

MAKE YOUR OWN DAMN MOVIE!

SECRETS OF A RENEGADE DIRECTOR

LLOYD KAUFMAN
WITH ADAM JAHNKE
AND TRENT HAAGA



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Your
Own
Damn
Movie!

SECRETS OF A REBEL

DIRECTOR

Lloyd Kaufman

with ADAM JANNEY and TRENT HARRIS



Karl's Media
New York



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Foreword

by Trey Parker

Lloyd Kaufman had a profound impact on my life. Twice.

The first time was when I was thirteen and I rented a movie called *The Toxic Avenger* at my video store. I'll never forget the way that film inspired me. It made me realize that if a crappy film like that could get good reviews and make it to video stores, I could become a filmmaker, too. I knew I could make movies that looked that good even if I was just thirteen. Hell, I knew just about anybody could quickly rent more Troma films and started to see their tactic. Quantity over quality. They obviously didn't care what it looked like, they just did it, and kept on doing it ... just like Merchant and Ivory. Encouraged, I spent every weekend shooting a new, crappy video movie with my reluctant friends with a huge camera with thick cables running to an enormous VCR. When I would direct my thirteen-year-old buddies to just spit out catsup to look like blood, they would complain.

"Dude," they would say, "that'll look stupid."

"No," I would reply, "that's what they do in the Troma movies, and *they* make it to video stores. Don't worry about what the blood looks like, just make the damn movie."

I continued to make tons of short, crappy movies throughout my teenage years, with the important lesson of quantity over quality that I had learned from Troma, and I kept making cheap crappy movies right through film school at the University of Colorado, where I was lucky to find people like Jason McHugh and Matt Stone, who shared my love for cheap, stupid, brilliant crap. Whereas most film students would save up their money and make one big, expensive, great looking film, we would shoot tons of little shitty ones; about three a semester. We didn't care about how they looked, only that they got made. Quantity over quality.

Having such a bulk of material eventually led to us being able to get money to make one big crappy film during our senior year. Thanks to Troma, we were empowered to think "Why *not* make a feature length movie in college with a bunch of rundown equipment? It'll look as good as *The Toxic Avenger!*"

We made the film, an hour and a half piece called *Cannibal! The Musical*, and it was, indeed, as crappy as *The Toxic Avenger*. Maybe crappier.

I believe now that having *Cannibal* and all our other short films from college is the main reason we found success in Hollywood. We arrived in that town not with one film to show, but dozens. More important, by making a lot of films in our younger years, (one of those short crappy school movies was the first *South Park*) it helped us to arrive in L.A. with our own unique voice that we had already defined. The studios would eventually corrupt our unique voice, of course, but not until much later in our careers.

You see, Lloyd Kaufman knew years ago what most people are just now figuring out—you don't need a big Hollywood studio to make a movie. With the technical advances in editing systems and digital cameras that's becoming more true every day, it's all about output: output, learn by doing. The hell with whether you should shoot at 5.6 or 5.6-8 split. Fuck all that. Just start making crap. Quantity over quality. The first important lesson I learned from Lloyd Kaufman.

The second lesson came some ten years after the first, when I was twenty-three, and actually had the opportunity to meet Lloyd Kaufman face to face.

It was 1995. At that time, I was living in Los Angeles sleeping on people's floors and running around with Jason and Matt trying to sell *Cannibal! The Musical*.

After its completion, we were rejected at every film festival (except the Denver film festival where my aunt Marilyn worked). Its relative success at small screenings started to make us think more and more that we could actually sell *Cannibal* to a distributor in L.A. We drove out there, and for months met with lots of people who kissed our asses, told us *Cannibal* wasn't right for them, but they'd love first rights to our *next* movie.

Then Troma called. They had seen the film and were interested in the distribution rights. I was excited, thinking that things had come full circle. We were told that Lloyd Kaufman himself was going to visit us in L.A. and we would 'do lunch.' It had been almost three years since we had made the film, and it looked like *finally* we were going to make some money off of it.

Lloyd arrived at our rundown apartment wearing a chic blue suit and a very busy yellow tie. When someone asked me to create a cartoon character of a little cliché Jewish, Mel Brooks—type producer from New York, I would have drawn Lloyd, and I would have done the voice just like he does.

"Hi, hi, Lloyd Kaufman from Troma. I love your movie, great stuff. You guys are brilliant. So you guys ready to eat lunch?"

"Sure," we said, knowing that doing lunch in L.A. meant a meeting was fairly serious.

"Where should we go?"

"I saw a Del Taco across the street, you guys like Del Taco?"

I remember studying Lloyd's face then, seeing if he, like so many other producers was just trying to put on an "I'm down to Earth" act.

But then I saw it in his eyes: This man really does like Del Taco. He wanted it. Bad. We walked over to Del Taco, anticipating what kind of great offer Troma was going to make us on our movie.

I can replay the whole meeting in my mind as if it happened hours ago. We all placed our food orders at the counter. We quickly realized that Lloyd had no intention of paying for our tacos. In fact, when Jason offered to pay for Lloyd's beef taco with loads of hot sauce, Lloyd's face lit up like a child at Christmas, and he promptly added some guacamole to his order.

We got our food and sat down. The negotiations were about to begin.

Lloyd began the conversation by unwrapping his taco and saying that *Cannibal* was one of the best films he'd seen in recent months and he wanted to distribute it into video stores. Trying to contain our excitement, we settled into the points of the agreement.

"Okay," I believe Jason said, "so how would the deal work?"

"Well, if we ... er ... I mean you can put a bit more violence up front in the movie and fix some of the sound, we'll make a nice video package with the Troma logo in the corner," Lloyd replied, "and hopefully, lots of people will rent it! Then maybe we'll make back all the money we spent on the packaging some day!"

We stopped eating tacos.

"So how much money do we get up front?"

"Oh. Nothing." Lloyd said casually.

"We get nothing?"

"Odds are you'll never see a dime. This is a small movie, and it will take years in video stores just to make back the money we're gonna spend on the new shiny box and posters." I believe he finished off this sentence with another bite into his now rather messy taco with extra hot sauce and guacamole, adding a heartfelt 'mmm' at the end. "Okay," Jason came back shrewdly, "Let me get this straight. You want us to give you the rights to our movie, to distribute as you wish, and we make nothing?"

