

Outpost Traumatic Stress

By Leo Robb

I'M STANDING in Thomas Ikimi's flat with the last of the other hangers-on some time after 3am. I'm desperately sweeping for booze and it's all got a bit nasty. Where I was once surrounded by stars and crew, all grounded and likeable, ladies of doubtful virtue and drunken unknowns have arrived out of nowhere. Worse still, I no longer have the safety of a crowded bar to save me from the macho poser who's been gunning for me all evening.

I had been warned that this party was ill-advised, but I courageously decided to follow the last of the alcohol and the sycophants to this impromptu soirée. If there had been illegal substances and high class escort girls, I might have actually stayed.

The only thing I find in

Ikimi's fridge when searching for a forgotten beer is a solitary pack of unopened bacon. Hardly rock and roll, but it's not his fault. He's only staying up here for a few weeks. However, a party without booze is like a car without wheels. It's going nowhere. Enough is enough.

It didn't start this way. I arrived at the Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT) around 8pm, overjoyed that a friend managed to wangle me a ticket for Ikimi's *Legacy*, the Glasgow Film Festival closer. I made it to the bar for a pre film aperitif, feeling like a genuine member of the Glasgow Glitterati, looking forward greatly to the film. The buzz surrounding the festival finale and film's premiere was highly immersive.

The film itself is a home-

grown affair. Black Camel Pictures is a small Glasgow based film company. Arabella Page-Croft and Kieran Parker pooled their short film and TV production experience and set it up in 2004.

"I had been running a company in London and

His voyage through insanity becomes more convoluted and engrossing as the film progresses

found it frustrating not getting paid," says Arabella. "Kieran and I had been talking about it for ages. I had a road movie I wanted to make and he had a short film. We realised we had to make a break for it or the next ten years would go past and nothing would happen. We didn't want that."

Legacy is their second full-length feature co-produced along side Idris Elba. Their first, *Outpost* was a horror movie about Nazi Zombies. It's exactly what it sounds like: an homage to the overblown horror film, but done well. So well in fact, that the pair won a Scottish BAFTA for best new producers in 2008. It's also gained a cult following with notable DVD sales in America.

Legacy is a far grittier release, starring Idris Elba and Eamonn Walker as estranged brothers. Grittier still is Elba's character, Malcolm Gray, an ex-special services soldier on a quest for retribution. His voyage through insanity brought on by post-traumatic stress becomes more convoluted and engrossing as the film

progresses. This is without doubt Elba's most real and raw performance to date. Bearing in mind that his breakthrough was in hit US TV series, *The Wire*, as the head of a Baltimore drug cartel, that is saying a lot.

Unfortunately, due to work conflicts, Idris can't make the premiere. Still, before the film is rolled, we get brief speeches from Black Camel, and Ikimi, the writer and director.

It has clearly not been an easy road for them. The film itself was shot exclusively in the UK, predominantly in Glasgow, with a host of British actors, yet, for the most part, is set in a Brooklyn hotel room. For this reason, as Arabella points out, finding funding in the UK was impossible. Plus, she jokes, they didn't have "Will Smith or Denzel".

She explains further: "Thomas was a completely unknown writer and director in the UK, and unless you're known here it's almost impossible to get funding. Thomas, however, was very determined."

In order to actually acquire funding, Ikimi had to return to Nigeria. He was supposed to go for two weeks, but didn't return for three months. When he did reappear he had only acquired £300,000. A great deal of money for some, but only pocket change in the film industry. The smaller the budget, the bigger the problems.

"We had a quarter of the time to film that we should have had. As a result I was usually pretty grumpy on set," Ikimi admits. "You spend time questioning whether you should be doing what you're doing,



Malcolm Gray sitting in his hotel room

but luckily I had supportive people around me. My mother was one of the partners. She still wants me to be a lawyer though."

Filming was completed in 22 days which, given Legacy's complexity, is truly remarkable. Arabella points out that the lack of funding did cause other problems:

"We could have done with more coverage," she says. "You always could do with more money in film-making but we decided to go ahead with it anyway."

"We had one of the fight coordinators from the Bourne Supremacy and he worked for considerably less than his standard fee. As a result the set pieces are fantastic. Idris was training hard for two hours every night."

The filmmaking process may have been long and arduous but the film premiere is time to forget the trauma of tight deadlines and minute budgets and enjoy the end result after a great deal of blood, sweat and tears. Other than a tell-tale shot of the Glasgow Council Chambers that few outside of the city might recognize, the film is believably Brooklyn. The action scenes work well with the grinding psychological drama Idris' character combats.

The evening at the GFT goes off without a hitch. The film goes down a treat. Still, Ikimi seems rather underwhelmed in the cinema foyer.

"I'm worried people are just saying it was good." Perhaps this is his curse as a writer and director. Doubt.

Eamonn Walker is not as apprehensive as his director. Amongst other things he has already built a solid career in the cult TV series Oz, and opposite Nicholas Cage in Lord of War. For an African Warlord, he is a



Thomas Ikimi and Idris Elba discussing makeup on set during filming

very personable guy with a surprising cockney accent that catches me off guard.

"I'm very happy with how it went, but I want to watch it again," he says. "The acting between Idris and I in the room was so organic. It was a shame that so much of it had to be cut, but I'm really happy with the film."

Playing Darnell Gray Jnr, a US senator and brother of Malcolm, Walker's performance is indeed excellent.

Ikimi himself had

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claimed he was difficult to work with. Walker disagrees: "I was amazed when I met Thomas, I thought 'you're so young', but it was a real pleasure working with him. There's so much going on in the film."

The after show party is electric. Arabella's partner Kieran is savouring the atmosphere and is delighted

with how the night has turned out.

"We're really chuffed with this evening," gushes Kieran. "To be an independent Glasgow film company, and to be closing the Glasgow Film Festival is a real honour."

Arabella is just as excited: "We're privileged, this opportunity to close the festival came at just the right time. It really worked in our favour. To premiere the film on our home turf, and to bring the cast and crew to our local cinema is fantastic. The press have given us so much support as a Scottish company, which has been amazing"

The party continues without incident until the bar closes at 3am. I've managed to avoid the overly aggressive guy who I unwittingly queued in front of at the bar. Other than getting served very quickly and moving away as fast as possible, the only other run-in I endure is when he offers to beat me up for the guy I happen to be chatting to. My friend refuses his offer.

The bar closes but many

are not ready for bed. Ikimi invites the few remaining back to his rented flat in the West End. I find myself in a taxi with Steve Barker, the director of Outpost and a few other members of the Black Camel crew. Conversation turns to Nazi Zombies. Outpost II: Black Sun will begin filming in July.

We arrive at Ikimi's flat and I find myself wondering why I'm here. People are past their prime and I'm worried that my life is in danger as the nutball has followed in a different taxi. A few friends and I make our excuses and grab another cab. We arrive home with the last bottle of champagne, which disappointingly turns out to be something loosely resembling Lambrini. We wear the night down outdoing each other with classic movie trailers found online. Forget the film, the original trailer to Alien it turns out, is the most terrifying thing committed to celluloid. Ever.

It's 6am and bed is calling. I take the couch.