“King of Herrings” with Stanley B. Gill

[SPOILERS AHEAD]

Randy Mack: Hola. Welcome to Essential NOLA Cinema, a conversation between cinephiles about the past and future of New Orleans movies. My name is Randy Mack, and I’m pleased as hell to have Stanley B. Gill with me today to talk…

Stanley B. Gill: Hey, Randy.

RM: Hey. How it’s going? Today, we're talking about the King of Herrings, the 2014 film co-directed by Sean Richardson and Eddie Jemison, shot here in New Orleans. I always begin these interviews with - and by always, I mean this is the first time ever, so I'm breaking this format in with you - Where did you go to high school?

SG: [Laughter] “Where did you go to school at?” down here as we say in New Orleans. I went to a private boys' school called Archbishop Shaw in New Orleans. It's in the Catholic region of all of the Catholic schools here.

RM: Cool. Since I didn't grow up here, what part of town did you grow up in, and where do you live now?

SG: Westbank, as we like to say, the best bank. Ironically, the best bank is South of New Orleans. So, if you're in New Orleans, and you look due south, you can look on the Westbank, but that's due to the Crescent Riverbend in the city.

RM: I call it non-Euclidean geometry, the whole city.

SG: Yes. It's a... let's see what is it... If you stand looking north, you look towards the lakes; south, you look towards the Westbank. If you look to the west, you’re looking to upriver; and the east, downriver.

RM: Right, exactly. That way you can't get confused by the curving roads and bizarre geography of the whole place. So, yes, the King of Herrings is one of my favorite independent films to come out of New Orleans in the last 10 years or so. When did you first see it, and what was your first impression of it?

SG: That's a good question. I first saw it probably, what, two years ago? So, this is what, Spring 2020, and it was - King of Herring came out in 2013, so two years ago. Yes, so apparently, I've seen it - I saw it five years after it was released. I don't recall how I came across it other than listening to industry folk that work here, and we probably talked about it or something, so I really don't remember how it showed up on my radar. But the fact that it was a locally shot and produced film intrigued me.

RM: Yes. It was put together by a team of LSU graduates who all came up with Steven Soderbergh in the ‘80s. They were part of the drama school at LSU. If you look at the

cast, the five main roles; Eddie Jemison, Joe Chrest, David Jensen, John Mese, and Wayne Péré - they were all classmates together. So, the whole thing came out of a Louisiana set of people. They've all gone on to have extensive careers working with Soderbergh and tons of other big-time directors and most of them, I think, live permanently in LA now. When they put together the project, it was always conceived as a sort of acting thing. It came out of an acting workshop, in fact. Eddie wrote this script just to be performed as a theatrical piece, and they brought it to their old mentor at the LSU drama school for him to direct.

The idea was originally to do it as a stage play, but their mentor by that point - the boys were all middle-aged at that point and the mentor was on in his years. So, he suggested they direct it themselves and just shoot it for a budget. So, the acting workshop became a play, became a film screenplay, which they ended up shooting - basically, from what I could tell from the notes, it was almost all shot in New Orleans with a couple of scenes in Baton Rouge, and I think one right outside of town somewhere, which I can't remember. As I was watching the film, I was looking for locations, and there are a couple of locations where I was scratching my head a little bit. Like that train station that opens and ends the film is definitely not in New Orleans proper.

SG: Yes, the thing I liked about it was the ensemble cast. When I watched it, and I watched these actors work together knowing - I didn't know anything about the film, I didn't know anything about the actors or the writer, director, anything like that. I had actually had talked to Wayne Péré some time ago, I ran into him - I probably ran into him at the New Orleans Film Festival, and saw some work that he did. He acted in a 48-hour film project here in New Orleans that they have every year. He did such an awesome job in it, being a short film, a five-to-seven-minute short film, that the first thing that struck out to me was - you got to remember, I didn't know who this was, but when I saw him in that - in this little short, I said, “This guy definitely has chops that you clearly did not get from here.” And then when I started hearing about King of Herrings at the 2013 New Orleans Film Festival, I put it on my watch list.

So, I guess it's been on my watch list for like five years. I can't believe it's been on there that long, but I have a very long watch list. If I stopped doing anything in life outside of eating, I would finish my watchlist in 2049. So, when I get on these kicks, I started looking at what would be a New Orleans flair and ran across it. Then I saw Wayne Péré’s in there, and I went, “Oh yes, I remember seeing that guy. Let me take a look at this.” Then I started putting it together, realized that he was such an established character actor, and he had the chops; I said, “You just don't wake up one

day and have this." When I went and did a little research on King of Herrings, and found out about the cast, and they had worked through LSU, and had the same – I believe they had the same acting coach, if I'm not mistaken. Like you were saying - you were talking about a mentor, so I don't know if that is the same thing.

