

Vindicta Director Sean McNamara Talks Slasher-Thriller & Italian Renaissance Influences



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By [Grant Hermanns](#) — Oct 9, 2023, 2:31 PM EDT

☰ SUMMARY

- *Vindicta* is a horror-thriller film centered around a rookie paramedic in a town plagued by riots and a sadistic serial killer.
- The movie blends social commentary on homelessness in America with slasher thrills, aiming to be both insightful and bloody.
- The director, Sean McNamara, discusses the development of the movie, including the inspiration behind the villain's look and the challenges of filming on a budget.

A town in flames becomes terrorized by a powerful killer in ***Vindicta***. The horror-thriller centers on a rookie paramedic whose first days in a city plagued by riots becomes all the more terrifying when a sadistic serial killer begins targeting a select group of people, leading her to learn of a dark secret with connections to her own family.

Elena Kampouris leads the ensemble *Vindicta* cast alongside Michasa Armstrong, Jaime M. Callica, Karolina Cubitt, Daniel Cudmore, Robin Atkin Downes, Travis Nelson, Sean Astin, and Jeremy Piven. Blending social commentary on homelessness in America with slasher thrills, the movie aims to be an insightful ride as much as a bloody one.

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Ahead of the movie's release, *Screen Rant* spoke exclusively with director Sean McNamara to discuss *Vindicta*, the timely themes of its story, crafting a potential iconic slasher look and the Italian Renaissance influences on the kills.

Sean McNamara Breaks Down *Vindicta*



Screen Rant: I find it curious that you don't seem to really have much horror experience prior to coming on board for *Vindicta*. What was it about Steven's story or Ian's script that really spoke to you to make the jump to this genre?

Sean McNamara: *Well, it's interesting. Steven actually had me do my first horror film the year before with Dangerous Game, and I've always loved the genre ever since I was a kid watching movies like The Exorcist, The Shining, Carrie, Halloween. I just love the genre, it's just something that I wasn't making, but then when I got the script, it was like, "Wow, this, this could be really something, this could be something interesting." Then, getting together with Ian and Steven to come up with, "How can we make this the most frightening film that we can think of?"*

I had taken a trip to Italy and saw Michelangelo's David, and I was like, "Okay, we got to figure out how we get him into this movie." Then, I was in Malta, and I saw all of these torture

devices, and I was like, "Alright, we got to come up with things that we've never seen before". So it was kind of a combination of Ian's amazing script, and Steven's wonderful production, and just coming up with ideas, and then just having a stellar cast to round it out.

How much would you say it changed from when they first approached you with it to what we see in the film?

Sean McNamara: It changed a lot. That happens on Steven's films a lot, you come up with ideas, and when you get the locations, and which actors are available, it definitely changed a lot. But the core [concept] of a town that has been taken over by a bunch of thugs, that was always there, that was it, but how we tell the story of what actually happens in this town, that kind of evolved.

I love that you mentioned Halloween as one of your favorite horror movies, because I do very much get that Michael Myers-like approach to this villain. Was that your big inspiration for this film, or did you have any others in the genre that you looked to when putting this movie together?

Sean McNamara: Well, I love all the films like Scream, like Halloween, where they have a guy in a mask that if you saw it in the light of day, you'd be like, "Whatever, it means nothing," but you do it at night, and you do it skulking around the hedges, all of a sudden, it becomes very, very scary. They literally become iconic, and everybody knows that, "Oh my god, this is what this mask means." So, for me, coming up with the whole David mask, from seeing Michelangelo's David, and then like, I have three

boys, and they all wear hoodies around the house, and I see just a crack of their face, and that's just always a menacing look. Then, I was sitting with Josie, our costume designer, and we were just saying it's not menacing enough, and she added the leather jacket on at the end, that full-length leather jacket, and then all of a sudden it was like, "Alright, now it's starting to get menacing." And, we shot it through fire, and we shot through smoke, we were always trying to make every time we see David to be just a little bit more scary.



