Written by Michael Helms
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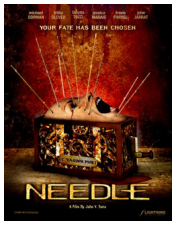
No notable horror films have lurched out of Western Australia since ZOMBIE BRIGADE circa 1988. NEEDLE, shot just before Christmas 2009, is seeking to redress the situation, and goes about it with a deadly device from the 18th century. This is the third feature from John V. Soto, who wrote PREY (released Down Under to negligible returns last year), co-directed CRUSH (now visible via video on demand and hitting U.S. DVD April 21) with Jeff Gerritsen and helmed NEEDLE from a script he wrote with Tony Egan.



On the set, situated within the confines of an old network TV studio in a languid Perth suburb, the common NEEDLE description offered by all is “a psychological thriller with horror elements.” Soto even says as much, before explaining a little history of the movie.

Collaborating with Egan when the latter was brought in to give the CRUSH screenplay a polish sparked the development of NEEDLE. (Egan, by the way, is the writer of FLIES 3D, a project that STORM WARNING’s Jamie Blanks is attached to direct; Blanks supplied the score for NEEDLE, as he did for CRUSH). “Over the last three years, I’ve wanted to do a whodunit/murder mystery-type movie, a sort of Agatha Christie,” Soto tells Fango. “She was light years ahead of most people. A lot of her work has been turned into films, and she was the master of ‘Who is the killer?’ I just love the puzzle element.

“We talked about that,” he continues, “and at the same time wanting to involve our favorite genre, horror, and include a supernatural element. We pitched ideas to each other continuously for months until essentially arriving at the same concept, which was a machine with supernatural powers that kills people from afar. I can’t go into specifics, but let me just say that I’d call CRUSH a gentle thriller, while in NEEDLE, the gloves are off and it’s full-on with very strong elements of horror.”

The director casually mentions that people do die painfully in NEEDLE: “They basically come apart from the inside. We got MEG FX involved to help us with the kills, but it took an enormous amount of work creating the machine’s mythology. We looked at Grand Guignol, and in those

days, they did have devices that could create illusions, all these weird and wonderful things. I read somewhere about a scientist who created something like that and thought, ‘That’s not a bad idea.’ I could see how it could work. So we basically built the mythology based on some rumors, or things we’d read or heard and the research we’d done. And the machine, supposedly built in the late 1800s, has plausibility. I can’t say what it does, but it has supernatural powers and is very effective at its job.”

NEEDLE puts the device in the reluctant possession of a young guy (DAYBREAKERS’ Michael Dorman) whose father has died in a car accident a couple of years earlier. Academic connections are called in, and soon discover the worst. “It’s got amazing supernatural powers—bad powers,” Soto explains. “It’s a machine for revenge. And there’s also a major backstory on that. His friends get him to do a big feature story on it in the university newspaper. He goes back to his room, back to where he has hidden it away, and it’s gone. One night at a party, he had shown it to his friends, so all of them know about it, about seven of them. The next day, one of them is murdered. The police can’t solve it, and the coroner is puzzled, as it seems the victim’s body somehow heated up on the inside. It’s quite graphic. There is no entry wound, but there are exit wounds. It’s a real mystery. We’ve spent a lot of time mythologizing this. When the concept is revealed, you’ll realize, ‘I should have thought of that.’ ”

Investigations into the pointy end of NEEDLE will continue in Fango’s pages…