IRON LUNG:

A SPOILER-FREE LOOK AT A YOUTUBER'S UNEXPECTED POWERHOUSE FILM

ILLUSTRATION BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



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Made on a budget of only $3 million, "Iron Lung" by YouTuber Mark "Markiplier" Fischbach surpassed all expectations with a slam-dunk box office opening this weekend.

"Iron Lung" opened on Friday, Jan 30. at over 3,000 theaters and earned $9 million on its very first day — surpassing Sam Raimi's "Send Help" and earning Fischbach three times the cost of the film, according to Box Office Mojo. Raimi has since surpassed Fischbach, having earned $20 million as of Sunday, Feb. 1, but Fischbach sits in second place with $17.8 million, above other new releases "Melania" and "Black Bear."

Based on David Szymanski's 2022 horror game of the same name, "Iron Lung" tells the story of a post-apocalyptic world with few resources and even fewer people left alive. The main character — simply referred to as "the convict" for much of the film and played by Fischbach himself — has been tasked with navigating an ocean of blood on a mysterious alien moon, with only a rickety submarine and a camera. If the convict wants to earn his freedom, he's going to have to find and photograph the mysteries hidden in the blood.

Fischbach's role as the central character is initially jarring — as Fischbach has been broadcasting himself online for the past 14 years, it can be difficult to recognize the character as "the convict" and not as Fischbach. However, Fischbach's acting is solid, believable and capable of bringing forth plenty of emotion, despite his internet fame.

Fans of the original "Iron Lung" game will appreciate the movie's attention to detail. The convict's submarine is a highly faithful recreation of the game's version, down to the green LED control display.

Fischbach takes full advantage of what the submarine set offers him. The entirety of the film takes place within this single craft, which could have gotten old quickly if not for the creative usage of the space. The screen that displays the convict's photos is particularly well-utilized — as one of the only light sources in the ship, it's used many times as a flashlight, which lends to some creepy lighting and atmosphere.

Another core aspect of the convict's ship is the radio that he uses to communicate with his captain, safely in a station above the blood ocean's waves. As Fischbach is the only character in the submarine, much of the movie's dialogue comes from this radio, which is both a blessing and a curse.

The usage of the radio for nearly all of the movie's dialogue lends to the isolated atmosphere and the claustrophobic nature of the submarine. Additionally, as the movie later dives into surrealism, the truth of the radio comes into question and Fischbach begins to wonder how accurate the radio truly is and who is on the other end of the line.

The voice actors of the movie do an incredible job speaking through this radio, conveying plenty of emotion despite the limitation. However, at times it can be challenging to make out their words through the radio's static, and viewers who have difficulty with audio processing may benefit from captions.

"Iron Lung" shines best in its plot and use of horror. To stay as vague as possible to avoid spoilers, the movie is functionally a picture of one individual falling victim to an undefinable power, but as sanity has become highly relative and it's difficult to trust with the convict sees, the viewer must question what is real.

Fans of cosmic horror and Lovecraftian-esque monsters will doubtlessly enjoy "Iron Lung." The movie does have plenty of body horror and a few jump scares, but much of the horror comes from the unknown and the helplessness of the convict's situation. The scares don't feel cheap, and Fischbach and his team do an excellent job of building suspense.

As for the story itself — most viewers could benefit from doing a little research into the game before watching the Fischbach's adaptation. I attended the movie with several friends of mine, and those who went in with no prior knowledge were the most confused. The movie is still an enjoyable watch without any preparation, however. For those who want to learn about the world of "Iron Lung" before diving into the movie, playing through the game or watching Fischbach's own playthroughs are the best places to start, and the only background research needed. The game doesn't spoil the movie.

While the storytelling, atmosphere, acting and horror of "Iron Lung" are all stellar, the film is about two hours and feels it. It can feel slow and a bit tedious at times, but whether or not that's a negative is up to the viewer. After all, the convict's process of slowly navigating the ocean and taking photos is tedious for him, so why not for the viewer as well?

Additionally, the story can be difficult to follow. Much of the plot is left up to interpretation, and viewers shouldn't expect a cut-and-dry ending. Fischbach is ready and willing to take the audience on a ride, and it's best to remain prepared to answer the movie's biggest questions yourself.

With all its strengths and weaknesses, "Iron Lung" remains a success story. To write, build and film a $3 million movie, independently locate theaters willing to show it around the world and promote it entirely by yourself is no small feat, and Fischbach deserves all the praise in the world.

As artificial intelligence continues to find its way into film and television, and as corporations continue to find and grab hold of all available media properties, it's nice to have a movie that was made by a small team with heart. If you love people, art, horror, video games and/or humanity itself, it might be time to see "Iron Lung." The mission at stake is greater than all of us, after all.

Rating: 4.8/5



Markiplier, born Mark Fischbach, is an American Youtuber who has risen to fame playing indie horror games. Markiplier has garnered more than 38 million subscribers on his youtube channel, Markiplier.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF @MARKIPLIER ON INSTAGRAM



Promotional image of Markiplier's independent film "Iron Lung." The film was released into theaters Jan. 30, 2026.

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