Slashers have ranged everywhere from the grounded take on Michael in the original to some of the more supernatural characters like Jason and Freddy, and David in this movie feels like a very interesting blend. He takes a lot of damage, and yet still keeps coming back. During the development or the filming, did you, Steven and Ian really lay down some rules for yourselves on how much damage he could actually take before it starts to become a little egregious for how he's surviving this?

Sean McNamara: Well, it ultimately stems from starting out that David is a normal guy with a normal family. There's nothing supernatural about it, and he's doing what any father would do, tries to rescue his family and is unsuccessful at that. I didn't want to give too much away, but that's what starts his journey to get back and have revenge towards all of the people that caused his family harm. So, as it goes on, the sort of damage that he can take gets worse and worse, but all the things that happened to him are very much of this world.

You mentioned the cast earlier, and this is a movie that very much rides on Elena, as much as it's cool to have established actors like Jeremy and Sean involved. What was it like looking for the perfect lead to carry this movie?

Sean McNamara: Well, it started about a year before, I had lunch with Elena Kampouris, and she's a force to be reckoned with. I just said, "She's gonna be a star one day." You know, you meet those people that just hold the room, and she's just so articulate, and so talented, just talking to her. Then, I saw some of the films she did, and I said, "She's equally talented as an actor, just incredible," and then we had the opportunity to bring her into the movie. Now, she brought in like the speaking Mandarin, because she speaks Mandarin, and she wanted to add that shading to her character. She brought in [the character's athleticism], because she does know how to fight and martial arts, and she just worked out to just get in such great shape for this movie, she added those elements, and that's what I love about making films with actors that bring their magic to the floor. So, that was Elena, just total

gold, and I know she's gonna win an Oscar one day, she's that talented.

Next up, Jeremy Piven. In my phone, when his picture comes up, I keep thinking Ari Gold's calling me, it always gives me a start. Super talented guy, and a quick plug for him, he just did a film called The Performance, it's coming out next year, and he's gonna win tons of awards. He's such a talented actor, and I'm just so glad I got to work with him, and he just added so much to the film that we did, the nice nurturing father who wants what's best for his daughter. And then, as the film gets unraveled, we start to see more and more about his past.

And then, ultimately, Rudy. Sean Astin? I mean, the chance to get to work with him is extraordinary. And from the Lord of the Rings, he would just regale us with Peter Jackson stories, and just tell us these amazing things. He's just great at his craft, had tons of ideas, which we used all of them, and he was just great to work with. So, it just made the shooting of the movie really fun, but the three of them together were just gold.



One thing I find interesting about Sean Astin in this movie is that we often see him as a nice guy character, and in real life, he is like you were, just such a sweetheart. Yet, with this role, he plays such the opposite of that. Did you ever have to push him to go further with the character, or was he always ready to take it that step further to be the demanding captain to Elena's character?

Sean McNamara: I'll even just say more to him, that was something that he kind of brought to it, that he is a no-nonsense captain. It's in the story what happened in the past, but the way he decided to play it was no nonsense, that wasn't necessarily in the script. But I liked his take on it. I said, "Yeah, let's go with that. This is fun." He is just such a talent, he makes everything work, and so it's interesting to have such a nice guy, and then at the same time, he can be a tough guy with a past.

The production values of this movie are quite impressive, especially with a lot of the kills. With indie productions like this, sometimes they can be

hampered by that. What that was like for you, working on this budget and still having a lot of those creative ambitions when it came to the visuals?

Sean McNamara: When it came to those things, like the kills, I had gone on vacation last year to Malta, this gorgeous ancient city, walking around, and they ended up having a museum of horrors. I just found myself down there, just appalled at what I saw, what they would do in the Middle Ages to people. So, a lot of the things that came up in the story are things that we found down in there from this museum in Malta, and then everything had to be real. Everything that's in the script was a real torture device that was used in the Middle Ages and are in museums now, so we just kept on with that. I always try to find things that we haven't seen in cinema before, and hopefully, that work. I don't want to give away too much, but there are certain things that happen that are pretty gory and pretty amazing.

If you can answer this while avoiding spoilers, I'd be curious to know. Which did you find was one of the trickier kills to pull off?

