

DVD REVIEWS



FILM RATINGS ★★★★★ WINNER ★★★★★ MOVER ★★★★★ SHAKER ★★★★★ FIZZER ★★★★★ SHOCKER ★★★★★ TOTAL DUD
DISC RATINGS ●●●●● ON FIRE ●●●●● HOT STUFF ●●●●● WARM ●●●●● TEPID ●●●●● STEAMING ●●●●● NO FEATURES

THE TUNNEL

Year 2011
Rating M
Director Carlo Ledesma
Cast Bel Delia, Andy Rodoreda, Luke Arnold, Steve Davis, James Caitlin

Distributor Paramount
Available For rent & sale from May 19

The Film ★★★★★
The Disc ●●●●●

Funded by regular Joes via an online campaign and simultaneously released on DVD and as a free internet download, there was the danger that this homegrown horror film may have generated interest because of its unconventional birth, rather than its merits. This is decidedly not the case. *The Tunnel* is solid entertainment, filled with spine-chilling scares, Hitchcockian tension, and real human drama. A low budget faux documentary partly filmed on location in the maze of disused rail tunnels beneath Sydney's CBD, it commands your attention from the get-go. It begins with an emergency services call, where a distraught woman is heard begging for help. "My friend is dying," she cries, with the transcript of the fuzzy exchange written over a black screen. Barely a couple of minutes in, and already you're spooked...

The Tunnel centres on a TV news crew who are investigating why the State Government has suddenly abandoned plans to tap water under Sydney's St. James Station. Ambitious reporter Natasha Warner (Bel Delia in her first feature) goes hunting for the truth behind the government's about-face, leading her and her team into the underground labyrinth. There's something under the city's surface that's causing ripples of terror – but what?

Switching between in-studio talking head interviews where the protagonists look back at the events, and the news team's eerie footage, debut feature director Carlo Ledesma hones in on one of humanity's most primal fears – the fear of the dark, or more specifically, of what's lurking in the dark. He knows that getting a good scare isn't about grossing out an audience. Manufacturing goose-bumps is a much more subtle art, which, like comedy, has everything to do with timing – something which Ledesma has a perfect grasp of.



The Tunnel isn't really anything new, but there's still a freshness to it. It fits comfortably into the horror genre (and, although not strictly "found footage", the news crew's video recordings do make this a relative of the sub-genre). Yet *The Tunnel* is also a bona fide thriller, and while there's gore, a strong stomach isn't really a prerequisite, potentially giving this wider appeal than some of the bloodier Australian horror offerings of late.

If there are any criticisms, they are minor and reserved for some of the cast in smaller parts – they're not bad, but you can tell that they're acting (with the stark exception of an excellent James Caitlin, who plays a freaked-out homeless man who has seen something deeply disturbing in the tunnels). The key characters, however, are played with aplomb. Steve Davis is impressive in his role as a cameraman – not only did he actually shoot much of the underground footage that we see, but it's the first acting gig for this real life news cameraman. Luke Arnold (who plays a sound recordist) and TV regular Andy Rodoreda (as a news producer) are wholly convincing, while Bel Delia shows off a

brilliant range as the journo who got them all into this dark, creepy, underground mess.

Using found footage is a favourite technique for cash-strapped filmmakers. But unlike sub-genre films like *Paranormal Activity* and *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Tunnel* jumps between the underground footage and present-day, doco-styled interviews, making the low budget origins harder to disguise. Aided by fine editing by the multi-skilled writer/producers Enzo Tedeschi and Julian Harvey, plus clever special effects and a well-placed score, this might be filmmaking on a shoestring, but the shoestring doesn't show.

Tedeschi and Harvey explain the internet origins of the funding somewhere in the bounty of bonus material, discussing how they sold frames of the film for a dollar each, with the target of selling 135,000 frames, which still adds up to a pauper's budget. The DVD edition comes with an entire disc of extras, including an extensive making-of documentary, two decent short films, an alternate ending (actually the film's original conclusion), plus interviews with the key cast, a handful of music videos, and an amusing mini-doco on Sydney's "zombie

walk", where people gather and march, rather slowly, through the city ("[We] definitely got to scare quite a few people; it was all-in-all a good day"). It's a fine and varied package of extras that adds to the excitement around this film.

Hollywood loves to remake foreign movies – especially from the horror genre. Given the very nature of *The Tunnel*'s release, it's conceivable that Hollywood will get hold of it. If they do, there will be elaborate sets and expensive CGI at play. But it won't be filmed inside the real Sydney tunnels – these near-forgotten relics of the past. The news crew in the film is not granted access to the tunnels, but in the real world, the filmmakers ironically found the authorities most obliging, and it's this actual location – the canny use of a real setting – that gives the film much of its edge. Yet it's more than that. It's the way that they've used the location, mining every cramped angle for fear. Hollywood may well one day remake *The Tunnel*, but it's doubtful that they could do it as well as this – great filmmaking isn't about budget, it's about imagination. And there's plenty of imagination here. **Annette Basile**