

SIX CAMERAMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The six of us, burdened heavily by the equipment we were carrying, climbed up the side of a steep hill, grasping weeds, vines, anything to prevent us from falling back into the ditch. After much tribulation, we managed to hoist ourselves and our equipment to the very top of the hill – cameras, tripods, costumes, a wheelchair. Standing before the entrance of the Woods – not just any woods, mind you, the Woods – we stared down the pathway, narrow and never-ending, before finally embarking upon our journey to begin filming our soon-to-be-classic *Faces of Evil*.

Our destination was a small forest located in the middle of town about a block away from my best friend's house. We had decided one day to explore this vast woodland and discovered its leafy interior, a perfect hideaway. It was well-suited for building club houses, playing “army” – a sort of advanced and violent variation of hide-and-go-seek – and, as we later learned, making films. We gave this sanctuary a very simple and appropriate name: The Woods. The Woods was an almost magical place for us, although there was nothing really special about it other than the fact that it was in town and easily accessible. This easy access made it ideal for making our amateur movies, thus leading to our decision to film the majority of our motion picture within the walls of our childhood sanctuary.

The shooting of the film took place during a particularly hot day during the pinnacle of summer, mid-July to be exact, and the heat was heavy upon our brows, sweat pouring from our pale faces like water. Despite the incredible heat, the film gods had been merciful enough to provide us with good weather, allowing for a very smooth day of shooting. The forest was lush and green, stretching for blocks and surrounding us on all sides. A canopy of leaves covered us, forming a veritable dome above our heads and

obscuring our view of the sky. We filmed and filmed and filmed, shooting at a frantic pace worthy of the epic and prestigious undertaking we were all part of.

That day resulted in one of the most glorious days of the summer. The six of us had the time of our lives, finally breaking the monotony that often accompanies the dog days of summer. At the end of the day, we returned home triumphant, like Roman warriors returning victoriously from battle.

Unfortunately, we would soon learn that victory is bittersweet...

A glitch* in the videotape forced us to return to the Woods the following week in order to recreate the brilliant footage we shot that day. No matter, we were all anxious to get back together and have another fun day of filmmaking and horseplay. Never mind that during the intervening week it had rained heavily. "It's just a little water," we thought. "It won't hurt anything."

Entering the Woods on that day could only be likened to entering the jungles of Vietnam following the monsoon season. (Or at least to the way it's portrayed in the cinema, although we of course know that on occasion the southeastern United States has been used as a substitute for Southeast Asia.) As a result of the "monsoon," the ground was soft, muddy, and difficult to walk through, resulting in many scenes being ruined. The opening scene, for example, was to be shot using a wheelchair as a makeshift dolly, but the mucky texture of the ground caused the wheels to bog down frequently in the thick mud, making both the wheelchair and camera shake and bounce uncontrollably. The resulting image was jittery and un-watchable, more reminiscent of one of my grandpa's shaky home movies than an epic feature film. The mud also caused actors to slip and fall during takes; they often fell flat on their faces during the middle of intense battle scenes. As the day dragged on and on, we realized that mud was the least of our troubles.

The first day had been hot, but not unbearably so. When extreme humidity is added to the almost oven-like heat of an Oklahoma summer, the result is excruciating. The fact that we had failed to bring water only added to our physical suffering. The Woods no longer resembled the magical, special place we had known the previous week, but it had become harsh and oppressive, mocking our every misfortune.

Perhaps because of the ugliness of the environment, dehydration, or any number of other unfavorable circumstances, we began to slowly lose our minds, as actors abandoned any attempt to recite their lines and began to focus more on playing with sticks. Crewmembers began to lash out violently at actors and vice versa. It seemed that even our equipment began to rebel: numerous takes were ruined due to technical malfunctions. One actor began ranting and raving like Klaus Kinski on the set of a Herzog movie. The mental state of this rag-tag group of filmmakers was reflected in our conversations, which became absurd, nonsensical, and completely incomprehensible. As evidence, I have included one of the stranger conversations heard between an actor and me:

Me

I'm ready to do the scene now, how 'bout you?

Actor

I won't do the scene unless you give me the keys to your house.

Me

Why should I give you the keys to my house?

Actor

I'm muddy. I want to go to your house and wash off.

Me

I'm not giving you the keys to my fucking house. You can wait and go back with the rest of us.

Actor

Then I won't do the damn scene.

Me

What the hell do I care if you do the scene?

Actor

I'm going to quit this shitty movie if you don't give me your fucking keys right now!

The events of that day resembled one of the Kurtz Compound scenes in *Apocalypse Now*, except we had cameras instead of rifles and we had all become Marlon Brando...

As our good fortunes changed into misfortunes, we also changed, shifting from a group of eager, optimistic filmmakers and friends to a group of ranting, raving lunatics. As we returned home at the end of the day, we were no longer the victorious Roman army. Instead, we were defeated, crushed, and humiliated by the victorious warrior known simply as the Woods.

*This "glitch" was actually the result of a certain crewmember getting his hand stuck inside the tape (!) and having to destroy the tape in order to save his hand.