Lloyd was really enjoying that messy Del Taco food; he sort of painted his face with it. He was not sporting a guacamole moustache.

“That’s my general offer, yes. It’s just sort of how it goes,” Lloyd replied, having been through himself a hundred times, “Not much money to be made in the video business, I’m afraid. Not unless you’ve got *Gremlins* or something. Mmm, this taco is really good.” He did not seem to care that he looked like a “got guacamole?” advertisement.

“Well, then,” I think I said, “Why should we even bother giving it to you?”

“Well, I just think *Cannibal* is a really great movie and people should see it. I mean, you guys made it so that people would see it, right?”

This statement hit me like a baseball bat in the face, and was the second time Lloyd Kaufman had had a huge impact on my life.

My buddies and I sat silent for over a minute, but in our heads we were all thinking the same thing—*This guy is totally right . . . This guy with a “got guacamole?” moustache was absolutely right!*

All these years I had been making movies because I wanted people to see them. That was it. We made *Cannibal* in college because we thought it would be funny. We just wanted our friends and family to see it, and to laugh. Just four months in L.A. had made us lose sight of all that, and focus on the money instead.

Thanks to Lloyd it suddenly became crystal clear to me. *Cannibal*, our first feature film, was never going to make us a fortune. But having it in video stores, having people all over the country rent it and pop it into their VCRs thinking, “*What the hell is this movie?*” as I had done all those years ago with *The Toxic Avenger*, well, that’s what it’s all about. That’s why we make movies. Hopefully, that’s the same reason you, dear reader, want to make “your own damn” movie, too.

If you want to make a movie because you want to become rich, go put a thousand dollars down on the thirteen black instead. Your odds are way better. You could also try law school or medical school; it will take about the same amount of time to see any profit from your film. You may even want to try selling your sweet ass on the street, odds are you will make more money doing that. If, however, you want to make a movie because you want people to laugh, or cry, or puke—then read on. Nobody knows how to make films and not make any money doing it better than Lloyd Kaufman.

Trey Parker, left, with Matt Stone on the set of Troma’s
Terror Firmer.



Introduction

by James Gunn



It was August 1996, we had just completed filming *Tromeo & Juliet*, and the film's associate producer, Andrew Weiner, and I, were the only ones left in the Troma building at the end of a long day. So Andrew and I did what we often did at that time—we snuck into Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz's office and messed around with their private stuff. I readjusted two of the Toxic Crusader action figures on Lloyd's shelf so that they were butt-fucking. Andrew pretended to take a shit in Michael's drawer. We sat across from each other in their desk chairs and did mean-spirited imitations of their voices ("Look at me, I'm Lloyd!" I said. "James, get in here and wipe this dingleberry off my ass!") And then, on this particular evening, Andrew dared me to masturbate in Lloyd's seat.

"That's disgusting," I said. "Sure."

So Andrew went back upstairs to do something important, like draw devils' horns on actresses' headshots, while I stayed in El Troma Presidentes' office. I popped in a videocassette of *Class of Nuke 'Em High*, fast-forwarded to Janelle Brady taking off her top, and commenced to rub one out. This is a difficult feat while giggling, but, eventually, Janelle's luscious puffies defeated my ironic intention, and I shot my man juice all over Lloyd's desk.

At this point, you may wonder what in the fuck this has to do with introducing *Make Your Own Damn Movie*.

Well, it goes to prove that when you're as cheap as Troma, you don't have any choice but to hire fuck-ups like me, people who masturbate in your office when you're gone. Sure, the chairman of 20th Century Fox has a lot of his own problems—*Glitter*, for instance—but finding mysterious yellow stains on his interoffice memos probably isn't one of them. And that's the first lesson of making low-budget films: *You have to make do with what you got*.

If life gives you lemons, make lemonade. If life gives you assholes, make a Troma movie. Life has been giving Lloyd Kaufman assholes for three decades now, and he's been doing his best with this raw material, somehow orchestrating their limited abilities in such a way as to churn out classics like *The Toxic Avenger*, *Class of Nuke 'Em High*, *Troma's War*, and *Terror Firmer*. And by "classics" I mean "Lloyd gave me twenty bucks to call them that." But, really, he needn't have wasted his money—there's no denying the uniqueness, the potency, and, yes, even the *genius* of Troma. Lloyd's blend of slapstick, gore, sex, vaudeville, and nuclear waste has inspired luminaries such as Peter Jackson, Kevin Smith, and Quentin Tarantino. We Tromaphiles are a secret society in Hollywood, numerous

anonymous, and omnipresent. So often I'll meet a studio exec who will discover I worked on *Tromeo & Juliet*. "You did?" she'll say. She'll blush, she won't be able to look me in the eye, and she'll whisper, under her breath: "I love that movie." And then she'll shudder uncontrollably. Holy cow, she's having an orgasm!

Take note: This book may not teach you how to make a great film (after all, it's not called *Make Your Own Good Movie*)—the quality is up to you—but it *will* teach you how to make the best film you can within budgetary constraints: You can't afford an expensive car stunt? Just splice in a car flip from an old film.¹ You can't find the right person for the part? Use the wrongest person you can—someone who can't act at all is usually funnier than someone who can act a little.² Don't have enough latex left to make a fake head for a head-crushing scene? Use a watermelon.³ Not enough cash for a watermelon? Use a cantaloupe, or a grapefruit. Use a fucking *orange* if you have to! Because, in the end, making a low-budget film is not about *getting it done right*. It's about *getting it done*. We all know so-called "artists" who have ingenious ideas for films, novels, or origami monoliths but who never get up from watching *Friends* long enough to do anything about them. To make a movie or novel, you must risk making shit. And Lloyd Kaufman is my mentor and my hero, not only because he has risked making shit, *but because he has actually been making shit for over thirty years*. But it's marvelous shit, and the world is better off because of it. Unless you include *Big Gus*, *What's the Fuss?*⁴ Then the world's a little worse off because of that.

