

Filmmaker Jonas Åkerlund has worked with the world's biggest stars, from Madonna to Metallica to The Rolling Stones. His career spans over three decades, and includes rock videos, commercials, short films, and documentaries. For his latest feature film, *Lords of Chaos*, he returns to Scandinavia and his own black metal roots for his most personal project to date. We visited him in his homes in Stockholm and Los Angeles.

# Jonas







# Åkerlund

Filmmaker Jonas Åkerlund's career spans over three decades now. That is pretty crazy.

Rock videos, commercials, short films, documentaries, feature films, all with a clear artistic vision, a unique visual language, and an emotional presence that simultaneously functions as visceral eye candy and thoughtful meditations. I love Jonas work, I always have. We've hung out once in a while over the years in that classic Swedish capacity of mutual friends and working overseas. Ten years ago, I edited a book called *True Norwegian Black Metal* with the photographer Peter Beste. Peter was fascinated by the music, the culture and the notoriety of the events, and as a perfectly obsessive photo journalist, he started travelling to Norway over and over to take thousands of photographs that he brought for the two of us to compile into a visual document of the subculture. Jonas' is a fan of the book, so he requested that I'd conduct this interview.

I was happy to oblige. Jonas and I share a fascination for the machinations of pop culture and the identity politics of the myriad of microtribes and macrotribes that have shown up and disappeared in this lifetime. Over the years, this has been a frequent topic. Preparing for our talk, I watched the lion's share of Jonas' work as a director of music videos. This was an epiphany of sorts as the nature of music and stardom has changed through smartphones, social media and streaming. The presence of celebrity in these cinematic shorts has changed, and in an odd way, so has the nature of our attachment to the music itself. The music video in hindsight has become a form of "Gesamtkunstwerk", where the director is a component alongside the featured players, the visual style, the backdrop, the costumes, the choreography. Call it operatic. The music, whether it is by Metallica or Beyonce is repertoire, like a performance of *The Magic Flute* or *The Ring Cycle*, and the staging of the music sets a mood which now mostly is removed from the business of the music business trying to sell a product with a promotional film.

Jonas Åkerlund's rock videos are short films, and often little cinematic masterpieces. I found myself wondering how they will be viewed in a distant future where Metallica and Beyonce might be mostly forgotten, and where the visual language of the late 20th century and early 21st will still be studied and understood, or misunderstood for that matter. I find myself really liking that a masterful visual artist like Jonas spent his formative years working in an idiom that everyone thought was ephemeral, but seems to ultimately not be, and that perhaps the musicians that we feel or felt are omnipresent will one day be forgotten, while the music videos, originally created as promotional tools, will end up as freestanding films.

I brought this line of thinking with me as I watched *Lords of Chaos*. The notorious events that unfolded in the early 1990s in the milieu of the Norwegian black metal music scene are now mythical and have receded into the kind of representation that often follows the interplay between human tragedy and

media sensation. A fictionalised account in cinema form of a series of real-life events has the labyrinthine narrative pattern within it from the get-go. Most filmmakers use the turgid disclaimer "based on a true story", but Jonas chose the much ballsier "based on truth and lies". In Norway, 25-odd years ago, a troubled metal-head committed suicide, a 20-year-old man-child murdered a 25-year-old man-child. Another man-child got cruised by a gay man and stabbed him to death. And architectural masterpieces were burned to the ground. These events occurred alongside a local underground music cult, starting as a micro-tribe and rapidly expanding into pockets around the globe, and now a quarter of a century later lasting and thriving as a macro-tribe contained within the even larger macro-tribe of metal music culture and its attached identity politics.

