

## Out of Hours

# The 68th Edinburgh International Film Festival

What makes a good film festival? Obviously the programme is vital. It should be exciting, edgy, experimental. It should be a dialogue between the artist and the audience, attracting filmmakers and filmgoers from around the world while nurturing both emerging and established talent.

An opening night film should excite and surprise, create some much-needed buzz, some word-of-mouth. It should be a film you're still talking about and digesting the next day. Not so much raising the curtain as ripping it down, this year's opening night film, British crime thriller *Hyena*, was a refreshingly nasty choice, particularly after last year's soporific exercise in privileged angst, Drake Doremus' *Breathe In*. Written and directed by Gerard Johnson, whose last film was 2009's grubby, kitchen-sink, serial killer thriller *Tony*, *Hyena* is a rabid dog of a film, an ultraviolent descent into hell that charts crooked cop antihero Michael Logan's (Peter Ferdinando of *Tony* and *A Field In England*) increasingly frantic and convoluted attempts to stay one step ahead of the game as Albanian sex traffickers begin muscling in on the local drugs trade and Internal Affairs is breathing down his neck. Perhaps what's most refreshing about *Hyena* is the absence of the lazy, Charlie Big Potatoes, lairy Mockney geezer stereotypes familiar from most modern Brit crime flicks.

The winner of this year's Michael Powell Award for Best British Feature was Joanna Coates' explicit, bourgeois flesh fest *Hide And Seek* and saw four white, middle class, pretty young things (two boys, two girls) head off to the country to live out their utopian ideals of free love. This being a British sex drama, their encounters are strictly regimented with a rota establishing who's bonking who on a particular evening and a surprising reluctance to show any boy-on-boy action. Unless I'd nodded off and missed it, which is always a danger when you're sat in the dark watching five films a day.

Receiving its UK premiere a week ahead of its nationwide release, attended by its director, Jim Mickle, and its star, the icon that is Don Johnson, the wonderful *Cold In July* had more twists than a Cretan mountain road, a dark hymn to the violence and chaos lurking in all men that sings to your reptile brain. When mild-mannered small town businessman Richard Dane (TV's *Dexter*, Michael C Hall) shoots and



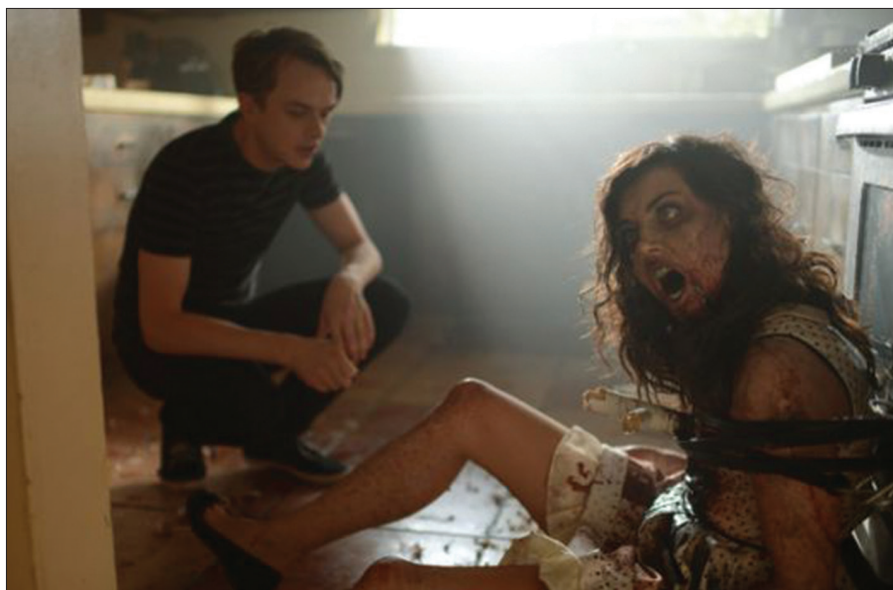
*In Order of Disappearance (Kraftidioten)*. Hans Petter Moland/Norway/2014/116 mins. Stellan Skarsgård, Bruno Ganz, Pal Sverre Hagen, Jakob Oftebro, Birgitte Hjort Sørensen, Kristofer Hivju, Anders Baasmo Christiansen. Fiction/Norwegian, Swedish.

kills a burglar, he sets in motion a violent chain of events that will see him join forces with the dead burglar's ex-con father (Sam Shepard) and a sleazy, pig-farming private eye (Don Johnson) on a violent quest for vigilante justice. While it looks great on the big screen, you can never quite shake the feeling that you should be watching *Cold In July* on a battered VHS pirate tape sometime in the '80s (when the film is set) for that authentic exploitation experience.

