*Screamfest 2015 Winners & Wrap-up*

Here we are at the closing of another Screamfest. In its 15th year, we got more ghouls, ghosts, slashers and monsters than you could throw a rock at. Or an axe or a knife. Kill the creatures however you’d like. Just be creative. And with the mostly brilliant shorts and features coming out of our ears over the past 10 days, these filmmakers have taken that “just be creative” mantra to heart.

The festival ended with the premiere of the “final” entry in the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension* (check out the review here) and an extravagant red carpet with many stars of the current film as well as several actors, writers and directors representing the entire 8 year old franchise. In attendance was the creator and writer/director of the original film, Oren Peli. I got to chat briefly with him on the carpet prior to the premiere screening. His favorite in the franchise is “his baby”, i.e. the original, but he’s also partial to the third installment. And he answered the biggie question, since the studio is touting *The Ghost Dimension* as “the last one”.

**BHM:** What are we in for tonight? Everyone says we’ll get closure. Is it for real?

**OP:** We will answer a lot of questions for sure. I can say honestly, that no one at Paramount is talking about making another one. I didn’t have any conversations of like, “Let’s see how this one will do.” Everyone is really serious about “this is the last one”. No talk about it. Who knows, maybe 10 years from now… remake!

Among some of the other highlights: Leigh Whannell – the horror genius behind *Saw* and *Insidious* – was in attendance for a screening of the documentary *Game Changer: The Legacy of Saw* – recounting the trials and tribulations of the most successful horror franchise in history. During the screening, a fire alarm went off in the Hollywood/Highland complex (home of Screamfest’s host, TCL Chinese Theatres) and so the film was interrupted halfway through. Upon our return to the theatre (there was no fire, by the way) we still had to wait for the projector to reboot, so Whannell as well as directors Kevin Greutert (*Saw VI* and *Saw 3D: The Final Chapter*) and Darren Lynn Bousman (*Saw II*, *Saw III*, *Saw IV*) told tall tales of their time shooting the films in Canada, and the antics which went on in the hotels where the cast and crew were accommodated – in one instance, their tom-foolery resulted in Whannell’s and Bousman’s expulsion from the hotel. Definitely a “had to be there”, once in a lifetime inside scoop. Although I’ve personally never been a huge fan of the *Saw* films, this documentary and the Q & A with Whannell and company got me jonesin’ to take another look at this long-running “game”.

And adding some real cache to the festival, were some of the bigger names attending – Oscar winner Sean Penn was there to support daughter Dylan’s screen debut, *Condemned* (review forthcoming). And in an early morning film block, James Franco was there to chat about an anthology of student films called *The Labyrinth* (which he exec. produced as well as narrated). Franco teaches film at both USC and UCLA – so he’s out there shaping the futures of many filmmakers-in-the-making!

With 19 features screened at the festival and 37 short films (of which 6 were student film shorts), we made it our goal to see as much as we could. And I’m pleased to say that we attended every single short, and missed only 4 of the features (admittedly, I’d already seen the original *Paranormal Activity* and *Feast* and 1974’s *Phase IV* was a retrospective screening). So in actuality, I’ll just offer up a little rationalization by saying I only missed one feature which was in competition.

And now, without further ado – here are the **winners** of the 2015 Screamfest Horror Film Festival!

Best Picture: *Patchwork*

Best Director: Corin Hardy of *The Hallow*

Best Short: *Daddy’s Little Girl*

Best Student Short: *Massacre in San Jose*

Best Score: *The Hallow*

Best Actor: Neville Archambault of *Slumlord*

Best Actress: Tory Stolper of *Patchwork*

Best Editing: *Patchwork*

Best Makeup: *The Hallow*

Best Cinematography: *The Hallow*

Best Special Effects: *The Hallow*

Best Screenplay (screenplay competition): Blackvoid by Joseph J. Greenberg

And with these wins, these lucky folks take home the coveted “Skully” designed by the legendary Stan Winston. Congrats to all of you! Dust off your mantle and set up an insurance policy, ‘cause “Skully” is yours now!

But, I am a reviewer after all, so I do feel inclined to rank *my* personal favorites.

**Top Five Features (in order of preference):**

1) *Naciye* (check out the review here)

2) *Estranged* (review forthcoming)

3) *They Look Like People* (check out the review here)

4) *The Hallow* (review forthcoming)

5) *The Abandoned* (which I had seen before at LA FilmFest under the name *The Confines* – check out the review here)

**Feature Film Honorable Mentions** **(in no particular order):** *Patchwork* (review forthcoming), *Slumlord* (review forthcoming), *Tales of Halloween* (check out the review here), *Curve* (check out the review here)

My top choices for shorts are as follows (I’m including the student shorts in my judging):

**Top Ten Short Films (in order of preference):**

1) *The Pond*

2) *The Call*

3) *The Bridge Partner*

4) *Die! Sitter! Die! Rupert*

5) *Daddy’s Little Girl*

6) *Turned*

7) *Massacre in San Jose*

8) *Willa*

9) *The Flesh of My Lovers*

10) *In Extremis*

**Short Film Honorable Mentions (in no particular order):**

*The Severing*, *Night of the Slasher*, *The Thing in the Apartment*, *Oh Darling*, *Demons in the Dark*, *The Autumn of Zao*, *Meridians*, *On Dark Paths*, *Yummy Meat: A Halloween Tale*, *Don’t Fall Asleep Motherfucker*

As fast as this last year went, you can expect the 2016 Screamfest to come back around in what will feel like 2 ½ weeks or so. Which means, you need to start preparing now – to submit, to attend and to scream. And don’t forget, for those 12 hour days sitting on your duff and enjoying the blood, death and suspense on the giant screen before you, bring a cushion for your butt. It’s a long haul to get through so many great films in one day, and you won’t want to miss a beat. So make sure you’re comfortable.

I must again insist that you drag your bullet-riddled and rotting carcasses to LA next year for a film-watching, one-of-a-kind networking and genuinely hair-raising extravaganza!

Another bang-up job by festival founder and director, Rachel Belofsky and her dedicated team of staff and volunteers! Can’t wait to do it all over again! 2016, baby!