

**T**he word from its filmmakers is that *Basement Jack* (coming from Brink DVD October 20) is a "smart" slasher movie. But before you roll your eyes and say, "Next..." producer Eric Peter-Kaiser, who also plays the killer of the piece, wants you to know that the mayhem quotient is pretty high.

"Oh, there's gore," he chuckles during a break in an all-night shooting session. "Some of it is digital, but there's a scene with [actress] Tiffany Shepis where we definitely bring out the gut suit."

*Basement Jack*, the feature directing debut of veteran visual FX expert Michael Shelton from Fango scribe Brian Patrick O'Toole's script, begins when 17-year-old Jack Riley, after years of mental abuse, snaps and goes on a seven-day killing spree. Dubbed *Basement Jack* by the press, he is caught and sentenced to life in prison. But 11 years later, he's released on a technicality, and before you can say "hack and slash," Jack is up to his old bloody tricks. Hot on his heels is Karen Cook (Michele Morrow), the lone survivor of that long-ago murderthon, who has his own death on her mind. The cast, several of whom also appeared in Peter-Kaiser and O'Toole's first collaboration *Evolution*, additionally includes Sam Skoryna, '70s scream queen Lynn (The Crazies) Lowry, Noel (Hood of Horror) Gugliemi, The Cult's Billy Morrison and Nathan Bexton.

An FX contributor to *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, *The Wizard of Gore*, *Mirrors* and *My Bloody Valentine*, Shelton realizes that Jack's carnage is what Fango readers want to know about and is enthusiastic about his movie's red content. "This is definitely a hard R for violence," he says. "We're doing certain things digitally, which helps keep the damage close to the audience and in one horrific moment."

However, the director also appreciates the fact that his debut at the helm is not just another cookie-cutter killathon. "This is becoming much less of a slasher film, even though it has a number of those elements,"

he explains. "The big plus with this film is that the characters are so refreshing."

Especially Jack himself, who does not utter a word throughout the entire movie. "He's an outcast and a misfit who is twisted and broken by the one person we're all supposed to trust, which is Mom," Peter-Kaiser says. "That's what made the story so powerful to me. Yes, Jack does wear a mask at one point, but it's not the clichéd element we always see. Jack's mother has this perverse

love for a doll that she considers the perfect child. At one point, Jack smashes the doll and puts its face on himself in the hopes that his mother will now love him. So yeah, there will be the blood and guts, but audiences will have a much more interesting path leading to those moments."

Another key element of the film's casting involved offering different roles to off-typecast genre regulars. Lowry as the mother from hell? Can't beat that. Shepis with her clothes on? Unbelievable! Gugliemi, a guy who has probably played more gangbangers than any actor on the planet, as a cop? Right on! In addition, current rock star and former drug addict Morrison was awarded a stereotype-changing turn as a police detective.

"Obviously, I don't suck at this," laughs Morrison, previously cast to type as a drug user in *Evolution*. "Basically, what happened with *Basement Jack* was that Brian sent me the script and said, 'Tell me which character you want to play.' I read it, and it was obvious that I wanted to play the detective. I wanted to get away from being the rocker and

*Basement Jack* is ready to surface and take his place in the serial-killing pantheon.

## "BASEMENT JACK"

### Deadly cellar dweller

the junkie. I was dying to try this detective thing, and I believe it paid off. I'm always fine with the dark and subversive stuff, and that's definitely this role."

Peter-Kaiser insists that he has portrayed even weirder characters than *Basement Jack* in previous independent movies, but that there's a lot to enjoy about this villain. "I really like the whole idea of this being an intelligent slasher movie. We show you why Jack is a killer and why he became so distorted. Madness is essentially corrupted innocence, and that's what we're presenting."

His approach to the role was very much of the Method: Peter-Kaiser grew his hair out, dyed it black and grew an ominous goatee for Jack. And for two weeks prior to the start of production, he roamed the streets sporting this visage. "When I was walking around that way, people would stare at me real strangely," he recalls. "Because of that, I started going into a very solitary state of mind—which helped, because Jack does not speak. It's not that he's mute, it's just that he's never given the chance."

Shelton is well aware that his lead actor is also his producer and boss, but notes that has had no impact on how he has directed *Basement Jack*. "Eric and Brian didn't hire me to be a yes man," he says. "They brought me in to give this film both barrels, and that's what I'm doing."

—Marc Shapiro

We're used to Tiffany Shepis showing off some skin, not this much of her guts.