

Interview: Jose Carlos Gomez Screens ‘Day 1’ at 2017 Beloit International Film Festival

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CHICAGO – The success of a local Chicago filmmaker is always cause for notoriety, and writer/director Jose Carlos Gomez will present his film “Day 1” as part of the programming for the 2017 Beloit (Wisconsin) International Film Festival on Saturday, February 25th (for more information, [click here](#) [17]). “Day 1” is a post-apocalyptic thriller, and features Chicago actors Walt Sloan and Harold Dennis.

In the vague aftermath of a societal breakdown after a world-destroying event, a lone man (Sloan) must keep walking a pre-determined path, ordered through an unseen shadow authority. With rumors of disease that causes individuals to immediately attack each other, human contact is to be avoided. The man comes upon a military checkpoint, which is controlled by the autocratic Captain Reynolds (Dennis). The fate of all will be determined through this encounter in a redefined new world.



Walt Sloan is Outside the Fence in ‘Day 1,’ Written & Directed by Jose Carlos Gomez

Photo credit: Skibofilms Productions

Jose Carlos Gomez is a Chicago filmmaker who has worn multiple hats in the film industry, including cinematographer, camera operation, production designer and editor. After three short films, he debuted his first feature, “Bled White,” in 2009. “Day 1” is his fourth full length film. HollywoodChicago.com posed some questions in anticipation of Gomez’s screening of “Day 1” at the Beloit International Film Festival.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the origin of the idea for ‘Day 1,’ and what was the timeline of production and completion that led you to the Beloit International Film Festival?

Jose Carlos Gomez: The origin of ‘Day 1’ goes back six years ago during the filming of my previous feature film, ‘Plastic.’ I found myself needing long, quiet breaks on set, and I imagined myself walking away for the sake of walking. Then I thought...could this be a movie? A movie

about a person who needs to walk to live? The answer was ‘yes.’ I let the idea sit in the back of my head, and soon devoted my time to all things back to ‘Plastic.’

When I moved to film my next script, ‘Strawberry Summer.’ I had cast the main roles. Unfortunately, the financing fell through, so I then turned back to the idea of ‘Day 1.’ I used the same cast that had signed up for ‘Strawberry Summer,’ and found new talent along the way. We began pre-production the fall of 2012, and shot the film in 2013 from February to June. Post production went through its own epic journey, and we held the premiere in May of 2016. We hit the festival circuit soon after, and have collected multiple awards and recognition including Best Feature, Best Writer, and Best Cinematography. The icing on the cake was the acceptance into the Beloit International Film Festival. I’ve been trying to get in there for ten years.

HollywoodChicago.com: What fascinates you about a post-apocalyptic scenario, in the context of what you emphasized in the survivors in ‘Day 1’?

Gomez: These scenarios allow me, as a writer, to give total freedom to my characters. They can do as they see fit, and there are no laws as we know them – all we have in the story is humanity in the context of ‘right and wrong.’ I’ve worked before with that concept in my previous film ‘Bled White,’ and these ideas are explored once again with in ‘Day 1.’

Post-apocalyptic scenarios allow me to create my own worlds. I am not constrained by traffic lights and stop signs. We don’t have to worry about cell phones, time, and the urban routine. My characters can do as they wish, within the context of the story, and those wishes are born out of our collective, primeval experience.

HollywoodChicago.com: You pushed the envelope visually in the film. Do you use a storyboard, a shot list or other means to plan your atmospheric approach to filmmaking?

Gomez: I seldom use a storyboard. I might do a birds-eye view of the scene for my crew, for their understanding of what we’re trying to accomplish, but not much else. Half the visuals are in the script, and the other half come when we’re on set, as most of the time we are trying to complete eight to ten pages of story per day. The locations we found were perfect, with most of the shoot taking place in the latter stages of the winter season. We found outdoor spaces devoid of comfortable colors – we wanted stark, cold locations. We wanted you to feel uncomfortable in our toxic landscape. We wanted you to be inside ‘Day 1.’

HollywoodChicago.com: Your two lead actors – Walt Sloan and Harold Dennis – have specific looks that lend themselves to what you were trying to communicate. What was the process of finding those actors, and how did they complement the story?

Gomez: I knew I wanted to work with Walt Sloan from the moment I saw his head shot. Walt is amazing. I worked with him in ‘Plastic.’ So I knew he would be in whatever script I filmed next, and essentially, I wrote the role of Kevin for Walt.

I also worked with Harold Dennis in ‘Plastic’ and ‘The Disappeared.’ Once the idea of the Captain was born, I knew Harold would be perfect to take on that role. First and foremost, he’s an incredible actor, and he absorbed the role of Captain Reynolds. He gave us intensity that, I feel, only he could bring forth.

HollywoodChicago.com: And you mentioned that the other cast members were in place from previous projects?

Gomez: Yes, finding those actors was relatively easy since I had cast most of them for ‘Strawberry Summer’ and ‘Plastic.’ The hardest role to fill was that of Private Williams – I needed someone special to make that role come alive. It’s an extremely long story how I found Jessica Oberhausen, so I will just say I am glad she came along.

As to specific ‘looks,’ I don’t generally cast people based on looks. I try to find people that will connect, spiritually, to a role. I need them to ‘be’ the character, and I needed to see the characters come alive from the pages of the script – that’s what I look for. Walt, Harold, Jessica, Yvonne Nieves, Bruce Spielbauer, Joette Waters and the rest of the cast made it happen.

HollywoodChicago.com: We recently went through a presidential election that, because of our divisions, have people wondering about our future. Do you see elements of our current situation in the scenario you create in ‘Day 1’, and why?



Filmmaker Jose Carlos Gomez
Photo credit: Skibofilms Productions

Gomez: Yes I do. I have to say the origins of the Captain came to me years ago when I was trying to develop a script about a cult leader. The idea didn't work for me at that time, so I put the concept aside. When I brought back the concept of a 'leader' with blind followers for 'Day 1,' I had the novel 'Moby Dick' in mind. And what is 'Moby Dick' about? For me it's a warning on the dangers of blindly following a demagogue – Captain Ahab in the novel – who can mesmerize with gold coins and wild adventures, then cons you into helping to fulfill his personal goals. Following a demagogue has never worked throughout history...it didn't work for the crew of the Pequod, it doesn't work out for the soldiers in 'Day 1.'

But the film was shot years before the current political climate. In the end 'Day 1' is just a reflection of human nature. What does the future have in store for us? I don't know. We're in uncharted waters and the 'White Whale' is out there – that's just the nature of our Great Experiment.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you are stuck in a creative block, which filmmaker or creative artist is on your 'What Would ____ Do?' bracelet, and why?

Gomez: I can honestly say I don't really suffer from writer's block. This summer I will begin shooting my latest script, a new suspense thriller entitled 'The Green Chair.' We are currently seeking investors with profit sharing, and I urge anyone interested to track me down during the festival. But, overall, I generally know where I want the story to go.

But if I did wear that bracelet, it would say 'What would Stanley Kubrick or Andzej Wajda or Andrei Tarkovsky do?' Why those three? Because they are my film gods.

"Day 1" will screen at the 2017 Beloit International Film Festival (BIFF) on Saturday, February 25th. Written and Directed by Jose Carlos Gomez. For more details about the BIFF, which runs from February 24th to March 5th, [click here](#). [18] For more information on Jose Carlos Gomez and Skibofilms Productions, [click here](#). [19]



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [21]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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