And don't believe that this book will only be helpful on low-budget films. In my own experience, the only differences between making the \$350,000 *Tromeo & Juliet*, the \$1 million *The Specials*, and the nearly \$90 million *Scooby-Doo* were the size of the paychecks and the quality of the actresses' breast implants. No matter whether it's a Troma movie, an independent period piece, or a studio film, you'll have to deal with crewmembers' griping, arguments between directors and producers, and your idiot pyrotechnic guy accidentally exploding your lovingly crafted five-foot-long Penis Monster before his last shot of the day. Well, okay, that last one probably only happens at Troma. Unless there's a five-foot Penis Monster in the next Harry Potter movie I don't know about.⁵

Anyway, what I mean to say is my time at Troma taught me everything I need to know about working in the studio system and making low-budget films. I joke around about Lloyd, but the truth is he's a good friend and a true visionary and I get giddy every time he sends me a cut of his newest film. When I worked at Troma I was able to learn from Lloyd every aspect of filmmaking, from writing to location scouting to casting to shooting to marketing. Unfortunately, I had to learn the hard way: by actually working at Troma. Now you, the blessed, can learn from Lloyd's wisdom with very little effort at all, by simply partaking of the next few hundred pages.

So say goodbye to your old life, and prepare yourself for a Tromatic transformation. As the serpent said unto Eve, "Eat up, chippie—and welcome to Tromaville."

April, 2002
Los Angeles, California

CHAPTER 1

Let's Make Some Art!

I was surrounded on every side by vermin, roaches, and rat shit. And I wasn't even meeting with executives at Blockbuster.

This was the basement of the Troma Building in New York City. For years, Troma has occupied this four-story building in the part of Manhattan formerly known as Hell's Kitchen.⁶ From this mighty temple, we had steered the mighty ship of Troma through such films as *Tromeo & Juliet*, *Terra Firma*, and *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger Part IV*. The Troma Building occupied a proud, majestic place on the New York skyline. But now, disease and decay had entered the works. Rats threatened the very foundation of the Troma Building.

The Troma Building's basement is Troma's memory center, its archive, its remembrance of things past. In other words, it's where a lot of shit has been dumped and forgotten about over the years. And now, it had been invaded by rodents. No one knew quite where the rats had come from. The Troma Building had remained relatively pest-free for the better part of two decades. It seemed like no small coincidence that the arrival of the rats perfectly coincided with the opening of a brand new McDonald's directly next door to the office. Thanks to that devil-worshipping, burger-shilling corporate clown, Troma was lousy with humongous, voracious rodents that knew no fear. And now everything in our basement was contaminated by rat shit and had either been partially eaten by the rats or was in imminent danger of being so.

Now ordinarily, ridding the basement of rats the size of baby coyotes would be a job for anybody but me. After all, I am president and cofounder of the fucking company. You don't see Harvey Weinstein in the flooded basement of Miramax trying to salvage old promotional T-shirts and baseball caps from *Playing for Keeps*.⁷ But, after years of doling out the most backbreaking, humiliating, odious tasks imaginable, I had finally stumbled across a job so disgusting and wretched that *nobody* would accept it. Even our interns (who are, by their very nature, subjected to more humiliation than our regular employees simply by virtue of the fact that they are unpaid) refused to take it on.

The choice was simple. Either we seal the basement forever like some old, abandoned mine that has been tapped out or rendered unsafe and just write off thirty years of Troma history (an option that was seriously pursued by a small handful of Troma employees who were always looking for an excuse to blow something up) or I had to go down there and deal with the rats myself. The history of Troma was in that basement. A shit-stained, fucked-up history it may be, but it was a history that Michael Herlihy and I had built. I couldn't ask anyone to defend that history but me.⁸

Armed with a shovel (which I cleverly figured would serve double duty as both shit scooper and mallet/bludgeon), I swung wide the steel doors that led to the cellar. I switched on the single 40-watt bulb that provided what milky light the basement offered. I could see four or five rats stop what they were doing, look me in the eyes, then lazily make their way deeper into the basement. Presumably they were mere sentries, going off to let the others know that some asshole was about to interrupt them.

I continued into the darkest recesses of the basement. I walked the rickety pallets to the far door, the door that led into the real heart of darkness. Rat Central. A filthy, damp, pitch black storage area that

contained those weird items that tread the fine line between garbage and artifact. Too precious to throw away, but far too useless to ever hope of using again. All around me, I could see the physical reminders of my thirty years with Troma. There was a box containing production schedules and the shooting script from *The Battle of Love's Return* (1971). I thumbed through the papers, trying to decipher the notes I'd written to myself almost thirty years earlier. It just seemed like gibberish now and I wondered if I'd ever been able to read them. That would explain a lot about that movie. Stacks nearby were molding stacks of posters from *Troma's War* (1988). There were all kinds of posters from dozens of different movies but it seemed as if you couldn't turn around without seeing a *War* poster. There were decomposing boxes full of *Squeeze Play* T-shirts (circa 1980), the computer monitor with the smashed, bloody severed head of Capulet from *Tromeo & Juliet* (1996), and the costume for Tromie, the Nuclear Squirrel¹⁰ from *Class of Nuke 'Em High* parts 2 and 3 were precariously balanced like gargoyles atop unmarked boxes. I turned and nearly tripped over a pair of metal film cans coming ominously close to landing face-first in a mound of petrified rat shit. I examined the can and was not in the least bit surprised to discover that I had almost fallen over the work print of *Big Guy and Rusty the Fuss* (1973). My worst movie, arguably the most heinous atrocity ever committed on celluloid, continued to find novel ways to injure and humiliate me. It was the only thing I'd found down here that I thought deserved to be locked away and left to collect dust and feces in this dank basement.

As I cast my eyes over the collected Tromabilia, all of a sudden I knew with the certainty usually reserved for either the very pious or the very insane that spread out before me was what my thirty-plus years in movies boiled down to. All the hours spent on set, all the disappointment when something didn't go according to plan, all the elation when something turned out better than hoped, all the money-men I'd had to fellate ... and what had it got me? An extremely limber throat and tongue and a basement full of neglected crap that was slowly being transformed into a public toilet for every sewer rat in Manhattan.