RM: Yes, that's the guy. Their acting teacher at LSU was their mentor.

SG: Well, that's the thing that struck me about this film, is that this is the only film that I have seen - if you put aside studio projects, films that are shot down here, big studio budgets, and when I say big studio budgets, anything over $10 million, this was such a great cast that I liked the way they interacted with each other. It sparked my interest just to find out who are these actors, where are they at, what are they doing, and that's when I went down the path and discovered that all these guys and the director's wife had played - she played Evie, Andrea Frankle. I believe that's his wife, if I'm not mistaken.

RM: No, no. It's the other one.

SG: Okay. Laura Lamson that plays Mary, that's right.

RM: Yes, exactly.

SG: So, when I found out that that was the case and she was a part - the ensemble cast worked so well that it just intrigued me. It was a nice character study. Those kinds of films, it's tough to get them out in the distribution chain, but there is an audience out there that absolutely love character studies, and I really thought that this film was well worth watching.

RM: Yes. Yes, I agree totally. I was really impressed with the bang for the buck. When independent people put together their films, sometimes, they'll try to rely on a science fiction hook, or they'll try to rely on a genre film like type of concept where it's like, "Oh, it's a film noir but it's set in high school," or it's, "We're going to do a heist movie but it's a low stakes heist movie," or "It's all set in a bar on a single night," or whatever, those kinds of independent film hooks. These guys said, "We're going to make the characters and the character dynamics the front and central concept of the film."

SG: I think that was the key that sucked me in, is that - listen, you and I are both directors, and we die for great actors that are willing to explore whatever characters we've created, and I could clearly see that that's what this crew, this cast, was trying to do. It worked so well. If I recall correctly, once I finally saw it, I definitely put a nice little review on my Facebook page and said that I would really hope that one day I could get

this cast in a film that I do because it was such a wonderful dynamic. This is the kind of dynamic that a director dies for. It wasn't one or two actors, it was the whole cast. What do we have? A half a dozen people in there. Having that kind of dynamic with that large cast, I thought was pretty special for the film.

RM: Yes, definitely. It's a great chemistry that's really lived in and seasoned and nuanced that can only come from people who are really comfortable with each other and understand how to play off each other. The quality that comes from experience.

SG: Yes, that's true. It's the fact that they all knew each other already, and it's one thing when you know somebody from a personal level, it's another thing knowing them in the business sense. For instance, in the real world, as I like to call it, let's say you're an attorney, you do contract work or something like that, and you know other firms in town, and you know those attorneys, and you may never work with those people. You just may know them in a social setting or a business setting where maybe you run into them at court or something like that, or whatever the deal happens to be. *[00:10:00]*

In this instance, actors and directors and writers and producers who know each other sometimes never work with each other, they never have an opportunity. Not because maybe they don't want to work with each other, but it just is the nature of the beast. Because you may work with somebody and not see him for 20 years, and then show up on another project and say, “Hey, it’s been 20 years since we worked on that other project.” [Laughter] This cast, the fact that they knew each other from a personal level, had studied with each other, and actually went out and did a film, I think was the secret sauce that made this work.

RM: Yes. IMDb lists, I think, eight people in the cast. They’re the five major friends, Laura – the actress who plays Evie, who's fantastic, and then the bartender at the very beginning of the movie and during that the... What do they call that kind of poker where you put the card up? it's like Liar’s Poker, I think they call it. So, that's the whole cast. In fact, there’s a major character who's never seen, and that's the man that Evie is going to marry. He's clearly a huge role, like he's the one who's got the most to lose in terms of her infidelity, but that's a fascinating what-if question of, “What would've a scene between Ditch and that guy be like?” since he’s marrying Ditch’s sister, and you know how brothers can get about their sisters, especially a guy like Ditch. [Laughter]

SG: Yes, that's the thing that – so, Eddie Jemison, he plays Ditch, who wrote and directed this, I definitely liked his character. I think that part of the problem that this film suffered from was that you had actor-writer-director, and I'm not 100% sure - even though there's Sean Richardson is listed as a co-director, I'm not 100% sure how that

worked out on the set. So, Sean Richardson is the director of photography. So, he's listed as a co-director. So, I'm not sure if those parts in the film which suffered were caused by trying to act and direct at the same time or not, but that was the sense that I got. I'm not saying it was a bad film, I'm just saying I saw from a director's point of view where that could have been an issue.

RM: Sure. Let's get into it. What did you see as the major flaws of the film?

