

Takashi Shimizu's New Dimensions of "SHOCK"

Written by Norman England
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It has been three years since Takashi Shimizu stood beside a film camera and worn his directorial hat—literally. Eschewing the black leather cap that was seemingly glued to his head throughout the production of the Japanese JU-ON and American GRUDGE movies that made his name, Shimizu is not only sporting new headwear for his newest feature, but is also shooting with a new, custom 3-D digital system, the first for such a production in Japan.

Journeying down to the city of Tateyama, Fango paid a visit to the set of THE SHOCK LABYRINTH 3D last summer (just as the current dimensional boom was beginning to explode) to catch up with director Shimizu's return to feature filmmaking. Within the peeling walls of a local hospital, Shimizu and his crew are hard at work on one of the final days of shooting. Seated behind a large LCD monitor, the filmmaker reaches over to a spare set of 3-D glasses and hands them to this writer. Instantly, the blur on the monitor knits together into an image of surprising depth and clarity.

With one of the unbecoming pairs of specs nestled on his own nose, Shimizu shares a few words concerning his latest film. "I guess you can say it's in the same vein as my movie REINCARNATION, since it's not a ghost story," he explains. "And the 3-D aspect is interesting, and is an entirely new experience. During preproduction, I was imagining it would be a big hassle when shooting, but it has hardly slowed anything down. We're right on schedule."

But isn't the dimensional process often employed as a gimmick, a kind of cheap shot to cover a film's lack of substance? The affable Shimizu reassures that such is not the case with THE SHOCK LABYRINTH. "I'm not making a 3-D movie per se," he notes. "I'm making a film that will play out in 2-D as enjoyably as it does in 3-D. But at the same time, I can't ignore that there will be people seeing it because it is in 3-D. It's a fine line. So, rather than go out of my way just to make things pop out haphazardly on the screen, I'm working on the setups and creating shots with good depth of field."

"There has been a boom in 3-D filmmaking as of late," SHOCK LABYRINTH producer Masayuki Tanishima notes. "But that's not why we choose the process for this film. Eighty percent of it takes place in a ghost house, and we felt that 3-D would best capture the feeling of being there." Tanishima is referring to the Fuji-Q Highland Ghost House located near Mt. Fuji, which claims the Guinness record for longest haunted attraction in the world; the production shot on the Fuji-Q location after hours. "Yeah," Shimizu butts in, "but don't forget that I forced everyone to

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watch MY BLOODY VALENTINE 3D!

"American 3-D films are cut too quickly for me," the director continues. "It takes longer for people to adjust to a new edit [in dimensional movies] than in standard films. For this reason, I'm trying to make the cutting less frantic than in our U.S. counterparts."

According to Tanishima, the 3-D camera being used on THE SHOCK LABYRINTH is a custom-crafted system built around two unnamed cameras imported from the States. "You can see how insanely small our system is," he boasts, and indeed it is. For the life of this reporter, it's impossible to figure out where the camera body exists, as the rig appears to be little more than two lenses similar to those on military-issued, infra-red night-vision goggles that run into two small metal boxes on a pushcart a few feet away. "James Cameron is employing a gigantic 3-D camera for his film AVATAR," Tanishima continues. "But we're getting similar results from something the size of a shoebox."



THE SHOCK LABYRINTH 3D, scripted by Daisuke Hosaka, is the story of a group of teenagers that begins with the disappearance of one of them, Yuki (Misako Renbutsu), at an amusement park's ghost house. On a rainy day 10 years later, Yuki inexplicably returns. However, no sooner is she united with her former friends than she collapses, and the group rushes Yuki to a nearby hospital. But after checking in, they discover that there is something not quite well with the medical center. As the night wears on, the group sinks deeper and deeper into the events from a decade past that led to Yuki's disappearance.

"Although we have Shimizu directing—a name synonymous with Japanese horror—we are not making horror," Tanishima says. "We are making a thriller. In this film there is no blood, no murder, no ghost, no Jason, no Kayako. Our goal is to create a feeling of dread and foreboding. We are going for the darkness that exists within the human heart. This is why, working with

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Shimizu, we chose the actors we did. It's an exceptional cast of talented people. Plus, no one in the cast has experience making horror films. In fact, none of the actors particularly likes the genre! Before shooting, I made them all watch ROSEMARY'S BABY and THE EXORCIST, and told them to study the performances of Mia Farrow and Jason Miller. These are examples of the type of acting we are seeking for the movie."

Heading that ensemble is Yuya Yagira, who won Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004 for his performance in the film NOBODY KNOWS. Also on board are Misako Renbutsu, Ryo Katsuji, Ai Maeda (an exception to that genre-newcomer statement, having previously been seen in GAMERA 3, BATTLE ROYALE 2 and DEATH NOTE: THE LAST NAME, among others), Erina Mizuno and Suzuki Matsuo. In charge of the makeup FX for THE SHOCK LABYRINTH 3D is Yoshihiro Nishimura, who in the past few years has become one of the most in-demand special makeup and creature creators in Japan (as well as a director himself, who cast Shimizu in his recent VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL). For this production, Nishimura and his staff have put together a slew of bizarre mannequins and creatures seen as the group make their way through the ghost house.

THE SHOCK LABYRINTH 3D played Japanese theaters last October; it has opened in several foreign territories and will continue to play internationally throughout 2010. American distribution has yet to be nailed down.

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