



TRIESTE IS BEST!

That's what Alan Jones thinks. but then he has good reason to champion the virtues of Italy's most famous science fiction festival!



I am thrilled and honoured to have been made Artistic Director of the Trieste Science+Fiction Festival. I first attended the festival in 2004, loved it and the city so much I became a permanently invited fixture and decided to make Trieste my second home. So, I couldn't be more excited with the fantastic opportunity to turn this absolute jewel on the genre festival calendar into a more international institution, a heritage destination for world-renowned filmmakers and industry creatives to positively interact with their audience.

Festivals are more important than ever in the current shrinking landscape for showcasing, giving a diverse voice to and real chances at greatness to the many below-the-radar independent movies that could and should go the distance given the right boost and positioning. I am determined that Trieste Science+Fiction will continue to provide that crucial outlet and attract an ever-increasing fan base for the still buoyant genre this wonderfully supportive city has been synonymous with for nearly sixty years now".

And with those press release words from January 2022, I took over control of one of the oldest and most beloved fantasy festivals in Europe. The offer to do so came completely out of the blue. La Cappella Underground, the Italian organisation which manages the finances and day-to-day operation asked their staff who they thought would be the best person to update and take the festival forward and, amazingly, their choice was yours truly. Based on my co-director FrightFest experience, my constant attendance at Trieste S+F and complete grounding in understanding of the vagaries of the Italian Film Industry, thanks to my relationship with Dario Argento it must be said, everyone thought I was in the best position to make a massive mark on what is still a festival in the shadows. It is my mission to change all of that and make sci-fi fans everywhere fall in love with the city as I did when I was first invited to take part in the 'Brit Invaders' strand in 2004 along with my great friend, writer Kim Newman. I dubbed the two of us 'Extra-Triestrians'!



If you believe in fate, then I suppose I was earmarked for this job back in 1963. Let me explain. Over the past few years I've written three books about exploitation movies; *The Act of Seeing* co-authored with *Drive* (2011) cult director Nicolas Winding-Refn, *The FrightFest Guide to Exploitation Movies* and *The FrightFest Guide to Grindhouse Movies*, (the last two still available at www.fabpress.com). In all three, but mainly the latter, I extensively wrote about my (de)formative years as a fledgling genre fan, driven crazy by all the posters advertising X certificate releases I was too young to see that appeared on billboards at the end of my Southsea, Portsmouth, home street. *Teenagers from Outer Space* (1959), *The Day of the Triffids* (1963), *Island of Terror* (1966), *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) and more became a tracking-down lifelong obsession, one that happily and gratifyingly turned into my profession.

One of those many posters was for Roger Corman's sci-fi classic *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (1963). On that lurid green day-glo quad poster was this alluring strap-line "Winner of the International Science Fiction Film Festival". Having been caught out by such questionable promotional tricks before – I mean, did the naturist magazines endorsing *Nude on the Moon* (1961) actually exist? – I decided to do some digging. And indeed there was an International Science Fiction Film Festival. It was based in Trieste, just a little way over from Venice on the Adriatic Sea, and they had definitely given *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* their top prize, the Astronave d'argento (Silver Spacecraft).

When I finally did get to see the Corman shocker, I felt it was a well-deserved win.

Sure, as a child I knew all about tourist Rome thanks to movies like Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion monster adventure *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957) and all those sand-and-sandal kiddie-orientated muscle-bound peplum sagas in the mould of *Samson and the 7 Miracles* (1971). But Trieste? Forty years later it would become my second home away from home because I became besotted by the city that is now on the movie location map

thanks to the likes of *Diabolik* (2021), *The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard* (2021), even going as far back as *The Godfather Part II* (1974), and the recent ground-breaking Mafia TV series *Gomorra*. And it's also the birthplace of such exploitation actors as Ivan Rassimov (Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires*, 1965) and his sister Rada (Argento's *Cat O'Nine Tails*, 1971). What better endorsement could there be?

