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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
 Posted: September 13, 2010 04:13 AM

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Toronto Film Fest Day 3: Strikes, Snafus and Sexploitation!

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The Toronto International Film Festival has a long-standing reputation as low-key, unstressful and friendly to the press. So maybe that's why when something goes wrong it seems even more shocking. At Cannes, press can be herded around and treated with disdain. It's almost expected. But Toronto? So it was big news when a technical difficulty meant a public screening big-footed the press screening for the most anticipated movie of the day, James Franco in *127 Hours*. I left one movie early to get in line, only to wait two hours to ultimately find out I would be five people away (!) from getting in. It drove a hole through everyone's schedule, so that instead of seeing

five movies I only saw three. The only reason people didn't implode were the ever-present volunteers. They politely listened to every anxious, angry question and were so wounded at not being able to help or even give any actual information (they were in the dark just like us) that it was kind of sweet.

The day began poorly when I decided to skip the first screening to catch some sleep and get in line extra early for *Let Me In*, the US remake of *Let The Right One In*. I was certain it would be jam-packed. And while the screening was well-intended (and most of the reviews positive) it was not the madhouse I anticipated. Then came the *127 Hours* fiasco and boy, was I in a grumpy mood. The Bell Lighthouse -- the new center for the festival -- was having a black-tie event before the grand opening. But obviously, the designers never accounted for cars or people on the sidewalk. So they had to block off a lane of traffic and the sidewalk for VIPs. After two hours of being kept in the dark, attendees had to dodge into traffic just to get around the security for the new venue. Plus it doesn't contain the really grand space (1,000 seats, 1,500+) that would be ideal for the big films. Grrrrr.

LET ME IN ** out of **** The Swedish film *Let The Right One In* is a modern masterpiece, moving and strange and scary and unshakable. Hollywood's decision to remake it seemed puzzling; it was such a...

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Swedish film. Or at least European in its sensibility and quietness. Why would Hollywood want to remake it? And how bad would they screw it up? Now that I've seen the remake I'm more puzzled than ever. Don't get me wrong, it's crafted with care and no one could accuse them of Hollywood-izing the movie. It's quite faithful to the original in plot and tone. But the more similar it was, the more I kept wondering, why bother? For the folks who won't read subtitles? It's not exactly a high concept, action-packed movie. Remaking the Korean horror flick *The Host* -- that would make sense. But this is an art film, really. By which I mean it's not a broad entertainment that will appeal to millions. It's quiet and strange and sad and you won't be in the mood to munch down popcorn. The leads are good, both Kodi Smit-McPhee as the boy who is bullied at school and Chloe Moretz as the girl who moves in next door but never gets cold and won't come into your home until you invite her. Maybe Moretz doesn't have exactly the same eeriness and substance of the original's Lina Leandersson. But I wouldn't place my problems with the movie on her or any of the other actors, which also include Richard Jenkins and Elias Koteas. It's been a while since I saw the original, but I think the score here is more prominent and distracting. Maybe it begins with the title: *Let Me In* isn't bad, and it gets across the same idea. But somehow, it's not nearly as subtle or memorable as *Let The Right One In*. Exactly.

I should point out that others have been much more positive about the film, so I may be in a minority here.

MACHETE MAIDENS UNLEASHED! *** out of ****

With so many heavy festival films, it's often a good idea if not downright essential to make sure you catch something purely entertaining. This look at the Filipino market -- the source for countless B-movies that played drive-ins all over America in the late 60s through early 80s -- fit the bill. As expected, it offers a ton of great clips that were surely a lot more fun in little snippets than actually watching most of these low-rent films. But director Mark Hartley (*Not Quite Hollywood*, about Aussie B-movies) also spoke to everyone, from Roger Corman to Pam Grier to top Filipino directors and pretty much any busy actress he could find. The hilarious stories come fast and furious, including stunt men who expected to be really punched and kicked, horrible living conditions for the cast and crew, helicopters needed for scenes that were busy putting down uprisings on the far side of the island and the persistent rumor that one actress flew to the Philippines...and never came back. It's all goofy fun, but Hartley digs deeper and shows how cheap life was under Marcos and how it all deteriorated. Director John Landis is a welcome antidote to the talk of how these movies were actually empowering to women. And Corman is unflappable, as always. But above all, it's an un-cynical look at a shady situation that turned out loads of junk for the American and ultimately world film market. They might not always have been paid, but they always came home with great stories to tell. Assuming they made it home, that is.

BLESSED EVENTS ** 1/2 out of ****

So I've had a bad day, even though *Machete Maidens Unleashed!* has lifted my mood somewhat. (How upset can you be when you're watching chicks blow things up and give the bad guys what for?) A German film described as a slow-burner doesn't exactly sound promising as the final film of the day, but it's the only movie available for people who aren't hitting parties or going to public premieres, so off I go. I don't think I've seen any of the other films by co-writer and director Isabelle Stever, but I'll be looking for her work in the future. Still, though made with technical skill and well-acted, this is a very odd duck. Our heroine is Simone (Annika Kuhl), a bit of a loner who ends up having a one-night stand in a bar with a guy and leaving him without a word in the morning. I thought the next scene was the next day, but apparently it was weeks later because Simone finds out she's pregnant. When she's leaving the hospital with this news, she bumps into the one-night stand, Hannes (Stefan Rudolf), who rather unexpectedly is a very nice, decent, kind guy who is thrilled and wants to start dating. The more wonderful he turns out to be, the more suspicious she becomes (without reason). If he even nods at the woman living next door, she's jealous. Meanwhile, when her old boyfriend is in their home wearing his t-shirt and bolts at the sight of Hannes, he never asks a single question. Which probably annoys her more. The sense of revelation is strong throughout: What exactly is going on? Why does her ex-boyfriend say he wouldn't be surprised if she were stalking him? Why does she try and abort the baby by crashing her bicycle? What the hell is going on? It's a credit to the film that I was engaged throughout. But the more we were led to expect some sort of epiphany, the more annoying it was to watch the film just sort of peter out. Rudolf oozes decency and Kuhl is very good in a difficult, opaque role. After the screening, people actually asked each other if they'd missed something. No, they hadn't, but I'm afraid the director had.

And then there were the strikes. In Europe, strikes are crippling affairs. In Canada, they're... nice. Hotel workers are unhappy with their contracts so they're doing rolling strikes, hitting one major hotel a day. This means they picket out front, banging drums and decrying the working conditions. Martin Sheen (in town for *The Way*, the film he stars in and his son Emilio Estevez directed) was out with the picketers

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in a heartbeat. He spoke to them and autographed their signs and offered to move out of the hotel. But no, Canadian strikers don't want to unduly inconvenience anyone. And they love the film festival, as they announced at press conferences. So the strikers apologize for their strike. The cops apologize for asking them to move forward or back on the sidewalk. And the hotels probably apologize for existing in the first place. It's all wonderfully Canadian.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available free on iTunes](#). Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also [available for free on iTunes](#).

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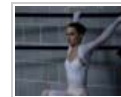
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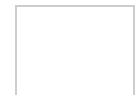
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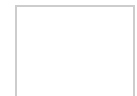
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