, wildly successful that are just. Not, not great movies, you know, you know, you watch it. You're not gonna sit there and think this is Citizen Kane, uh, you know, Velossa Pastor.

That's a great example of a movie that did unbelievably well on a very low budget. And it's absurd and it's silly and it's not, you know, from a objective point of view, it's not a great movie from a subjective point of view. Mm-hmm. have all the fun you want, enjoy it, love it, whatever. Um, you know, it's, so that's why I think when you look at Terrifier, when you look at Skinamarink

when you look at Winnie the Poo, uh, blood and Honey, and you think to yourself, what is going on? Why are these movies so successful? Uh, it's because they do something different. They all do something different. Terra two brought Gore that had for many people, , uh, for entire generation had never been done on in theaters.

They hadn't seen that they hadn't lived through, um, you know, seeing Scream or, or I know what you did last summer, or all these movies where mm-hmm. , blood and Guts pour out. Sure. Uh, they weren't, they weren't born literally. That's the o that's the only impediment Winnie the Poo, blood and Honey. It's taking something that is beloved from your childhood, and it is turning it into the complete opposite.

It's a murder, it's depraved and Skinamarink is just unlike any other horror movie, mainstream horror movie that anyone had ever seen. So it really is, and, and you brought up by the way, uh, Jed and Host, I think Host is also another fantastic example of how do you take found footage and do something different.

And I was talking with Jed just the other day and I told him, you know, what made, what made Zoom, uh, what made hosts so fascinating and scary for me is, . You look at that movie and you think, oh, they're, they're together. You know? Here they are all on the screen. They're all together. No, none of them are together.

They are all completely alone cuz they're in their homes. Mm-hmm. separated from everyone. They, you see them all on screen together and you think they're together. They're not, they are all completely alone in the dark doing a stupid fucking idea of doing a seance over zoom and botching it up and all getting their, their just rewards.

So, , each of these films thought, what can we do that is different? And, or they didn't even consider that they just made what they made, but it tapped into that, you know, retroactively. We look at it and it goes and, and it did something different. So I think that's what we're seeing and that's why these films are getting the success and adoration and discourse that they are is because they're different.

They are challenging audiences, and audiences want to be challenged.

Jim: Uh, yeah, that was gonna be one last question. Like, do you think it's kind of indicative of what the horror audiences want rather than kind of the, uh, you

know, paint by numbers approach that we're, you know, that we kept? I don't want to smirch anybody.

You know, it's, it is hard to even make a, a bad film, but, um, you know, that's, yeah. What, what, what do you think. Is is gonna be coming next in term, you know, or we could do you seem more of the same in, it's kind of a ridiculous question, I guess, because it's, it's difficult to say,

Jonathan Barkan: I suppose. Well, I think, you know, I think Skinamarink is going to start a trend of very kind of abstract horror films.

We saw that, uh, what is it? Uh, backrooms, is that what you, oh my gosh, yeah. Backroom Getting back Rooms that has been picked up with James Wan and Sean Levy in a 24. Never. That never would've happened even a year ago. I truly believe that the success of Skinamarink made these, made all these parties go, okay, I, I feel more comfortable taking on this risk because clearly there's interest, and this might be the kickoff point for the bigger, for the more exciting horror comes in Waves Horror all has always come in wa you know, been released in waves and in themes and I think with.

as the internet has become bigger and bigger, and as streaming services have become bigger and bigger and a bigger part of the discourse and of the way that fans can engage with horror, I think now we're looking at the first time when, when horror doesn't have to follow a trend necessarily. Mm-hmm. . Um, and there have always been movies that don't follow trends always, but usually when you look at decades, you can pinpoint a trend of some kind.

Um, you know, the fifties were, you know, it was post-war and it was the fear of radiation. It was the fear of, of everything related to that because there was the Adam Bomb mm-hmm. , you know, and it was terrifying. And so what do you do Attack of the 50 foot woman, them, you know, kingdom of the spiders, you know, all of that.

Uh, you look at, um, uh, the sixties and you get stuff like, Rosemary's baby, and you get stuff like neither Living Dead. Um, where, you know, ni Living Dead was a reaction to Vietnam, uh, you know, where war could be covered in real time rather than we have to wait weeks for film reels to be shipped and then edited and then played in theaters.

It was, it was now on tv. It was live. And that plays such a big role in not leaving dead, you know, the, the need for the TV for information. Uh, you look at the seventies and you've got a lot of, uh, religious horror. And then the

eighties came and it was the age of excess. Mm-hmm. . Um, and that's when we had a lot, that's when horror movies really started embracing, uh, wild, practical effects and going over the top.

Um, and nineties became meta. Uh, you know, towards the second half and Slashers. And then nine 11 happened in early 2001, and then we started seeing the quote unquote torture porn sub genre. Because when you have an event that is so horrific and so shocking and so traumatic, how do you engage with that?

And horror has always engaged by going one step above. . , because, you know, I remember seeing, I remember where I was when nine 11 happened. I remember seeing that and how do I work through that? Those horrific images that I've seen, well, horror going huge and above, that's a safe place for me to look into because mm-hmm.

now I'm, I can, I know it's fake. I know that it's not real. I know. The person who just exploded into a pile of guts and viscera. Mm-hmm. , they're fine. They're standing off to the side. Mm-hmm. watching their effigy get blown up and having a, having a giggle. But now with streaming, you've got elevated horror, you've got slashers, you've got foreign horror, you've got supernatural, you've got comedy, you've got queer horror, you've got, uh, horror from all sorts of different filmmakers.