With the advent of social media and smart phones, juvenile cultural stances remain as a key part of our identikit well up into middle age. We all remember the high-pitched whine of the spoiled man-child. The kid in your high school class who would draw swastikas over and over again on every notebook page. The kids who would surround themselves with the insignia of totalitarian power, be it nazi or be it satan. The adolescent joy of pursuing us-verses-them-art that fed into the elitist stance of their chosen or inflicted outsiderdom. Extreme music, extreme films, extreme drinking, extreme acts. Repeatedly blunting the edges of reality and allowing the raging ID and the super ego of adolescence to take charge. How this works 25 years later when the extreme outsider stance of your teenage years is maintained as your cultural identity, as you struggle with car payments and a mean boss and pre-school pick up logistics is a key component to how I think *Lords of Chaos* is experienced as a film. In Mackay's 1842 masterpiece *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* the mechanisms of mass hysteria and moral panics are described. Salacious media events become hipster calling cards. Six years after the murders and church burnings, Lower East Side and Williamsburg art hipsters wore the t-shirts and the corpsepaint and played in imitation bands as the first sensationalist bestselling paperback book on Norwegian black metal was published. Fifteen years after the events, Norwegian black metal had become a notable source of Norway's export income, and coffee table books and documentaries started to happen.

In 2018, luxury consumption of ideology is legion, whether you are a west side Los Angeles yoga chick or a committed Norwegian black metal head. Identity politics have ended up in a place where the belief system supporting the façade you present has become a brand, whether you like it or not. This becomes troubling for the people who perceive themselves as OG, and can lead to odd situations of what hip hop legend Grandmaster Caz calls "lioners"; people who feel the need to write themselves into a cultural history they did not originally participate in. For the metal subculture, authenticity is key, possibly as an aspect of its rather childlike stance towards the world at large. Luckily for the metal community and the black metal cult, Jonas Åkerlund is not only an OG metal head with immaculate pedigree (he played drums in the proto-black metal band Bathory and helped design their badass logo) but also a major visual artist with a significant core understanding of the humanist and existentialist connotations of making a movie about adolescent rage and despair, murder, suicide, identity politics, passion and outsiderdom.



This interview took place in Jonas' living room in Stockholm in July, moments after I'd seen the film. I was enthused and dazed by the experience, still am.

"THIS MOVIE,  
FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, WOULD  
BE MADE ON MY TERMS."

Stockholm, Sweden

*You're the only one I know that could make it too. So it worked. I remember one or two conversations we had about this over the years and it was clear that you could handle it. So, how much thought went into this? 20 years' worth?*

— Yes, kind of. It was strange how it went down when I had been walking around thinking about it so damn long. And then when you sit down and write it goes really fast because you have done so much thinking for such a long time.

κ — It will be better that way. Who is the guy that you wrote the movie with?

Å — Dennis Magnusson. Dennis was a, what's it called? A Voice! My good friend Tomas Alfredson [the Swedish film director] and I were looking at the whole narrative and I felt that I had not written a feature film script before — I've certainly done a lot of processing — but not in that way. Then he suggested Dennis, a dramaturge, who helped him. In particular, he worked on "Let The Right One In". Dennis and I wrote the film together.

κ — The dialogue is superb, just like in the movie Tomas; as a viewer you believe in everything that the kids say.

Å — Yes! Dennis came in and he was like an undercover metal head. Day three he appeared in a Motorhead t-shirt.

κ — An old one or a new one?

Å — Old!

κ — Aaah, that's tight.

Å — And then he starts to say things about metal that were a little too accurate.

κ — Was there any particular knowledge he dropped that bowled you over?

Å — He knew it all. He nailed the dates and the years better than I did. And then he began to talk about spin-off bands and obscure songs and general marginal knowledge.

κ — He is a metalhead.

Å — Aah! Then it turned out that he kept much better track of all these bands, than I do. So it became a three-step rocket blasting into orbit: Damn good writer, partner, and a mini-hard rock professor and a damn good friend.

κ — The fact that Tomas is so intellectual and has such cultural sensitivity, you can always rely on him when he proposes things.

Å — Agree. I utilise Tomas and Tomas utilises me. He

is one of the few that I know that you can use to get feedback and notes that matter. And that's damn hard.

κ — Yep. But the film industry seems quite advanced in the pseudo-truth-feedback, they half-lie to see what you think before they start agreeing with you.

Å — You've totally been in the US for too long. That's what it is like in America.

κ — Not at all in Sweden?

Å — No, it is very much like this, it could be the feedback that I do not like that actor, or I do not like that music, and that feedback is quite useless. I am fortunate where I have two champions who I use utilize a lot in my career and that's [Swedish film director] Stefan Jarl and Tomas Alfredson. Stefan Jarl has given me feedback on my work throughout my career and to be honest, I have no idea what he personally actually likes when it comes to my work.

