

The Gate

Canada : 1986/87 : dir. Tibor Takacs : New Century Entertainment / Vista : 92 min
 prod: John Kemeny : scr: Michael Nankin : dir.ph.: Thomas Vamos
[Stephen Dorff](#); [Louis Tripp](#)
 Christa Danton; Kelly Rowan; Jennifer Irwin; Deborah Grover; Scot Denton; Ingrid Veninger;
 Sean Fagan; Linda Goranson; Carl Krainos; Andrew Gunn

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	♀	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5640	2.5	5	0	1,478	3	7	7	7	7	Yes	Feb 2002

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"It's a boring weekend: Dorff is grounded, his sister is babysitting while the parents are away – then he and a pal discover the gate to hell in their suburban backyard. Worthless first half is somewhat redeemed by amusing/scary special effects in the second; this low-budget horror film opened big the same week as "ISHTAR" and came close to beating it out as the No. 1 box-office attraction! Followed by a sequel. ** "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Young boy and his friend and teenage sister accidentally discover and open a gate to Hell in the back yard. Derivative storyline, but the film is sparked by well-drawn characters and excellent effects. **1/2 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Glenn (Dorff), a Canadian in his early teens, has a thing about rockets, a 16-year old sister who cares, an HM-loving demonologist buddy, and parents who make untimely decisions to go away for the weekend. As such, this spunky, diminutive Everyman is clearly well equipped to deal with the Forces of Darkness when, for no apparent reason, they come steaming out of a hole in his back garden. After an eventful but soporific first half, the plot, as full of holes as the Albert Hall, takes off into surreal nonsense that is almost delightful: inappropriately cute and beautifully animated SFX monsters thrown up from Hell; a hand stigmatised with a

functionless eye; and a dead workman who never existed in the first place arriving zombie-like to wreak revenge for nothing in particular. The lunacy on view is strangely dreamlike, and no bad thing. It's only a pity the film actually tries to make sense. More abandon all round, and the result could have been a Z-grade cult classic."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"A film that insists that children shouldn't play heavy-metal records with satanic messages. The kids in this film do and so unlock a gate to an ancient netherworld with an ancient evil more powerful than the devil. Though not very scary, this film exhibits outstanding special effects. Rated "PG-13" for mild violence and profanity. ** "

Credit listing from John Willis Screen World 1988 Film Annual:

"New Century Entertainment / Vista Organisation. Producer: John Kemeny; Director: Tibor Takacs; Screenplay: Michael Nankin; Photography: Thomas Vamos; Editor: Rit Wallis; Music: Michael Hoenig, J. Peter Robinson; Designer: William Beeton; Sound: Doug Ganton; Special Effects: Randall William Cook; Make-up: Craig Zenon, Bill Bannerman, Kathleen Meade; Casting: Mary Gail Artz, Clare Walker; an Alliance Entertainment Production; Canadian; Colour; Dolby Stereo; Rated PG-13; 92 minutes; May release."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics'

"We accidentally summoned demons who used to rule the Universe to come and take over the world!"

Tisk tisk. What are we to do with boys who come to us with such a tale? Set them to writing film scripts, I guess, since it didn't do master Michael Nankin any harm. "**THE GATE**" has something of the same virtues and defects as "**A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET**" (84), and look what a lucrative franchise that proved to be. Both are trashy horror tales with minimalist character development, ludicrous plots, indifferent performances. And both are very largely redeemed by inspired effects work heaped almost randomly onto the screen, scatter-shot sub-strands of weirdness that make no sense at all but contribute to an agreeable sense of disorientation. Where there is no internal logic, anything indeed can happen, and if the brain is left offended, the imagination can still be aroused.

Glen (Stephen Dorff) and Terry (Louis Tripp) have been digging for geodes in the back yard where a spooky-looking tree has been felled. Glen's folks go away for the weekend, "grounding" him for leaving a gaping chasm in the yard (that's what passes for "punishment" these days, also in Canada) and his sister Alexandra, 15, is left in charge. "No parties!" the parents call back as they drive off, so cue an immediate teen house party, lots of trendy US youth slang – "Way to go!", "Don't have a cow!", "Tres uncool!" – and kid brother being levitated in the parlour following a bout of spook yarns. Earlier, when cracking open a large geode they unearthed in the yard, the boys observe certain strange effects (a gas is released, leaving a demonic message, which they read aloud). Terry sleeps over, and late that night is visited by his dead mom, who metamorphoses into the family dog, Angus, which has died during the night. Terry, a fan of heavy metal group "Sacrifyx", loses no time in reaching his conclusions, and produces one of their album covers in evidence. Somehow Glen and he have conjured the dark forces who ruled the world aeons before man. What other explanation could there be? Playing the LP backwards helpfully reveals spells for banishing these demons whence they came.

Attempts to re-seal the hole in the yard prove fruitless however, and tiny gremlins come scrambling out to lay siege to the house. Terry finds himself dragged off into the walls by the corpse of a construction worker (whose existence and death he'd invented to frighten Glen), sister Al follows suit soon after, and young Glen is left alone with his miniature sky-rockets to Save The World From Damnation. And now the demon king arises through the floor of Glen's home, to the ecstatic dancing of the gremlins. Glen's parents are going to be **well** pissed.

The visual effects work of Illusion Arts, and Frank Carere's special effects, are all that holds the attention to what is essentially junk food for the teen audience. The stop-motion techniques are done in the Ray Harryhausen style. Today it would all be achieved by CGI, look less jerky and probably cost less, but the old skills that computer graphics have made redundant sometimes still have the ability to impress. If only computers could polish up the scriptwriting so easily – dialogue is the weak point of most horror films.

With two boys of 10 or 11 as the leads, "**THE GATE**" would be a great hit on children's television, and there is little in it to disturb even the sensitive, although Stephen Dorff does get flung about a good deal in the process of defeating ultimate evil. Unfortunately the producers of children's TV are so fearful of incurring angry letters from parents that only the most bland and anodyne of material ever surfaces on children's viewing slots. Meanwhile the kids are all watching more violent and harrowing films on their videos and DVD players, and playing graphic computer games very much in the vein of this story.

Diminutive Stephen Dorff went on to make some US features in his late teens, well beefed out now, such as "**THE POWER OF ONE**" (92), "**BACKBEAT**" (93) and "**INNOCENT LIES**" (95). Louis Tripp returned – without him – in the sequel called, but how did you guess?, "**THE GATE II**". Made in 1989, it was left on the shelf for three years, which says all we need to know.

Does anyone remember the days when Canada used to be a real country? Not anymore, if films like this are any indication. Everybody talks American, looks American, dresses and behaves American, their slang is American and no Canadian word or place-name is ever mentioned. Canada **is** a de facto annex of the USA (like Puerto Rico) without voting rights, an invisible star on old glory. The UK, deeply envious of Canada's good fortune, is working year on year for the day when it too can become an invisible star on the U.S. flag.

Speaking as one who dug holes in the back garden, and had a fetish for letting off rockets when **he** was a boy, I can assure you the whole thing is made up, and since no-one has yet worked out how to play a CD backwards, the eclipse of vinyl seems to have put paid to the prospects of conjuring demons that way. (In case you were worrying about it, the dead family dog is not in fact dead, Glen's murderous zombie parents are not dead either, and no moths were harmed in the making of this picture. So that's alright then.)

See subject index under **DOGS** and **HORROR / SUPERNATURAL**.