You really now have a buffet in front of you. . . So I, I really think that when we look back, the twenties are going to be known as the genre as the decade where horror didn't have an identity. And I think that's great. Mm-hmm. , uh, that's not a, that's not a negative. It's simply that it's so multifaceted that it's a kronen bergan, uh, amalgamation That doesn't make sense.

And that's, . That's exciting. I love that.

Jim: It's a nice problem to have.

Jonathan Barkan: It's a wonderful problem to have because now because theaters are looking at Terrifier two and Skinamarink mm-hmm. and you know, out waters and Winnie the Poo, blood and honey and are saying independent horror is generating revenue. We should keep, we should give that a chance.

So independent horror is going to do more theatrically. I really believe that. And then, and streamers are looking at what is succeeding and they realize that they don't have to follow a trend. Mm-hmm. And you know, like with Shudder, it's a

great example. They have reality show, they have Dracula, they have documentaries that fans are like clamoring for sure.

Um, so yeah, that's, I think the future is unknown. But it's so exciting.

Jim: It is.

What do, what do you think that independent horror filmmakers can do to utilize and, you know, benefit from the way that things are at the moment? Because, you know, the iron is hot. And from my, from my perspective now is the time to strike what, you know, as an ep, someone who's been in the, in the, um, in the business, in, in many different ways, and clearly a, a huge lover of horror.

What can independent horror filmmakers be doing right now to kind of help their chances to get things going?

Jonathan Barkan: So the first thing that I'll say, and this is for every filmmaker out there, is you have to, there has to be honesty. Um, you know, I, I can watch movies and know right away if the intentions were honest while making it, or if it's just like, Hey, let's knock this out.

You can, it, it, it drips off of every. Moment. Um, so definitely go into this with honesty. Uh, the next thing is

just think what makes your story different. And it doesn't have to be a huge thing. As a matter of fact, it probably shouldn't be. Um, it's as, as we we've seen, it's very, very, very, very rare. That's something that a film does something wildly different and it lands, it's really, really hard to do that focus on doing something just a, a little bit different on, you know, some small subtle change that brings a new dimension.

Um, you know, I think it's really important to, to kind of ask if we're doing something different, how does that. What is the spiderweb that suddenly un unveils itself from that small decision? Because you really have to think, okay, you know, let's, let's just throw out as an example. What if, uh, we do a, a masked killer movie?

You know, something, a throwback to the eighties, but it turns out that the mask, that the identity of the mask killer is actually a woman. Um, you know, we, we haven't seen that too terribly often. Usually it's, you know, when you think of

the big masked killers, it's men. It's Jason, it's Michael, um, you know, even not necessarily the mask, it's Freddy, who are the slasher icons?

The majority of them, they're men. So we wanna make slasher icon that's a woman. Okay, cool. Great. Really dive into that. Really think about that. Okay. It's, it's a woman. We can't just, you know, you know, write, uh, something for. You know, a man throw in, you know, suddenly change that. It's, it's a woman. And see how that goes.

If, if you do that, then I really hope you're engaging with the actress that is playing that role and saying, okay, you're in the driver's seat. You're this mass murderer. Does this story make sense? Because you, with your perspective, is that, does this all feel authentic? Does this feel true? Is this what you, you know, how you would think, how you would act, how you would perform, and, and really explore where there are going to be the differences.

Because it's in those differences that many of us feel uncomfortable. And I'm also a person who believes that discomfort is not a negative. It's not a bad thing. We should be placed in situations where we're uncomfortable because that asks us to really explore ourselves and our reactions and who we are as people.

So put me in that position. Put me in a place where I am uncomfortable and where I want to explore what that says about me. You know, barbarian is a movie that I absolutely loved, absolutely loved, barbarian. I don't know if I ever wanna watch it again because of how much it made me feel like I was crawling inside my own skin.

Um, but that's a testimony to how well it was written and to how well it was, uh, executed. So I think that's the big thing. If you're a filmmaker out there and you want to strike while the iron is hot, as you've said, explore your story, see what it does that's different. See what will set you apart even a little bit.

And then also really put forth the effort. Really take your time, uh, crafting every scene, every shot. Cuz that's another thing. I've watched plenty of movies where I go, they didn't plan this. shot too. Well, like, they just, you know, said, okay, we need to shoot the scene. Let's just, let's just throw a camera in.

Let's, let's figure it out. Let's get it and move on to the next one, cuz you're excited for that next scene. Okay. Um, re you know, be excited for every single scene you're going to shoot. Make it live and breathe in its own beautiful way. Um, and then probably from a very pragmatic perspective, uh, I'll tell you this right now, if your video equipment isn't exactly the greatest, that's fine.

You be inventive and work and work away around that, your audio equipment better be incredible because I will watch a poor looking movie so long as it has good audio, I can watch the most beautiful looking film on the planet. But if it has crap audio, I'm turning it off.

Jim: I

think that's reasonable.

Jonathan Barkan: Yeah.

Yeah. .