κ — It's even better then!

Å — I have no idea what he thinks.

κ — Is he so sensitive that he can give you useful criticism on rock videos and commercials as well?

Å — Not commercials maybe, but in the past I'd show him everything. We saw a lot of each other and were always looking for reasons to do things together. He has seen Lords of Chaos as well.

κ — Once I got the email that we were going to do this interview I plowed through a batch of your rock videos on Youtube where you were listed as director. I have always admired your work as an artist, and now that the rock video is inching towards extinction, with its only consistent visual impact coming from super-mainstream artists, then as a cultural historian you begin to think about what the rock video means as a 1980s/1990s/2000s art form. Because then I can watch a video you did with say Lady Gaga or Metallica or whoever and actually experience it without thinking about the artist or even the song in question, and just think about if it works as a Gesamtkunstwerk. So, then the question, have you started thinking that way about your own videos done over these decades? What they meant, if they start to feel like short films instead?

Å — The first one that I think of in the manner of what you say, is the one I did for Metallica over 20 years ago. It really has integrity and sits dead against everything music videos were at the time. It was a Metallica video slash short film called *Turn the Page*. The whole idea and the way it was made was like



Right Jonas at home in West Hollywood, California.





what you do when you are shooting music videos. And now I've just done an action film, which is very different from the Lords of Chaos, and then I really felt that I got a lot from my experience with dance choreography, how I cut and the way I am thinking about storytelling.

κ — That's classic! All the old excellent Hong Kong action films and Asian horror films ever since the 60s, and also kung-fu movies, they are certainly based on thinking about dance choreography in how they structure all the action scenes. And Tarantino, *Kill Bill*, has a lot of choreography and dance and movement for the fight scenes. Lords of Chaos did not look like two million, it looked more like \$20 million. How did you produce it? How much of it is self-produced? Å — Well, you do get the kind of producers and the kind of support that you pay for. I just made this big action movie where there has been great support from talented producers who are there and willing to kill for you, but I was basically all by myself with the Lords of Chaos. I had a lot of great players involved, Ridley Scott was one of my producers. I also had Vice who you of course know well, and they are no ordinary film producers, as they are doing television, documentaries and their hipster magazine. I needed Vice to ensure that Lords of Chaos got made, partly because they are Americans, but they are as close to Americans can get to truly understanding this project. Above all things, they were brave enough to say yes to help me get this film made.

κ — It seemed like you did a lot of personal direction based on the eyes of the actors.

Å — Aah, clearly!

κ — The eyes and gaze drove many scenes.

Å — Yes, above all with Euronymous. For the whole of his journey in the film it's very apparent how it starts and how it will end. It's a rollercoaster.

κ — Yes. Like The Sorrows of Young Werther. Or as any Bildungsroman really.

Å — Yeah, it's funny you say that because I have said from the beginning that this film could actually be about anyone or any time, or anywhere. One of the sketchy sources of weirdness about Lords of Chaos, and how it all happened in Norway is that people are damn sensitive about this story. People think it's their story that it belongs to them, people have so much commentary and they get upset.

κ — Whether they were actually there or not!

Å — Well yeah. Like Bob Marley at Gröna Lund, "I was actually there". Though the reality is no, you were not.

κ — Did you see Bob Marley in Stockholm in 1981? Å — No, but my brother was there. I've probably told people that I was there. With this thing in Norway, so many damn people think that this is important. It's a story that people think that they own. People think it is more important for them than for anyone else, and then they will be damn sensitive about it. I have said several times, that this is a film we have seen before. In the favelas in Brazil and in the suburbs of England. We've seen it before.

κ — Yes, the first thing you think of is *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Å — Like I said, I know that this story has been told before. The big difference is that these young people have nothing to blame, really. There was no one who was raped by their parents or were beaten, or were poor or had a drug problem. There is no one to blame.

κ — No, of course not. And it is almost never that way with heavy metal as a social identity, if you wanna talk identity politics. For metal as a social identity seems to

exist in exclusion of adolescence, in a strange way. It's not that "I became a metalhead cuz my mom hit me, and then I was unemployed so I started headbanging".

