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T H E P L A Y E R S M A R K E T P L A C E

THE LAST DIARY OF NIKITA ROSE

Sometimes it's better to not look under the bed.

**Merritt Films
Gives a New
Spin on Found
Footage
Horrors**

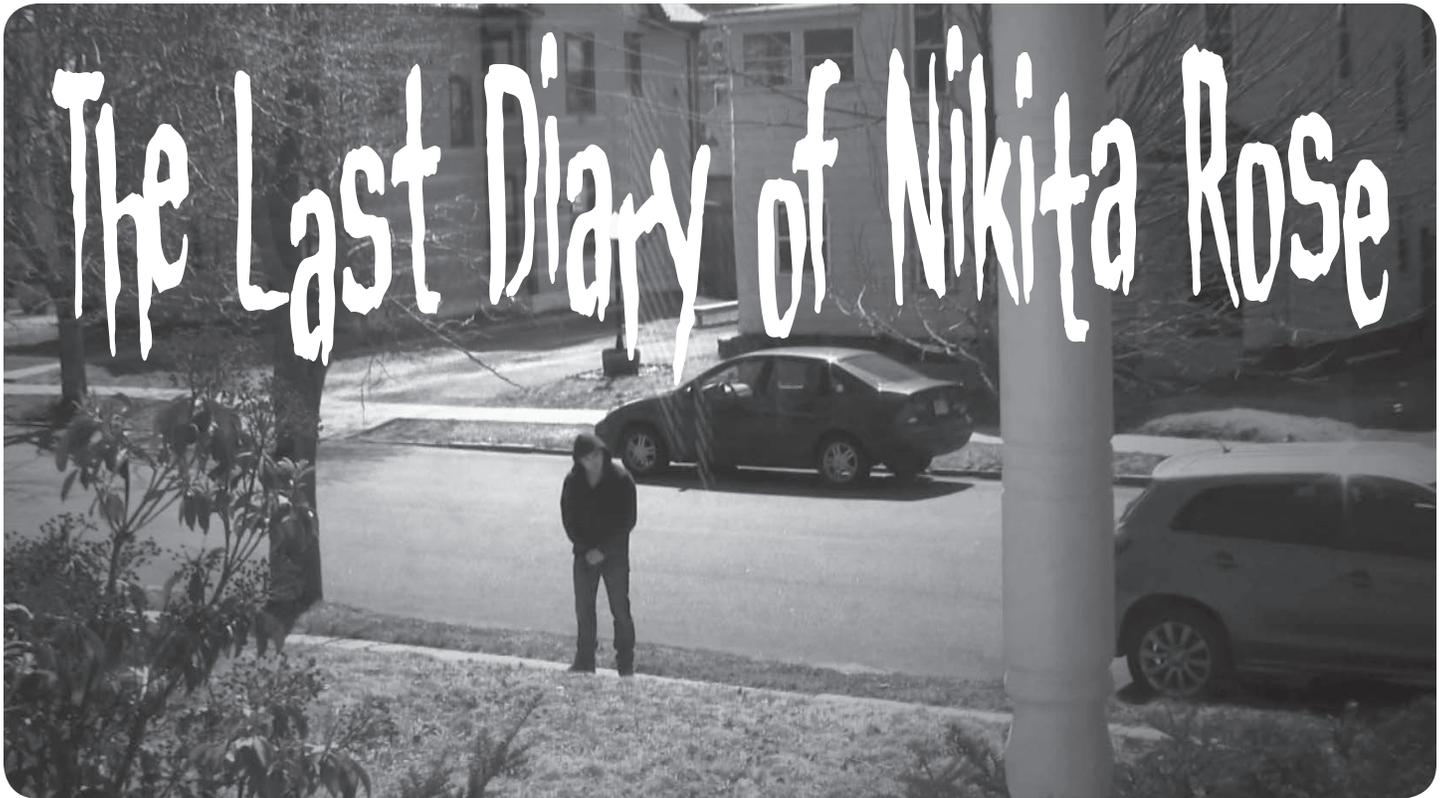
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**Q&A with U.K.
Screenwriter
Ivan Chapman**

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MERRITT FILMS PRESENTS "THE LAST DIARY OF NIKITA ROSE" STARRING MELANIE FRENCH, CURTIS REID
ANNIE KERINS, RACHEL SIMONS, LORI KAHLER, MICHELLE BANNING, BRYAN KOPP
WRITTEN BY IVAN CHAPMAN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PAM CATELL PRODUCTION ASSISTANT ALEX LYMAN
PRODUCED BY CHUCK HORNER AND IVAN CHAPMAN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ROB LAMAGNA

FIND
YOUR NEXT
SCRIPT HERE!



