

From the Desk of...

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Terror Creeps into Philly...AGAIN!!

by Baron Craze

November 16th, 2007 – Philadelphia, PA

Terror Film Festival has resurrected from its secret crypt to again unleash itself with unbridled lusts for horror, gore, and divine wickedness. For the second year in a row, Terror Film Festival has slithered into the Ethical Society Building in the famous Rittenhouse area of Philadelphia, PA. And this year's festival was even better than last year. This impressive young fest is led by an experienced and proven group of individuals that have a pristine quality called "showmanship". The fest is spearheaded by Claw, a film director/screenwriter in his own right, and the event was hosted by its official hostess, Princess Horror, the first ever princess of horror. This stellar quality film festival shined through the darkness like Jack Nicholson smashing through a door with an axe, by providing even more dedication to the films, the filmmakers, and the fans.

Their reign of terror lasted for six days, with 68 films displaying cinematic delights out of the 252 submitted films. There were additions such as a musical act and the Claw Awards ceremony presented live in front of all who attended. Although, a downside was an earlier starting time than that of last year...two hours earlier in some cases, the reason was justified...to highlight more talent. Claw and the rest of his team, also designed a Festival Trailer that presented Princess Horror and snippets of the films that would be screening during the festival. The trailer was laced with a nod to eerie music and Alice Cooper. Some of the filmmakers had traveled from great distances; in fact, a group even came from as far away as France to take part in the festival. Many were from California, a scattering came from Tennessee, and all were quite friendly in their audience Q&A's. And of course, there were local area filmmakers from Philadelphia, New Jersey, and New York.

The first night of the fest was Tuesday, October 16, which showed two segments of short films and two full length features. This was a special night for fans, for the films were truly a mix of genres, ranging from artsy to b-movie horror fare to sci-fi bliss. The first special film on the night's menu was **BACCHUS**, a film from France. Later, this masterful film would go on to win for Best Thriller Short Film. This film dealt with a mysterious painting and an incredible trip through life and facing lead character Laurent's nemesis, Giovanni. Laurent, at the age of 20, must also come to the realization of the secret of his nightmares and conquer them or be destroyed by them. Another incredible and intense actor in this film was Alexandre Dabusco, who has similar qualities to that of actor Antonio Banderas. Ideally, it was very special to see the actual director and star, Laurent Fabre and with part of his cast all from France, in attendance to support their film. The art of this film was both scenic and persuasive while the sound of strings simulated the pulse of the film, again showing to all the importance of the music fitting not only the film but also the scene. The film took two years to complete, but was worth the long time to see it to its completion. Personally, one should be looking for these filmmakers to grace the screen again.

The next short film of interest was a fun family flick. Something that is truly rare at many horror film festivals; it was **THE 30 BONES OF UNFORTUNATE JOEY JONES**, from directors Kevin and Matthew McManus of Rhode Island. This film was special because of its moral message to listen to ones'

parents about the dangers of eating unexamined candy. However, it was not preachy, rather using the dark humor and rhymes signaling out the 31 days of October into one special night all told in seven minutes.

The first main feature of the night was a film called **FLIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**. Terror Film Festival was the only film festival to present the film. This is truly a low budget horror movie from New Line Cinema that was in production prior to the release of **SNAKES ON A PLANE**. This film is unrelated to the comic book by the same name, creator Scott Ewen. The film starred seasoned horror actors, including, Kevin J. O'Connor (The Mummy) and Erick Avari (Stargate), along with Brian Thompson (X-Files) and Richard Tyson (Kindergarten Cop). The basic storyline has a mad team of doctors secretly transporting the cargo of an infected person who is the living dead – on a plane that has turbulence and unleashes the plague upon the passengers and crew. The best and most comedic line in the film was “she’s gumming me to death” in reference to a living dead old woman without teeth trying to feed on Kevin J. O’Connor’s character Frank’s arm.

The last feature of the night was **DECAYING ORBIT**, the sci-fi film directed by Tim Pyle, which had the honors to close out the fest’s first night. The film had character and plot elements that were similar in a form to **LIFEBOAT**, in which there was betrayal, greed, deception, war, hopelessness of survival, and one additional factor that was presented was a virus. The script was very twisty, with good tension, special effects and set design for such a low budgeted independent film.

