

By [Joshua Miller](#) · 10.03.2010 · [Movie Reviews](#)

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I have never thought of myself as a 3D hater. The bile rising upwards through my body when I hear about yet another movie getting slapped with a sure-to-be-awful post-conversion has always been caused by the \$-blind studio decision makers, not 3D itself. In general, I've enjoyed the experience of the 3D films I have seen. I don't know that I buy that 3D is how we'll watch everything someday, but I'm also not foolish enough to say it won't happen. I thought I was still in a wait-and-see position on 3D. Yet, during *Iron Doors* I found myself repeatedly musing, "Why the hell is this movie in 3D?"

*Iron Doors* – directed by Stephen Manuel, written by Peter Arneson – is a German film shot in English. It stars Axel Wedekind as an unnamed, cocky investment banker type who wakes up one morning in a sparse concrete cell. The only things in the concrete room are a metal cabinet, a dead rat covered in tiny maggots, a ceiling light, and a huge metal vault door. Axel (as I'll call him, since he has no name) has no memory of where he is or how he got there. At first he thinks a joke is being played on him, but eventually the reality sets in. He bangs on the door, swears (a lot), rages, sleeps. Unable to even open the locked metal cabinet, there is little for him to do. That is until spots a key nestled among the dead flies in the dome of the ceiling light. The key of course opens the cabinet. Inside he finds a hammer, chisel, two gas tanks, and the equipment to turn the tanks into a blowtorch. Axel tries but fails to use the blowtorch on the vault door. Then, after discovering a small chunk missing from the concrete wall behind the metal cabinet, Axel decides to dig with the hammer and chisel.

Two days pass as Axel becomes sweaty, hungry, and weary from his digging. With no water, Axel is forced to piss in his shoe and drink it. He begins eating the maggots that festoon the rotting rat. Eventually he succeeds in making a hole just big enough in the wall for him to squeeze through. But on the other side Axel finds an identical concrete room. Only this room has a lamp and a bright red coffin. Inside the coffin Axel finds...

I'll stop there. *Iron Doors*, as you might guess, is low on plot and relies heavily on ominous reveals. The film is very much a smaller scale and less tech-based version of *Cube*. If you liked *Cube*, you may find things to like in *Iron Doors* too. *Iron Doors* feels like the world's greatest student film (which was, in fact, essentially what *Cube* was). Unlike *Cube*, *Iron Doors* lacks big set pieces and thrills. *Iron Doors* is more intimate, like an entire film of the Cary Elwes portion of *Saw*, minus the grime and mutilation.

The film never really gets exciting, but at a scant 80 minutes in length it never bored me either. Director Manuel keeps things moving along while allowing a light mist of tension to hover over everything. Axel is never in danger from outside sources, but with only his piss to drink and maggots to eat, there is still a ticking clock for him. He'll soon be too weak to dig. Of course, the inherent problem with any film like this is that we're seeing a one-man show. Axel has a whole room to bounce around in, unlike Ryan Reynolds in *Buried*, but the same pitfalls are here, and Reynolds at least had a working cell phone to call people. As Tom Hanks and that volleyball proved, our solo hero needs someone to talk to or at least talk at. Otherwise he's just talking out loud unrealistically. Axel talks out loud a lot. *A lot*. The dialogue is the weakest area for *Iron Doors*. There is simply too much of it. Axel comments on everything, and generally his comments are on the nose to the point of obnoxious redundancy. When something weird happens, and he's making a perplexed face, he doesn't also need to say, "That's weird." Yet he does. *A lot*. Some of this dialogue is in the context of Axel speaking for the benefit of the people he presumes are sadistically monitoring him, but even these lines get pretty hacky at times. I don't know if Manuel felt that voice-overs would be too disconnected for the audience, or what, but I think it would've helped the film aesthetically. As is, for such an arty little film it has an extremely b-movie tone.

The film has a pretty lame ending, but so did *Cube*, and that didn't stop me from liking that film. All-in-all, I thought *Iron Doors* was a dandy little film – narratively and in general execution. Wedekind gives a solid performance, considering he's carrying the whole show for the most part. I found him cheesy at the beginning of the film, though this is mostly the fault of the aforementioned hacky dialogue. By the end I really started digging his performance, as Axel never wavers from his cocky, fuck-you optimism. I'm not sure what the future will be for *Iron Doors*, but if I were SyFy or some other cable network, I'd try and snatch this shit up. I'm not sure anyone will pony up 3D theatrical money to see this film though. Nor should they.

If 3D is indeed the future, I'm sure such comments as "why is this in 3D" will eventually be seen as comically shortsighted. But 3D isn't quite the new sync-sound just yet. So I'm left to wonder – why was *Iron Doors* in 3D? The 3D added nothing to the film. It felt perfunctory, almost like Manuel simply had no other equipment aside from 3D cameras to use. It's not that the 3D in the film is bad, it just serves no purpose. As current filmmakers have been learning, 3D feels less gimmicky when it is used to create depth instead of just having things popping out at the camera. But *Iron Doors* takes place in a small, dark, and bare cement room. Mostly, the only spatial pieces we have to work with are Axel and the walls behind him. There is simply no way to make these compositions really sing in 3D.

For a movie this small I assume the 3D wasn't a money making gimmick, I'm sure Manuel was genuinely excited about the technology, but using it on this film is akin to a filmmaker in 1928 jumping on the new sound craze for his film about mutes relaxing at a quiet day spa. And then asking the audience to pay \$3 more for their ticket and wear uncomfortable earpieces while they watch the film.

Unnecessary 3D rant aside, *Iron Doors* is a nice little (very little) film. If the film manages to find its way to a theater near you, I'd save your money, unless you're a 3D diehard. See it in 2D.

7 out of 10

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