

# BLOOD

## The Second Coming of

# TRASH

# THE DRESS

**J**ust in time for Halloween, Dustin Blake of Atlanta-based indy Productions, a 2010 EventDV 25 honoree, has resurrected the Trash the Dress (TTD) movement—and this time, he's added an element of the macabre.

Trash the Dress was all the rage in wedding videography circles in 2007–2008, a goth/grunge experiment grown out of the anti-bridal photography movement and adapted to moving pictures by a surprising number of enterprising event videographers (more on that later). But for most it was more a marketing move than a movement, an attempt to glom onto a passing fad that bore, at best, passing relevance to the prevailing trends in event video at the time. The TTD concept was both convoluted and stridently wasteful: to destroy the purest symbol of wedding elegance with imaginatively dramatic visuals, either as a way of

undercutting the notion of wedding elegance itself or (maybe) as a twisted way for a bride to underscore her wedding vows: “I’m in it for the long haul—I won’t need this anymore.” By and large, the approach was to sully that elegant dress by taking it to some unorthodox location and exposing it to sand, surf, dirt, rust, or some combination thereof.

But most wedding videographers weren’t really ready to let go of elegance at the time, and although there was certainly an incipient generation who saw things differently, tentative forays into TTD-land weren’t limited to the young and adventurous. In retrospect, the wedding video industry’s temporary dalliance with Trash the Dress was probably a harbinger of several things to come: absorbing nontraditional takes on the look and vibe of contemporary weddings into the videos that document them; embracing new



Dustin Blake producing an *indyBridal Extreme* (All images by Allison Reisz Photography)

points of artistic intersection between photographers and videographers who may have done little more than jostle for position in the past; attempting a photography-influenced wedding video style where the shot drives the story, rather than the other way around; and foreshadowing the evolution of wedding video into wedding *film*.

If the Trash the Dress movement of the previous decade was a starting point for the event filmmaking hey-day that arrived when video-capable DSLRs went mainstream in 2009, it was a false start. And it wasn't just because would-be TTD pioneers didn't have the right cameras. Most of them just didn't have a vision for it.

### ENTER THE INDYBRIDAL EXTREME

Blake's *indyBridal Extreme* films, as he calls the unique take on TTD that he has been producing these past few years, take the bride beyond the beach—and out of her gown. His latest, released on Halloween day, brings her to a backwoods barn in disrepair. The story that plays out is one part bridal elegance, one part slasher film, and one part skin flick.

The theme evolved after Blake asked his Facebook fans how they would next like to see a dress trashed. Always in search of new elements with which to destroy a bride's gown, Blake promised to give the people what they

wanted, and blood was the clear winner in his multiple-choice poll.

Facebook was also where he found his clients, by running an ad seeking a couple in the market for a TTD video (and willing to pay a premium for it). Facebook allows advertisers to target eerily specific criteria; young and engaged were just a few of Blake's. Blake chose a raven-haired beauty and her professional model fiancé to star. The couple represented three firsts for *indy Productions*: an all under-21 cast, a groom taking part in the trashing, and (ever-so-brief) nudity.

TTD films have always told a story to explain (or at least try to) how a bride arrived at the location (a junkyard, a lake bed, what have you) and at the conclusion that she should wreck her wedding gown in some creative way.

For this film, the story goes like this: A bride (really a decoy) loses patience when her fiancé is a no-show at their rehearsal. An interloper soon appears, and a brief catfight ensues. The attacker (actually, the real bride) pushes her down, snatches the dress from her, and flees to a barn. There, while slipping on the gown, she is met by the blood-thirsty, white-eyed groom. A sultry scene unfolds, leaving viewers, if not blushing, then sweating and peeking through their fingers.

The final scene reveals the groom (minus the scary white contacts) waking the real bride with a heart-melting smile on the morning of their wedding day. It was all a dream—a twisted, titillating dream.

### TTD REDUX

Blake's *indyBridal Extreme* films have clearly graduated from the once G-rated TTD videos of the mid-2000s. Las Vegas photographer John Michael Cooper of AltF coined the phrase “trash the dress” in 2001. The concept, also known as “fearless



Dustin Blake on the set for his latest Halloween-themed *indyBridal Extreme*



*Bridal elegance meets vampire film*

bridal” or “rock the frock,” was an outgrowth of a larger “anti-bridal” movement gaining steam at the time.

Unlike the photographers who adopted a watered-down version of TTD (“slightly smudging the dress?”), Cooper took some of his TTDs to unforgettable extremes—setting dresses on fire, for example.

Videographers such as Darrell Aubert, Chris P. Jones, Patrick Moreau, and others took notice in the mid-2000s and began translating the idea to video. They shot brides wearing pristine gowns juxtaposed with grungy settings—abandoned buildings, swamps, and so on (you can read about an early TTD collaboration shoot involving Cooper, Aubert, Jones, and Rob Neal in *EventDV*’s October 2007 issue: <http://bit.ly/ttd-2007>).

The point of it, many claimed, went beyond “subverting traditional notions of elegance and sentimentality,” as Stephen Nathans-Kelly wrote in the article. Trashing her dress was a bride’s way of declaring to the world that her commitment was solid. It also presented the bride with a lively alternative to boxing up the dress, mothballs and all, with limp hopes that her daughter would someday walk down the aisle in it. An ode to her gown, you could say. The act of it was also cathartic, a celebration of

the end of the wedding-planning and wedding-day stress.