SG: I don't particularly like using the word "flaw" because every filmmaker that makes a film has intrinsic things that are in there. Either something that the filmmaker could not control, or they could control but did it in a certain way that maybe some of the audience or maybe somebody else didn't agree with it. For instance, one that comes to mind right off the top of my head was the HBO series called Chernobyl. The very first thing when I started watching it, in the first five minutes, I realized that because this is the retelling of the story of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the '80s in Russia, that none of the actors had Russian accents. They didn't even pretend to have them or not. It took an entire episode for me to try to figure out what was going on. It didn't make sense to me. The creator, Craig Mazin, who was the showrunner and creator of that, said in his podcast the very first time, he said that they weren't going to do that because he made a creative decision. It was his show and it was his creative decision, and I didn't agree with it at all from a creative standpoint.

I'm not saying it made Chernobyl bad, in fact, I love the series, it was great. But in this instance, bringing it back to the King of Herrings, it's the same thing, it's just my creative take on it. It's not that I'm saying this is a bad film, or it's bad directing or bad writing or bad acting or anything in that respect, it's just my impression as a director, would be that it seemed to me that that's - there was a vision that the film lacked. Meaning, that in my opinion, what I would have liked to have seen is a much heavier hand as the director. Even though it's an ensemble cast and they're playing out these roles and these parts, it seems to me that there was no hard vision from a director's point of view. I'm not saying that they put the camera down on a tripod and just said, "Okay, play it out like a stage play, and whatever you get on film, you get on film." I'm not saying that. It just seemed to me that there was no directorial narrative thread that connected it together, just from a director's point of view.

RM: Interesting. Yes, I share your opinion of Chernobyl's accent choice by the way, for what it's worth. That was really strange. [Laughter]

SG: I remember listening to that podcast because they did a podcast after every episode, that was the very first thing. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, I think Craig Mazin used the

term, “Let's address the elephant in the room.” He said that, and I went, “Okay.” If I was sitting in a room, and I had creative decision, and he overrode me, I would have told him, “All right. I don’t agree with you, but it’s your show, and it’s your creative vision.” That’s the vision that he saw. I felt his storytelling suffered from that, but what do I know? I mean, Chernobyl was a hit, a lot of people watched it. Did the audience, in the general sense, did they care or did they find it odd, or five minutes into the film, they forget? For instance, a recent film I saw some months ago was Renée Zellweger in Judy. Five minutes into that film, I believe Renée Zellweger was Judy Garland, and she knocked it out of the park. Of course, I know you remember me telling you that when I came out of that film, I said, “She's hands-down winner for the Oscar,” which she did get.

In that instance, I totally believed that character. In Chernobyl, it took me time, even though the acting was outstanding, to get into those characters because I just couldn't get over the fact that they all had different dialects. Maybe that's part of the reason - maybe part of that thinking is from growing up down here. Because – like I have British friends that they can tell me by listening to somebody what part of the city they grew up in, which are certain specific dialects that they can recognize. I'm sure it's the same in New York, and I'm sure it's the same in Jersey, in Boston, and those kinds of things. Well, it’s the same down here. In that sense, as far as…

RM: It’s the same in Russia too.

SG: Yes. There you go. Same in Russia. In that sense, that – bringing it back around to the directing, even though in Chernobyl I didn't think that would have been a creative decision - not I didn't think, I would not have made that creative decision, it's the same thing in King of Herrings when I wouldn't have made the creative decision if I was involved to act, write, and direct. Listen, there are people out there that do that. The Robert Redfords of the world used to do that when we could do that a long time ago. Clint Eastwood's another good example. That was the only thing that this film had that I didn't agree with. I don't like to use the word “flaws” or “suffers from” or things like that because I understand, if I do a film and somebody critiques it using those kinds of words, yes. Hey, listen, I'm not saying I have a heart of stone, but if you can’t articulate the way that it affects you, then you’re just some other Joe on the street giving an opinion. [Laughter]

RM: So, let’s talk about the strengths of the film. What did you think of the cinematography?

SG: I don't know what the choice was with black and white. In fact, I had made a note about that because if you go back to something like Schindler's List, and I remember reading about how Spielberg had decided that he wanted to shoot Schindler's List in black and white, and the only color element in that film was the little girl in the city running around with the red jacket. But that was his distinct specific directorial clue, that the director, Spielberg, wanted to put in that film. And I totally agreed with it, because you're talking about World War II and the black and white filming was his choice. Could you have shot it in color, in muted colors, or made it look like Kodak Ektachrome back in World War II? I'm sure you could, but that was a creative choice that he made, I agreed with it.

In this one, with King of Herrings, I couldn't understand why they shot it in black and white. I don't know if it was a creative decision or if it was something happened technically, meaning that when they got the dailies back or whatever, they said, “There was a problem,” or whether Eddie Jemison, the director and the other creatives in the film had decided, “You know what, this film would work best with black and white.” Whatever their motivation was for that, I just didn't see it. I would have much rather liked to see it in color, I didn't see the reason just to do it in black and white though.