Å — I think that is why heavy metal survives. Why a child can go with his dad and grandfather to Sweden Rock and enjoy it. That's pretty cool.

κ — It's all about the myths, and it's the same thing as opera or gothic novels, a caricature, if you wish, of all that you experience in life, that your metal mirrors you, most often flattering, but not always. Death and life, and that there are moral phenomena and it is Milton against God and Satan, and all that. And whether this is pretentious champing at the bit or not, the Lords of Chaos can not escape these themes, they are there whether we like it or not. So it does seem like you and Dennis looked at Voltaire or Rousseau or the Bildungsroman when you worked on this.

Å — We did not, but this must surely be a compliment. κ — It is a super-compliment! Good artists can always extrapolate these things, from the world they inhabit. You guys have this skillful intuition about what it's like to be young, so you may have just soaked up Voltaire or Rousseau without having had to read it. Å — Haha, I did not read it! I knew that this was a timeless story, and over the years once in a while I had heard that others had tried to pull off making something about Norwegian black metal.

κ — So you bought the rights to the book Lords of Chaos.

Å — What happened was that I met a Japanese man who is an investor, and he loves black metal. True

κ — Who got upset?

Å — Some people are angry that this movie is made and passed their sentence on it way before we started filming, and I have not taken that seriously. I think, the most difficult situation was around Euronymous' parents. They have distanced themselves from this scene and are very disappointed with Euronymous' friends.

κ — Has Øystein's parents seen the movie?

Å — No, but they have read the script. That's what I had to do, I felt that this movie could not be done if I did not have the music. When Euronymous died, the rights went to Euronymous' parents, and he was generously giving co-songwriter credits to many people. It's crazy how many different people have songwriting credits on these songs. And I had to get some kind of okay to use the music, even though we had the music re-recorded. Everything is newly recorded for it to match the movie, so the sound will be bad at the beginning and get better and better and better. And like that. In the beginning of the movie they are in the rehearsal space and are just figuring out their sound.

κ — The film felt right. It never felt like the old guy trying to remember what it feels like to be young. What's your analysis on that?

Å — Who knows. I have to admit that I have taken many pieces from my own past. I always say my memory is so damn bad that I do not remember things. But funnily enough, I've been able to draw on my own experience. The jokes, how they are all inept around girls, how everyone looks and acts. And how there

*"I have taken many pieces from my own past."*

Norwegian Black Metal is huge in Japan. He had even started his own version of this. Where the corpse paint make-up musicians were pop stars and superheroes who could fly. With action figures in cereal boxes.

κ — You got a little poseable Euronymous?

Å — No but you could build a little cardboard church that you could set on fire and stuff. He was crazy enough to pay for the rights to the book. We bought the rights in order to clear everything. It is not a good book. I read it when it came out, as I got it as a Christmas gift from my brother. Since then I have never read it again. There's a much better book, I don't know if you've looked at Necrobutcher's new book, *Death Archives*. It's damn good; he has lots of pictures never seen before, and he has pulled the story together from his perspective. And he was there. I think it is the best book. I like Necro. I do not know if he agrees, but we're kind of friends. We talked to him the other day. And he has been skeptical as hell about this movie.

And that's one of the choices you make when you put together a biographical movie, work with the people who are still around, or not. Or should I wait until they are all dead. Or do you work without caring what they think. What do you do? I think I've managed to choose some sort of strange combination, when I looked them up while getting started with the film without them being consistently involved.

is always an odd undertone of comedy, even when there shouldn't be one. Thinking you are an adult when you clearly are not. Luckily enough, I remember those feelings so damn clear from my own teenage years. And it may be that what made me remember is that I'm still hanging out with my old friends from that time. As I said, on this past Wednesday here, we were acting exactly as we were when we were 14-years-old. I promise you, so exactly, exactly. The party in the movie, where he blows fire and stuff, it was the Gullpans garden. I have been to that party so many times.

κ — It never felt like you were taken out of the film experience by something that didn't feel emotionally correct. You must have spent so much time on personal direction of the actors.

Å — Very much. Very, very much so. Especially in the preamble and what I began to tell you earlier was that what was so damn awesome with the actors I chose for this movie was they all became so damn amazingly engaged in their characters. All the way down to the smaller roles; everyone was in touch with their true role model and everyone did their own research.



