

'The Oak Room' — a slow burner with a rich horror story



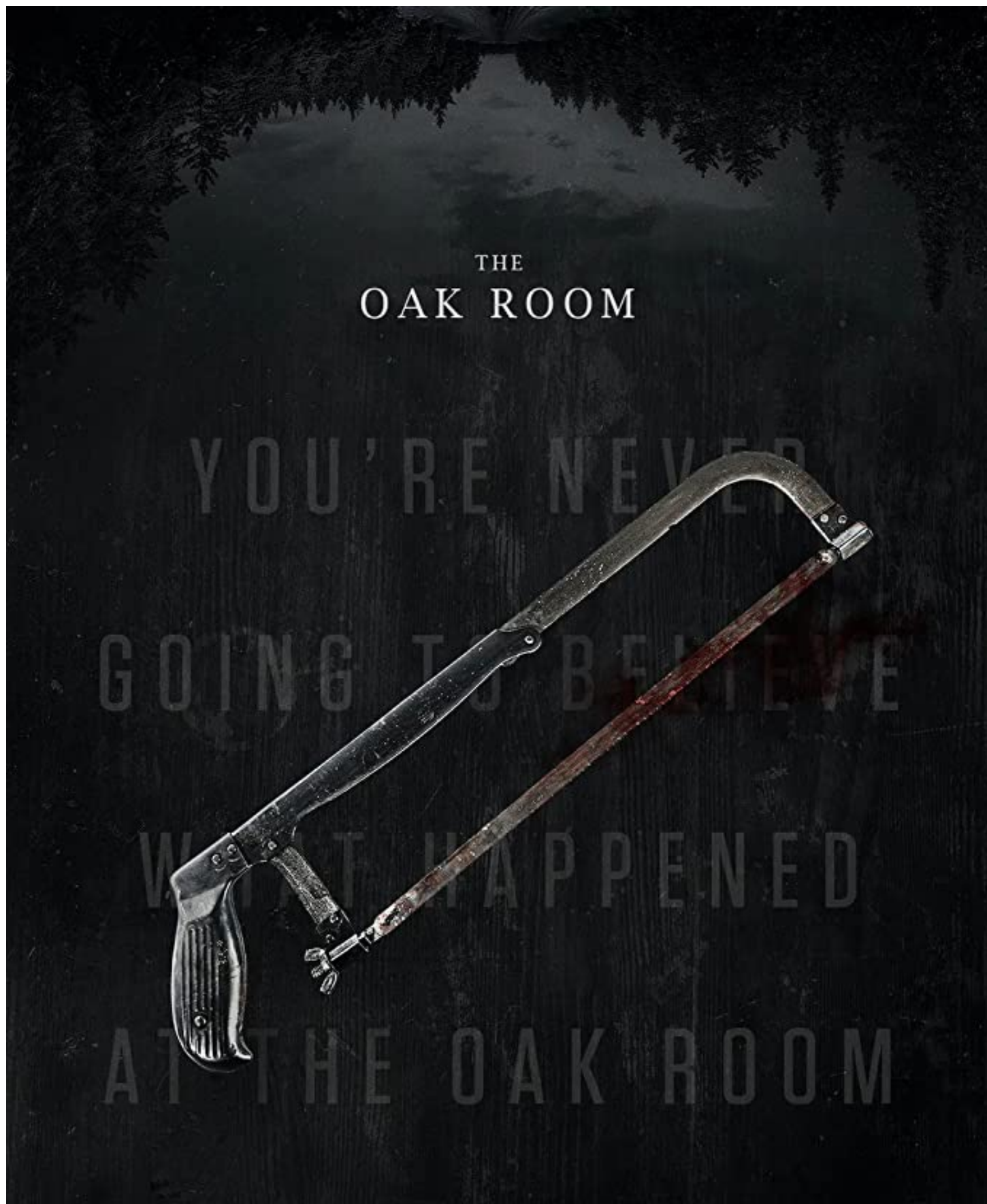
CHENNAI: The late Ismail Merchant, who made magnificent cinema along with James Ivory, would often say a good movie must tell a good story. Cody Calahan's ("Let Her Out", "Antisocial") newest film "The Oak Room," part of the recent Cannes Market held on a virtual platform, true to Merchant's thinking, is rich in the way it builds up the plot and conveys it.



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The work, one of the 56 titles that the Cannes Film Festival picked but could not screen as the coronavirus pandemic stopped the 12-day event in May, begins on a cold, icy night with a blizzard raging, an apt setting for a gothic horror. The mysterious

happenings revolve around a Canadian snowstorm, making the movie a compelling watch.





The film stars R.J. Mitte and Peter Outerbridge. Supplied

Amid this gloomy and dark night, Steve (R. J. Mitte) walks into a bar, just about to pull down its shutters. After many years, he returns to repay an old debt to bartender Paul (Peter Outerbridge). But Steve tells a rather annoyed Paul that he would give back the dues in the form of a story. What slowly emerges is a terrible tale of mistaken identities, brutal violence (including decapitation) and a threat to expose the town's secrets.

Written by Peter Genoway (an adaptation of his own stage production), "The Oak Room" — despite being a chamber piece, and with just a couple of characters on the screen most of the time — gets you completely engrossed in the lives of the two men. The film draws you into the suspense with studied precision until it reaches an exploding point, throwing up twisted facts and sheer gore, even while examining a father-son relationship.

Most brilliantly portrayed by Mitte and Outerbridge, the narrative demands one's undivided attention. Otherwise, viewers can lose the thread of the plot. Calahan throws subtle hints and peppers his story with clues. But they are not easy to spot, and "The Oak Room" is certainly not for one who may wander in and out of the room to take a phone call or get a bag of popcorn.