RM: Well, hypothetically, you can someday see it in color; the film was shot in color. It was designed to be black and white though from the jump. According to the research I did, the reason was that they wanted the film to have a more classic timeless look and be devoid of pop culture references that would date it. Stuff like cellphones and household technology, things that would immediately date it ... Eddie and Sean were inspired by... Eddie has this great quote. He said in one interview, “Have you ever walked into a diner and just see a bunch of guys hanging around a table just wreak of failure? Well, this is a whole movie about them.” [Laughter]

SG: [Laughter] Yes. *[00:20:00]*

RM: I think the idea was to evoke that these kinds of men have existed for a long time. Like it’s not just a specific generational thing, that these are people you could have found in the 1800s or the 1900s, and so forth. That’s my understanding. I love that cinematography, though. I’m not sure what it brings to the storytelling component other than that timeless look, but there’s a beautiful sensuality to it, and a kind of drab - there's so little positivity in these people's lives that it’s as if the color had been drained out of their lives, so there was a parallel there for me. I thought it was a bold choice, and I tend to be more forgiving of bold choices, like when a filmmaker just really goes for it, [Laughter] in that sense. So, I like the fact that they did that, even though they did, in fact, shoot it in color. But they had always planned to, and that's

where Sean came in, I think, as a visual designer of the film in terms of knowing how that color palette would then bleed into a set of grays and so forth.

SG: No, I can understand that. Like I said, if I had to flip a coin and figure out what it was, it clearly was a creative choice. I just threw in a technical issue because in low-budget filmmaking, sometimes things happen that you can't control, and you don't have the budget or the money to overcome that. But in this instance, I was 80%, 90% sure that it was a creative choice. I'm not saying that it detracts from the film at all; it gives it its own quality and character. We're talking the last percentile of creativity where 99% of the film is absolutely fine, and we're just going in for a critical eye, being industry-related, as opposed to two friends talking over coffee going, "Hey, did you like that film or not?" and then discuss it. We're trying to do a deep dive into it and dissect it for what it was.

RM: Let me give you a little more context for how it came together.

SG: Good.

RM: I did a deep dive into the interweb, and I found their original Kickstarter campaign which is still out there.

SG: No kidding?

RM: Yes. Apparently, they raised about $6,500.00 for post-production in 2011 - or maybe production rather. The goal was $5,000.00, they raised $6,500.00, and I think the final budget was about $20,000.00. I don't know if that includes post-production or not. It premiered in October 2013 at the New Orleans Film Festival. I was lucky enough to be there. That was very cool, I got to meet Eddie and so forth, and talk to them about the whole affair. And most of the cast was there as well. It was an interesting thing because Joe Chrest, and Dave Jensen, and John Mese, and Wayne Péré, and so forth, they work all the time as character actors, they never get meaty juicy central roles, and because of their particular physiologies and their faces, locked them into recurring types of people.

David Jensen, in particular, is always playing a judge, I've noticed. [Laughter] So, I think they were writing these roles to show other sides of themselves, to break out of the typecasting that they've acquired over 20, 30 years of professional acting in Hollywood. I think that's why everybody's cast against type, especially Eddie Jemison, who is the sweetest guy I've ever met, and he [Laughter] also plays a borderline psychopath in this film.

SG: [Laughter] That’s true. That’s something interesting that you bring up. I knew by going through their resumes, and what they had done in the past, and what they've done from the past up till now in the last, what, seven years, that they were character actors, and the one thing I absolutely love as a director is working with character actors because it's the only thing that you can do, in my opinion, in the cinematic process, in the creative process as a director working with an actor is they literally bring you a blank palette and they say, “I can play whatever you want me to play. Let's design a new character.” I knew that about these actors, and you're right, getting the opportunity to play lead roles and to be able to play off each other being an ensemble cast.

That's why I go back to my original statement that this was an alignment of the stars. You had all this talent there on screen, and all this talent being put together as far as their ability to work off each other, which clearly was the fact that they were friends and that they had worked through the same acting classes and the same acting casting coaches and things like that, that's the thing about them, is being able to take that character actor hat off and put a lead actor hat on, and that's what I absolutely loved about the film.

RM: Yes. That's a great segue into the next topic, which is how this film works as an independent role model, hypothetically, as a template going forward into another movie. There’s a lot of wonderful precedent for small independent directors, especially regional directors identifying a star in the making or a character actor who needs a new spotlight shined on them. A favorite example - there are two, actually, really great ones. There is the classic case of Jeff Nichols seeing Michael Shannon on television, and writing him into his micro-budgeted first film in Arkansas, of all things. He wrote fan letters to Michael Shannon, and Shannon agreed to star in this no-budget Arkansas movie called Shotgun Stories, and Jeff Nichols has used Michael Shannon in every single movie since.