I bent over with my shovel in one hand and an open garbage bag in the other. As I attacked the rat crap with my shovel, the ancient turds exploded into thick, heavy clouds of dust. The dust immediately coated my ears, eyes, nose, and throat.¹¹ I kept shoveling and, squinting through the putrid dust, saw a huge rat lazily walk past and, I swear to god, salute me with a Bronx cheer, just like the mouse in *Tom & Jerry* cartoons. *Tom & Jerry* had been a huge influence on the Troma style of violence. The debt I owed to this thing's animated counterpart didn't prevent me from taking a swing at it with my shovel. The rat seemed unconcerned by this attack and, after staring at me for a few uncomfortable seconds, disappeared between some boxes.

As I returned to my shoveling, I wondered, when all is said and done, why the fuck was I even bothering to make movies? It's certainly no way to make money. Harvey Weinstein and I started in the business at around the same time. Now people flocked to him like flies to shit, while I was actually down in the shit. It was getting to be virtually impossible to even get our movies seen. The vast majority of movie theaters in the U.S. are now once again owned and operated by the major studios who seem intent on forcing the same Tom Cruise blockbuster onto every screen and driving the theaters into bankruptcy (both moral and financial). Smaller mom-and-pop video stores were being pushed out of business by Blockbuster and one or two other giant chains that impose an economic blacklist on Troma and other independent studios.¹³ And every day seemed to bring news of another independent studio going out of business. The "lucky" ones merely lost their independence and were absorbed into a gigantic, devil-worshipping international megaconglomerate. More often than not it seemed the only way to make money at this was to sell out your ideals and give up your independence. But it's not always about money. The late, lamented, legendary Sam Arkoff, cofounder of American

International Pictures, once told me that the biggest mistake of his life was selling AIP to Filmways (which was later bought by Orion which later went through a spectacular bankruptcy that has fucked up the distribution of hundreds, if not thousands, of movies).

If it's not money, I thought to myself as a rat the approximate size and color of a kielbasa ran across my feet, leaving a trail of fragrant droppings, *maybe I'm doing it for the respect and admiration of others*. Yeah, sure. I couldn't even command enough respect to get my own goddamn employees to do the scut work around the office. Maybe I'd vomited green Bromo Seltzer on camera once too often to be a truly effective leader.

Scraping the shit off my feet, I saw another large, immobile rat on the floor next to me. The rat knew they had control, so it wasn't at all unusual that it wasn't moving. But this one looked far too comfortable. It was either completely at home or dead. "Lucky fucker," I muttered and enviously kicked it to make sure it was dead. As my foot hit fur, the rat burst open. Hundreds of spiders erupted from their corpses, swarming every which way. Confronted with a plague of rat-born spiders, I did what any pillar of manly American fortitude would do. I squealed like a prison bitch and slammed my shovel down again and again, hitting the floor, my feet, the dead rat, the walls, and, I'm fairly sure, at least a couple of spiders.

Exhausted, I leaned against the wall. A particularly brave rat, unphased by my spectacular display of martial arts, peered at me from atop a box of SGT. KABUKIMAN FOR PRESIDENT pins from 1992. I recognized the contemptuous look in its eyes from dozens of surly production assistants over the years. Whatever my reasons may have been for starting to make movies, the cold reality was that this is what it boiled down to. There was no glamour when I made movies. There was nothing but hard work to be assigned and, more often than not, returned to my lap. This was the world of filmmaking that I knew. No limousines. No craft services. No imported bottled water to wash the starlet's hair. Just a never-ending basement full of shitty, moldy rot that had to be cleaned out. Why the fuck was I doing all this?

DISSOLVE TO:14

Thirty-six hours later in the magnificent town of Sitges on the Mediterranean coast of Spain and I have my answer. Every October, the city hosts the Sitges Film Festival, one of the most comprehensive and prestigious horror, science fiction, and fantasy film festivals in the world. I've been fortunate enough to have movies I've directed invited here several times. In 1996, Sitges showed *Tromeo & Juliet* and in 1999, we brought *Terror Firmer*¹⁵ here. This year, they were hosting the world premiere of *Citizen Toxie*. Not only had the festival flown me over for the occasion, they'd also brought along Heidi Sjursen, who plays Toxie's blind wife Sarah in the movie, and Gabe Friedman, the movie's editor. Now it's one thing for a film festival to fly in the director or the star of a movie. But if you think it's commonplace for a festival to fly in a movie's editor, guess again. Editors are notoriously pale, shaky guys who rarely see the light of day. The inhuman amount of hours they spend locked away watching the same footage over and over again causes them to have social graces that are rudimentary at best and a bizarre, unpleasant omnisexuality that makes it very difficult for them to see other people in the flesh without becoming visibly and embarrassingly aroused.

Lloyd Kaufman receives a "lifetime achievement" award in *Citizen Toxie*. This scene was cut from the film because it was just too damn unbelievable—even for Troma. (Doug Sakmann)



Citizen Toxie was playing in an amazing 3,000-seat cinema that ranks among the best I've ever seen. I took the stage to introduce the film and immediately remembered why the fuck I bothered making movies. Here was an auditorium full of enthusiastic men and Gynos¹⁶ who were genuinely excited to see a movie. Even more astonishingly, they were excited to see a *Troma* movie. Here we were, people applauding and chanting "Troma! Troma! Troma!"¹⁷ Here were fans dressed as Toxie, Kabukiman, and the Tromettes. Not because anyone asked them to, but because they wanted to. One group of fans had started their own website, Villacabras.com, and arrived at Sitges with their own Toxified bottles of champagne called Tromanpagne. Another Spanish fan club, Fester, had made their own Troma T-shirts using images and lines from the script of *Terror Firmer*. I was gratified and amazed at all the effort the fans had put into showing us their appreciation. Heidi and Gabe were completely overwhelmed. They had no idea Troma had such a far reach.¹⁸

I was inspired not only by my renewed connection with the audience but by the other film screenings at the festival. Finally, audiences were given the opportunity to see amazing, brilliant movies they'd never have a chance to see through ordinary channels. At Sitges, it was possible to go on a three-day movie binge, watching ten films a day with each one better than the last. Movies like Geoffrey Wright's uncut version of *Cherry Falls*, Santiago Segura's *Torrente*, Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tokyo Fist*, and Alex de la Iglesia's *Common Wealth*. Seeing these masterpieces in such incredible surroundings with audiences who appreciated them was as invigorating as seeing the movies in my youth that first inspired me to be a filmmaker.

