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THE SCI-FI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL // THE SEARCH FOR SIMON

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THE Sci-Fi London Film Festival hits the scene once again, returning for another dose of aliens, robots, dystopian/utopian futures, magic, conspiracy and a good deal of fancy dress. This is a film festival that has always held a special place in my heart, appealing to the sci-fi fan in me that so rarely gets expressed. Previous years at the Apollo Piccadilly have always buzzed with excited volunteer stewards, tons of merchandise and a decent following that provides plenty of crowd watching entertainment (especially trying to spot the biggest sci-fi geeks, it's not hard!). I was hesitant to book tickets for the main venue at Stratford Picturehouse this year – being so far from me – so was pleased to see a good portion would be screening at the BFI, allowing me to indulge in some film snobbery.

Of all the film festivals I've loyally sampled recently, the Sci-Fi London Film Festival was inevitably going to be the one I would criticise most, after two very satisfying trips in 2011 and 2012. Simply put, this year's feature-length programme failed to grip me, although I do usually pride myself for selecting the most obscure films possible at such festivals (previously giving high praise to Hungarian anti-utopian techno-flick 'Transmission' (Dir. Ronald Vranik) and the philosophical 'Exit' (Dir. Marek Polga) – a kind of existentialist porn). I decided, regrettably, to go with something a little more popular looking this year, booking for 'The Search for Simon'.



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Everybody enjoys a good bit of cow vs alien.

Directed by Martin Gooch (who questionably cast himself as lead actor), and co-produced by SFLFF/ festival Director Louis Savy this is immediately a catch. Given Sci-Fi London's previous achievements, programmes and events in addition to Savy's claim to watching 10,000 shorts through the festivals' past submissions, this should be a good grounding for a well-made film.

'The Search for Simon' is a comedy feature about David, a 30-something alien enthusiast who's spent his life searching for his younger brother who he believes was abducted as a child. The story is a journey through his search, tracking down the weirdoes and con men who might hold the answer he needs. With the inadvertently helpful guidance of a desperate psychotherapist and a bunch of loyal friends, David eventually finds his way to the truth.



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Unfortunately, even with a promising cast comprising of some respected sci-fi names; Tom Price (Torchwood), Carol Cleveland (Monty Python) and Simon Jones (Hitchhikers Guide), the film failed to live up to my expectations.

That said, some praise must be given to the moments that resembled some of Britain's finer science fiction. The opening scene was a brilliant start; seemingly transporting us back to wartime until Gooch's character, David, answers his ringing phone – complete with TARDIS ring-tone. Nice touch. The film has distinctive style and to be fair, the plot wasn't all that bad. While dialogue was a weak spot, it still managed to cause a good few laughs and warm the audience with its romantic developments and enduring friendships.

Given that the film was produced (according to Gooch's enthusiastic introductory mathematics) on 10p per frame, when compared to the \$600/frame (or something like that) spent on some Hollywood blockbusters – the whole thing redeems itself for a micro-budget project. It's also worth noting that the project was a first for Sci-Fi London and both Gooch and Savy put their reputations on the line to make it. Like so many films made recently, it was crowdfunded through IndieGoGo's flexible option but only reached a third of its £15k budget.



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The screening itself had a great vibe, with the cast and crew whooping throughout, a pleasant reminder of the thrills of achievement. While 'The Search for Simon' couldn't live up to the high expectations I set, it has real potential for future projects from the producers and given a higher budget and some more careful details this could have been a brilliant new name on the British Sci-Fi scene. Either way, whatever

comes next will defiantly be on my watch-list and hopefully back on the programme for Sci-Fi London Film Festival next year.

Find out more and for future screening check out: www.TheSearchForSimon.com

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Director of Short Sighted Cinema and a freelance short film programmer and events coordinator, Kate is dedicated to promoting and developing the London cinema culture.

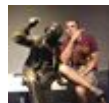
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Louis Savy

thanks for the kind words and look out for more productions and festival news soon!
Louis

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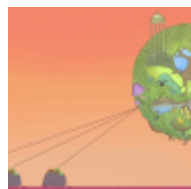
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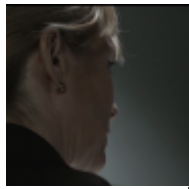
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