

Digging “THE TUNNEL”

Written by Michael Helms

Tuesday, 27 December 2011 10:34



Sydney, Australia-based filmmakers Enzo Tedeschi and Julian Harvey had been working together in postproduction for the better part of the last decade before they developed their first feature, the found-footage chiller THE TUNNEL. The project, written and produced by Tedeschi and Harvey, directed by Carlo Ledesma and shot on location in actual tunnels under Sydney, was partially financed via Internet crowd-funding, and was first released directly on-line to great acclaim. As it hits U.S. DVD today from House Lights Media, Tedeschi and Harvey spoke to Fango about its creation.

FANGORIA: What kind of horror movie is THE TUNNEL?



ENZO TEDESCHI: Not in terms of blood and guts like a TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE; it's more of a tense thriller kind of horror, if that makes sense. Like, THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT is a horror movie, but there's no gore, no blood, no guts. It is very much an edge-of-your-seat-tension kind of film.

FANG: What's the basic plotline?

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TEDESCHI: A journalism crew come across the story of a cover-up conspiracy involving homeless people and the tunnels underneath Sydney. When they go down there, they realize that the story is actually chasing them.

FANG: How did you approach the *vérité* style?

TEDESCHI: The off-the-shoulder camera shooting is interspersed with talking-head documentary interviews. To our mind, that’s where we made our departure; we tried to put our own stamp on it by giving it a slightly different spin. It does feel very much like a documentary.

FANG: Where does reality become fiction in THE TUNNEL?

TEDESCHI: Basically, the starting point for our writing was when the New South Wales government announced plans a few years ago to drain the underground lake beneath St. James station. There is actually a large flooded tunnel under there; it is enormous and holds a lot of water, which they were looking at recycling. Then we noticed that the plan disappeared very abruptly. People just stopped talking about it, and it never eventuated. There was no news that it had been scrapped; it just stopped altogether. So our minds started to work from that, and we started building a story about this crew investigating why it went quiet so suddenly. That’s our point of departure from reality; from there, it all goes into fantasyland.

FANG: Do a series of characters recount their experiences?

TEDESCHI: Yes, they do, like you’d expect from any other documentary. They give you insights, so that rather than having 90 minutes of shaky-cam, there is a little bit more of—for want of a better way of putting it—production value in the film; it’s a bit more cinematic.

FANG: Different memories of the same events?

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TEDESCHI: That’s exactly the vibe.

FANG: Have you seen the similarly themed LAKE MUNGO?

TEDESCHI: It’s similar in style to LAKE MUNGO, which we saw while we were writing our film. We caught it at a film festival, and there was mild panic because we thought someone had beaten us to the punch. Having said that, I think LAKE MUNGO is a lot slower, with a lot less scares than I believe we’ve built into our movie. Hopefully, in ours, there are a few more moments that make you jump out of your seat. With LAKE MUNGO, it took until the end before I got a good scare.

FANG: How did you get to use the underground locations?

TEDESCHI: A hell of a lot of sweet-talking on Julian Harvey’s part [*laughs*].

JULIAN HARVEY: I managed to get access to St. James and the area behind and under the station. That took a couple of months of not taking no for an answer. Then, because our film is set in a kind of parallel universe, we spent a lot of time going out and looking at other tunnels and places around Sydney that gave a really cool vibe.

TEDESCHI: We filmed at a few spots like old military places; we convinced the navy to help. We also shot at a big base in Sydney, in one of their old air raid shelters for a couple of days, and others around Sydney. It wasn’t just St. James; it was four months of talking to a whole raft of people to get into all these places.

FANG: Where was the hardest to film?

TEDESCHI: Each location had a different set of challenges. Working so close to a functioning rail line at St. James Station had obvious security and safety risks. One particular location was at an old military building that was half-buried in a park in Vaucluse. The access to the

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subterranean part, once you got inside the front door, was a little two-by-two-foot ladder shaft, so getting a crew down there was an interesting experience, with gear and also the lack of light. Everything had to be battery-operated in such confined spaces—generators and cables and leads and all that sort of stuff. It really was a lot of “Oh, can’t do it,” but then “How do we get around that?” That’s when you put your thinking cap on and mull it over for a while. We got through most of it, so it’s all good.