Guerilla marketing at the Cannes Film Festival whilst "campaign for shaved armpits" reaches climax (From left to right). Terry Firmer (super Tromette), Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD, Heidi Sjursten (star of *Citizen Toxie*), Troma volunteer, Toxie, and Troma head of production Doug Sakmann. Unfortunately this picture was taken two weeks after the Cannes Film Festival in Newark, New Jersey.



Finally, I'd found the reason I continued to make movies despite the many, many reasons I could come up with for trading in the whole goddamn thing and trying to do something vaguely productive with my remaining years like becoming an air-conditioner repairman. Days earlier I'd been risking the plague in ankle-deep rat shit, now, here I was, surrounded by people who appreciated what I'd been doing, enjoying free drinks and pot. And I knew that as long as there were people with a passion for watching movies, I would retain my passion for making them.

Tromettes publicize Troma movies at the Cannes Film Festival. Troma-tic tip to aspiring filmmakers: Tell the Tromettes you are gay and challenge them to "in" you!!! (Tartan Burgess)



Over the past three decades, I've directed, produced, written, shot, and/or distributed hundreds of movies and, believe it or not, not all of them received standing ovations, glowing reviews, and orgasmic audiences at prestigious film festivals. In fact, more than a couple died painful, humiliating, protracted deaths. Some of them deserved it. Some of them, I think, deserved better. None of them, good or bad, were easy to make. If you're looking for a book that will help put you in touch with your inner genius and make only good movies while avoiding the bad, keep on a-lookin' (and if you find one drop me a line at lloyd@troma.com. I can use all the help I can get). What this book *will* help you do is avoid having two days worth of abandoned footage because, for whatever reason, everything fell apart on you at the last minute.

To make your own damn movie, you have to be equal parts dictator and diplomat. You must be both the visionary storyteller addressing the audience at the film festival and the dickhead shoveling rat shit out of the basement because nobody else would and everything would be lost if it didn't get done. You must be both extravagant artist and penny-pinching asshole. It isn't easy, it isn't always fun, and

if you're looking to get rich quick by making the next *Blair Witch Project* then you'd might just well stop right now. The odds are stacked heavily against you ever making a dime directly off your masterpiece.

So, knowing full well that the road you're about to embark on is long and painful, will probably require you to be publicly humiliated on more than one occasion, and will require your total obsessive attention for more than a year, is it worth doing? Absolutely. Writers know the satisfaction of completing a story. Musicians know the satisfaction of completing a song. But filmmakers know that they've brought people together and created something bigger than any of them could have done individually. They have orchestrated an experience that no one involved will ever forget.¹⁹ They have created something that will have a life long after they're gone. They have made some art under circumstances that would send most people into therapy for the next five years. In the end, it isn't about money ('cause it probably isn't out there) or fame ('cause some of the people who do end up knowing your name or face will hate your fucking guts) or free dope and booze at film festivals ('cause ... well, maybe it *is* about the free dope and booze a little bit). It's about capturing a vision and sharing it with those willing to watch. Sooner or later, your vision *will* connect with someone and when that happens, it makes all the rodent fecal matter you've gone through worthwhile. Even the time you had to take a diarrhetic shit in a paper bag.²⁰

THE MAN IS INSANE, BUT IN A GOOD WAY

Trent Haaga

Inspiring chapter, isn't it? One of Lloyd's greatest strengths as a person and a filmmaker is the ability to make something as horrendous as killing rats with a shovel seem noble, if not downright romantic. This is how he managed to lure me into two feature films, a television series, countless hours of office work in the "mighty temple" that is the Troma building, and, finally, the book you hold in your hands.

My name is Trent Haaga and I'm a Troma-holic.

As I said, Lloyd is a truly inspiring guy. Sure, I question his mental stability. But he's inspiring nonetheless. When Lloyd came to me with the proposal for this book, his dreaded two-page contract in hand, I almost declined to be involved. A book is a bigger project than a movie in some ways and, as usual, there wasn't much money involved. But then I harkened back to my humble beginnings as the lone weirdo, skateboarding, punk-rock movie freak in my dismally small midwestern hometown. Troma films were an inspiration for me to get the hell out of bumfuck. Lloyd was living proof that you could thrive in the cutthroat business of filmmaking without having to sell your soul or compromise your artistic integrity. He was living proof that you could still love *Mad* magazine and punk rock music, could still keep your middle finger firmly extended toward the establishment while doing what you loved. Ten years ago, I was the guy who would've rushed right out and bought this book²¹ and it would've inspired me to go out there and Make My Own Damn Movie. How could I say "no" to being involved?

In my long four-year career with Troma (I know four years doesn't sound like much, but one Troma year is equal to approximately 10 human years—which makes Lloyd over 250 years old, for those of you counting) I have endured verbal, mental, and

financial abuse. I've been spit, shit, and puked upon and assraped more than once. I've narrowly avoided prison time and severe beatings at the hands of angry crew members and, most horrifically, I've had my crotch fondled by Lloyd Kaufman (see *Troma's Edge TV*, episode #5). All of these experiences became my film school and, although I'm not rich by any means, I've managed to eke out a living as a writer, producer, and an actor due to the things that Lloyd Kaufman taught me. I'm living proof that you, the reader, can follow the steps in this tome and go from a how-to book reading film enthusiast to a bona fide filmmaker. It's going to take a lot of hard work, cajoling, begging, and debasement ... but it can be done.

All right. Enough with the Lloyd worship. I've acted for the guy, I've produced for him, I've written for him, I've hosted a TV series for him, and I've been his office bitch. I'm not just here to champion the guy. Sure, he's a genius, but he's also one of the hardest employers to work for I've ever had. And he also tends to have selective memory when it comes to some subjects. I'll be popping in periodically to remind him of some stories and to give you some insight on what it's like to make your own damn movie when you're not the director, but part of the crew.

