

Dark Desire

here! TV's *The Lair* stacks the sex deck with a cast of porn stars.

BY KEN KNOX • PHOTOGRAPHY BY HERETV.COM

In a shadowy sex emporium, two men played by XXX stars Brad Benton and Michael von Steel (pictured) meet and strike up a flirtatious conversation. They retire to a private room and clothes are flung aside in their haste to rub their bodies against each other. They kiss and fall naked onto a bed of pillows, their bodies thrusting in the throes of passion. As von Steel throws his head back in ecstasy, Benton eyes his bared neck and reveals a set of sharp, white fangs before he tears into von Steel's flesh.

It may sound like a scene from a porno (*I Want to Suck Your Cock*, perhaps?), but in fact it's from here! TV's Gothic soap opera *The Lair*, which begins its second season on the on-demand gay channel this month. A spin-off of here!'s *Dante's Cove* (about a beach town terrorized by sexy witches and warlocks), *The Lair* revolves around a private "gentleman's club" where male residents of a quiet seaside town go to have sex with one another. A titillating hybrid of *Dark Shadows* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the show's wildly over-the-top supernatural storylines and salacious softcore sex scenes have made it a popular guilty pleasure among viewers. But for fans of gay porn, the real draw is the inclusion of more than a few former and current superhot triple-X stars in its regular cast.





FRED OLEN RAY

Besides the aforementioned Brad Benton (who stars as vampire Colin using the name Dylan Vox) and Michael von Steel (who appeared in season one as doomed human-turned-vamp Eric), a virtual cavalcade of porn studs have dropped trou on the show. In addition to series regulars Vox and Colton Ford (as hunky Sheriff

Trout) the second season of *The Lair* boasts star turns from *Unzipped* cover model Johnny Hazzard (under his real name, Frankie Valenti), and retired adult performer and *Men* model Chris Crawford. Meanwhile, both seasons have featured a number of the jizz biz elite in walk-on or extra roles, including Dean Phoenix, Jason Crew, Park Wiley, Cole Ryder, Tyler Saint, Marco Paris, Christian Owen, and Zak Spears.

Why are porn stars flocking to *The Lair*? According to the show's director, Fred Olen Ray, it's because he needed guys who were OK with taking off their clothes on camera and performing scenes of an explicit nature. "The level of sexuality and sensuality in the show creates a situation where there is a very limited talent pool," he says. "The actors have to be photogenic, and a lot of these [porn stars] had the upper hand because they were able and willing to do the sensuality and had the level of sex appeal that's required. You can't just get that out of any actor that you cast off the street."

With that in mind, the show's producers recruited XXX director Gino Colbert to help with casting. "I was brought on to find actors who would do full-frontal nudity," says Colbert, who has performed similar duties for *Dante's Cove* and for playwright Ronnie Larsen's productions. "The nudity thing is the most challenging; very few actors will do it. Most think it will ruin their career, and their agents advise them to stay clear of nudity—not to mention anything that uses porn stars."

Luckily, actors like Peter Stickles (who was already familiar with sexually charged material from his appearance in John Cameron Mitchell's controversial *Shortbus*) didn't have a problem with nudity. And, of course, neither do any of the porn stars. "The show is sexually charged, so porn models feel right at home," Colbert says. At the same time, he adds, the series has given those models a chance to prove that they can do more than just suck and fuck. "In a sense, shows like *The Lair* are opening doors and creating opportunities for these guys by giving the ones who truly want to act a place to do so."

MEASURING UP

Of course, anyone familiar with porn knows that acting ability



JOHNNY HAZZARD

isn't necessarily a requirement for the job. "Definitely it was a concern for me that a person who's famous for one thing was being asked to do something completely different," Ray acknowledges. "It's like when people who have successful TV shows suddenly decide they're going to cut a record. The standard that [the performers] are being held to is completely different in the adult business. You're not being called upon to perform 10 or 15 pages of dialogue and play a continuous character for weeks on end."