FANG: What was the casting process?

TEDESCHI: We had a couple of contacts in terms of performers we liked, so we spoke to them and shot the teaser, which is on our [website](#). It was pretty much part audition and part a tease concept for us to see if the way we were planning on shooting this thing would actually work. The cast we had really impressed us, so we felt that, for those roles, we didn’t have to cast further afield. That was Andy Rodoreda, who we all knew from BLACK WATER, and Bel Delia. We’d seen Bel doing theater and really liked her.

The real creative bit of casting was Steve Davis, who plays our cameraman. We knew that, given a) the budget of the movie and b) the nature of the shooting—which had to look like it had been done by an actual news crew—it would be really good if we could find someone who was experienced in using a camera. We talked to a few people and came across Steve, and he seemed willing to give it a punt. We auditioned him and he was just fantastic, and probably the biggest surprise package, because the visuals we got were spot on; it feels like he shot it, because that’s what he’s done for the past 25 years. He’s also a great actor.

FANG: So his camerawork is almost another character?

HARVEY: We just knew that how that camera saw things, how it worked, how it moved, was going to say so much. Watching things like QUARANTINE, it doesn’t seem real, and as soon

Digging “THE TUNNEL”

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as you lost that sense of reality, it pulled down the story; it didn't work the same way. You look at THE TUNNEL, and we like the way it feels bang-on. It feels like you're really watching a news camera shooting.

FANG: One cast member you haven't mentioned is Goran D. Kleut. What does the crew encounter down there?

TEDESCHI: What they encounter involves Goran; he's just a killing machine. He's a scary, scary presence—the loveliest bloke, but when you get him in makeup, he gets terrifying pretty quickly.

FANG: Who or what is his character modeled on?

TEDESCHI: We had a lot of points of reference. Originally we thought of the Gollum character in LORD OF THE RINGS and a couple of the ways he moves. We started to draw on the thought that he's a little too feeble to do any major damage, so we looked at other things—images drawn from music videos and all kinds of crazy stuff—and started building this amalgam of freaky, creepy-looking characters. We thought, “How can we take that kind of image and give it a very solid grounding in reality that's feasible?” From there, we left it to Goran to develop his own story.

FANG: Where did the crowd-financing idea come from?

TEDESCHI: Basically, we'd been playing around with the idea of the film for a while and had started thinking about approaching, not the usual funding bodies, but private investors. So we sat down and ran figures and stuff, and found that it wasn't working in terms of financial viability. There was no way we could walk in to these investors, ask them for 100 grand each and actually prove to them in any way that they stood a chance of making that back with any kind of a guarantee; it was a really big gamble.

So we started getting creative and looking at how we could do it otherwise. We were talking around the table one day, and I had a 35mm STAR WARS film frame. We did the math and

Digging “THE TUNNEL”

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thought of the number of frames from a movie and the number of dollars for a frame, and suddenly we were talking about, not a huge amount, but a reasonable amount of money.

FANG: How successful was your crowd-funding effort?

TEDESCHI: It was quite friendly to us, particularly because we were collecting in U.S. dollars, and it was enough to get it happening and moving forward. It's an interesting thing with the crowd-funding phenomenon at the moment: Current statistics say that \$10-12,000 is where the system usually maxes out, and also that you have to raise the majority of the money in the first four weeks. That certainly rang true in our experience, as we raised most of the money in the first month and it slowed down around the \$12,000 mark. Having said that, the statistics are skewed a little bit because 95 percent of crowd-fundraising is limited to a month, so obviously most of it will happen in a month.



FANG: What was the approach to the film's violence?

TEDESCHI: If you can imagine people in that situation and the way they're shooting, a lot of the violence comes fleetingly or happens off camera. What is left to the imagination can be a lot more brutal than anything you can throw all the blood and guts in the world at.

FANG: Is there a continuing story with THE TUNNEL?

HARVEY: We do leave the end open, and it is very cyclical. That was very deliberate, to keep

Digging "THE TUNNEL"

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people interested as to whether there's going to be another story. Things build up, and I find old-school horror films much more cool and scary and more of a ride to watch than something like HOSTEL, which is kind of brutal, and after a while you get desensitized and it's not quite so shocking. So we left a lot at the end up to the imagination.