A REVOLUTIONARY EVENT

2023 will mark the ever-changing Trieste S+F Festival's 60th anniversary, so how did it all begin back in the days when Corman's *X* marked the spot? In a greeting telegram still in the dusty La Capella Underground archives, Italian futurist poet Giuseppe Ungaretti started the Festival Internazionale del Film di Fantascienza by inviting a group of like-minded artists to create a revolutionary event that would bring a celebratory roster of global genre stars to the city, which has had a tortured political history and deserved some uplift and adoration.

From being ruled by France, Austria, Germany and Great Britain (yes, really, hence the 'Brit Invaders' strand) at various key points, Trieste finally became partially annexed to Italy in 1953 and fully in 1970. So a sci-fi film festival with major stars seemed to be the best way to profile a city emerging from a very strange, dystopian and multi-dimensional even, past indeed.

Guests at the inaugural event included Corman, influential Italian director Riccardo Freda of *Caltiki, The Immortal Monster*

(1959) and *The Exterminators* (1965) infamy, 'Famous Monsters of Filmland' editor Forrest J. Ackerman and medievalist author Umberto Eco (*The Name of the Rose*) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) icon Arthur C. Clarke.

The following two decades would turn the coastal port city of Trieste, one caught between Italian and Germanic cultures, into a unique backdrop for genre films and a wonderful platform to create awareness for controversial fare. Like Peter Watkins' *The Gladiators* (1969), awarded the Golden Asteroid for "the intelligence and extraordinary visual efficacy with which he presents social and political problems" as per the statement issued by the Jury led by noted Brit author and Nebula/Hugo Award winner Brian Aldiss.

In 1970 actor Terence Stamp was given the Silver Asteroid for his "insightful and illuminating portrayal of the human condition in a particularly difficult role" in *The Mind of Mr. Soames* (1970). Other winners have included the American TV movie *Hausen's Memory* (1970), the Douglas Trumbull classic *Silent Running* (1972) and the Ozploitation gore-fest *Wyrnwood* (2014), while special mentions went to *Scream and Scream Again* (1970) and *Gas! – Or - It Became Necessary to Destroy the World in Order to Save It* (1969).

But for every good, or left field, film of course there have been plenty of bad ones that made their first and often only appearance on the Italian scene at Trieste. Step forward *Gappa, the Triphibian Monster* (1967), *Zeta One* (1969), *Equinox* (1970), *Chariots of the Gods* (1970), *Beware! The Blob*

(1972) and *Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell* (1968). Yet countering this necessary evil – then, as indeed now, the sci-fi choices were from a far smaller pool of contenders than the always over-stuffed horror one - the festival would often focus on commendable TV product, such as the Harlan Ellison scripted 'Demon with the Glass Hand' episode of 'The Outer Limits' (1964) and retrospectives of Corman's B-pictures, German Expressionism and an all-encompassing *Devils, Sorcerers and Witches* season.

HORRENDOUS CONDITIONS

In researching the early genesis of the festival I came across a few yellowing newspaper reports and critical magazine rundowns of the European banner event. While most praised the fact it actually even existed, it's clear there was still a lot to be desired and many journalists damned the whole enterprise with faint praise.

Take for example the horrendous conditions under which many of the films were shown. If the non-Italian movies didn't have subtitles as many of the lesser-known titles from a wide-ranging variety of countries didn't – the Czech android comedy *Pane vy jste vdova/You Are a Widow, Sir!* (1971) anyone? – the soundtrack suddenly cut out, and a narrator via a tinny tannoy system gave a long explanation of what had just happened on screen. Many couldn't stand this annoying and distracting presentation, the attending talent especially.