So how did the porn stars measure up? Ray is happy to report that there were virtually no problems. "There are people I had concerns about, but they came in and they auditioned like everybody else, and we would work with them a little bit."

Of the best of the bunch, Ray points to Hazzard and Benton as examples for other porn stars with acting aspirations to follow. "Everybody was really high on having [Johnny Hazzard] on the show, and he came in and he was really serious about his work. He was very studied; he went

home at night, and he was rehearsed and ready to go the next day. And [Brad Benton] is what we call a utility player: He's a guy that fits comfortably in all types of roles. He's a good-looking kid, and he's got talent. It was an easy decision to cast him as Colin."

Benton is the only cast member of *The Lair* to have appeared in the segment of *Dante's Cove* that introduced the titular gentleman's club. "It was a natural move for him to move on over to the new show," Ray says. "I think he's found exactly where he is meant to be."

It's a good thing, then, that Benton didn't listen to his agent. "She didn't want me to do the show, so I submitted myself for the part," says Benton. "I went in and read, and they liked me. I was so thankful when they decided to spin me off onto *The Lair*."

"I think the producers were smart to step outside the box when they were casting the show," he adds. "Even in the end-



MICHAEL VON STEEL



ZAK SPEARS

less sea of actors in L.A., there are still only a handful who are willing to do gay love scenes." Asked if he feels he was brought on because of his X-rated background, Benton demurs: "The talent that they have cast for the principal roles are all attractive, strong actors, and I think that criteria was more important than their past jobs."

Still, the porn veterans readily admit that the softcore sex scenes were a breeze for them. In fact, if anyone on the set was going to have a problem with those scenes, it probably would have been Ray, who is straight. But, having directed several T&A films such as *Ghost in a Teeny Bikini* and *Teenage Cavegirl*, Ray says he was already well-versed in getting his cast to deliver the goods. "It's basically simulated, so what it comes down to is making sure that you have the right amount of footage to cut a nice montage out of it," he says. "I must be doing something right, because [the folks at here!] told me I did a better job directing gay love scenes than some of the gay directors they've had!"

"BIG BALLS AND GOOD TASTE"

Ray says he keeps things very professional on the set, but he admits that there are days when the actors can get out of hand—particularly while shooting those hot orgy scenes. "When you have a scene with 10 guys rolling around on a mattress, sometimes they do get carried away," he reports with a laugh. "I'll look over and yell, 'Hey, stop that over there! This isn't the Playboy Channel!'"

The chief offenders, he concedes, are the porn stars: "We don't have that problem with the [mainstream] actors. But when you've got a mass of guys whose normal, day-to-day routine is *not* faking it, things can get a little out of control."

Of course, such shenanigans can make for an interesting day on the job. And now that season two has debuted, the director says he's looking forward to coming up with even more naughtiness for season three. "What gets me going is the ability to tap into these wild story lines that nobody else would let me tackle. It's a great incentive to go out there and do the best I can. It makes it fun."

Casting consultant Colbert also loves his *Lair* gig. "It's enjoyable for me because I'm helping to bring porn guys to the mainstream," he says. "Few shows will cast porn stars even as background players, no matter how talented they are. But here! TV knows what the gay community wants to see. They're a network with big balls and good taste."

"I've cast porn stars, go-go boys, waiters I've pulled from restaurants, comics from comedy clubs, guys from acting classes, and even guys from the street," says Colbert. "I'm not afraid to approach the unapproachable and get them in for a reading." And, he adds, porn stars will have an awful lot more to look forward to next year. "I've already begun recruiting for next season, and I have some incredible-looking guys on my list."