The second night (Wednesday) presented pieces that are more thoughtful and some treats to have the audience savor. The program format was a repeat of the previous night, two segments of shorts followed by two full length features. The first short of creative genius was **THE DOLLHOUSE**, a creepy film from Maryland, told through Mark DeGaetani. The film has some tributes to the 70’s, such as a woman’s revenge, demonic children and exploitation, while the lighting is an homage to Dario Argento. There is a joyous venture featuring a tantalizing mother, played by Juliette Bennett, who exudes enticing sexuality similar to Elvira, but never overacting the part. The daughter, Lilly, is quite the character. Her creepiness transcends through the film and creeps-out the audience. Her freaky doll collection have an interesting relationship and convey a story for men to watch their behavior or face punishment and a permanent grounding. The creepy daughter is played by the up and coming child actor, Christina Barlas. This was another shining example of the fresh films that were presented and teased audiences at Terror Film Festival.

The next segment had two very different standout films, first was **ONE SOUL** from director Arun Vaidyanathan. It should be noted that he was the Terror Film Festival’s first repeat filmmaker having his work shown at last year’s fest, as well. This same director went on to become the festival’s winner for Best Cinematography. His film was a further exploration of his personal views of India customs with ventures of love and affection towards parents when faced with the sense of desperation. The cast for this film was the same ones that were in **THE SÉANCE**, last year’s film fest featured short. Two overwhelming hidden notes of **ONE SOUL** were that it filmed in one fifteen hour shoot day and that actor Valentina Quinn, who plays the mother in the film, is the daughter of famed actor, Anthony Quinn.

The other short film, from Denmark, had a silly but funny title, **ZOMBIE WESTERN: IT CAME FROM THE WEST**, and a wonderful sound of psychobilly and surf music throughout it. It plays homage to Sergio Leone’s classic westerns referencing Clint Eastwood. The film has a wonderful mixture of puppets and animation that made for a unique experience and dark humor that wonderfully conveyed enjoyment to the audience.

The first feature was a classic, must see, throwback b-movie of the late 80’s, from Prodigy Entertainment, (coincidentally this is their first film), with horror and intentional humor and gore galore.

The film, called **BRAIN DEAD** (no relation to Peter Jackson's classic horror film) had a good solid script, from Dale Gelineau, of which the filmmakers never actually take to a serious standpoint in the film, which actually works for them. It has the commonplace T and A, and very good special effects from the experienced hands of Gabe Bartalos, for such a low budget horror film. In fact the film has a keynote scene that must be viewed by all b-movie horror fans, and that is the most original way to give birth to a zombie creature, that shatters **DAWN OF THE DEAD** (2004) birthing event with an up close and personal mannerism. This particular film is destined to become a word-of-mouth fan favorite because it is scary, funny, gory, has zombies, and of course, nudity. Though not treading new ground, it is still worthy of being a classic in the b-movie cinema.

The science fiction entry for the night was a film that harkened back to the old rules of cinema, those being once the film starts no one may enter into the theater. This special film was entitled **DIAMOND ZERO** and starred actors Bronson Pinchot and Leo Rossi, who was on hand for the film, and would later be a special guest presenter at the Claw Awards ceremony. In addition, the legendary Tippi Hedren of **THE BIRDS** fame starred in this semi-low budget dark thriller/sci-fi film. In addition, Richard Moll, who starred in **HEADLESS HORSEMAN**, marks the screen with his presence. Bronson shows off his talents of comedy and drama similar to **TRUE ROMANCE** and is briefly upstaged by a 'talking turd' – must see for yourselves. The film is both funny and uses a voice over narration that is not annoying to the audience. Leo Rossi's contribution is wonderfully captured and presented in this film; showing his talent and dedication to acting. The plot is original, showing greed, lies, deception and corruption. The storyline had twists and turns which are becoming more commonplace in films. This is a guarantee must see film for fans of this genre, for the stars in it do sparkle. This was the second sci-fi film of the fest to have the honor to close out the night. It also had the luxury of a large crowd to be on hand for it.