When we think of Halloween here at InkTip, we think of pumpkins, candy, and taking the kids out for trick-or-treating (or avoiding the trick-or-treaters entirely while hoarding the bowl of chocolate for ourselves, depending on the staff member).

And, of course, horror films. It isn't October until we sit down for a good scream on the screen.

Luckily, Rob Lamagna and Chuck Horner with Merritt Films bring a new spin to the horror genre with the production of Ivan Chapman's script *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose*.

The Last Diary of Nikita Rose is a found footage film at its core, a horror sub-genre that became popular with *The Blair Witch Project* and later *Paranormal Witness*. So, what makes *Nikita Rose* different from the rest? It has to do with a premise and a style – horror seen through the eyes of technology – that have been updated for the new millennium. “The story behind *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* is basically a found footage horror movie, but it is also a ‘killer in the house’ horror,” says producer Rob Lamagna, “and to my knowledge there has never been one of those movies before, so this is a first in the industry. ... ‘Killer in the house’

movies are like the classic *Halloween* or the 2006 French-Romanian horror *Them*, but *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* is different in that it uses modern technology in camcorders and CCTV and webcams to capture the footage of the killer.”

The revolutionary idea started with writer Ivan Chapman, who Rob found previously on InkTip when perusing our shorts section. Ivan pitched them a low budget, limited location and cast horror done in a found footage style to be shot with CCTV (closed circuit TV), camcorders, phone cameras, and webcams to keep costs minimal. The serial killer is caught on these cameras, which are everywhere in our lives now, throughout a day as he stalks Nikita and eventually kills at night. Rob and Chuck liked the low-budget, out-of-the-box idea. “*The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* is a low budget movie with limited cast and location and as such is a great fit for us at Merritt Films as budget is always something we have to consider,” Rob stated. “Therefore, casting and location scouting was easier. We secured the fantastic cabin in Manchester, Connecticut on Case Pond for the prologue shot, where they are now filming another horror movie. I think we started a movement there.”

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The use of CCTV and other camera technology doesn't just have a budgetary advantage. There is a distinct style choice by capturing a found footage horror without all the stomach-churning shaky cam. Rob elaborated, "The first half of the film is camcorder and cell phones and webcams, but as soon as the CCTV is installed, because Nikita is becoming spooked by strange things happening around her house, the camera is controlled and motionless [in the second half of the movie] ... And as you know, the only time you ever see CCTV is when a crime is being committed, and as such it should be very difficult for the audience to disassociate themselves from that ingrained notion."

The film also touches on the fact that technology can not only bring us together in a large world and protect us from dangerous people, but it can also make us more vulnerable to predators. Information people believe is personal or not readily available is disturbingly easy to find on the web. In *Nikita Rose*, the killer uses technology to locate Nikita after murdering her sister. "All this information is freely available with a bit of detective work," said Rob. "And that is another thing which makes *Nikita Rose* different, as the killer uses this modern technology to help him as he stalks Nikita. I won't give anything away ... but it is pretty creepy if you consider you maybe don't know who

the person is at the other end – whether it be Twitter or Facebook or even a friend's cellphone."

The film was produced by Rob Lamagna and Chuck Horner, who also directed. Although the film was a joint effort between the pair, Rob expressed that there were many people involved in making the film come to life. Alex Lyman assisted them and even landed the crucial role of "dead girl" in the prologue. "She played it so well we cast her in another horror feature of Ivan's called *Killer Heelz*, which is coming soon," said Rob.

Rob also raved about the rest of his cast. "We have the fantastic Melanie French who plays Nikita, and Curtis Reid who plays her boyfriend Ben in the movie. Melanie is a black belt in martial arts, and our killer, Bryan Kopp, is too, so that made for a fantastic third act. All the fight scenes are very real and were choreographed by Melanie and Bryan."