Michael Shannon is now almost a bona fide movie star. He played Zod, for Christ’s sake. Their careers were intertwined and grew together. And, of course, you have Michael B. Jordan. So, Ryan Coogler saw Michael B. Jordan on some TV show and was like, “Oh, this guy is amazing. How come he just has a small role on some small TV show?” So, he wrote him a role in his first micro-budgeted film, Fruitvale Station, and of course, Kill Monger is born, and the rest is history. Yes, you can get a lot of mileage identifying small character actors and giving them lead roles because they will do it for the opportunity. You don't have to pay them the Hollywood wages because you're giving them artistic satisfaction in a way that Hollywood can't.

SG: Well, let me turn the spotlight around to me for a second because this is all about me. [Laughter] One thing I have learned in my career is that I remember somebody telling me something. One day, we were talking industry shop, this was out in LA, and they said, “You should have been an agent.” and I looked at him like, “What? Are you kidding me? I would have never been an agent in a million years,” and he said to me something that stuck with me and the way I can paraphrase it is that if I have to have a superhero power in this industry it's recognizing talent where it's completely blank to anybody else. And I look at other people that are able to find talent like that and generally it's agents because you hear, you read the stories from Hollywood golden years like, “So and so found this actress in a diner and she was a waitress and then turned her into a big star,” that kind of thing.

The thing I absolutely love is just running across talent, especially in a film like this, where that's why I love working with first-time actors. I love working with people who’ve said, “I've never acted in my life,” or they had never thought that they could be an actor, or they’ve worked as a background actor or a character actor, and they want some lead role and something like that. I see parallels here in the King of Herrings where clearly that these guys and gals had an opportunity and they knocked it out of the park when it came to that ensemble cast.

RM: Yes. I had a similar experience with **Laundry Day** in terms of I cast a lot of musicians, a lot of standup comics and a lot of street performers in supporting roles, including Samantha Huffman [aka Samantha Ann, aka Sam Aquatic] as one of the leads playing Natalee, came out of the circus community.

SG: Perfect example.

RM: Yes, you can find a lot of talent in New Orleans that way. The people who are used to performing in front of crowds tend to not be fazed by cameras the way that non-professional actors are fazed by cameras. They already have a strong sense of their own persona and a strong sense of just comfort in front of the lens.

SG: Yes, yes. I agree. That’s the dichotomy that I deal with and think about, and we’ve discussed this a lot, is being creatives in New Orleans, looking for that kind of talent. We don’t see thousands of actors on a weekly, yearly basis like you would see in Los Angeles because that’s where all the cattle goes [Laughter] and being able to pick out the right cow, to paraphrase something Hitchcock one said. There’s very little acting talent in this town. I know I’m making a lot of my actor friends upset.

RM: You’re saying there’s a low quantity of acting talent, right, not a low…

SG: There’s a low quantity of high-level quality acting talent because there's not that many people. Acting is something that you... it's just like any other craft. It’s like writing and directing, as you and I both well know, you’ve got to practice at it, you’ve to work at that craft. You can’t just wake up one day, grab a bunch of paintbrushes and start slapping stuff on a canvas and call yourself a painter. The other side of the equation that we’ve talked about a lot is there is a commerciability about the stuff that we do. We want to create films that get a good box-office draw, get a good streaming draw that audiences love. If five people like it, yes, we're happy, but we would like to have 5 million-plus people like it, that kind of thing. In this instance, the sad part of this film and it's more of a sad level from a creative standpoint is that, like you said, earlier practically all these actors probably live in LA and they're probably doing just well because character actors work an awful lot, that's for sure. They may not make the big dollars that big A-list kinds of stars make, but they work an awful lot. *[00:30:00]*

It's not something that this town grows. If you grew up here, like you were asking me earlier about growing up here, I did the exact same thing. As soon as I got out of high school, I went to LSU for two years, and then I turned around and went to Hollywood, and I spent three decades of my career there before I basically got everything I needed out of Los Angeles and moved back here. So, it’s almost like your train’s going the opposite direction like, “Wait, that's some great talent and they're going out to LA,” but the world is so much smaller nowadays that it doesn't particularly matter where you live. If you want that talent or you want to be able to put them in your film, that's great. I just wish there was more of a quantity and quality here in New Orleans.

