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Samuel Zimmerman Indie Frights



Writer/director Jed Strahm got in touch to tell us about his new chiller KNIFEPOINT, which just wrapped principal photography, and serve up some exclusive pics (see them below). It's a vicious home-invasion film revolving around Abbie (Katherine Randolph) and her wheelchair-bound sister, Michele (Krista Braun). On Christmas Eve, their apartment is broken into by Jess (Grant Reynolds), his sister Lorraine (Kym Jackson) and their host of criminal followers. When the girls' parents arrive as a holiday surprise, however, the situation further spirals out of control. LEATHERFACE's R.A. Mihaloff co-stars; TOOLBOX MURDERS' Dean Jones created the makeup FX.

Strahm tells Fango that, like many genre projects, KNIFEPOINT had its inspiration in its creator's own worst fears. "The story stemmed from my greatest dread: awakening in the middle of the night to discover that someone has entered my home and is looming over my bed. My feeling is that one's home is the only place where someone can truly feel comfortable and safe. It's the only place people can walk around naked, sing out loud to their favorite song and not give two squirts about how unattractive they appear or how off-key they sound—and once that sanctity is violated, one never feels that safety again. Sure, you can put up walls and connect security cameras, but the necessity of these things only further illustrates that you'll never again be truly comfortable when you're alone in the dark.



"That said, one of my favorite subgenres of horror has always been the home-invasion film," he continues. "Ever since seeing Wes Craven's LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT when I was 13—much to my mother's chagrin—I was bitten by the bug, and over the years have sought out and devoured every possible variation of that scenario.



It's a lofty ambition, but Strahm's a good salesman, citing a host of solid influences from horror faves like Sam Raimi and Mario Bava to classic auteurs Jean-Luc Godard and Ingmar Bergman to controversial filmmakers such as Ruggero Deodato and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The director also had a clear sense of how he wanted to structure and present his movie. "The theme of control is prevalent throughout the film," he notes, "and the tonal choices for KNIFEPOINT were very clear to me from its inception. They are dictated by who is in possession of that control, and how they exert it on those around them. The story's first act, involving the sisters Abbie and Michele, takes on an operatic structure, which is used both to lull the audience into a state of comfort and to set them up for the second and third acts, when it is taken from the sisters—and the audience—and is passed through the hands of others; some of whom are more capable, others of whom are less so.



"These choices also influenced how portions of the film were shot and edited," he continues. "Without giving too much away, there are characters in positions of power who don't quite know what to do with the authority when they have it. You see how that affects them, the characters around them and the story itself as their ability to keep things in line begins to derail."



KNIFEPOINT is the debut feature by the Melon Farm company, which was founded by Strahm with David Penotti and Damian Pejka (who produced the film along with Eric Miller, following their partnership at the Raw Nerve company.) Strahm explains that KNIFEPOINT was specifically conceived to be simply but effectively on a low budget. "When I sat down to write it," he says, "many variables factored into the need to achieve maximum impact with a minimum of moving parts. These included the desire to have the entire story take place in a single location, and the idea that a large cast became a very necessary evil to achieve a lot of storytelling within those four walls. Once I figured out where the story began and concluded, it became a bit of a chess game in that I had x number of moves to tell the tale within the structure I had chosen. Having made that call, the challenge then became how best to keep the story progressing and the movie feeling fresh, without the security blanket of opposing storylines or locations that I would be able to jump between to keep things interesting.



"As most every filmmaker knows," he adds, "it's quite the challenge to tell a feature-length story that takes place entirely in one location without the result feeling like you're adapting a stage play. This couldn't feel like Shakespeare in the park. KNIFEPOINT needed to feel real and immediate, and it had to yank the audience out of their seats and drop them into the middle of the action, to involve them in a way that watching scenes unfold on a stage simply can't do."

With shooting completed, Strahm is confident the film will achieve that goal, after having seen how much his actors gave without the added elements of sound design, music and editing. The film is now in postproduction and its release plans have yet to be hammered out, but its creator, ever proud of what he's creating, believes the final product will deliver: "Just wait til you see what we've got in store for you!"