CHAPTER 2

Raising Money or Mastering the Ancient Art of Fellatio

I've always received a fairly large number of calls, letters, and face-to-face encounters from fans that border on the erotic and homoerotic, but ever since e-mail took off, that number has skyrocketed. After all, my e-mail address is posted all over the internet. And even if it wasn't, it doesn't take much genius to figure out lloyd@troma.com. Hell, it's already been in this book twice and this is only page 14. Needless to say, I'm probably the most accessible head of any film studio. Much to my employees' dismay, it's virtually impossible to not get ahold of me.

Of all the e-mails I get, most of them are along the following lines:

hey asshole,

just wanted to remind [sic] you that you are not fooling anyone. you are a hack and your movies are stupid and boring. you've got nerve to call yourself an artist you parasite. i hope you live long enough to see payback for all the people you've ripped off.

sincerely,

amy taubin²²

Of the nonthreatening e-mails I get, most of them fall into the next category:

Dear Mr. Asshole,²³

I've been watching Troma movies since I was dick high. I love them all. I have an idea for a really kick-ass movie that I want to make but don't know how to start. How do I raise money for my kick-ass movie?

I get the feeling that most of the people who ask this question are hoping on some level that when I respond, I'll send them the number and password to a secret Swiss bank account that exists solely for independent filmmakers. The fact is, there is no right or wrong answer to this question. Everyone struggles with this problem and everyone finds his or her own way around it.

Sam Raimi shot an 8mm short for no money and took it around to local people he figured had money (mainly dentists²⁴ and doctors) to get the money to make *Evil Dead*. Chad Ferrin, director of the Troma movie *Unspeakable*, sold his house to make his movie. Robert Rodriguez subjected himself to paid medical experiments to finance *El Mariachi*. These three guys risked humiliation

homelessness, and hideously deforming side effects to raise money for their projects. Each of the decided in the end that getting their stories told on film was the most important thing in their lives. You will need that conviction every step of the way. A lot of people will only tell you about the constraints under which they are placed by a low budget. I, on the other hand, have always found liberating. The more money people put into a film, the more concerned they become over what happens to it. Unless your last name is Spielberg, Lucas, or possibly Hitler, you will find that the more money you have to work with, the less creative freedom you have.

Unfortunately, you are going to need some money in order to make your movie. The easiest way to get money is to come from a wealthy family. No matter how disapproving they may claim to be of your project, your parents are a much surer bet for some easy cash than a complete stranger. Assuming that you either do not have or are not on good terms with some fantastically rich relative, you will need to find some other way into people's wallets. The most common of these is convincing people with money that your project is a worthwhile investment.²⁵

The road to getting investors is a tricky one. There are a lot of complicated legal issues involved that you've probably never even thought about, particularly if you're a young person who hasn't had to deal very much with shit like taxes. If you think the Nasdaq is a creature from the cantina scene in *Star Wars*, you might want to do some financial research before heading out to raise funds.

When Michael Herz and I raise money for a movie, we form what's known as a limited partnership. A limited partnership provides two big advantages for our investors. First of all, they receive certain tax advantages in the likely event that the movie loses money. The investors are also protected legally under a limited partnership. Basically, they themselves are not personally liable for what is done with their money under the terms of that partnership. So, if somebody gets maimed or killed on the set, the investors are not responsible and can't be held accountable (dammit!). We are. It's our fault and if anybody gets sued, it's going to be me, Michael, and whatever dumbfuck was directly responsible for causing something to go wrong.

Limited partnerships are among the most straightforward methods of legitimate entrepreneurial endeavors.²⁶ But the laws governing them vary from state to state. In New York, for instance, you are only allowed to solicit money from a handful of people (I believe it's fewer than twenty), all of whom are supposed to know each other. You are not allowed to call every name in the phone book and ask for \$5 from each of them.²⁷ Still, a limited partnership is the least expensive legitimate way to access under a million dollars. Just be careful and familiarize yourself with your state's laws. The forms for limited partnerships are easy to come by: A quick internet search can help locate them. New York's Practising Law Institute (PLI) publishes these forms and others in massive books that may also come in handy later in production as a heavy object to drop on your head when you're looking for a way to commit suicide that will look like an accident. I would reprint the New York form here but it runs thirty pages. My contract with St. Martin's limits me to about 300 pages and my editor believes that reprinting the form would be even more boring than whatever I could come up with.²⁸

Once you have an investor on board, you can use that person to find others. One dentist with money to invest in an independent film probably knows like-minded people (like dental hygienists, florists, manufacturers, etc.) who might also be interested. We often throw a cocktail party at the home of our primary investor.²⁹ That person would invite a bunch of likely prospects, we'd trot out our little dog and-pony show and wow them with our pitch, and maybe by the end of the night we'd have one or two more investors signed on. As a bonus, you might get to hear some pretty gruesome stories about painful dental procedures that can inspire another movie.

Besides dentists and oral surgeons, some filmmakers will enter into partnerships with their cast and crew. This might be a swell idea if you're working with a group of spoiled rich kids who honestly

don't care what happens to their parents' money, but it does have some significant drawbacks. For one thing, ~~you're going to be working closely with these people. If they think they've invested more in your movie than you have simply by virtue of their monetary involvement, you could run the risk of losing control on the set.~~ In my own experience, I know full well that most of the people I'm working with are going to hate my guts by the end of production. You don't want your investors angry with you before you've even finished principal photography. The last thing I need is to be harassed over money by some incensed key grip.³⁰

Forming a limited partnership will also be the first time in the filmmaking process that you will need to consult with a lawyer (although it will not be the last). You'll need the lawyer to go over the forms and contracts to make sure everything's on the up and up. The one thing you *don't* need at this point is an entertainment lawyer. All you're doing right now is raising money and forming a limited partnership, so your family lawyer is more than qualified to handle this. This isn't rocket science and your chances of running across an honest lawyer are greatly increased if you look outside the entertainment industry.³¹

Honesty may be a strange thing to discuss in a book devoted to filmmaking but I believe it's vital and important. While it may be a lot of fun to consider bilking the old war widow down the street out of her last \$10,000, doing so can actually land you in jail. While it's certainly possible to create great art in prison, it's uncommonly difficult to make a great movie in prison. So be honest with your potential investors. One of the reasons Troma has survived for so long may be that Michael and I have always been completely forthcoming with our investors. We advise them that investing in any movie is risky and investing in a low-budget Troma movie is particularly risky.³² We tell them there's even the possibility they might not see any return on their investment and they should only invest money they can afford to lose. Tell your investors right up front that if they're looking for an investment that has a better-than-average chance of producing a return, they're probably better off investing in General Electric. They're more likely to get their money back and they get the satisfaction of knowing they've contributed to the pollution of the Hudson River.

