



“Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls” is Geeky Fun... But Not Just For Geeks

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PARK CITY, UTAH – JANUARY 22: (L-R) Clark Baker, Barbara Crampton, Olivia Taylor Dudley, Andrew Bowser, Melanie Chandra, Rivkah Reyes, Arden Myrin, and Michael Mobley attend 2023 Sundance Film Festival “Onyx The Fortuitous And The Talisman Of Souls” premiere at Egyptian Theatre on January 22, 2023 in Park City, Utah. (Photo by Neilson Barnard/Getty Images)

By Peter Jones

By day, Marcus J. Trillbury is an insecure nerd-virgin, a would-be occultist who still lives in his parents’ basement with a clumsy computer and flips burgers at Meat Hut.

But his alter ego is Onyx the Fortuitous. He’s a self-styled super-nothing who still has to clean out the cat box before venturing into all-important geek-outs.

The internet-based character comes to life on the big screen in *Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls*, a broadly comic tribute to campy 1980s horror that premiered January 22 at the Egyptian Theatre as part of the 2023 Sundance Film Festival.

Writer-director Andrew Bowser, who also plays the title character, says the likable drip was originally the product of an improv class.

“I thought about doing a character that was so insecure that no matter what he said he would kind of back pedal and immediately say ‘I don’t know.’” Bowser says.

“Even if you said, ‘What’s your favorite movie?’ ‘Pumpkinhead. I don’t know.’”

Onyx first appeared on TikTok and other platforms before a pandemic-era Kickstarter campaign helped fund a full-length movie to fully flesh out the character.

The apprehensive, socially awkward man-boy churns out his multiple words like a hyperactive used-car dealer, but he is oddly endearing, especially in a comic universe of extremes less appealing than he is.

“He’s the embodiment of my anxiety and my stressors, my hyper fixations,” Bowser says. “So if I get stressed enough, I start to think and sound like Onyx. ... He’s the lightning rod for a lot of the things that would otherwise go undealt with.”

Bowser’s own geek-out is the horror comedy of movies like *Fright Night* and *Gremlins*. But Onyx’s is the pabulum of amateur occultism and his idol Bartok the Great. There are shades of both Willy Wonka and Agatha Christie when Onyx and a select cross-section of eccentric Bartok devotees are summoned to the master’s mansion to raise a spirit or two.

“I brought my compendium of dead languages, but I left it in my room,” laments Mr. Duke, played amusingly by T.C. Carson.

Bowser has also cast *Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls* with a number of actors who populated some of the many horror comedies that inspired this one — including Barbara Crampton, star of *Re-Animator*, *Chopping Mall*, and *Puppet Master*.

“I’ve been a fan of Barbara’s as long as I can remember, and the film is obviously an homage,” Bowser says. “But we wanted to make an ‘80s throwback through a modern lens.”

Jeffrey Combs (*Frightmare*, *Re-Animator*, *Cellar Dweller*) plays Bartok.

“He was always in my head, but he wasn’t top of mind because I didn’t know he would shave his head and grow a goatee and all of that,” Bowser says.

Adam Dougherty’s puppets create what Bowser calls “a dark Jim Henson vibe.”

Nerd heaven, right?

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