

Three Minute Thrillers

Mark S.P. Turvin

goldfishpublishers.com

mspt@goldfishpublishers.com

2004 Phoenix Film Project Thriller Challenge

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In a fairly packed Valley Art Theatre the Thursday before Halloween, indie filmmakers offered their response to the Phoenix Film Project's Thriller Challenge. Asked to create three-minute films that are appropriate to the season, the audience was treated to horror, suspense, and spoofs of the thriller genre. Considering the short timeframe given for creating their work, a good amount of the 24 submissions were quite impressive. The audience was asked to vote on their favorite film (as long as it was not the one they created) while a panel of special judges weighed in on more specific items, including acting, cinematography, editing, directing, and writing.

The winners of the evening were as different as the options available to directors. Placing third was **Trevor Shultz'** creepy entry *Scourged*. The film brought the audience into a world ravaged by a killer super disease and centers on three people, one who has the antidote and the other two who are at his mercy. Filmed in a dark and forbidding style, the highlight is the makeup depicting the debilitating disease and the sharp editing.

Second place went to **Steve Wallace's** dream-infused imagist *Tempest Fugit*. As the alarm clicks toward ringing, the audience is treated to nightmare images of the

central character walking through endless sand dunes in a vast, forbidding desert. Here, the cinematography was the strongest element, keeping us aware of the dream and dreamer both.

The top prize of the evening was awarded to **Dean Ronalds'** *The Netherbeast of Berm-Tech Industries*, a hilarious spoof on corporate life when it meets the realm of the undead. This straight-faced narrative keeps the audience laughing as a contemporary office worker deals with his boss, who not only wants a report given to him, but also asks him to dispose of the wooden stake-impaled body of a coworker whom the boss insists was a vampire. The script and acting of this hilarious film make it of a quality seen in bigger film festivals. This is one I'd like to see again to appreciate the genius behind its premise and plot.

Other highlights included **Edward A. Mendoza's** music video-inspired *I'm Dead*, a *Telltale Heart* for today's generation that explores the effects of murder and guilt. **Matt Knowles** offered the only animation of the evening with his bizarre *Buy Candy*, a warning to unwary door openers who would rather opt for the trick than the treat. Reality filmmaking was central to **Adam Bates'** *12 Free Dinners*, which recreates the murder of a local glass repair tycoon. The perils of coffee drinking are illuminated in **Alex Mermelstein's** cute *Monday Morning*, while the best acting and most bizarre offering of the evening was **Justin Ward's** *ManScare*, a tongue-in-cheek non-cause-and-effect exploration of what sets a jittery young man into paroxysms of hysteria, from coffee makers through the consumption of a large baguette to generic carpeting, punctuated by musical interludes highlighting the name of the film. I couldn't stop laughing at such earnest and odd acting and situations.

For a modest \$5, the audience was treated to living proof that the indie film movement in the valley is growing stronger everyday. I look forward to even more work from all of these talented filmmakers.

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