RM: Yes. I think as a small city, we have to find clever hacks of working around the fact that we’re not going to see 50 people for every role when you’re casting a project; you’re probably going to see four or five. Part of that is creative imagination and it's also the ability to re-tailor a role around somebody - you may get somebody in the room who’s wrong for the role you wrote, but they may have a certain charisma or a certain talent set, especially if they come from a different kind of performing background. Like if they're a great juggler or something, you can write the juggling into the character hypothetically and that creative flexibility can give you a way of working around the quantity problem. I also think about the fact that... Eddie is a character actor and he wrote this project for himself and tailored it for his friends. It reminds me a lot of Affleck and Damon writing Good Will Hunting as a vehicle for themselves and all the different actors who have written projects for themselves to act in over the years and how good some of those projects actually turned out to be.

SG: Yes. That's a perfect example. I would love to sit down with this entire cast and ask them that stereotypical question, “Did you know when you were making it that you were never going to get back that same je ne sais quoi, that same mise-en-scène of all you guys in the same space working together?” You might not ever see that the rest of your careers and how lucky you were to be able to do that with such wonderful talent. It's very rare that you can get a good stack of good actors in front of the lens as far as – as well as you and I know. Even my last short comedy film, “Get Bingles,” I had one, two, three, four - I'd say half my cast were first-time actors and one of them was a blind actress. Once I started crafting the cast and putting them together, I realized these are the people I wanted to work with and that's what I loved about King of Herrings. I just loved the quality of talent that they had and they worked so well together with such a dynamic. I'm like, “Man, I would absolutely love to have them in a film that I would do.”

RM: Yes, they're all wonderful. David Jensen stars as a United cab drive in one of the best New Orleans independents made in the last 20 years.

SG: Yes, King of New Orleans. It’s a great film.

RM: I love that film. It’s a film with really weird history because I think directing passed through several people’s hands and it ended up being finished by the producer at the end. It's one of those interesting things where I think the film was originally supposed to be finished and released before Katrina and then Katrina came in, and they had to tack on a whole other shoot to incorporate Katrina into the story. Dave Jensen stars in it and he's appeared in a lot of New Orleans work, including Hollywood South work as well, which is great for him. Of course, because they all came from Soderbergh, they all have small roles in multiple Steven Soderbergh projects. Most prominently probably, Schizopolis, which is the nervous breakdown film that Soderbergh made in the mid-90s when his career was at its nadir.

He went back to Baton Rouge with his tail between his legs after essentially... He shot a film called The Underneath which he realized halfway through he didn't care about and didn't want to be making and he had a little bit of a creative breakdown. He talks about it in his book, Getting Away With It. He essentially goes back to Baton Rouge where he had grown up and went to college. He just starts making a movie almost like a meta-movie where he stars in it and he got all his friends from LSU to have roles in it, including Eddie and Dave and Joe and so forth. He cast his own ex-wife as the ex-wife of the main character and stuff.

Apparently, he didn't have much of a script, he was just coming up with scene ideas on the day and he shot it over a long, long period of time just on weekends and stuff. Just coming up with ideas and then shooting for a weekend and then ruminating, and then going back and shooting for a weekend, and this is all pre-digital. So, 16 millimeter, I believe. Schizopolis is like a bizarre artifact worth watching for any filmmaker who wants to know just how crazy Soderbergh's imagination can be. Eddie stars as his best friend/nemesis, the original frenemy coworker who's undermining him. It's a great role. Then later, of course, when Soderbergh hit his stride and started - he made Out of Sight and Traffic. When he made Ocean's Eleven, the 11th member of the team is Eddie Jemison and he's in all three of the Ocean's movies.

SG: Yes. You think about the talent, the creative talent, that was around at that time. These guys have gone on to do very well. I like the work - I definitely liked the film. I don't want it to sound like that I hated the film. I actually loved the film. It's just when we discuss it from a creative standpoint, from a filmmaker's standpoint, we're really micro-analyzing every single thing about a film that can happen. Everything from a technical issue to a creative choice to anything else. You get into a conference room with 10 directors and you give them the same script, you're going to get 10 different films.

RM: Absolutely. Overanalyzing movies or scrutinizing them, or delving, all of those words are what this podcast is all about. It's trying to break apart and study, and learn from and then apply the lessons moving forward as filmmakers and for anyone listening. The podcast is designed for both appreciators of New Orleans films and maybe filmmakers who want to get started and want to dissect all the technical things and learn how it all works, and at the same time, New Orleans people who maybe they work in one art or the other or maybe they've made 48-hour films and want to think about how to make their own feature film to get going. The idea is to inspire their own thoughts about their own work and how they can apply the lessons from films like King of Herrings into their own practice.

