

## **DIRECTOR BEATS LEUKEMIA WITH SCI-FI FILM PARODY**

### **Flint Film Festival**

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*By Ed Bradley*

Sixteen years ago, John Huff thought his Hollywood career was over. Diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia, the longtime television writer and story editor planned to retire to the California desert to live ... and die.

"I was dead, and my career was dead," Huff says.

But he didn't die, and neither did his career. Having reinvented himself as an independent filmmaker, Huff has directed and co-written a comedy, "Cyxork 7," that has been making noise on the festival circuit. Next up: a screening Saturday at the Flint Film Festival.

A parody of fantasy filmmaking and the seemingly insatiable appetite for reality entertainment, "Cyxork 7" has sprung from the pen (or computer keyboard) of a man who cut his teeth on 1970s and '80s episodic TV.

Huff co-wrote 40 episodes of the NBC series "CHiPs" and, perhaps more relative to "Cyxork 7," three installments of the ABC horror/sci-fi series "Kolchak: The Night Stalker" (that's the fondly recalled 1974-75 show with Darren McGavin, not the ill-fated remake of last season). Among his other TV credits: "Barbary Coast," "The Fall Guy," "Knight Rider," "Glitter" and "Street Hawk."

After all that, Huff's first directorial effort is "Cyxork 7," which stars Ray Wise ("Twin Peaks," "Good Night, and Good Luck") and Sonya Smith. They play participants in the shooting of a schlocky, low-budget sequel in a once-thriving science-fiction film franchise.

The franchise star, Rex Anderson (Wise), needs a hit in the seventh of his "Cyxork" films to resuscitate his faltering career. The young, inexperienced director (Smith, a star of Spanish-language TV) wants to make an art film.

Along the way, someone decides that the film's climax should be shot during an expected real-life calamity - the California earthquake to end all California earthquakes.

The 93-minute film culminates an unexpected comeback for Huff at age 60. In 1990, he moved to the desert in hopes that the climate would boost his flagging health. Once the leukemia subsided, he began working in radio and returned to movies and a writer and production assistant.



Everything Michigan

He and his current writing partner, Andreas Kossak, met on the set of a real-life low-budget fantasy sequel, "The Howling VII," and determined they had a mutual love of independent film.

"'Why are we out here?' we asked each other," Huff recalled from his home in Los Angeles. "We decided it was because we loved the work, that it wasn't the money."

That revelation was what drove the writing of "Cyxork 7." "Our script went through many changes, but the central idea persisted about (these characters) loving the work of doing a movie," he said.

"Anyone who tells me that the work ethic is dead in this country is wrong. I've just had the finest movie experience of my life."

That experience included working with Wise ("a master actor ... a gentleman") and Smith (the co-star of Univision's drama "Cara Sucia" "stopped traffic when I walked her across the USC campus"). Other notables in the cast are Greg Proops ("Whose Line Is It Anyway?") and Beata Pozniak ("JFK," "Babylon 5").

They made "Cyxork 7" for \$934,000 in 19 days, all but one in the "high desert wilderness north of Palm Springs," Huff said.

Armed with favorable reviews (Film Threat magazine called the film "a beautiful little package"), Huff has been getting distribution feelers and hopes to have a theatrical/DVD deal soon.

"We're very pleased with things," he said. "We believe we have a midnight-circuit type of movie ... a bit of a cult classic."

"Cyxork 7" will be shown at the Flint Film Festival at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Flint Institute of Arts Theatre. The third annual festival, at the FIA, 1120 E. Kearsley St., begins with a gala from 7-10 tonight and continues from noon-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday and noon-8 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$10 daily, \$25 for a three-day pass (\$20 for students and FIA and Greater Flint Arts Council members), at the door; gala and three-day pass are \$50, \$40 for FIA/GFAC members. Details/schedule: (810) 237-FILM,

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