Now that's something we can sink our teeth into! ■

THE SHERIFF'S A STUD

Personal trainer, singer, dancer, actor, porn icon—is there anything Colton Ford can't do? He broke into adult video at the remarkable age of 39 and, after making only a dozen films, left the industry in 2000 a superstar. The multitasking buff daddy went on to record a hit single with Peppa Ma'Shay ("Signed, Sealed, Delivered"), release a full-length album, *Tug of War* (see "Music to Fuck By," page 26), appear in several music videos and movies (check out his sexy cameo in *Another Gay Sequel*), and become the central subject of a documentary film (*Naked Fame*). Now he's back for a second season on *The Lair* as hunky Sheriff Trout. We went fishing for some juicy tidbits about his (so far) nonsexual role.

How did you come to star on *The Lair*?

I've been working with [here! TV sister company] Regent Releasing since they acquired the documentary *Naked Fame*. They've been amazingly supportive of my career endeavors over the years, and when *The Lair* was being cast they phoned me up and asked if I wanted to be a part of it. I, of course, said yes. It's a really fun, entertaining show that gives the viewers an opportunity to escape for a few minutes and enjoy the ride.

Do you ever laugh—we do, through our tears—at the irony that you're the only regular cast member who never takes off his clothes?

Actually, it's been a great gift [that] the focus and attention have been on my acting instead of the other things for a change.

Your character's role was beefed up in season two because of your popularity among viewers. Any chance that we might get to see you have one of your own sex scenes?

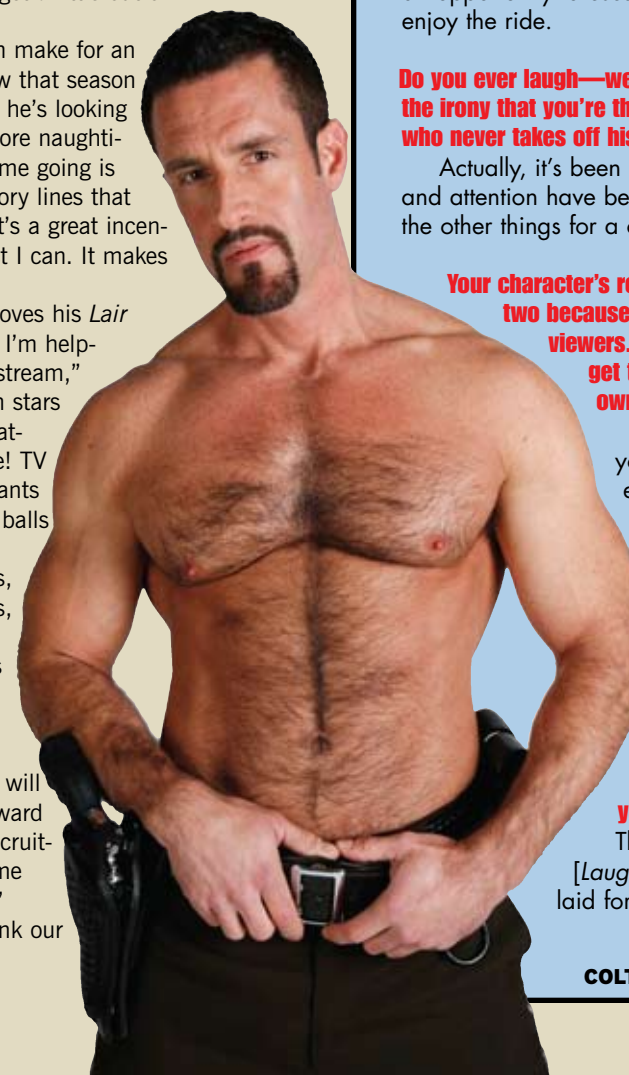
I'm not opposed to it, but you'd need to ask the powers that be.

You're playing a common gay male fantasy figure: a cop. What's the sexiest thing about getting to put on that costume?

Why, wearing the big stick, of course!

What are your hopes for your character next season?

That he becomes mayor! [Laughs] Maybe then he'll get laid for a change. ■



COLTON FORD