

LORDS OF CHAOS

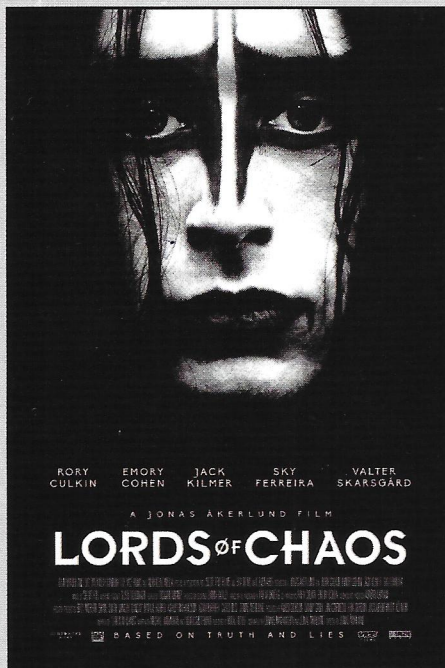
by Jay Kay

True crime is a big media business. Each year, more documentaries, television shows, and films are chronicling the blurred line between right and wrong. Crimes of passion, madness, and obsession are usually stranger than fiction no matter where you are in the world, even Norway. Based on the infamous, late-'80s murder of the Norwegian Black Metal movement leader Euronymous, *Lords of Chaos* tells the story, focusing on the origins of this musical movement, the young men behind it, and the fan who would end up murdering its leader. Taking many years and dealing with numerous challenges to get this story made into a film, *Lords of Chaos* is co-written, produced, and directed by talented filmmaker Jonas Åkerlund. A polarizing film put out by the company Gunpowder & Sky, *Lords of Chaos* stars a talented cast including actors Rory Culkin as Euronymous and Emory Cohen as Varg. Based on truth and lies, *Lords of Chaos* is a portrait of innocence, madness, and the disturbing murders that rocked the music world, leaving a brutal and lasting mark.

During the promotional tour for *Lords of Chaos*, *HorrorHound* sat down at New York City's Vice Studio with Culkin, Cohen, and Åkerlund to talk the connection to the music and lifestyle, the impact of costuming, humanizing these mythic characters, and the responsibility of adapting the story from the book entitled *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*.

HorrorHound: Can you talk about why it was the right time to adapt and tell the story of *Lords of Chaos*?

Jonas Åkerlund: I think a lot about that now. I am really happy that I did not do this film 10 years ago or even five years ago. I have been thinking about it in different shapes and forms already, since it happened. I think it is the timing; it feels like it needed some distance. There are still a lot of people who were around then and who are curious to go along with a whole new generation who will know the story. I remember seeing the church burnings on CNN since I was already shooting here in America. All the way back then, I thought there was something in that story. I went through that whole process thinking that this story was more important to me than



anyone else for years. I kind of like own it, and I feel closer than anyone to it. I understand what that is. I seriously started to think about it and wrote the script five, six years ago. I met Rory [around] five years ago. Rory ended up being the first in and last out.

Rory Culkin: I was first in and I am still here.

HH: How did you two (Rory and Emory) get connected with the script?

RC: The script was sent via hard copy. We were still getting a hard copy five years ago and before the title page, there was just a

picture of the lead character Euronymous. It was him in the cemetery, in a cloak, with the sword. It could have been a painting, I did not know. It was a strange image that immediately grabbed my attention. I then read the script and honestly, I had a hard time keeping up with the characters because of all the crazy names like the Necrobutcher and such. I just really took to it, and Jonas and I met over the years.

JA: He stayed on it, which I appreciate. It took a long time, and over the years, I was worried that Rory was going to go away. Emory and I met late. For a while, it was like a whole thing of moving characters around and finding that chemistry in the group. Where did we meet, Emory?

Emory Cohen: We met on Skype and then in London before the project. What drew me to *Lords of Chaos* was being a huge fan of Rory's work and Jonas' film *Spun*. From being around and being a part of independent films, I felt like these are the guys who I would really love to go on this journey with. It is hard to make an indie film. Eighteen days is harder. People think that big movies don't have the same problems that indie movies do. They have the exact same problems, but the big movies have more money and more time. So, I wanted to be with these guys.

HH: Can you talk about the re-enactment of the film's brutal kills and what you based them off of?

JA: Knowing that I wanted to make the



Jonathan Barnwell and Rory Culkin go "BLACK" in *Lords of Chaos*.



movie as close to the reality as I could, it was probably the easiest part of it because it was so well documented in the police reports. I tried to stick to that as much as I could and wanted to look as real and raw as possible. I did not add any music, and I made it very clean. The suicide is in daylight, which makes it even more raw, and it's a lot of close-ups, which affected the sound. We also did it very old school. We shot it with rubber prosthetics, and we used pumps for blood. Nowadays, many would have used more CGI.