Of course, you might decide to forgo the entire process of looking for investors by applying for a grant. That's certainly a viable option and there are plenty of places to turn, from the National Endowment for the Arts to all manner of corporate foundations and fellowships. Depending on the movie you want to make, however, this option might not work. If you've got your heart set on making a movie about sex with farm animals and you've applied for a grant from the National Donkey Fucking Foundation, you might have no trouble at all. But if you've applied to the Endowment for the Humanities with the same script, you'll probably run into trouble.

Early in my career, I did a free budget for Barbara Kopple's producer that was to be included with their application for a grant.³³ She told me there was no real secret to getting these grants. She told the various foundations what they wanted to hear and it didn't hurt that what they wanted to hear was coming from the lips of a black woman. Now even though I am a black woman, I'm unable to do that. I don't have the patience (or the cynicism) to please anybody. And which fucking foundation am I going to ask for a grant from, the National Association for the Advancement of Fart Jokes? But if the method suits you, then by all means pursue it. You'd have to be some kind of idiot to turn down free money.

"All right, Kaufman," you say. "So I've gone to every dentist in town and I'm being totally honest with everyone about all the risks involved in investing in my kick-ass movie. All I'm getting is a whole bunch of thanks but no thanks. Sure, I'm going to heaven but in the meantime my movie is going nowhere! Thanks a whole fuck-of-a-lot for the advice, shithead!"

If this is the case, now's the time to appeal to their benevolence. When you're talking about making a movie or any sort of artistic expression, a lot of philanthropic individuals may not necessarily think in terms of financial profit. They'll feel like they're part of the creative process, allowing a young genius (that's you) to blossom under their benevolent patronage. Granted, this technique works a lot better if you live anywhere in the world other than New York or L.A., where everybody and their pedigreed schnauzer has lost money investing in a movie. But if you live in Pocatello, Idaho or someplace, it's definitely worth a try. Besides, if you strike it big and start collecting awards and big paychecks, then they'll be able to say they were in on the ground floor and they knew you back when you were serving dip cones at the Tastee-Freeze and telling everybody who'd listen about your brilliant idea for a kick-ass movie.

It's very possible that you may have missed the fact that at the tail end of that run-on sentence, I buried the only useful tip that anyone will ever give you about raising money for an independent film. For those of you who are just flipping through the pages, convinced that there will not be a single piece of worthwhile advice in this book, here it is again.

TELL EVERYBODY WHO WILL LISTEN ABOUT YOUR BRILLIANT IDEA FOR A KICK-ASS MOVIE.

Unless you have amazing psychic abilities, there is no way you can predict who is going to come through for you and give you the money you so desperately need.³⁴ When I was trying to secure financing for *The Battle of Love's Return*, I went through all the usual channels, pitching the movie to every well-off person I could think of. I was still coming up short. I was beginning to think my movie would never get made.

One evening, after a particularly fruitless day of attempting to squeeze blood from stones,³⁵ I went to the movies.³⁶ As I left the theater, I ran into Garrard Glenn, a classmate of mine from Yale. Garrard asked me what I'd been up to lately, as people do when they unexpectedly run into people they know and are forced to be polite.

At this point, I had a decision to make. Do I (a) assume Garrard's just being polite and give the standard, noncommittal "not much" answer that most people are looking for when they ask the question? Or, (b) should I tell Garrard exactly what I'm doing, which is running around making appointments with dentists, trying to get money for my kick-ass movie? Figuring that at worst Garrard will get a glazed look on his face and regret coming over to say hello, I plunged into my spiel about *The Battle of Love's Return*.

To my surprise, Garrard's eyes did not glaze over. Instead, he became genuinely interested and told me that he had wanted to become involved in a movie project. This was news to me. I wasn't even aware that Garrard liked going to the movies, much less that he wanted to work on one. As it happened, Garrard not only became a producer on *The Battle of Love's Return*, he raised money for my next movie, *Sugar Cookies*, as well. Pretty good for a chance meeting with somebody who would've been one of the last people I'd have thought to approach for backing.

Sooner or later, you will have to ask yourself how badly you really want to make your movie. You run the risk of losing friends, alienating complete strangers, and humiliating yourself in ways you never imagined possible ... not to mention the very real possibility that if things don't work out, you may never have a painless visit to the dentist ever again. But the big question is always how big a schmuck are you willing to look like in order to get your movie made? Is there a line that you won't cross? 'Cause if there isn't, there's plenty of money to be made in the sex industry and you might be

able to finance your movie a lot quicker. Back in the '60s, some of my father's friends would hire graduate students from a prominent Upper West Side university in New York. These girls said they were financing their college education, making around \$200 a night, roughly the equivalent of \$2,000 these days. That's a pretty good gig by anybody's standards. Before you dismiss the idea completely, just think how many people in Hollywood have sucked and fucked their way to the top. If it's good enough for them, maybe it's good enough for you.³⁷

But while you're compromising your dignity and maybe your morals in your quest for money, don't be a completely selfish asshole. Don't risk more than you can honestly afford to lose. If you're married and/or raising a family, your movie probably isn't worth losing your house and security over. Sometimes it's possible to borrow money directly from a bank and, if you're extraordinarily lucky and catch them on the upside of a boom/bust cycle, they may take a gamble and accept your film as collateral. But more often, banks want something of bona fide tangible value, like your house or your scrotum.

It isn't just banks that threaten the homes and welfare of independent filmmakers. Many gamble all on something called a negative pick-up deal. Usually what happens here is that the filmmaker enters a deal with a distributor, gets a small advance and the promise of participation in the project's future profits. It's extremely rare for this kind of deal to bear fruit.

