Opening this weekend is arguably the best action movie to hit the screen in 20 years. No, not THE HUNGER GAMES—we’re of course talking about THE RAID: REDEMPTION. Shot on a miniscule budget in Indonesia, THE RAID is the brainchild of Welsh-born writer/director Gareth Evans (pictured left), a man who grew up on a healthy diet of martial-artsploitation and ’80s action cinema and proudly wears his influences on his sleeve.

It has been argued that THE RAID is like an ’80s-era grindhouse actioner plucked from that time period and released in 2012; Evans doesn’t mind the comparison, though he denies that was his intention. “I made the film based off my influences, based off the films I wanted to see, that I love,” he says. “My taste is that era, I guess. I love ’80s and ’90s golden-age Hong Kong cinema, you know? And so I made it with all seriousness and an honesty to it, because I didn’t want it to play out tongue-in-cheek, like, ‘Oh hey, by the way, we’re doing grindhouse.’ So no print scratches or stuff like that, which has kind of been overdone now, you know?”

THE RAID’s story is awesome in its simplicity: an elite police force has gotten the go-ahead to infiltrate an apartment building deep within Jakarta’s slums, one that houses the city’s most ruthless gangs. The raid goes smoothly at first, but soon the officers’ presence becomes

known. Now against insurmountable odds, they have to fight their way out of the building to survive. Though already deemed an action classic, THE RAID came about unintentionally: "I tend to have a bunch of little tiny concepts that I put away in a drawer somewhere," Evans explains, "and eventually I'll call upon them when I need to. THE RAID actually was a plan-B project. It was a backup thing, because we tried to get the money in place to do a different film first. We finished our first movie, MERANTAU, and after that we wanted to do a bigger film, and we just couldn't get the budget in place. We spent like a year and a half trying to do it, and just couldn't.

"So after that long [stretch], I was like, 'We need to do something and we need to do it fast,' " he continues. "It became this thing of knowing we had to work within a certain budget constraint. I was like, 'OK, let's make something which is all in one building, then. Let's control the budget a little bit more.' So then I could turn to the synopses, the little thoughts and snippets I had, and THE RAID came from there. But it was informed by other films, too. Like, once I knew I was shooting it all in one building, I started to look at films like DIE HARD and ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13, things that could help me figure out how they're structured, and how to go from a big action setpiece to more of the stepping stones you need to do to get the audience ready, [to get them] at the bursting point for the next fight scene."

John Carpenter's ASSAULT has indeed come up quite a bit in discussions about THE RAID, but Evans says another genre classic also served as an influence: "We riff on THE WARRIORS a little bit as well. We have the shot where the boss is talking into the microphone, and that was taken from the deejay shot [in THE WARRIORS]. That sense of being hunted, as well, I really love in those types of movies. ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13 helped a lot because it was shot on a low budget, and we had to work on one as well.

"It's like this: My favorite scene in ASSAULT is when the lights go out, and then the snipers outside start shooting up the place. All you see is glass smashing and paper on the desk being hit, right? But you don't see the shooters, and you don't get a feeling of an army of people storming that building, 'cause Carpenter didn't have the budget for that many extras. And I didn't have the budget for that many extras on my film, either. Beyond the people who are actually in the fights—we've got a lot of fighters, but then whenever there are crowds of people charging at the rooms, banging on doors and stuff, you don't see any of them. It's all sound, it's all foley work, because we couldn't afford to pay anyone. So we had maybe four or five people outside of the fighters."

[redacted]