HH: I am glad that you constructed these kills practically. Watching the blocking and movement of Dead's suicide as well as the raw emotion of Euronymous and Varg in the final act, it gets under your skin and shocks you. As actors, what were your thoughts about bringing these murders to life?

RC: It is a good amount of choreography, but this is a real murder that took place. We know it started in the apartment and ended in the stairwell. It is up to us to fill in the blanks of what happened between that. I assumed there was a good amount of pleading and talking as you see. That was interesting to try and fill in those gaps.

HH: I love the choreographing of Euronymous' murder including taking each step down the apartment staircase and the series of stabs with such rage.

JA: If you notice, most of the stabs in that specific scene were in his back. Which meant he [Euronymous] was trying to get away.

HH: There were 36 stabs in that sequence. That is the total amount we witness during that scene, which is so paced and disturbing. Speaking of dis-

turbing, Emory, can you talk about playing a role like this and humanizing the character of Varg?

EC: I've played some mean characters before. Someone has got to play the part.

RC: But he did not start that way.

EC: I focused on him before he killed Euronymous. I focused on how you get to that point for the story. Not necessarily being a fan of the music coming into it, I didn't understand this world. I wasn't trying to understand, but I was trying to fill it with life and meaning and behavior. That's what I do. We also keep talking about the murder scene, but we forget it is the last scene in the movie. I focused on seeing him confused, hurt, and scared.

HH: What about humanizing Euronymous?

RC: Yeah, there is definitely an aspect of

the group and Euronymous to admire. He's very passionate and he was good with publicity. He was a good musician, too, but then there are things that he says, like, he wants his music to provoke suicide. It's things like that which you cannot get behind. I would like to think that was a part of his promotion and he did not feel or think of all these things. As far as the murder scene, there is a feeling of a scorned lover. I don't know this for sure, but I think that Euronymous was growing up a bit. He was listening to Tangerine Dream at the time of his death and he cut his hair.

I got a chance to see a photo of Euronymous dead and he had short hair and he was in pajamas. He suddenly became like a kid. It was important for me to do Euronymous justice and not lean into the character that he was trying to portray.

HH: Did you guys talk about the nature of the music and the impact of that scene?

JA: The film was never meant to be about the music. I mean, it's there, and it was a big part of what they left behind with their creativity. Still, it's probably the best black metal there ever was. They did create that sound and that logo. They did some truly memorable things in that scene. It's not really a movie about that, though. I needed to have that in there, and it's a big part of what they did. I mean, the first act is about them trying to figure it out, learning their instruments, finding themselves, being awkward around girls, and having parties. That is all part of the first act to remind us [that they were] so young.

HH: Can you talk about bringing on your



Jonas Åkerlund, Rory Culkin, and Emory Cohen.



longtime DP Par M. Ekberg to this film?

JA: He kind of comes with me, it's like a package deal. We have a broad spectrum with what we can do. He is not the only one. Other people that I work with came on to this project. In the case with Par, there was so much material to work from. We used a lot of it. These kids were really good at taking pictures pre-internet and mobile phones. They were shit cameras, but it gave us a look to work with. We used a lot of those reference pictures. I guess we can thank Kodak for the exposures.

HH: Did you need any permissions to use any of the characters, music, and/or materials to make the film?

JA: We did not have a problem with that. We bought the book for that specific reason. In fact, a lot of it was public domain. I spent so many hours getting the props to build an authenticity, including the sneakers, the instruments, the stickers, the T-shirts, and the posters to make everything right. However, the biggest thing was getting the rights to the music. I couldn't really make this movie without the music. I know I said the music was not important, but of course it is important to have the right music. Before we started this project, I had the script, but before we went into production, I had the approval to use the actual Mayhem music. It was kind of difficult because when Euronymous died, the rights of the music went to his parents. The parents decided right after his death that they wanted to have nothing to do with it. They never spoke to anyone about it and they disappeared. So, for me to approach them with this, it was difficult.

HH: One of the film's criticisms surrounds the absence of the victims not

being shown or honored. Was that a difficult choice or challenge to not include their side in the film? Was is planned that way at the beginning in the script stage?