#### **SHED THE DRESS?**

After the initial novelty of TTD wore off, the trend nearly faded to black—perhaps because of the reigning romantic, elegant wedding video mentality at the time. Was the industry unprepared to ditch that in favor of something more gritty? An even likelier explanation for TTD’s demise is the fact that the type of edgier, shot-driven wedding films TTD presaged

didn’t quite come into their own until the DSLR era.

Blake was just the filmmaker to revive, and maybe reinvent, TTD, with his self-described “maverick-style wedding cinema for those that like breaking the rules.”

Taking pride in his infusion of sexuality into his wedding videos, Blake makes no apologies. “It works for us!” Salty wedding films became his niche after one preceremony bridal prep shoot: As the bride slipped out of her clothes, the photographer, a female, turned away out of respect. Blake just kept rolling tape.

“This knock-down, drag-out gorgeous girl was changing right in front of me. I was shooting, and it was hot. I thought, ‘What’s wrong with that?’” Blake remembers. “I didn’t show much. But when I showed her the playback and told her I’d like to use it she said, ‘Go for it!’”

Soon Blake booked the wedding of the Detroit Tigers’ Nick Trzesniak and his wife, Alanna. She specifically requested the “butt shot” from the aforementioned bridal prep. “So we shot her changing. We did it so many times, pulling her dress up, taking it off, pulling it up,” he says laughing.

A flood of women started requesting that butt shot, including Kathleen Reynolds, wife of then-Arizona



*indyBridal Extreme: a sexier kind of wedding shoot*

Diamondbacks infielder Mark Reynolds. Blake saw quickly that “people are digging this. Then we got into showing more skin.”

Lest you assume that eager grooms are booking these appointments, know that the brides are the ones lining up to have their 20- and 30-something physiques recorded for posterity.

### A DIFFERENT BREED OF BRIDE

Before long, Blake was throwing his hat in the (mostly empty) TTD ring. He did so after being turned on to the work of CinematicBride’s Joshua Smith, who was doing TTD videos at the time. Calling Smith his inspiration, Blake remembers thinking, “This stuff is so awesome.” But he knew he wanted to take it to a new level, to add his signature amorous style. He showed a bride one of Smith’s TTD videos and said, “Let’s do a video like this. But let’s take some clothes off.”

Part of his vision stemmed from shooting weddings in which there were women present “who looked hotter than the bride,” he says. “I got tired of seeing it. I thought, we’ve got to start making videos in which the bride is just so freakin’ hot. She’s the bride! She needs to be the hottest thing at the wedding.” Not nude, he insists. “If you show nudity, it’s not sexy anymore.”

Blake’s first TTD films didn’t reach far beyond the standard-issue TTD of earlier years. But soon his brides were doing more than getting their feet wet—literally—at the beach. They were having their gowns torn off their bodies and destroyed, ripped, “where you can’t use it again.”

With each TTD he would add a new element to destroy the gown, as well as a story that the bride could relate to. Each of his indyBridal Extremes spins a fictional story depicting the bride finding her dress, slipping into it, and commencing to trash it—all while revealing her stunning curves to the camera.

You might be blushing, but the brides who participate don’t do much of that. “It’s a different breed” of bride,



Dustin Blake: “If you show nudity, it’s not sexy anymore.”

Blake says, calling them the “‘Hey, look at me!’ brides.” “These girls”—who, he says, make up 14% of his clientele—“*want* to do these videos.”

He’s even had women who have seen his work online drive from states away, such as from Virginia, to star in their own indyBridal Extreme. Some of them aren’t even getting married. “They just like the sex appeal of it.” For many of them, it’s about preserving the way they look today. “You will never look that good again,” Blake says gravely. “Probably,” he adds just in time.

### NOT FOR EVERYONE

If the idea of a member of the opposite sex paying you to film them undressing sounds enticing, be warned that not everyone is cut out for this. “You have to be sexy yourself. You have to feel it,” Blake says. “Everything is kind of sexual with me, whether I’m shooting a girl or a guy or details.” Once your clients see that you’re comfortable in your own skin, “they’re cool with being sexy in front of you without it being weird.” Plus, the bride always brings along a close girlfriend for moral support.

It’s kind of hard to take one of Blake’s last comments seriously—“It’s not *all* about sex,” he says, somewhat pleadingly, because it has

worked so well for him. And while he recognizes that some might consider his niche taboo, he knows there’s a group of people who don’t. “There’s a market for it, and it’s how I make my living.”

That market includes a same-sex couple, for example, who recently approached Blake with the idea of doing a “girl-on-girl” indyBridal Extreme. Indeed, he says, “It’s not just for guys.”

What’s next for Dustin Blake? With winter around the corner, snow is next on his list of elements. Blake is also developing ideas for a TTD in a candy shop (think sticky, gooey, and sweet) and in a roller rink playing bubblegum pop (roller derby, anyone?).

Reflecting on where he is now, Blake is equally grateful for the visionaries who cultivated the TTD phenomenon as he is for the creative types eager to push the envelope with him. “I didn’t invent TTD,” Dustin says. But he did what many of the genre’s pioneers wouldn’t or couldn’t: take it to its natural (or *au naturel*) extreme.

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