One of the great role model angles for this film is also the use of locations. There's a beautiful economy to the locations. Really, if you think about it, it's only a couple of people's apartments, a couple of hallways, one very pivotal bathroom scene, and then a bar and a diner. Yet, the film has such a fascinating growing menace over the course of the film that you're so caught up in the emotions of the characters and that whole feeling of, "Oh my God, what is this guy capable of? What's he going to do next? What's going to make him snap?" That the drama pulls you in and you don't realize how small the scale is because you're so fascinated by the characters.

SG: You're right. Let's say you're an up-and-coming actor. I don't care how much you've had on your acting resume or if you just decided, "You know what? I want to get into acting," this would be a great film to watch. It would be a great character study to be able to watch each one of these actors bring that character to life. Like I said, that's what I absolutely loved about the film. You're right, each one of those actors, each one of those characters bring a little bit of - they stitched together the tapestry of the film story. If you stitch it just right and you show it to an audience, and somebody is like, "Wow, that's great." This would be a great character study for actors no matter what part of their career they're in and this is talent. If you're here in New Orleans and an actor here in New Orleans or Louisiana, this would be a great film to watch to get you an idea of how these actors were able to bring these characters to life in this film.

RM: Definitely. Yes, it's a wonderful example of making the character the concept. You mentioned how you wrote about the film when you saw it. Actually, this podcast came out of a blog I wrote called Essential NOLA Cinema as well. The blog, it's basically me going through the history of New Orleans films and writing pieces about whether they really count as New Orleans cinema or not and if they do count, how so.

SG: No kidding?

RM: What I wrote is, "It doesn't take a huge concept or a vast scope to make a riveting movie and New Orleans has a unique asset that lends itself to great indie filmmaking, namely extraordinary personalities. And by smartly writing for and around their fellow actors, Jemison and Richardson have made their characters the centerpiece, the central concept of the film. It's an invaluable lesson for indie filmmakers." *[00:40:00]*

SG: That's a great review. Can you tell me again who wrote that?

RM: That would be, let me get the... is it Andy? Andy Mark? Andy Mark? **[Laughter]**

SG: [Laughter] Yes. You hit the nail right on the head with that hammer. That's another part of - the projects I'm developing, New Orleans is a character all unto itself in every script that I have. That's another thing that King of Herrings did is that it definitely used New Orleans as a character in the film and used it to great success. Could you have shot the film in Philadelphia? Could you have shot it in New York? Sure. You could have shot it in LA, but I'm being a little bit of a homer here, I don't think you would have been able to get the quality and the character of New Orleans across in your film if you ended up shooting it someplace else.

The other thing is this is one of those films that was done here that, like you said, it doesn't have to be a huge production, it doesn't have to be a huge number. This was

specifically a character study of these characters in their lives and where they came across each other, and the arcs that they went through. It did not take a lot of money, it did not take a lot of - they had no studio help, right? But if this was a hundred-million-dollar film, it would have clearly suffered. Granted the filmmakers would have probably said, “I would have loved more money in the budget.” True, but you were talking earlier about the actors, but if you're a filmmaker, you don't have to dream up these high-concept kind of films. If you want to, go right ahead, but King of Herrings shows you how you can make a character study and make wonderfully enticing characters that people are going to sit down and watch.

RM: I think that it’s interesting that you chose the film because the plot of the movie - it basically kicks off with a poker game and you've written - Get Bingles is about a poker game in a way and you’ve got a couple of poker game concepts. There’s something really interesting about the dynamic of these five friends where you have a very small thing, somebody owes somebody $9.00 and then it becomes a dick measuring contest, male pride, all insecure and fronting, and everyone is trying to be like, “Oh, no, you owe me and you're going to shake my hand.” It becomes all about this posturing thing.

Then if they were normal guys or just other people in the group, it probably would have been resolved in a day but because $9.00 just happened to be owed by one guy who is incredibly hyperbolic hotheaded borderline violent, a human tyrant and then another guy who will stop at nothing in order to undermine the other guy, you have essentially the immovable object meeting the impenetrable force – wait, that's not right, something like that. [Laughter] You have the two least grounded people suddenly in this escalating pissing match where nobody is going to back off no matter who gets hurt or how. Joe Chrest’s character, the professor, ends up basically deciding that because Ditch owes him $9.00 and won't shake his hand that he's going to destroy the man's marriage.

SG: [Laughter] Yes. exactly.

RM: It's great stuff. It's almost Greek in it's tragic comic - all the strengths of a great tragedy and the characters have all the flaws of great tragic heroes.

