“It's all a blur.” What really happened at the costumed party of a big Polish book publisher? Your guess is as good as mine, even áfter watching the mystery-thriller IXJANA at the Rotterdam International Film Festival.

We got a peek at this second feature film by Józef and Michal Skolimowski (sons of ESSENTIAL KILLING director and EASTERN PROMISES actor Jerzy Skolimowski) at the last day of the festival. Marek Newski (Sambor Czarnota) is a young aspiring Polish writer. He's terribly hung over at the beginning of the film, but things are slowly coming back to him. So he knows he was at that party at Mr.Hellers villa last night. He also seems to remember that the publisher agreed to publish his debut novel, ominously entitled MY BROTHER, MU KILLER. But how did his friend Artur (Borys Szyc) end up dead? Not a clue. A combination of whiskey, vodka and pills will do that to a brain.

Three months later, Marek is complaining of chest pains. They started at the party, or so we are told. Could be the pills, could a broken heart, since Malek terribly misses his former girlfriend Marlena (Magdalena Boczarska). It is confusing then, to say the least, that Marek starts looking for a fortuneteller called Ixjana. Only much later is it revealed that Marlena and Ixjana are one and the same person. In a vision, Malek sees himself, lying on the floor bleeding. “Go back to the villa. Find out what happened,” Marlena/Ixjana tells him.

Marek actually doesn't do a very good job at convincing us he's a writer. The guy doesn't seem to read or write more than a few sentences, his voice-overs keep stating the obvious and he’s always playing with a big-ass folding knife. He is however, either drunk or depressed

throughout, so I guess that qualifies. All of IXJANA's other are equally contradictory or one-dimensional.

Apart from the grating narration and the flat performances, IXJANA suffers from a serious case of telling, not showing. The Skolimowski brothers tried to make things more interesting but the enormous amount of exposition, flashbacks and false memories only manage to confuse and frustrate. The net result: you simply give up trying to figure it out.

Described as "sinister," "expressive" and even "occult," there actually isn't a lot of excitement to be had from IXJANA. A couple of murder scenes and a Faustian figure with a Devilish goatee and a black cape(!) can't make up for such.

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