By Thursday, the fest was in full swing, with the filmmakers each conversing with each other, some entourages and others alone. Altogether, they combined to make one large family that brought smiles to the event's organizers and had the dark creative genius swelling to the top. There was a constant warm greeting from all of the event organizers and it was not limited or just catering to the filmmakers, but also engaging with the fans, a rare quality not present at many festivals. Everything had the touch of class and style. The format still had no change in appearance in its presentation; except that this night was a **Grindhouse Slashtacular** night, for it was to have two films of exploitation.

The first short film segment highlighted three films. The first film was entitled **PIG TALE**, a film from Canada, dealing with a child rapist and killer who from the title kills girls with pigtails. The film had the reverse element of the television show **GHOST WHISPERER**, where the dead speak and torment the living taking justice to him. The rapists like all other molesters tries to justify his crimes, but dead children do not listen. Rather they have the strength to destroy the evil and the monster. The film has a truly graphic fight scene and sodomy done to the molester that is justified.

Next was **EYES OF SAMIR**, a corky film from California that starred Tony Todd in the briefest of on-screen roles since the film **COLORS**, but still had his passionate strength as an actor. The storyline was the basis of terrorists versus the American media through displays of imposing wills and displaying these graphic and shocking images on the internet showing the beheadings and executions. The terrorists' sleeper cell had discovered this was the best way to convey their message - live executions equal better television ratings. However, this film develops into a supernatural thriller with twists and turns, and ends with adventure ready to take hold of society's desirable thirst for higher ratings.

The last standout short was **TRAVESTY** that starred the powerful actor Duncan Garrow, as one who conveyed his passion for his craft as an actor of a man who kidnaps a woman holding her hostage. The

location in this kidnapping horror film plays an important part, so remote, away from the security and confines of society, in reality, it is Malibu, California. It is for this reason alone that the film must be seen. Duncan Garrow, who was on hand for the film, stated that the “location is a real shack in the Malibu hills of California, that has a real owner, and required very little enhancement for the film, and that helped him use the scenery to add to his character’s attributes.”

The Thursday night full length feature that started the evening was **TIL NIGHT**, a vampiric romance murder mystery, with the underlying theme of one man’s darkness that exists in his soul and his drowning in despair and destruction while one woman whose love transcends endless bounds for her true love. Director Matt Boatright-Simon, is a director who can pace his storyline and create a human drama of which had many nods to Alfred Hitchcock with an easy to spot **PSYCHO** reference, and the surprise and suspense ratio. This film is great if seen with one you care for, as it is not a gore fest, rather it has character development, something that lacks in many films today, along with multiple layers of intrigue. This was truly the first film that is similar to the literary works of the recent, romantic vampiric novel by such writers as, Laurell K. Hamilton. In addition, this film gave new meaning to dining out.

It was then time to ring the Grindhouse elements that have resurrected themselves due to Quentin Tarantino. The first film was called **ADDICTION IS MURDER** which had both the event organizers and the audience wondering if it was not an actual snuff film. The film is currently available on www.youtube.com for everyone to debate whether it is real or fake. Please take some time to weigh in, too.

The accompanying feature film was called **WEREWOLF IN A WOMEN’S PRISON**, a film that gained a lot of attention on www.myspace.com. This is your basic women-in-prison film, borderline porn, and has the common place lesbian themes, often associated with these films. There was a clear reference to **AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON** and a subtle note to **BAD MOON**. This film is an over the top b-movie of exploitation, funny lines, a werewolf in a hairy costume never taking itself serious and was a big college crowd pleaser. The script by Vincent Bilancio, is campy and film of eroticism, he also gets the opportunity to star briefly as the lead character Sarah’s (Victoria De Mare) boyfriend. This film definitely assisted in bringing out more audience members to the remaining days of the festival.