*Above* The road between Bergen and Oslo plays an important part in Lords of Chaos.

*Right* Filmed at Holmenkollen, with views over Oslo.





*Above* Working from home in West Hollywood, California. Jonas also has a home in Stockholm, Sweden.





Above Rory Culkin plays Euronymous in Lords of Chaos.  
Below Åkerlund's home i full of collected artefacts and memorabilia from his films.



And there is so much research material — on this story I had put together a picture script that was 700 pages or something like that. So, when the script has pictures with it — that could be a nice book, by the way — but in any case, this thing with wigs and instruments when you are watching a movie is very, very difficult. It goes so badly wrong so many times, so often.

I was afraid of it, it goes right into a death sentence, like, even trying to make actors with instruments and wigs rock out and look legit.

κ — Did you have to use some strange digital mumbo jumbo to get the musicianship and wigs to look real?

Å — No, it was all blood, sweat and tears. It all happened in the rehearsal space. Rory got a guitar from me one year before we started filming, he stopped cutting his hair to grow it out long, but then we were really unlucky and he had to book another damn job just when our movie was going to get going, so he cut his hair, and it became a wig anyway. Something which was incredibly beautiful to see, and which I did not realise until we had finished the movie was how incredibly hard it was for the actors to separate from their role characters, especially Rory. He did not want to take off the leather jacket. It was terrible for him to separate from the role and he was so moved at the premiere. When we got to the Q&A, as we stood on the stage at Sundance, me, him and some of the actors, Rory received a question from someone, and he did not answer, and then I saw he was in tears. He was so terribly touched by the movie and I suppose he got back into that character, there for a moment.

κ — In your movie, it is completely clear that they are very young, that they are kids. And I can sit around and talk Voltaire and all that, but what is moving and touching about the movie is that you can completely understand their chaos, and remember your own. That it reminds you of the chaotic identity politics

κ — I think you showed great sensitivity in how you described him as well, you could sense your own memory of teenage depression, and although I've never experienced a teenage depression of this bleak depth, you watched the movie realising that teenage or adolescent depression reaches this abyss of pure hopelessness. The film does not feel like cool metalhead Jonas Åkerlund, the eternal hard rock player made it, what it feels like is a deeply human generational portrait. You should be very pleased with that.

Å — Oh — that is exactly how the movie grew and unfolded for me as well. What I think many people will expect from this movie is that it's a movie about black metal and that it will have a lot of music and that it is going to be a bit violent. And nothing deeper than that.

κ — The violence was horrendous. You succeeded. It looked like unpleasant everyday violence.

Å — It had to be. The big focus of the film was still the relationship between Varg and Euronymous. That was what became the core. I could have done . . . maybe it was better to do a TV series of this, because then you had time to go deeper into so many interesting aspects of the story that I researched but couldn't fit in the movie. From the police survey to the music to the parents, the weird Swedish-Norwegian feud to the trial with Varg, all of these narratives were a film unto themselves. I had a version of the film starting with a journalist who is interviewing Necrobutcher 20 years after the events, and that felt like the movie as well. I travelled in so many directions with this movie before I ended up where I ended up: Euronymous is easily influenced, he is young and he meets Pelle Dead who takes everything to a level of extremes that no one could have expected, and after that, Varg shows up and they build an extremely tight relationship, you know, "I want to hug you so much that I almost kill

*"I remember that feeling as a teenager when you felt lonely and strange and misunderstood."*

of your own youth. Who has seen the movie as of yet, out of the people on the inside of the story?

Å — No one actually. Euronymous' parents will probably never see the movie, and I do not know if I think they should either. I think they were amazing that they wanted to talk to me and that they wanted to read the script and that they understood that the film portrays one person and one child.

κ — And a lifespan.

Å — And a lifespan. If you go online and google Euronymous, you'll find a monster.

κ — And you'll find a fascist.

Å — Yes. Whatever you find, it has a negative tone and it was my pitch, if you can use that kind of language, that is what I told Euronymous' parents as a motivating factor for why this movie should be made. I think that is good. After that, Anders, who is Pelle Dead's brother, Pelle Ohlin's brother, has been extremely helpful but is still deeply troubled by the whole scene. And is probably thinking of his brother every day.

you". I remember that feeling as a teenager when you felt lonely and strange and misunderstood and then found someone who locked into a dialogue with you.