If you've read any of the inexplicably glowing reviews of *Joe* from last year's Venice Film Festival, you'll already know that David Gordon Green's slice of miserabilist poverty porn is being hailed as a return to form not just for its former indie darling director but for its star, everyone's favourite Elvis impersonator, Nicolas Cage. Don't be suckered in; Green needs to read a bit more Flannery O'Connor and a bit less Cormac McCarthy. *Joe* feels almost like a Wayan's Brothers parody of hicksploitation ('Ain't Them Bodies Saints' pull their 'Winter's Bone Out Of The Furnace' and dip it in the 'Mud') with Cage's fundamentally decent ex-con glowering and offering gruff manly, father figure to Mud's Tye Sheridan (who effortlessly blows Cage off the screen), dispensing life lessons and teaching him how to BE A MAN before a perfunctory climactic spasm of retributive violence.

German cinema was well represented by the likes of the moving, darkly comic *Finsterworld* a Short Cuts-style collage of interlocking stories and lives that delivered a quietly profound parable of Holocaust guilt and German identity that was by turns hilarious and shattering, while Dietrich Brüggemann's masterful *Stations Of The Cross*, already a Silver Bear winner at Berlin, was a bold allegory of religious fanaticism, awakening sexuality and self-mortification unfolding in just 14 long, stark takes, each corresponding to one of the 14 stations of the cross. Perhaps one of the most formally challenging films of the festival, *Stations Of The Cross* ultimately proved one of its most perplexing and emotionally gut-wrenching.

The Nordics meanwhile were being as moody and noirish as ever with a teenager learning some hard lessons when he gets in deep with the local loan shark in Finland's *Korso*. From Sweden came the labyrinthine crime thriller *The Fat And The Angry*, a taut, violent tale of corruption, racism, and social comment, based on actual events, with an unreliable narrator straight out of *The Usual Suspects*, a skater punk/stoner who may or may not be telling the whole truth about a mysterious explosion and an online fraud. Perhaps the most satisfying Nordic entry however was Norway's *Fargo*-esque revenge thriller *In Order Of Disappearance*,



**Life After Beth.** Jeff Baena/USA/2014/91 mins. Aubrey Plaza, Dane DeHaan, John C Reilly, Anna Kendrick, Molly Shannon, Cheryl Hines, Paul Reiser, Matthew Gray Gubler. Fiction/English.

which saw grieving, taciturn snowplough driver Stellan Skarsgard getting even with the gangsters who murdered his son.

There was also some terrific genre films on offer in the festival's Wild And Wicked late-night strand with the UK premiere of Eli Roth's retro-cannibal flick *The Green Inferno* which saw a bunch of do-gooding, leftie eco-warriors crash in the South American rainforest and being eaten by the very tribe whose habitat they were trying to preserve. While not a patch on the ferocious *Cannibal Holocaust*, *The Green Inferno* was an enjoyably nasty gorefest which made me hungry for a pulled-pork sandwich.

Sticking with people-eating, rom-zom-com *Life After Beth* showcased Indie darling Dane DeHaan's hitherto unsuspected gift for comedy as our young hero is forced to deal with a full-on zombie apocalypse and a second chance at love when his girlfriend, the titular Beth (played by *Parks And Recreation*'s Aubrey Plaza), returns from the dead with a taste for human flesh. Low-budget horror flick *Let Us Prey* played out like a Scottish version of *Assault on Precinct 13* with rookie cop Rachel (the wonderful Pollyanna McIntosh) forced to deal with threats from within and without, including a wife-beater, a wee ned, some corrupt

colleagues, a murderous doctor, and a serial killer when she bangs up Death himself (*Game Of Thrones*' Liam Cunningham). As well as the visceral thrills the film offers, BBC Scotland New Year stalwart, *Only An Excuse*'s Jonathan Watson makes a chilling wife-beater and it's great to see McIntosh play a goodie for once after so many junkies, bitches, and cannibals.

Riffing on *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, Leigh Janiak's tense *Honeymoon* essentially updated the '50s B movie for the Crystal Lake generation with young newlywed Paul (Harry Treadaway) become increasingly suspicious of his sleepwalking bride Bea (Rose Leslie) during their honeymoon at her folks' isolated cabin in the woods. Suffused with a creeping dread, horror's rarely this intimate and Scots actress Leslie is phenomenal.

The hottest ticket at Edinburgh this year (other than a one-off screening of *The Empire Strikes Back*) however, was the latest offering from last year's Head of the EIFF's International Jury, visionary Korean director Bong Joon-ho's mean, muscular, mental post-apocalyptic sci-fi *Snowpiercer*, where the last hope for survival during a near-future ice age is a high-speed, perpetual motion train, an ark with its own eco-system. But even after the end of the world, society is still divided into haves and haven't-got-a-hopes and revolution is brewing back in the cheap seats where the passengers have had to put up with squalid deprivation and cannibalism while up in first class it's sushi, steak, and designer drugs. With a cast including *Captain America*'s Chris Evans, Tilda Swinton, John Hurt, Ed Harris, and Jamie Bell and already a massive hit everywhere around the world but the UK and the US where its release is held up by a failure of nerve on the part of producer Harvey Weinstein, *Snowpiercer* serves as both a cautionary tale of eco-meddling, an allegorical satire of the class war and a grim, gritty vision of the future that's a rollicking entertaining ride. And in case you're wondering: 'Babies taste best.'

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