

TELEVISION

Cleveland-based TV show stars local actors, locations

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Plain Dealer Reporter

Cleveland detective Teresa Maria de los Angeles — Angie to her friends — is assigned to a special regional task force that takes on the worst cases. She's under pressure from her superiors, a corrupt prosecutor and a publicity-hungry mayor — all demanding answers.

But when Angie sleeps, that's when the real mystery starts. Unbeknownst to her, inside her body lies a dark entity that emerges to carry out its own justice on criminals.

Dying to find out more? Don't tune in the news. Angie is a character in "Out of Darkness," a television series being shot in Cleveland.



Michaels

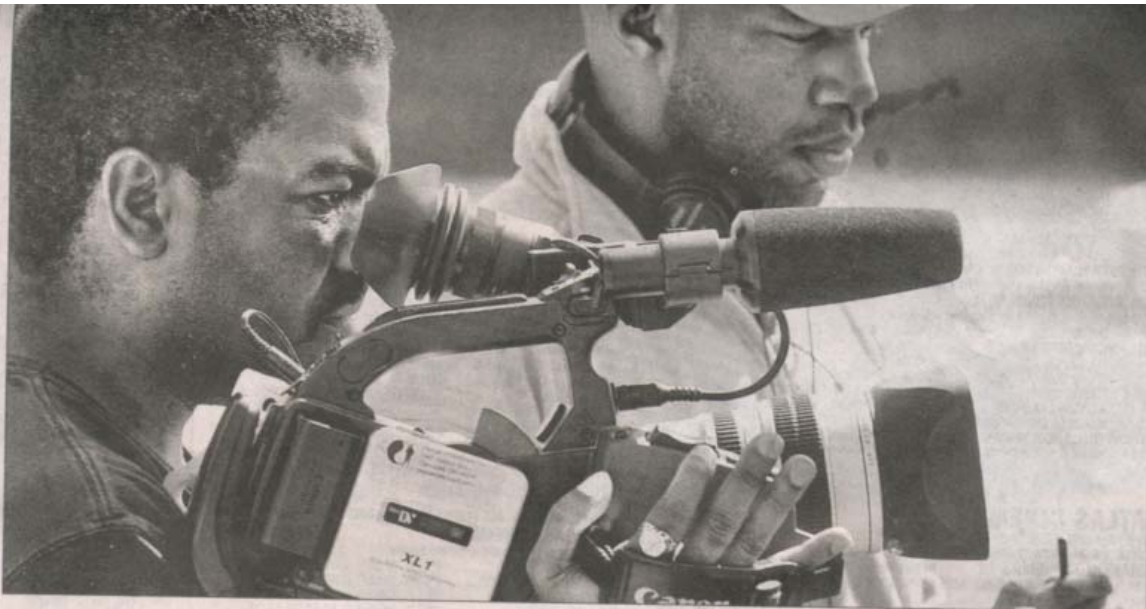
That's right, Cleveland. Series creator Alex Michaels worked for six years to create "Out of Darkness" and get it on the air. Last month, the supernatural crime series debuted with a five-episode run on the Dish satellite network. It airs at 12:30 a.m. Saturday on Dish channel 216, which is the Resorts and Residence channel, through Saturday, Sept. 24.

Michaels, an independent filmmaker with an entrepreneurial spirit, landed sponsors by pledging to write those businesses into "Out of Darkness" episodes and shoot scenes there.

The businesses get exposure. Michaels, 39, who lives in Cleveland, gets financial support and free locations for shooting.

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LYNNISCHAY | THE PLAIN DEALER

Series creator Alex Michaels checks out a shot for his television series "Out of Darkness," before handing the camera back to cinematographer Jerome Lee Brown. "Out of Darkness" is a supernatural crime show being filmed here and airing on the Dish satellite service.

SHOW

FROM E1

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He garnered enough support to buy late-night spots on Dish, which was cheaper than buying time on local television stations, he said.

He liked the late-night berth because he thinks that people who are up past midnight will like the series and because some episodes will contain adult themes.

Michaels found like-minded entrepreneurs, such as Massimo da Milano Restaurant, were eager to help a project that could boost Cleveland's image.

He made deals without showing sponsors any footage. "They did not care," he said. "Business is about the other person. They don't care about me."

Michael Feigenbaum, owner of Lucy's Sweet Surrender bakery in Cleveland, said he made a small investment in the series. In exchange, Michaels wrote the bakery into scripts as a police hang-out.

"I thought that would be real fun," said Feigenbaum, who even got to say a few lines. "It's pretty brave of someone in this day, when everything is so hyped, and he's shoestring. I believe in small local business. He represents that to me."

On a recent sunny afternoon, Michaels switched from businessman to filmmaker. A few

cast members, plus one cameraman operating a digital camera, gathered at the Whiskey Island Marina to shoot scenes for the fourth episode. A small building at the marina stands in for the fictional Seventh District police headquarters.

Michaels, 39, has written and directed most of the episodes, but he has brought in other screenwriters and directors as well.

The striking Ada Carolina Ortiz, who plays Angie, rehearsed a scene with two other actors. Ortiz is the third actress to play Angie; the others left due to disagreements with Michaels, who had to reshoot episodes.

Ortiz said she thinks "Out of Darkness" will let Cleveland's filmmaking community show its talents to the nation.

"Angie's personality, troubled past and the extreme circumstances she goes through allow me to show a wide range of emotions," Ortiz, who lives in Chagrin Falls, wrote in an e-mail. "Each episode allows me to display my own Spanish heritage and culture and will include some Spanish dialogue. On top of that, this girl has superpowers!"

Actor Joseph Primer, who portrays Angie's partner Drew, was cast after Michaels saw him perform at Cleveland Public Theatre in 2002. Primer, who lives in South Euclid, is excited that the series finally has made it to the airwaves.

"Now someone can turn on the TV, and there you are," said Primer.

Michaels plays one of the main

characters, the shifty prosecutor George Bailey Raft. Michaels took on the role because he initially thought it would be small. But after Michaels and actor George Fiderio, playing a shady businessman, clicked in their scenes together, Raft's role was expanded.

The first time that Michaels got behind a camera, he was filling in for a director who had bailed on a small project for which Michaels had written a script.

Growing up on Cleveland's East Side, he was more interested in writing stories than watching or making movies. After studying medical technology, he gravitated toward movies and theater. He said that a family trust fund provides living expenses but can't be used to fund his projects.

Michaels directed a few inde-

pendent film projects, including "Blood Kiss: Soul of a Woman." They didn't find distribution. He learned that films take a long time to shoot, with no guarantee of distribution or income at the end.

Now "Out of Darkness" has a chance to find an audience. Michaels has paid for five episodes to air, but he's certain that funding for the entire 13-episode season will come through. He knows that his cast and sponsors are counting on him to complete the series.

"I have a responsibility to these people to do what I said I would do," he said.

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