κ — Those kinds of friendships could become so important and so close that they were almost more rewarding than love or sex relationships at that age, because you could feel so unbelievably and deeply understood. But the flipside of that which both you and I remember is when you also started trying to impress each other or trump each other with acts of vandalism or violence or drinking or blasphemy or whatever it was. That you were so uncertain about your social role and social standing that you constantly had to try to impress and intimidate your friends. How did you get from metal dude to film maker?

Å — What happened was that we had Bathory and then there were lots of other bands and here and there and so on, but the same day I realised that film editing was the most natural thing in the world for me to do. I became like film-editing Rainman and got enormous amounts of self-confidence from that.



κ — Was it the Candlemass video?

Å — No, it was really long before that, because in this context I started working as an assistant to a director who was a damn good film editor.

κ — Who was it?

Å — His name is Anders Skog. He was also the drummer in the band Ratata. Anders Skog was way ahead of his time. He had a brother named Johan Skog. They were way ahead of their time with everything that constituted storytelling in a narrow time slot, they were filming very wide beautiful images and telling their stories in a suspicious and mysterious way. Nowadays, everyone does this, but back then this was a brand new exciting stance and I sucked it all up and absorbed it like a damn bath sponge. And, becoming a filmmaker became my number one priority, so I stopped playing drums and drifted away from the music scene in that way. So I became quite uninterested with the whole scene. You know that Pelle Dead has a bit part in my Candlemass video?

κ — I did not know.

Å — Dead is in that video dancing. And Pelle was one of those metal heads hanging out at metal shows and metal bars, and I did not stop being a metal head just because I became a filmmaker. I do not know how much we are going to talk about Bathory, but Ace was a similar kind of person as Anders Skog was to me: He was such a wow of a person. I've never met such a guy before. And we had played in a thousand bands, but we had never played with someone who was as brilliant as he was and had so much integrity. I've never really tried to take any credit for Bathory, at all, I was involved with the logo and goat, but everything was Ace's vision. It was a little Uriah Heep, Black Sabbath, a bit of Motörhead and then he wanted it to be real fast as well. And then that Ace could not sing in a traditional way, so he sang the way he did, which made it become the unique band it was.

κ — Bathory is Proto-Black Metal just like Stooges is Proto-punk. So, as you and Dennis worked on the script, it is clear that it travelled in numerous directions as more information and material was made available to you.

Å — There's so much of it online, but there is also a lot that isn't. I can give you an example of a small detail that changed unbelievably much to me in the research work that happened quite late, in the development stage, but that changed the direction of the movie. A friend of mine had access to, not online, but there is a picture, a police image of Euronymous' dead body in the stairwell. When he showed me this picture I said to him, "That's not him. That's the wrong picture. You're wrong, it's not him". It was a little hard to see, a lot of blood and so on. Then he says, "yes, that is certainly him" — "but he has short hair", "yes, he cut his hair the day before he was murdered". And I did not know that. And that's probably the one thing the fans will say I got completely wrong.

κ — That is incredible, as he changes such an important part of his appearance, it is clear that he desires to change not only your persona, but your state of mind.

Å — That's the reason I'm telling you this now, that in the scripting process, I changed my mind. Dennis and I — we were really shocked! For us, it meant that Euronymous was heading somewhere. And it changed the entire third act of the film. That's when he's in a head space where he wants to get out! Move into his own apartment, give Varg his damn rights back and give up on these acquaintances, and I don't think that

we would have had a clear picture of the last part of his journey if I hadn't seen that photograph.

κ — Of course. Absolutely not.

Å — That kind of stuff really happened. And the thing is that this will continue. Unfortunately, now the movie is made. But it goes on, more will be revealed. You can probably imagine though, with my movie, how many mistakes I will be accused of. According to some people.

κ — Comic boy guy says: "This Scorpions badge did not show up until April -93!"

Å — With all that stuff, I am 100% right, actually. Sneakers, t-shirts, patches, hairstyles, instruments...

κ — Big respect and big up that all the t-shirts were boxfresh. Takes a great director.