Rob is currently in talks with potential distributors for the film. He's optimistic it will reach its audience with so many avenues available like video on demand, Netflix, TV networks, iTunes, etc. The main focus right now is on festivals. For Merritt Films, Rob plans to grow the company and continue producing independent movies. "There are a lot of independents about, and together we can make some amazing movies," he said. "You just have to look at the amount of smaller production companies on new

pretty big budget releases these days to realize by uniting these companies we can produce some super movies and all share the merits that normally the big studios swallow."

Another short, based on an idea of Chuck's and written by Ivan, is in the pipeline for the company. They also have two feature scripts from Ivan, one co-written with his brother, that are in development, one with the ideal remote island location secured. As evidenced with their slate for production, Rob stated that working with Ivan Chapman has been wonderful. Even with the 3,000 miles between them and the time difference, the working relationship has been smooth – a real testament to modern technology bring the film world closer.

"I would say Ivan's writing matches or betters the majority of the scripts in Hollywood I have read, and as such I have optioned a fair few of his," said Rob. "I know he is trying to garner interest in his other bigger budget scripts and has made great strides recently, some through InkTip. I wish him all the luck; he deserves it. InkTip is a very easy website to navigate. It is perfect as a conduit for producers like me to reach thousands of scripts and the writers behind them with a few clicks. When has that ever been possible before?"

By Chris Cookson



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Q&A Screenwriter

Ivan Chapman



Breaking into Hollywood isn't easy for screenwriters. It's even harder when a writer lives outside of Los Angeles. For UK-based writer Ivan Chapman, the dream could have remained just that – a dream.

But by cleverly utilizing InkTip's services and diligently working on his craft, Ivan is now a produced feature writer. He started by posting in InkTip's free short section, which garnered the attention of executive producer Rob Lamagna of Merritt Films. Now the short, *What Goes Around*, is entered in film festivals. From this connection grew a working relationship that has developed into a produced feature, *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose*, and more in development. Ivan had a chance to talk to InkTip about his experience writing *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose*.

InkTip: Was *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* a spec script you had written?

Ivan Chapman: *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* was written specifically for Merritt Films. I approached Rob Lamagna, an executive producer at Merritt Films, about the possibility of a feature. I pitched it as a low-budget, limited cast and location, and found footage style shoot with CCTV and camcorders and phone cameras and webcams in order to keep costs down. Rob was immediately up for it and secured a cast, location, directory of photography, and make-up almost immediately. Chuck Horner, a producer at Merritt Films, was asked to direct and readily took up that challenge.

InkTip: Could you describe the story for our readers?

Ivan Chapman: *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose* has a prologue where Nikita's sister Rachel is murdered at a cabin in the woods as she talks to Nikita on her phone. Because of this, the killer returns a year later to stalk Nikita – this time in her home. Nikita begins to notice odd things happening in and around her house, so decides to have CCTV installed and keep a video diary. The footage from the house is what is seen in the movie when her stalker attacks.

InkTip: How did you come up with the story?

Ivan Chapman: All found footage movies I can recall have always concerned supernatural themes. There has not to my mind ever been a "killer in the house" found footage movie and that was the driving force behind the script – that and there having to be a reason CCTV is installed and why the killer is stalking Nikita Rose.

InkTip: What direction did you decide to take with the script and characters?

Ivan Chapman: I wanted to utilize modern technology in phone cameras and CCTV and webcams used in VOIP

calls – basically anywhere a camera can be used – and show this collected footage as a completely normal day turns very quickly into a nightmare. I am also very aware how CCTV is always seen as ultra-real and so wanted to incorporate as much of that as possible. CCTV doesn't have the "shaky cam" that found footage is criticized for, and that also released the characters from having to film everything throughout.

InkTip: Do you prefer to write one style of genre over another?

Ivan Chapman: Horror and thriller are my preferred genres to write in. There is so much you can do in these genres whether it is a psychological thriller or bloodbath horror. And with the success of low-ish budget horrors, *The Purge* and *The Conjuring*, *Sinister* and *Insidious*, I expect production companies to show more interest than usual in the up to 5 million dollar scripts. As such, that is where I am concentrating my writing. Horror has always been the best return on money spent, but you do need to have new ideas. You can't keep rehashing or remaking old franchises.