There was also the over-reliance on short films; many days were filled with just those items on an endless conveyor belt. ➔

This spread: Images from the Trieste Science+Fiction Festival and Artistic Director (and author) Alan Jones at the microphone



Above: The 2021 fest launched with Romain Quirot's film *The Last Journey*, introduced by actor Hugo Becker, one of the stars of this French sci-fi movie that deals with important environmental themes

One host venue in particular came under severe scrutiny. While most films played at the ritzy Excelsior Cinema on the Viale XX Settembre – think Trieste's version of Barcelona's Las Ramblas - many of the tent-pole American entries were kept for the open air cinema temporarily constructed in the picturesque grounds of the imposing San Giusto Castle. As the festival dates were always sometime in July, this was an ideal location on balmy summer nights. Unfortunately, for many years in a row, constantly stormy weather meant the continuous cancellation of the main films everyone wanted to see. Yet the International Science Fiction Film Festival staggered on through thick and thin until 1982, when the had-enough organizers decided to call



it a day and it abruptly came to an end. Cut to the year 2000, when La Cappella Underground under new, aggressive and forward thinking management decided to pick up the tradition of the festival, presenting blockbuster sci-fi, independent film productions, Italian premières, classics, conferences, panel discussions, tributes and meetings exploring the whole range of the science fiction world, from cinema to comics, from literature to musical performances. And so the Trieste Science+Fiction Festival arose phoenix-like from the ashes of past conventions and rituals.

Then in 2002, in cooperation with Arnaldo Mondadori, editor of the sci-fi and fantasy magazine *Urania* (and indeed publishing home of the giallo novel), the Urania d'Argento (Silver



The final evening of the 2021 Festival in which the winners were announced was enhanced by the Asteroide Lifetime Achievement Award to Abel Ferrara who also answered questions from the public

Urania) Career Achievement Award was created and the first went to *Zeder* (1983) director Pupi Avati. Other recipients over the years include Dario Argento (2003), Hammer writer/director Jimmy Sangster (2004), Lamberto Bava (2005), Enki Bilal and Terry Gilliam (2006), Joe Dante (2007), Ray Harryhausen (2008), Roger Corman and Christopher Lee (2009), George A. Romero (2011), Alejandro Jodorowsky (2014), Rutger Hauer

(2016), Sergio Martino (2017), and Douglas Trumbull (2018). In 2019 the name of the Award was changed to the Asteroide Lifetime Achievement Award and was presented to Phil Tippett and, in 2021, Abel Ferrara.

The first time I attended the Festival it took place mainly in the Cinecity, a faceless multiplex on the city's outskirts. Minivan shuttles from hotels to the venue often meant late arrivals and a lot of waiting around. Then good sense prevailed and the Sala Tripovich became the central hub for a few years. This theatre, centrally situated by the main train station, was actually the rehearsal space for the nearby opera house, the Teatro Verdi. Always in need of major repairs and renovations, this venue had to finally be abandoned when the roof caved

in during a heavy rainstorm in the middle of a screening. It has remained empty ever since then and only this year has the local council approved it being torn down completely.

Now the festival takes place in the absolutely gorgeous Politeama Rossetti, situated at the top of the aforementioned Viale XX Settembre. Opened in 1878 and a quintessential example of rococo design, the Rossetti is the theatre where top Italian actors and pop stars appear in dramas and musicals and European touring shows of such Broadway and West End hits as *'Mamma Mia!*', *'Cats'*, *'Hair'* and *'The Rocky Horror Show'* play for limited weeks. But for six days in autumn the Rossetti is customized to become the home of Trieste Science+Fiction. Audiences love the luxury setting, visiting talent admire the stellar presentation and on the doorstep is a wide array of restaurants and bars catering to all tastes and pockets. In my new role as artistic director I want a more international audience to experience that uniqueness and I see that directive as my major challenge. Trieste S+F mixes the hospitality of the region and its unique artistic heritage with cutting edge, compelling and forward thinking values emphasizing originality, diversity and personal engagement with filmmakers of industry stature and professional figures in the fantasy genre. More people need to know about it and under my watch they will.

BIJOU BRUTALIST SPACE

Throughout the many main venue changes though, and the festival usually uses three cinemas, one has remained consistent; the seaside located Teatro Miela. This bijou brutalist space is where the Master Classes, panel discussions, live performances (Goblin for example), poster art gallery and other satellite events take place. Many die-hard pass holders still recall with horror the time Italian Z-movie director Luigi Cozzi presented his latest effort *Blood on Méliès Moon* (2016) with a deathless Q&A. First audience question was, "Why is your film so boring?" Eeek, bring back

Starcrash (1978), all is forgiven! And indeed they did, which Caroline Munro presented in her ever-wonderful way.