Sean McNamara: Maybe the Head Crusher, because you have a human being in this real device that could kill you. So, how you do that and not hurt the actor is a thing, so we had to be very careful of how we handled it. Because if you do it wrong, you could do some serious damage on the set. [Chuckles]

One thing I found intriguing is this movie's exploration of the topic of homelessness in this country. That's something that a lot of big cities

like Seattle in this movie have to deal with. Did that come from the script initially, did that come from you, Steven, and Ian's brainstorming sessions together on how to further elevate this script?

Sean McNamara: Well, there are things that are just ripped right out of the headlines in this. We chose the city of Seattle, and this is going on down there. There is crazy rioting going on, and we see it from the news' point of view, and then we just go away, but we're going, "What is it from the point of view of an EMT? What does she walk into after the rioters leave?" They gotta go in and help people that need help, so that was, I found, really interesting of how we get them in there, and the idea of, "We're in this town where there's homeless, so what do the homeless do if there's a riot there?" It's bad enough just when there's peacetime, but what are they going to do when they're just there during an extremely violent time of protests?"



Now, did you give any of your actors, even Elena, homework of going and visiting an actual fire department to really get an on-the-ground view of what they were going to be bringing to life?

Sean McNamara: Absolutely. Elena, we brought her to the real training center that you see in the movie, and we matched her up with a female firefighter to make sure she knew how to carry herself, carry the equipment, what she would say, how she would react, how she would stand. That's all research that is done, and Elena is such a good actress, and did a meticulous job of getting it right, so it was incredible.

What would you say was one of the more intriguing things for you to have learned from her experience?

Sean McNamara: Well, the whole story is triage, like, "Who do you go and take care of first? If you look at somebody, you know they're gonna die, do you make them comfortable and move on, or do you go forget them, because they're gonna die and go help somebody else?" That's helpful, and that, to me, was intriguing of you're going to try to save everybody is your first instinct, but when you have to choose a life and death for people, that is a crazy thing. But we tried to make it as accurate as possible. What would you do if somebody got their throat slit, how do you save that person? What would you do? So, we tried to make it as accurate as possible, and it is amazing, those guys have to make decisions on a daily basis of who they're going to go to first, of who's the most saveable.

I'd love to hear about crafting the look for this movie, because it doesn't feel so dark, even though a lot of it's set at night, but at the same time doesn't feel so overly lit that anything becomes less terrifying. What was it like finding that right balance, even when you were in the daytime scenes for this movie?

Sean McNamara: You know, it's interesting, a lot of horror films are shot at night, and actually the first draft of this script was all at night. I was going, "I would love to see them in the day and have it go into night, and that night becomes a scary thing." Like, they go into this area that had rioting and looting, and they go help people in the day, and it's kind of scary. Some weird things happen, but it's kind of okay. And then they go back, and they're like, "All right, we're ready for our next shift," and now they're saying, "You gotta go back at night where all the bad stuff goes down," and that's like, "Okay, really, we're gonna go do that?"

I saw the result of it in the day, now I have to actually really be in it across the bridge, where there's really bad stuff happening." So that was fun, and shooting our David through fire and through smoke and figuring out a way to shoot it through in the day. I always picked out burned-out cars and had foreground flames going when we would see him to keep some sort of an element of tension going on when we would see David in the day.

Vindicta ends on a note where there could be more. Have you, Ian, and Steven had any talks about possible expansions of the story?

Sean McNamara: Absolutely. I mean, that's the whole point. We

want to have the David go on.

About Vindicta



When a city is terrorized by a sadistic serial killer, a seasoned detective and a newly recruited paramedic are forced into a deadly game of vengeance, only to discover the key to stopping the bloodshed lies in unlocking the truth of their own haunted pasts. Elena Kampouris (Children of the Corn), Sean Astin (The Lord of the Rings franchise), and Jeremy Piven (Entourage) star in this edge-of-your-seat thriller from the director of On a Wing and a Prayer.

Vindicta is now in select theaters and on digital platforms and VOD.



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