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Underground Film Festival At La Paloma

Variety Of Shorts, Plus Connecticut-Made Feature 'Rudyard Kipling's Mark Of The Beast' Play Sunday

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October 02, 2012 | By SUSAN DUNNE, sdunne@courant.com, The Hartford Courant

"Mark of the Beast" was written by Rudyard Kipling, and like many Kipling short stories it was set in India among British colonizers. But when Thomas Seymour first read it, he thought, this could happen in Connecticut, too.

So Seymour, an indie director who lives in New York City but films his movies in Connecticut, glommed onto the story's public domain status. The feature film he and Jonathan Gorman made in Voluntown, "Rudyard Kipling's 'Mark of the Beast,'" is one of the two centerpiece films on Sunday, Oct. 7, at the New England Underground Film Festival in Hartford.



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Seymour said he discovered Kipling's 1890 story while working at The Strand book store in New York. "I would spend my days researching and hunting down potential stories to adapt. I came across an old, dusty book of short horror stories. I read ['Mark of the Beast'] while still on the clock at work. It jumped off the page to me," Seymour said. "It has some things in common with Beowulf: a misunderstood creature ... and 'good guys' whose actions were very questionable."

"Mark of the Beast" tells the story of a bunch of friends in a cabin in the woods. When one desecrates an ancient holy place, a vengeful spirit puts a curse on him. It stars horror movie veteran Debbie Rochon and "Dead Like Me" star Ellen Muth.

It also stars, as the guy who desecrates the shrine, Phil Hall, the organizer of the film festival. Hall also appears in "World Without End," one of the shorts in the lineup.

Seymour said that if he can find funding, his next project will be another Kipling story: "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes."

Other Connecticut filmmakers in the fest are Christopher Husta of Marlborough, Ryan Ondrizek of Southington and Daniel Kuriakose, who is only 13, of Woodbridge.

Kuriakose's movie, "Checkmate," is about a homeless pickpocket and his friend. Kuriakose, who goes to Foote School in New Haven, said he was inspired by seeing homeless people in New York.

"I started from the concept of people living on the streets who weren't necessarily bad people," Kuriakose said. "People

Entertainment

always say, 'never give them money, they're faking it.' There's the assumption that they're bad people."

He started working on the movie when he was 12, with 18 friends in the cast and crew. Kuriakose said he has another film project in mind, and hopes someday to go to film school, "preferably NYU."

Ondrizek said he made his film, "Spirit First," a documentary about a singer-songwriter, after asking the musician one question: How would he fill in this blank: "My name is Levi Weaver and I _____." Weaver responded "My name is Levi Weaver and I will never be famous."

"I had this sick feeling in my stomach. His response weighed heavier than anything I had expected," Ondrizek said. "It was sad. It was honest."

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The film tells the story about how Weaver finds professional fulfillment by adopting a different mindset than someone working toward a conventional definition of success.

Another noteworthy film at the daylong fest is "His Majesty, the Scarecrow of Oz," a delightful 1914 fantasy directed by "Oz" books author L. Frank Baum. It includes all the familiar Land of Oz characters, in addition to a cruel king, a princess in distress, a mermaid, a laughing mule and a little girl named Button Bright.

"This is the third time I've shown this film at an event, and it's a real eye-opener," Hall said. "People come expecting 'Over the Rainbow' and they get a completely different vision of Oz, the vision that L. Frank Baum had in mind."

Here's the lineup for the program of eight shorts and three features:

>>12:05 p.m.: "World Without End," apocalyptic drama by Husta.

>>12:20 p.m.: "Spirit First".

>>12:35 p.m.: "Checkmate".

>>1 p.m.: "Genevieve Goes Boating," fable directed by Lucy Gray of California.

>>1:20 p.m.: "Hit and Run," drama about a pregnant woman directed by Luke McKay of Australia.

>>1:30 p.m.: "His Majesty, the Scarecrow of Oz".

>>2:40 p.m.: "Working Stiffs," feature-length comedy about zombie office workers, by Michael Legge of Massachusetts.

>>3:40 p.m.: "Anecdote," drama about a male prostitute by Ahmed Ziari of New York.

>>4 p.m.: "Parrot," drama about family religious conflict by Craig Foster of Australia.

>>4:25 p.m.: "Off Season," romantic drama by Eugene Ioannou of New York.

>>4:50 p.m.: "Rudyard Kipling's 'Mark of the Beast'."

THE NEW ENGLAND UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL will be on Oct. 7 at La Paloma Sabanera, a cafe on the corner of Capitol Avenue and Babcock Street in Hartford. Admission is \$10, \$5 students. Details: newenglanduff.webs.com.

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