SG: It’s funny you should talk about the $9.00. I find it hilarious because I've actually played golf with people that at the end of the game - of course, you're not supposed to bet in golf, but that's all golf is about is betting. At the end of the round, you're sitting at the bar and everybody’s settling up and you owe somebody $9.00, and you're like, “Hey, can I give it to you tomorrow?’ and they go insane. Their life revolved around that $9.00 that they needed for some reason and it wasn't the $9.00, it was the

character problem, the character flaw. So, it's funny. I've seen that happen before, not a lot, with some you know people that I've played golf with in the past that would go crazy if you owed them $3.00 and you're like, “Oh crud. I had $20.00 on me, I figured that if I lost today, I wouldn't lose more than $20.00, but I lost $23.00. So, hey, can I give you $3.00 tomorrow,” and then they’re like, “No,” and they go insane. [Laughter] I find that hilarious. That's what I loved about the film, about the $9.00.

RM: Yes. It's one of my favorite sub archetypes of storytelling, “The wrong man on the wrong day” kind of story. The movie Falling Down is a great example or After Hours by Martin Scorsese where if it had been the same man on a different day, it would have gone differently, but because of where that person was in their life at that moment when that thing happened, now it’s, "All bets are off. Hide the children." [Laughter]

SG: That’s true. That’s another one of my favorite films is Falling Down with Michael Douglas. I don’t know. As a creator, when you’re creating those characters, something very simple as in a poker game, and poker was invented in New Orleans, so that’s another thread that’s woven into the history of this city. That’s a great creative tool to use. Conflict in characters, that’s what made King of Herrings a great film.

RM: Yes. I totally agree. There’s something wonderful about telling a contained story where it’s the people become the subcultural unto themselves. They’re all middle-aged men, there’s one person who’s had a tracheotomy and speaks through a device, you have a person who self-styles himself as an intellectual and so forth. They’re all familiar and unique at the same time. There’s just a wonderful specificity to them that – and you can – you don’t necessarily have to take a known subculture of New Orleans. We all have these broad subcultures of the New Orleans cultural landscape. You can get really specific and just focus in on a pack of people who essentially hang out unto themselves. Of course, you have the diner. The diner is almost like a character in the film. It's Anita's Diner on Tulane Avenue. At the time they shot the film, there was no university medical complex across the street. They’d just razed that entire neighborhood. It was all under construction.

So, they had to do a lot of shooting around the sound of the cranes and bulldozers working. When you see the exterior shots of them walking up and down the street around that diner, you can clearly see the CBD in the background of one angle and Mid-City in the background of the other angles but the diner becomes a self-contained bubble for the characters to exist in. So many of the conflicts and the turning points in the storyline happen in that diner because they couldn’t really happen anywhere else. These seem like people who go to their apartments, go to work and then go to the diner, and that’s their whole lives. It’s interesting. It’s almost like if you took side

characters out of Barfly, the less colorful, less zany ones and followed them around for a week, you might get a story like King of Herrings.

SG: Yes, yes. You're right. It's like if you look at their one sheet, it has New Orleans in the background. It's not a beautiful shot, but it perfectly fits with the story. Definitely a great character study, a great film for filmmakers in New Orleans, local filmmakers, Louisiana filmmakers. This is an example of, "You don't need - you need more creativity than you need money." Even though money will get your film made, creativity, in my opinion, in the end, is what sells it.

RM: Perfect way to end the podcast. Big shoutout to Bayou Brief Magazine, which did a whole history of the Marcello family and the New Orleans mafia throughout the 20th century. They just published Chapter II of it just a couple days ago and they talk about the history of gambling here and what a huge role poker played in the formation of the city as well as the role of slot machines and so forth and so on. Stan, where can people find you on the internet?

SG: On the interweb tubes, it's real easy, stanleybgill.com.

RM: Cool. You have a blog as well, is that right?

SG: Yes, the blog is hollywoodsouthblog.com or hollywoodsouth.com. You can get there either way. I have migrated my writing over to stanleybgill.com. HollywoodSouth is more of an aggregator for news information, industry talk, that kind of thing but I've been writing more on my Facebook, but everything can be accessed through stanleybgill.com.

RM: All right. Killer. King of Herrings is available for streaming all over the place. You can get it on Tubi, iTunes, Amazon, Google Play, YouTube. It is definitely worth the rental. So, support your people, watch the movie, enjoy it. In fact, you should probably watch the movie before you listen to this podcast. Note to self, put all of the streaming info at the top of the episode, not the end of the episode, for next time. [Laughter]

SG: [Laughter] Yes, that would be great. I would highly recommend you watch the film and then listen to the podcast, but if you've gotten to the end of the podcast and realized, "Oh, I should have watched the film first," don't worry, it's still good.

RM: [Laughter] Yes. Exactly. Thank you, Stan. It's been awesome having you.

SG: Thank you, Randy.

RM: All right man.

SG: Thanks for inviting me. *[00:50:00]*

RM: Subscribe, rate, review, tell your friends, et cetera.

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