Å — Yea, they were brand new too! All my old friends had a look-see. But of course, it's a driving force for me to make this movie on point with all that. One of the most nerve-wracking situations was when Erik, Vatain-Erik saw the film. Because he knows everything about this. And there I got approval. In that department, it's clean, as well. We built the instruments to make it look right.

κ — Are there any made up characters?

Å — Just one.

κ — The female photographer?

Å — Yes. I know that Euronymous had a girlfriend when he died. There are lots of pictures of a girl who was around, but nobody knows anything about her. I have asked around and tried to read about her. Then there was another girl named Ilse, a Swedish girl whom Varg was dating. There was a rumour that Euronymous was involved with her too.

κ — I had heard that as well.

Å — So we decided to put her in the movie as a composite. My friend Attila, who is now the singer in Mayhem, lived with Euronymous just a few weeks before he died, and he confirmed that there was a girlfriend around at that point. It is actually Attila's son who plays Attila in the movie. He looks exactly like Attila did at the time. Jason Arnup, the Kerrang! journalist plays himself in the movie.

κ — Was there a lot of source material from the Kerrang! archives that was used?

Å — No, not really. What Jason told me was that he recorded the interview with Euronymous, and has it on tape somewhere. So, I was like, "Come on!". Both the interviews that Finn makes with Varg and Euronymous are taken from the interview that were featured in Kerrang!, as well as in the newspaper. It was quite long that interview, I have the newspaper.

I will always be able to say that this is a movie, and that it is "based on truth and lies" and I added that to step away from the story a bit. I thought it felt better than writing "loosely based on..."

When we did the deal with Adam Parfrey for the Lords of Chaos book it was contractual that it would say "based on the book Lords of Chaos", but I don't really know if I feel that is right, but in the captions that is what it says. But then I added to this at the beginning of the film that it is also based on truth and lies. But you know that yourself. This is the case when you sit with the guys and tell a story that has been told 20 times, so the fish you caught just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And that's the same with Varg. I do not usually talk so much about him, because I do not know much about him. If you want to give a moment of understanding or try to see things from different perspectives, it must be very strange for him that a movie was made about a part of his life. It would be strange for anyone.

MAN



*Above* Strolling Runyon Canyon in an original t-shirt from Helvete, the store that appears in the movie.  
*Below* Jack Kilmer as Dead.





κ — Yes, it does not matter if you are a killer or truck driver.

Å — I do not know if it's a good or bad thing, but it's like this one time, it's time to tell this story.

κ — What will happen next? Will the film be in theatres?

Å — As I said, as we talked about before, there's almost no platform left for independent movies and especially when it's dark and I got a NC17 rating on this movie.

κ — Because of the violence?

Å — Sex, violence or language, that's what they judge. In my case there is violence.

κ — But your violence is not glamorous. It is real and scary.

Å — And that's why. With glam violence it would have been an R. Which was what I wanted. So I've had to restrain this movie, but the one you saw now was the uncensored version of the movie. But there's a censored version that will be going to the movies in the US this autumn. And then it has been much slower in Europe than I thought. We did Sundance and got great reviews, we did screenings there that were totally magical, I was really surprised that the American hipster audience connected as well as they did and it became clear to me that this movie works across the border.

κ — You do not need to know shit about black metal to like this film and react to it.

Å — You do not have to be a special age, you do not need children, you do not have to be children. It feels as if the film works really well for all kinds of different people, different types of people. And Sundance proved it. I still think this movie will be bigger in Europe, I really believe that... If you want to watch the wider audience, I think Germany, Scandinavia, of course, England...

κ — What a damn journalist question, does this feel like your first masterpiece or does it feel like other stuff you've done are masterpieces too?

Å — I can say that I've done some milestones in my life when you look back at your life when you're a bit older, as I have started to do. Do you remember when every new thing we did felt like it was the best thing you've ever done? That goes away. Then you start thinking "that was good, it was good, it was good...". And then when you grow up, you grow up proud of your body of work.

κ — That's an anarchist sentiment. Dignity of labour, there is dignity in effort.