Friday night presented another new element to the festival. A musical act by the name of Lone Vein. However, two more impressive short films were shown before they went on, one about a controversial subject matter and the other was sheer homage that only true horror fans could appreciate. The film dealing with the controversial subject was **REPRESSIONS**, another film from California, dealing with sexual child abuse, and the adult it happened to, and their struggle to overcome the despair, anger, and repressive memories from childhood. The subject matter of the film and the presentation clearly demonstrates how overzealous one’s assessments can be even for the most sincere professionals. Director and writer Adam Kargman delivers a Hitchcockian film that is tense and has a sordid tale of slow twists, showing humanity’s grimness, but never allowing his film to venture into a soap opera, which coincidentally starred lead actress, Sharon Case (The Young and The Restless). Both actors Sharon Case’s and Debra Hopkins’ interaction are truly incredible, and the performances are amazing, with each delivering punch for punch involvement in the storyline. Sharon’s performance as the victim is very believable, conveying to the audience her confusion and turmoil from her sessions, while Debra’s portrays a stunning psychiatrist who is willing to break ethical boundaries and get involved in her patients’ world.

YELLOW was the other inspiring and impressive short film at a mere seven minutes in duration, created by Semin Tareen. This film was a perfect non-speaking homage to Mario Bava and the Giallo films of the 70s. The production values were at the zenith levels, with strikingly rich colors and the traditionally haunting blue that was commonplace in Bava and Dario Argento’s films. The loving tributes come in the

form of first the music eerily similar to *Goblin* and then having it filmed on 16mm to capture Bava's style. This type of film would be a wonderful addition if attached to special editions of Bava's films.

Then came director Mike D'Anna's **SIDE SHO**, the first feature length film of the night that was also in a heated distributors' bidding war, involving many companies including Lionsgate. This film takes a suburban family and tosses them into a whirlwind storyline of a forgotten tourist attraction. This film is production company Lucky Kitty's first film, written by Frank Fox who also owns the production company and gambled his own monies to have it made. And with the assistance of Savannah College of Art and Design, Lucky Kitty truly created a wondrous set design masterpiece. Mike D'Anna showed his love for horror films with his creativity and by using Hitchcockian techniques of suspense, instead of surprise which was due to on-set problems which normally occur on under funded projects. However they overcame them with professional filmmaker style. Frank Fox stressed he had "one key stipulation of being under 90 minutes", and with Mike D'Anna's past experience in editing commercials, the film clocks in at 89 minutes and is worth every minute with such a tight storyline. **SIDE SHO** clearly marks reference to a recent horror film, namely **WRONG TURN**, and then harkens back to the classic and controversial film from 1932 called **FREAKS**, though D'Anna does pay homage to **EVIL DEAD**. How? See the film!

Before the next film was to show, the new element added to the festival was the special musical guest Lone Vein that took the stage and with no overproduction values or set pieces the group played a groove that made you feel like you were attending a voodoo ceremony from New Orleans. Singer Plain Jane's performance was reminiscent of Screaming Jay Hawkins, with fascinating songs that referred to both horror films and stars such as Lance Henriksen. Nevertheless, this session was brief, as they were to be performing at the Claw Awards ceremony the following night.

MURDER BELOW THE LINE was the last film of the night, which featured a killer by the name of Cineslayer, who terrorizes a small town and teases the police with videos. Unlike the standardized slasher films produced today that follow a cookie-cutter blueprint, this film by Norman Macera, does give the twists and turns, false endings and a grizzly killer that is outside of the norm.

Saturday, day and night, was highlighted by 14 films, and the all important Claw Awards ceremony which played to a sold out crowd of special presenters, nominated filmmakers, filmmakers in general, and of course the fans. One of the first films was the funny horror comedy called **THE TOLL**, an CGI animation film from Hatchling Studios. The film's creation was solely to show other larger studios what they are capable of creating, for a mere \$500,000, but the film excels in another area, and that is, conducting a lively interview with a troll that runs a toll bridge.

The next film was **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**, a film title that director John Faust stated has caused confusion with some of the viewers, but that aside, it was another film of the fest, like many others, which showed that Hitchcock's teachings of film presentation and storyline were alive and well. This was also the second film of the festival that hinted to the legend of Countess Bathor. The other was **THE LURE**. Belen Greene plays Jane, a woman who wants to restart life away from the city's turmoil and heads to a small out of the way town, while Matt Ryan, who portrays Lyle, is seeking to vacate the small town. Both intersect with each other either by choice or fate. However, to think that life is so vastly different in a small town, where incest and horror do not exist is, as we all know foolish to think in horror films. It starred Nancy Sinclair, who appeared in her first horror film, "didn't know how rewarding the genre was," and who showed some quite natural talents in wielding a dagger. This film was dynamic and complex, raging one moment and treading softly the next. John used Hitchcock's genius and masterful strokes throughout his film, making one wonder if, the Master himself was not on-set.