InkTip: Besides *The Last Diary of Nikita Rose*, what is your favorite horror film of all time?

Ivan Chapman: *Halloween* (1978) by a mile. Prior to *Halloween*, there had been *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Last House on the Left* and a handful of others, but *Halloween* spawned the slasher genre and "killer in the house," which is by far the most frightening aspect. Home is meant to be the safest place, after all, and if that is invaded then where are you safe?

InkTip: What type of practices do you have when writing a script?

Ivan Chapman: If I am writing a horror script I will watch every new horror film available at the time and then some of the older well-known movies just to get in that mindset. I will already have the ideas in place for the script, but watching horror movies gives you the feeling, the sensation you try and emulate in your writing. The beats of horror scripts are very different from other scripts.

InkTip: Were you on set for any of the shooting?

Ivan Chapman: Living 3,000 miles away has not been ideal, and I would have loved to have been on set. I was invited but instead was able to connect via Skype, which is great although weird at first! Being introduced to so many people at the initial table read, and then on the first day on set, [made it] quite hard to remember everyone's name, and being bombarded with so many questions. I think it went okay, and we are all connected with social media sites now and communicate more that way. Alex Lyman, who works with Rob and Chuck, during production carried me [on] the laptop round the sets – hah – to show me everywhere. Once again, it was weird but a great experience.

InkTip: Have you been able to see the film yet?

Ivan Chapman: I have seen around 75% of the film in various stages of editing and it looks like no other horror or found footage movie I have ever seen – and I watch a lot. And that is great in my opinion. Chuck has been concentrating on the color correction and look of CCTV. I think when the whole movie has been through the process, it will have elements of "shaky cam" mixed in with CCTV and webcams and night vision which we all hope will keep the audience engaged in the movie throughout.

Seeing your words acted out is extremely strange but incredibly exciting. It can be a difficult watch, as you are your worst critic and always would like to maybe have written something a different way with hindsight, but the cast was excellent and really put a lot of effort in and as such made my job a lot easier.

InkTip: What advice can you give other writers who are trying to get their foot in the door?

Ivan Chapman: Working hard in a solitary profession is hard. Keeping motivated is key and in order to do that [you] have [to have] a plan, make notes, and outline. I try and read a screenplay every few days, whether they are from films I have seen or upcoming movies or spec scripts or from screenwriter friends. It is as useful to read a bad produced script as it is a good unproduced one. Sometimes it is easier to spot mistakes than to understand how a good script is

good or great. If you can eliminate the bad elements from your own script, then you stand a better chance of it becoming the latter.

I would use InkTip and utilize every part of it. I also receive the very useful emails from Gato Scatena, one of the vice presidents at InkTip, which gives you insight into the perspective of a producer and how they respond to writer queries. I email production companies weekly and check back with them two weeks later, even if it's just to say, "Hi, how are things going?" It is all the usual advice any writer would tell you. There is no magic method. It is a combination of hard work, talent, and luck. The first two are up to you; InkTip will help with the last.

I don't consider myself a better or more hard-working writer or having any better ideas than any other writer. I have just been lucky is all. InkTip is a great vehicle for increasing that luck and your chances of being spotted.

InkTip: What are you working on now?

Ivan Chapman: I am working on a horror script called *Smashed*. It concerns an alcoholic who wakens every morning with items from the night before in his pockets but no memory of how they got there – until one morning his pockets contain a human ear and a bloodied corkscrew and an telephone number scrawled on a bar napkin. It is written in part "drunken" POV so the audience actually knows more about the events that happen than the protagonist, and as such that should increase the drama, and live action multi-camera. Also POV filming is low budget and an extremely exciting and current way of shooting.

The next feature, which is in pre-production, is *Container*. This contained thriller is set entirely within a shipping container and is in the vein of *Buried* and, crazy as it sounds, *The Usual Suspects*. I have around six other feature spec scripts – some co-written – in all genres and for all budgets. My first-ever script, a wacky part animated/live action comedy, co-written with two others, is with a Hollywood producer/director now. Fingers crossed.

Please check out Ivan's logline for *There's a Dark, Dark House* on page 20