Å — If anyone asks me today, what are you most proud of, then I say I've been in production every day since I started working with movies, that's my proudest thing. And it may be a much longer answer than that. But in order to answer that question, I feel that I have some turning points and stuff in life where you feel that things moved me somehow, not my career, because I have nothing to prove to anyone. It's often for myself.

κ — After 50, there is nothing to prove to anyone. You want the family and the friends and the beloved lady and you want to have some kind of dignity in your career. I think this is the best thing you've done as of yet.

Å — Thanks! It feels like that now, because it's new and... But now I've done another movie and now I feel that, which is much more uncharted territory for me, it's a movie I probably would not have made if I had not done *Lords of Chaos*. But my point is this, I've made six feature films, *Lords of Chaos* feels a bit like my first. Because it's the first thing I'm serious about, all my movies have been almost like

MAN

"I have had a list of ten projects I have dreamt of doing. *Lords of Chaos* was one, so now I have nine."



making commercials. "This seems to be a fun mission. This seems exciting. But *Lords of Chaos* feels a bit like my first movie. And what has happened now is that I dared to make a much bigger action film after such a small movie. I've also built self-esteem with the *Lords of Chaos* that I didn't have before. I came in with a fresh pair of eyes on a genre that I never thought I would work with. I have categorically rejected anything that is action films, these last 20 years. κ — Is the reason you turned them down that you thought the American film industry would box you in? Favourites of mine, like the Metallica video we talked about, the lovely Lady Gaga video, I like Smack My Bitch Up, Whiskey in the Jar, I like your Madonna videos too, but *Lords of Chaos* is suddenly so much better! In all of the videos I mentioned now, you use storytelling techniques and editing techniques that seem tailor-made for action rolls.

Å — Yes, that's what the Hollywood guys have thought throughout the years, especially 15 to 20 years ago when the music video director was the hottest of the hot.

κ — Yes, I remember. I worked at Def American then. Å — Yeah, you could pinch a job from Spielberg himself at that time. Damn many music video directors went on to make shitty feature movies and then there was nothing left. I've taken it a bit quietly and slowly. The film industry is like a damn thermometer. It's like you're fine, everything goes up and you're bad, everything goes down, have you got good ideas and you can sell them, if you have bad ideas, it's not possible. The key is to find the right people who believe in you. Right financiers, right producers and so on. And these guys, they have been fans and they have offered me movies for years that I said no to. And I like them, they are great guys. But it's also a challenge, because you can not get crazy as well, because then... You're not gonna get away with it. So it must be good stuff. So, they make me try to be better. And I've been working with artists, Madonna, for example, I've been working with her for over 20 years, and her big thing is that she makes me perform better than I thought I was. Each time. It's pretty good. I'm such a damn slow starter in my life, I've always been a late bloomer or what I should call it. Although I started working early and all that, and worked my fingers to the bone. But I've always taken it quite carefully and grown into stuff. I have always had dyslexia, everything I have to give comes from my impressions in life and not from reading. There are no shortcuts, there are no shortcuts. You can be young and get a hit movie and you can be a genius in the movie industry, but you can not cheat. And out in the big world, as a Swede you are a total hick. κ — Yes, every Swede is a country bumpkin.

Å — You're the cousin from the country.

κ — It does not matter if you are the hippest hipster in hippest Stockholm, you're still a hick from the boonies when you get out and roam around the big world, and that's really nice!

Å — I think it's really nice too, I always boost my inner hick. I am so damn respectful towards what I do, it is so amazing to be... For what's hard with movie making is that it's impossible to do this without paying someone and having to sell it on... and that means that you always have to be on your toes. κ — That's nice.

Å — It's great to work with movies and sometimes you still feel a bit embarrassed when you get into these conversations, or get a new project or complete an assignment. It feels like such a great win, and you feel like such an adrenaline junkie. The film industry is like a gigantic whirlwind of projects and ideas and talent and weirdos, people with ideas and visions from all over the world. And sometimes something just happens and becomes a reality. It can be the worst idea that becomes a brilliant movie or the best idea that turns out terrible. There truly is no rhyme or reason. I have a list of ten awesome projects I dream of doing. *Lords of Chaos* was one of them, so now I have nine, because I got one of them done. ✕



*Above* The burning churches was a mix of real churches and models built in Budapest. "We did it old school with gasoline and matches."



