



Sauna

Antti-Jussi Annila

FINLAND, 2008
Finnish, Russian

83 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Bronson Club**

Producer: **Tero Kaukoma**,
Jesse Fryckman

Screenplay: **Iiro Küttner**

Cinematographer: **Henri Blomberg**

Editor: **Joona Louhivuori**

Production Designer: **Vladimir Bedrich**

Dvorak, Antti Nikkinen, Ville Vauras

Sound: **Panu Riikonen, Vesa Meriläinen**

Music: **Panu Aaltio**

Principal Cast: **Ville Virtanen,**

Tommi Eronen, Viktor Klimenko,

Sonja Petäjäjärvi

Production: **Bronson Club,**

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I can positively guarantee that no other film in the Festival this year will simultaneously recall the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Eli Roth – let alone to such powerful and riveting effects. Antti-Jussi Annila's *Sauna* marries these two divergent approaches to cinematic narrative in a way not seen since, well, his previous film, *Jade Warrior*, which sought a middle way between Chinese historical martial arts films and Kaurismäki-inspired Finnish slacker road movies.

Like any decent transcendentalist horror film, *Sauna* is set at a particular, contested moment in history. It is 1595. Brutal wars have just ended in an uneasy peace between Protestant Sweden and Orthodox Russia. Finland has been trampled over and buried. The film concerns the spiritual defeats of two conquered Finnish brothers, one a hardened near-psychopathic war hero, the other a gentle scientist in an age with no use for such men. They find themselves in the swampy interior, demarcating the new border with a unit of sadistic Russians.

The film begins with a moment of affection marred by an act of cruelty. This is an act that will haunt the brothers as their travels take them into eerier territory. When they reach an undocumented town, populated by an ethnically indistinct but practically childless sect, the brothers' spiritual anxieties escalate, awakening a dark force that feeds off bloody borderlands and the moral vacuums such locales create. The centre of this force is in an otherworldly structure, a kind of proto-sauna appropriately housing a

vengeful Scandinavian demon.

Annila is a master of shifting tone. The early scenes have an alienating coldness about them, as we come to know these pitiful siblings. While their spiritual prison begins to make its weight felt, the film takes on an intense claustrophobia and an almost unbearable sadness, alleviated only by the onset of extremely violent, haunting horror, featuring imagery that will occupy your nightmares for days.

This is a director who has something new and fresh to say about the formal properties of genre, and his film is a case study in the modernist project of creating and releasing existential anxiety.

■ Noah Cowan



Antti-Jussi Annila was born in Helsinki, Finland, and studied at the Tampere Polytechnic School of Art and Media in Tampere, Finland, where he made a series of five short films called *Hard Student I - V*. His feature films are *Jade Warrior* (06) and *Sauna* (08).

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