The stellar film was **RED HARVEST**, which received an award for Best Horror Short, is from Indiana, and was originally slated for a full length feature, but like so many others, the lack of funds postponed that concept and instead a shortened script and film was created. The screenplay hints of Poe and Lovecraft traits, and pays homage in dividends to these two writers. Collin Armstrong's script shows 3 drug dealers trying to make a big payday. These 3 actors, the same ones who were to star in the full length feature, have a run in with a boy who may not be what he appears to have been. The packaging and transportation of the narcotics in the film makes one wonder if it is not based on someone's real life experience, simply because it is too well done. Not even the movie **BLOW** came close to this display. Unsure of what I am exactly referring to? Then perhaps then it is time to view the film.

Striving forward to the Claw Awards ceremony, the audience was growing as the next film opened on the screen called **ELECTRICAL SKELETAL!**, that homage to Ed Wood and the films of the 50s, that feature a death rock, psychobilly music Casket Architects. Brian Lonano, is now an award winning director, who was also a filmmaker at the fest last year, and used stop action animation and curious miniature set design presented in a black and white setting that is action packed for just five minutes. His film could be dismissed by some individuals as cheesy, however it is not. Rather it is perfect for a classic invasion style film that will delight fans of Ed Wood, and is family friendly.

The last film presented before Lone Vein took the stage one last time and the Claw Awards event, was appropriately entitled **THE WISH**. For the audience of artists had gathered, each with one wish – To Win A Claw Award! This film was from Potent Pictures of Philadelphia, and directed by Christian Jude Grillo, who up until this film had never won any award for any film, but did so by winning Best Screenplay – which left him speechless. His film dealt with an important question and provided a warning to others. The question: if a deadly disease was to ravage you, would you wish to outlive it, and accept the consequences? Well perhaps this film will help you to decide. But I would warn you, as does the filmmaker, to watch it before you play a game with a street vendor.

After another incredible set by Lone Vein, that pounded home their talents, the crowd was ready for the awards event. And then, Terror Film Festival unleashed its mighty wrath of the awards portion of the festival...the Claw Awards.

This young festival had a few notable quality actors on-hand to present awards. Those being Leo Rossi (Halloween II) and Tony Luke Jr. (Invincible). Also presenting briefly, was outlandish Count Scotchula, both a filmmaker and friend of Claw, who added some comedian presence. Count Scotchula is famous for his introductions of films at the North 3rd bar, on third street in Philadelphia. And Princess Horror also presented wearing the original dress from **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**. The Claw Awards also had their first ever tie for Best Actress, which Claw presented himself. Christina Barlas won for **THE DOLLHOUSE** in the category of Best Actress of a Horror Film, while Nancy Sinclair took home the award for Best Actress of a Thriller Film. For a complete listing of the nominated filmmakers and their films, and the winners, please visit www.TerrorFilmFestival.net. Although, thank you speeches were time limited, Leo Rossi stated, "There is great quality among the independent films that shouldn't be overlooked." Then was Laurent, from France, who struggled slightly with the English language, but was triumphant again, stating the greatest quote of the night "America is the land of the cinema."

Strangely, after what one would deem to be the last day of the fest, hence ending on the high note being the awards show, there was to be one last day of films. Again, obviously to highlight as many artists as possible and to delight the audiences further. The final films came from such areas as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Vermont, California, the cold region of Wisconsin, and from the fest's home town of Philadelphia.

First, of significance was **NIGHT TERRORS**, an interesting film from California, and from Taryn Hough who never went to film school, and is a self-taught filmmaker who funded her film by doing corporate videos, which probably inspired this production as it deals with a man dealing with the conflicting worlds of fantasy and reality. In which, life in many corporate videos tries to sell a happy, blissful positive side while actually, there is nothing but lies and grim reality. It is easy to detect why the film was selected by the festival. It is very promising, both in cinematic creation and directing style, but like many others well under funded.