Such memories I have thanks to the many guest invitees that Trieste S+F deems important to the tenor of the event. I was thrilled to meet John Phillip Law, star of one of my favourite films of all time, *Danger: Diabolik* (1968). He could not have been nicer and shared so many anecdotes about director Mario Bava I was enraptured. And the same was true about Antonio Margheriti, director of another guilty pleasure, the zany *The Wild, Wild Planet* (1966).

Then there were the two days I spent as Jimmy Sangster's tour guide of the local churches. I relentlessly asked him so many questions about his Hammer career, but he answered them all with such good grace. Terry Gilliam stupidly asked me why his awful *Tideland* (2005) had been a worldwide flop. And then there was the time I slagged off the Hitchcockian Austrian fantasy *Hotel* (2005) to a guest at a party, not realizing until it was too late she was Jessica Hausner, its director. Hated her *Little Joe* (2019) just as much too! Trieste also marks the last meeting I had with Christopher Lee; grumpy and as garrulous as ever, he insisted he didn't want to talk about his horror roles in any way whatsoever. But as usual, he reverted to past form and did.

As I write this, it's early days in my tenure at the helm of the Festival and all the exciting plans, events, guests and films I have already confirmed for November 1 – 6, 2022, can't be revealed as I have to adhere to strict press release time-lines. Unlike FrightFest, which is not funded by any government body, local council, National Lottery or the BFI (shame on them!), Trieste does receive support from a multitude of organizations including the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, the Ministry of Culture, the Municipality of Trieste and various University and education bodies. Hence I don't just have the programme to fill, I also have to take into account local school events, green issues,

THRILL-CRAZED SPACE KIDS BLASTING THE FLESH OFF HUMANS!



"TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE"



DAVID LOVE • DAWN ANDERSON • HARVEY B. GUNN • BRYAN GRANT • TOM LOCKYER
WRITTEN, PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY TOM CRAEIFF SCREENPLAY BY WARNER BROS.

video gaming, sci-fi authors and focuses on every aspect of the Italian film industry. Phew!

Also Trieste S+F is part of the European Fantastic Film Festivals Federation (EFFFF), which is composed of 26 festivals on the European continent (like Sitges, Strasbourg, Motel X in Portugal) as well as in Asia (Bifan) and North America (Fantastic Fest, Screampfest, Fantasia). With the objective of supporting European fantastic cinema artistically and economically, the EFFFF created the Méliès D'Or competition for the Best European Fantastic Film.

Past winners include *Censor* (2021), *Martyrs* (2009) and *Day of the Beast* (1996). Just for the record, FrightFest pulled out of the EFFFF because it is not a festival driven by awards or jury prizes and it couldn't justify the extra expenses involved.

Every Festival has its traditions and Trieste S+F is no exception. Here it's the omnipresent rallying cry, "Raggi Fotonici". Compères, guests and the audience yell this phrase out whenever there's a film introduction or need of vocal approval. Translated as "Photon Ray", and culled from the super robot Japanese Anime cartoon series *'Mazinger Z'* that was so popular in Italy during the 1970s, it was first uttered in a short film advertising the Festival, captured the spirit of it and stuck.

So if anyone reading this is thinking of making the worthwhile journey to an undiscovered part of Italy anytime in the near future to witness a full-on Science Fiction extravaganza, then be prepared to shout out 'Raggi Fotonici' to the rooftops. I will be hyping Trieste at a special sci-fi screening within FrightFest this year in August, you can follow the Festival on Twitter @tplusf and I really hope to see some of the more adventurous amongst you at the hub of what *Mandy* (2018), *Vivarium* (2019) and *Wyrmwood: Apocalypse* (2021), producer Todd Brown has called, "Not just one of the world's leading science fiction festivals (but) one of the finest genre events in the world regardless of the genre in question".