JA: For me, it was a very fine line keeping the people who I thought were important involved and respecting them for what they went through. A lot of people are still very hurt from this, obviously. I felt like that I did not want to win them over, and I wanted them to understand that I was going to make this movie either way, so we can work together then. We can have an understanding. My pitch was that we are going to humanize them and remind [the audience] that they were children, because with every fucking documentary, there is always a fire and a dark voice and a demon. That is what we are used to when we Google these names. I think this is a different perspective for the first time. I think they all kind of liked that and they all understood that is an important aspect that has-

n't been told before, but at the same time, I wanted to make my movie and didn't want them to come in to make their movie. It was a fine line. It was a balance for me throughout the whole thing.

HH: Was there a certain responsibility that you two (Emory and Rory) felt about bringing these characters to life even with all these controversial things that happened?

RC: I think it is just about trying to understand motives, but there are definitely cool elements to it. These guys look pretty cool and the attitude is appealing for a reason. So, I just tried to use that as my way in. So, if this culture is cool, then I sort of get why they like it and it's fun! You try to see the fun element in it. I never really got into the music before this. I am trying to understand it still. I think with this, it is sort of making light of death and suddenly death isn't so scary if we can have fun with it. Also, referring to yourself as Satan and/or the Devil. Suddenly, the demons aren't as scary, it's fun! You are sort of in control, and you are the one people are afraid of. I can see why that is appealing.

EC: You do want to make the characters human. I think you do want to respect all the people involved, especially the victims and things like that. Then, you want to take a deep breath and walk onto a film set for a first day of shooting and do what you do. You need to feel a sense of responsibility when telling real events, but you also need to allow yourself a little bit of permission to take that away and do what you are here to do. Also, as actors, different jobs and scripts come - who knows what the circumstance is - and you do your job. Like Jonas said, it is a fine line because you



Jonas Åkerlund and Rory Culkin.

These metal-heads are a tad ... unhinged.



should feel the weight of responsibility, but you should also remember that you are playing a different person. It's make believe.

JA: Also, we have at the beginning of the movie that this film is based on truth and lies. That kind of clears us and gives us a free pass to make the movie as well as being close to reality.

HH: We see the characters, like Faust, watching classic and gory horror films like *Evil Dead* and *Brain Dead* throughout the story. Did horror play a role or influence during any stage of this film?

JA: When I was editing the movie, I had different movies each time we came to those scenes, but due to our limited budget, we ended up with not that many, maybe two or three films. I think that it is. We had way more in the offline footage.

HH: Has there been a screening in the film's home country of Norway? How was it received if so?

JA: It is coming out in Norway, and it did play the Bergen Film Festival. It did really well and got great reviews. I don't want to say I did not expect it, but I was very happy to see it.

HH: Do fans of the music have expectations that you two (Rory and Emory) are fans of that music and that lifestyle? Is there a disconnect?

RC: I think, so far, they understand that we are performers telling a story, but before we shot it, I would tell someone what we were about to film and not everyone knew about this story. The ones that do, however, light up when they know it will be on-screen.

EC: I also found that a lot of people who

know about this story are not necessarily fans of the music. Normally, the question about liking the music is like three or four down. Other questions are like "Location?" or "How it was to wear the wig?" They understand there was a technical aspect to it, and then ask about the music.

RC: It's interesting, at these festivals, the kind of crowd we attract, we have those who love the arts and film, and then we have these metalheads who are mixed together. It makes for some interesting Q&As.

HH: Was there anyone in the cast and/or crew who was rooted in the music or a massive fan?

RC: Yeah, Jack Kilmer was. I think Wilson also knew a lot.

HH: How about the costuming? Did you keep the underwear from a particular scene in the film, Rory?

EC: Jonas has these great picture scripts and a lot of the shirts that we wear were

very authentic to pictures and the band names and stuff like that. In terms of my character's costuming, I had these boots that I really dug. I wasn't interested, however, in keeping them.

RC: I stole everything and I had to send it back. I held onto certain things, but they made me send it all back.

HH: They really made you send it all back!? Was there a certain piece of costume you wanted to keep?

RC: The leather jacket was hard to let go. I wasn't going to wear it in my personal life, but I wanted it.

EC: It was a great leather jacket.

RC: Yes, it was. It said "Euronymous" and all.

HH: *Lords of Chaos* has several established film companies that helped to bring this film to reality like Vice Films, Arrow Films, and Twentieth Century Fox. Can you talk about however the involvement of Gunpowder & Sky who has recently helped release genre films like *Tragedy Girls*, *Cam*, *Prospect*, and *Summer of '84*? What was it like to work with them on this film?

JA: To me, they are my big savior because this movie was not easy to sell. It was really hard to get it done. It was hard to get it financed. Everything was hard with this movie. It was an uphill idea from day one. It was hard up until I met them. It opened up doors. I knew Germany was going to like it. I knew it was going to work in England. Gunpowder & Sky helped me to open up these doors. I don't know where this movie would have been without them. 🔥

