

What's behind "IRON DOORS"? Director comments & exclusive photos!

Written by Jay Slater
Friday, 21 May 2010 10:02



The ale flows like there's no tomorrow at Cologne, Germany's All Bar One, a popular watering hole for hip city folk. Stephen Manuel (pictured left), director of the new horror film IRON DOORS, eyes the Jameson whiskey, no doubt inspired by his background—he was born in Ireland and raised bilingually in Germany. He and Fango are raising glasses over the success of IRON DOORS (see exclusive pics past the jump), which premiered recently at Estonia's Haapsalu Horror Film Festival and is currently being sold internationally by Julian Richards' Jinga Films distribution house.

"I love minimalistic movies that get the most out of simple settings, because to me that's one of the most interesting forms of cinema," Manuel tells Fango, explaining IRON DOORS' influences. "Movies like CUBE, PARANORMAL ACTIVITY, DUEL, OPEN WATER and THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT—even HALLOWEEN and THE FOG—don't have big budgets, but rely on psychological cleverness and intelligent use of effects to keep viewers entertained, scared or in suspense."



While Manuel, whose credits include the Billy Zane-starring thriller PERFECT HIDEOUT, is a horror-movie junkie, and an avid reader and supporter of Fango, he's also rather cynical, with an "I've seen it all before" attitude when watching movies. But when he read Peter Arneson's IRON DOORS script, he was struck by how the writer utilized a simple setting but constantly kept him on edge, expecting things that didn't happen and not expecting those that did. "The cool thing about IRON DOORS is not what you see, but the subjective images and feelings it conjures up in your mind," Manuel says, grinning. Two Kölsches are ordered.

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The story is simplistic and übertight, yet rewarding in execution. A middle-aged man (played with assurance by Alex Wedekind) awakens to find himself locked within the confines of a large tomb, each side made of brick and mortar save a huge iron door, presumably impenetrable. Bathed in flickering fluorescent light, he has neither water nor food for sustenance. At first believing he's the victim of a practical joke gone too far—he has no recollection of the previous night, save a pounding hangover—his only hope for freedom consists of industrial tools and a rotting rat. With a clever and ambiguous twist, IRON DOORS well and truly delivers a punch that connects. Is this a game? Sadistic torture where the protagonist is to die of thirst or physical mutilation? An act with higher stakes and consequences?



And in a genre overflowing with remakes and imitations, what does IRON DOORS bring that's new? Manuel believes his film is totally original, where many horror movies today are becoming increasingly predictable and/or focus on splatter to that over content. "Once you've figured out the characters and have guessed what happens next, your brain goes on standby and leaves suspense behind. I am jaded with horror remakes nowadays, as they take the craziness and scariness out of what made them work originally. I love the first TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE. There's absolutely no explanation for Leatherface or his family, and this makes it more effective than the remake. IRON DOORS starts off like many horror films, but this time, nothing you expect to happen does happen. And things that are supposed to be mysterious stay mysterious. It's not just a simple horror story, but an allegory for survival and life."

That said, IRON DOORS does seem to stomp in the clay footprint set by the SAW, and Manuel agrees that the initial concept will remind horror fans of the hit franchise. Yet while he believes it's virtually impossible to shrug SAW off as an influence when his film starts with a confused man who awakens in a walled room, "That helps IRON DOORS, because SAW is so ingrained in the pop culture that people will think they've figured out our movie immediately. So after a few minutes, totally different things happen and it will pull the rug from under their feet. Those unfilled SAW expectations can add to the overall experience, because they confuse the mind and make it more vulnerable to our unexpected twists."

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IRON DOORS was not an easy shoot, Manuel recalls; the vault, housed in an old parking garage, was not necessarily large enough for the crew. A more pressing restraint for Manuel and co. were the 10-days shooting schedule and the use of a single camera. "That makes it rather stressful if you're a cinephile director wanting to make a great movie with a small team. But since we were totally independent, we had total creative freedom—within our budget—and that made for a creatively relaxed situation."

For a movie that has just entered the genre-festival circuit, the future is bright. IRON DOORS won the "White Lady" award at Haapsalu and is being heavily promoted at Cannes. Although not bathed in blood, guts or the excesses of torture porn, IRON DOORS is the real deal. Psychologically deviant and filled with menace and tension, its atmosphere is claustrophobic and overwhelming. IRON DOORS deserves support. You can see the trailer below and the movie's official website [here](#) and its Facebook page [here](#).



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