In the late 1980s, my brother Charles wrote and directed a brilliant movie called *Jakarta* starring Chris Noth.³⁸ Troma coproduced the movie with an Indonesian guy and, thanks to my brother's talent,³⁹ the movie turned out quite well. MCEG paid Troma two million bucks for the international distribution rights to *Jakarta*, leaving us to distribute it throughout North America.

The Indonesian coproducer was dazzled by the money and figured all he had to do was throw together a flick with a couple of car crashes and he'd make two million bucks. Who needs Charles Kaufman and who needs Troma? So he mortgages his house to make another movie and enters into a negative pick-up deal with MCEG. He hires *Jakarta*'s cameraman to direct the new movie and ends up, perhaps not too surprisingly, with a piece of shit. MCEG takes a look at the awful new movie and tells him to go fuck himself, they had their fingers crossed on the deal and they're not going to pay him.

At this point, the Indonesian coproducer calls us in tears, crying that he's on the verge of losing his house and that MCEG refuses to honor their deal. Because we're nice (meaning stupid) guys, we decided to help bail him out. We signed over the U.S. distribution rights to *Jakarta* and got stuck with a shitty Indonesian movie called *The Stabilizer* that we have never made a dime from. And while the guy was able to keep his house, my brother's movie, and arguably his career, got royally fucked and *Jakarta* has never been properly seen in this country.

To add insult to injury in all this, the year after this whole debacle, MCEG threw a lavish party in Cannes for *Jakarta*. None of us were invited to this shindig. The good news is that MCEG went bankrupt not too long afterwards and my brother Charles has since become a legend in San Diego with his bakery, the Bread & Cie. Next time you're in San Diego, stop in and pick up an olive loaf.

"All right, pal," you now interject. "I'm toeing the line, being honest and straightforward with people and even found a few willing to cough up some dough. I've sold all the bodily fluids I have access to and turned a few tricks, but I'm still short by several grand. What the fuck am I supposed to do now to get the big shot?"

At this stage of the fund-raising process, it might be a good idea to come to terms with the cold reality that you might not be able to raise all the money you wanted to. The good news is you can always cut corners. Take a look at your script and see what you could possibly live without.

Also, keep in mind that making a movie is a *loooong* process. The only thing you really have to worry about at this stage is raising enough money to get your movie shot. Post-production will take several months and you can always return to raising money at that point. And don't forget the importance of bargaining. You may be able to get vendors and labs to give you their services at cost in exchange for a credit. If worse comes to worst, you can always go into debt to the lab. There are worse things than having a lab take possession of your film for a while.

If you play your cards right, however, it shouldn't come to that. There are also distributors like Troma who can provide you with finishing funds. We've done that for a number of movies, including *Decapitated* and *Sucker : The Vampire*.⁴⁰ The important thing to remember is that once a movie is shot, it usually ends up getting finished one way or another. If you can raise every dime for every stage of the film this early in the game, great! Congratulations and more power to you. But if you can't (and it's very very possible that you can't), don't let it stop you. Focus on getting your movie shot. The rest will work itself out in time.

I could drag this chapter out with boring stories about how one person or another got money for their movie but it wouldn't be particularly interesting or instructive. What worked for one person isn't necessarily going to work for you. It really isn't relevant to you how I raised the money for *Citizen Toxie* because odds are pretty good that your first movie isn't going to be the third sequel to a well-known superhero movie. Just remember the following points:

Back in their formative Yale days, Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz (with guitar) would sing Yale anthem "Boola Boola" before "script conferences." (Doug Sakmann)



1. Talk to *everyone*. Particularly dentists, orthodontists, and periodontists.
2. Sell the things you own that are worth money and you don't really need. Many vital organs come in pairs for this very reason.

3. You can always cut corners. In many ways, that's one of the traits that defines an independent filmmaker.
4. Be nice to your parents. It's much, much easier to save money if you're living at home rent free.
5. Attempting to double your budget by taking your investors' money to Atlantic City is *not* considered a sound investment.
6. Neither is Las Vegas.

Michael Herz and I learned points five and six the hard way. Fortunately, with the recent proliferation of casinos on Indian reservations, there is new hope. We have developed a system which we are confident will result in a windfall of gigantic proportions. Although our system has not paid off yet, that's no reason it shouldn't work for you. Take a trip out to the country and hit those crap tables. Your investors will thank you later.

Okay, let's pause for a moment to be reasonable. It may appear that the advice in this chapter is somewhat discouraging. While Hollywood's definition of "low budget" is downright criminal, even my definition of "low budget" may seem unattainable for 90 percent of you out there. Sure, \$350,000 is low budget compared to \$6 million, but what if you live in a place where there are only two dentists in town and they're partners? Where do you come up with that kind of dough when every one of your friends, neighbors, and family members are buying cigarettes with money they got by selling food stamps? If you live in New York City and happen to be walking around (unemployed but still having enough money to go to the movies) the odds are good that you're going to bump into/pass on the street *many* folks who are millionaires. And a small percentage of those millionaires may be able to lead you to other millionaires.

But let's assume there aren't *any* millionaire investors in your hometown. Good movies *can* be made for the cost of a car. New York filmmaker Chris Seaver is only twenty-four years old and has shot about fourteen feature films.⁴¹ The biggest budget he's worked with was probably \$1,000 or so, and his films are incredibly entertaining and certainly belie their budgetary restraints.

At this point it seems as if you'll never make a movie because I've been talking about lawyers and investors and limited liability. Ignore this for now. If you have to make your film for \$250, just make it. I've been making movies for more than thirty years now and the budgets I work with are pathetic compared to the budgets of people I started out with like Oliver Stone and John Avildsen. Even so, realize that \$350,000 is still a lot of dough by most people's standards. Do not let one hurdle stop you indefinitely. Move on no matter what the personal cost and get that movie made. Don't be discouraged by money. As you'll see by the rest of this book, getting money will be the least of your worries.

- [The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It here](#)
- [Heart of Iron \(London Steampunk Series, Book 2\) for free](#)
- [download online Dosage Calculations \(9th edition\)](#)
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