Next, was a hilarious flick entitled **NIGHT OF THE HELL-HAMSTERS** from New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The title of this film would have many thinking to just skip it, but that is the wrong choice. NOTHH has an over-the-top British humor of possessed hamsters battling mankind, and also unkindly eating mankind, too. This film easily hints to **THE EXORCIST**, but instead of drama and suspense, there is humor, fun, rich gory special effects and silliness, and as other films, mysterious haunting blue lights assisted in creating a stylized and spooky atmosphere.

Then, a truly hidden gem of a horror film called **THE CHAIR**, formerly known as *HUSH*, from the skillful hands of director Brett Sullivan. The film has a highly intriguing, supernatural storyline that hinted to both the elements of the film **M** (1931), to Poe qualities, to references of the movie **STIR OF ECHOES**. However, only the most aficionados of films will notice that connection between this film and the classic **M**. A creepy thriller which has a possessed soul haunting not only a home, but also, the homeowner, Danielle (played by Alanna Chishlom in her film debut) had the entire audience on edge. Brett's stirring film is a whirlwind of panic in the final fifteen minutes of this film.

The Sunday Festival Closing Night Double Feature event started with the Philadelphia film, **THE UNHOLY SIDESHOW**. Filmmaker Matt Broomfield's film came with a spontaneous and unplanned surprise that the fest's crowd enjoyed immensely. A sword swallowing show! This show featured the legendary 'Red' Stuart, the Amazing Barry Silver, and the director's brother, Jelly Boy the Clown. The event was both shocking and well received by the audience, again making Terror Film Festival enter into an elite status of presentation, where only a few other fests only dare tread. The film though dealing with zombies, had a fantastic score, and also has a strong warning label, not for the commonplace violence or gore, that were clearly represented, but rather for the real 'freak show' that occurred on screen – with such wondrous talents as, sword swallowing, walking on glass and burying faces into it. Nevertheless, one can't forget the hammering of nails to people's skulls, a mind numbing and shocking display that was repeated at the after party event by Jelly Boy himself, and with Princess Horror's help. It is unwise to skip Terror Film Festival because so many great things happen so often that it is hard to believe that much of it is unplanned. And yet it is.

The final film of the night, and the festival, was Donn Kennedy's **BACKWOODS BLOODBATH**, a film made in the backwoods of Wisconsin, based on a simple script that had an underlying twist and running along the surface was the urban legend that was feeding itself and the film. This urban legend is the Black Hodag, who is having a human buffet of all you can devour...or is someone else becoming the killing machine? Donn delivers an old school horror flick, that is gore packed, fast paced, and according to him, "we had limited funds and used the best of the guerilla-type filmmaking lessons: film fast, often, and be eventful with your resources". However, the summary of this film of friends venturing off to redneck woods to spend time together sounds like **CABIN FEVER**, but unlike that film, this one goes visually for the jugular and rips out the spine in the process. As the credits rolled on the last film, there was one last Q&A session moderated on-stage by Claw and both the filmmakers from the last two feature films, with Jelly Boy the Clown providing a dark comedic answer forum which was delightful to the audience.

And as the final filmmakers left the stage and the fest came to a close, and the crew began to dismantle the set and transform this once incredibly horror-filled auditorium back to its stately white presence, there were obvious smiles and happiness, intermixed with heartache. I watched as the theater was doused in darkness, and a depressing emptiness set in on everyone as we all realized that the festival had ended. Even the city outside seemed to take a moment of eerie silence as Terror Film Festival and its possession of the Ethical Society Building was releasing its death grip upon the city and its dwellers. Sure, we were all heading over to the closing night party to celebrate a wonderful event, but it felt sad to see it all end. However, to quote Claw, “We’ve discovered that a festival is a year long job that we truly love doing for the filmmakers and the fans, but still, we wish there was more time to work on the preparation”. Nevertheless, the fest has already begun its Call For Submissions for its third year, and in 2009, the festival will be unforgettable. It is one thing to take part as a filmmaker, but Terror Film Festival is truly designed to be cherished and enjoyed as a fan. It’s a great show.

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