



Dead by Dawn 2003 The Film House Edinburgh

British horror writer/director Frazer Lee reports on Scotland's only horror film festival, ten years old this year.

When Festival Director Adele Hartley started her weekend of horrors way back in 1993, she had no idea her creation would still be going strong ten years later.

This year's line-up featured some great movies and some top-notch guests. Kicking off on Friday with genre classic *The Evil Dead* and the launch of tie-in playstation game *A Fistful of Boomstick*, the fest rocked relentlessly all the way through to Monday.



Guest of honour Robert 'Freddy' Englund introduced a special screening of *A Nightmare On Elm Street* on Friday night and wowed the crowd with tales from the set of forthcoming sequel *Freddy vs. Jason*. It was great to see *Nightmare* again on the big screen. The last time I had sneaked into a cinema, aged fifteen. The movie still has its unique shock power and a new found ability to terrify through bad 80s clothes! Mr Englund treated fans to an electric Question & Answer performance and generously signed autographs (someone brought a chopping board for him to sign!) until well after 3am.

Next up was the much-anticipated screening of JT Petty's *Soft For Digging*, a \$6,000 graduation film set in the Blair Witch woods. Petty uses long silences and searing tension to tell a twisted ghost story that bodes well for the director's next gig on *Mimic 3*. The chapter cards preceding each major sequence weren't to everybody's liking, but overall those who stayed the distance went away disturbed and chilled to the bone - and all before lunchtime!

This year's Cutting Edge short film contest played to an appreciative audience who had trouble picking a winner from so many great entries. I was honoured to show my new short *Red Lines*, starring Doug 'Pinhead' Bradley, alongside such amazing films. The comedy-horrors ruled the day in the end; with bonkers zombie spoof *Strangers in the Night* getting the majority vote. My personal favourite was *RIP* (another splendid riff on the zombie genre) and is definitely one to watch if you get the chance.

With the alcohol flowing like virgin's blood all night every night, we were lucky to stagger through more screenings until our appointment at the Betty Ford Clinic on Monday morning. Highlights included Sangre Eterna (Eternal Blood), the most original take on the vampire genre for some years. Although the plot kind of loses its way halfway through, this Chilean 21st century gothic epic is worth tracking down on DVD if you like moody lighting, cute goth girls and high-octane bloodletting.

Neil Marshall and Keith Bell made a Q & A appearance, as they couldn't make it last year to introduce their extraordinary werewolf saga Dog Soldiers. The boys let us into the secrets of FX maestro Bob Keen's lycanthropes and plugged their new project, The Dark, which has the curious tagline 'Chicks with Picks!'

The highly anticipated Beyond Reanimator lived up to expectations with Herbert West on the rampage with his phosphorous green fluids in a vast Spanish jail. While nothing can live up to the majesty of Stuart Gordon's original, this sequel has far more kick than Bride of Reanimator. Short film Evelyn: The Cutest Living Dead Girl gets a special mention here as being one of the highlights of the festival. Fans of Tim Burton will either see it as a scurrilous rip-off or a brilliant homage. I'm in the latter category.

Dead by Dawn closed with a Bruce Campbell impersonation contest, with some lucky fiend winning a six-foot statue of Mr.Ash complete with boomstick and chainsaw! Nicely bookending the Evil Dead festival opener, our final treat was Don 'Phantasm' Coscarelli's Bubba Ho-Tep featuring Bruce Campbell as an elderly Elvis doing battle with The Mummy in a Texan rest home (truly the greatest movie pitch ever). This film is totally, utterly hilarious and brought the house down. Unfortunately, Coscarelli is still seeking distribution, but hopefully horror fans around the world will soon get to hear campbell deliver lines like, "I'm darned if I'm gonna let some undead mofo wrap his dry wrinkly lips around my asshole and steal my soul." What a scream!



Pausing for some raucous chat with the unstoppable Robert Englund and his lovely wife Nancy, filmmaker Shaky 'Angel of the Night' Gonzalez and his charming partner Mette, and scores of likeminded horror fans, we Drank 'Til Dawn

Here's to another ten tears for this wickedly fantastic horror film festival - the most fun you'll have in the dark outside your bedroom!

By Frazer Lee

from Bite Me Magazine,

August 2003