As I'm writing this, on Day 15, I have to admit I am in the midst of a truly terrible case of writer's block and movie daze that's quite hard to shake. The past few days have been truly insane, between hanging out and staying up all night with the Fantasia crew *and* the John Landis hour-long Q&A last night, I'm hoping I can bring you these tales in rough chronological order before they all merge and make my synapses collapse. I've also found myself sleeping way more than I would allow me to, but I'm guessing it's better than to drive this exhaustion further. Truth is, this tiny write-up took me 3 days to write, which I'm sure gives you an idea of (my incompetence) the madness of this ongoing Fantasia 2011. I guess what I'm getting at is: excuse me if disjointedness has become the shtick to which I stick.

Piecing past events together has proven harder than anticipated but hopefully, this haphazard retelling of Day 7 finds its way to your brain in some pleasurable manner.

The next morning, the bitter taste of THE WICKER TREE still lingering on my palate, I attempted to catch the screening of Japanese revenge film BIRTHRIGHT, but found myself lacking time and energy, thus adding the film to my ever-growing list of missed screenings. Expecting pandemonium for the free SHIVERS screening, which was going to be preceded by a Cinépix homage gala with Lynn Lowry and André Link in attendance, I got there early, but strangely enough, it turned out to be a very calm screening, yet a total blast.

First, a long series of guests shared their various Cinépix memories (from VALÉRIE's Danielle Ouimet to Link himself) and a screening of a short but most excellent Dunning & Link retrospective featurette (produced by Kier-la Janisse and featuring a Cronenberg interview shot by FANGO's own Chris Alexander), this showing of SHIVERS was going to be my first time seeing the film; on 35mm and with an audience, no less! I feel the universe has been working in my favor a lot lately, mostly in seeing important films for the first time on the big screen and having SHIVERS added to my already impressive tally (ILSA, SHE-WOLF OF THE SS, THE WICKER MAN, BATTLE ROYALE and soon PHANTOM OF THE OPERA with live orchestral score!) seemed like icing on an already scrumptious cake.

SHIVERS

Cronenberg's first films (STEREO and CRIMES OF THE FUTURE) are infinitely fascinating to me. In their dryness, obsession with institutions, emotional rigidity and hypnotizing quality, they allow a level of response quite unlike anything I've ever experienced with horror. Cronenberg's first feature film – also known under the most excellent and doubly appropriate names THE PARASITE MURDERS, THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, FRISSONS and the working title ORGY OF THE BLOOD PARASITES falls in perfect continuity with his previous efforts, offering once again a chaotic and austere stab at social institutions, by ways of trademark body horror, which happens to be both better and bloodier this time around. Integrating the sexual frenzy of STEREO with a hint of Romero's subversive walking dead, SHIVERS is a deliciously low-budget horror film that manages to be as effective today – although certainly less incendiary in its content – as I'm sure it was when it came out in 1975.

When a crazed scientist (Fred Doederlein) unleashes genetically-engineered, pheromone-secreting worms (conceived to liberate societies of its sexual inhibitions) on a calm suburban block on the outskirts of Montreal, things go expectedly wrong. Doctor Roger St. Luc (Paul Hampton) and nurse Forsythe (Lynn Lowry) are left to investigate, but mostly struggle to survive the hordes of lustful, dementedly infected "zombies" swarming the building. Working on its own as an enclosed-space survival narrative, SHIVERS is also a striking deconstruction of societal structure, showcasing the destruction of bodily boundaries that will become the norm in Cronenberg's later work (VIDEODROME, NAKED LUNCH), as well as offering a precocious metaphor for the outburst of venereal disease that transformed society's sexual mores in the 1980's. For one of the first times in Canadian film history, protagonists are pitted against their own repressed sexuality, subverting and reflecting on the 1970's movement of sexual liberation and turning it into a hailstorm of violence and horror, which once unleashed on the peaceful social construct of the Mies Van der Rohe Buildings, causes its collapse.

Moving at a mesmerizing pace, the film's dry architecture and uncanny rhythm will have you in a trance, anticipating the appearance of the venereal worms, given life through rudimentary but nauseating effects from Joe Blasco. Featuring a Ron Mlodzik cameo and plenty of gross-out, delightfully gory moments, SHIVERS is a must-see film for Cronenberg fans, zombiphiles and

Canuxploitation buffs especially, but truly for all horror fans, as SHIVERS inscribes itself in the socially resonant tradition of boundary-pushing films such as NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD and helped defined the body horror genre that would thrive in the hands of Cronenberg and many others during the 80's and further.

UNDERWATER LOVE

UNDERWATER LOVE was perhaps one of my most anticipated films of the festival. Combining three of my absolute favorite things—pinku eigas, Christopher Doyle's cinematography and the swamp-dwelling yokai kappa—into one kaleidoscopic musical odyssey, UNDERWATER LOVE blew me away with its sexy antics and sweet tale of rejuvenation. Undeniably weird, this cinematic UFO is definitely not for everyone, but I found myself watching the whole movie with my jaw locked into an incredulously joyous grin.

Written by Fumio Moriya and Midnight Eye's editor Tom Mess and directed by pink film legend Shinji Imaoka, UNDERWATER LOVE follows soon-to-be-married Asuka and her blooming love affair with Aoki, a reincarnated high school classmate and crush, brought back on this realm and into her life as a horny, yet sweet-mannered and shy kappa. The plot is arguably thin, but fundamentally—and unexpectedly–UNDERWATER LOVE is the beautiful story of a woman finding her youth again and taking her love life, marriage and future into her own hands. Refreshing exploration of sexuality (which just happens to have amphibian sex), extended musical dance sequences and a weird segment about an anal pearl (this reality's equivalent of the death-warding, fortune-bringing dragon's pearl); UNDERWATER LOVE is not the uncomfortable exploitative experience it may sound like. An erotic celebration of life, love, folklore and nature, the film will conquer your ears with the saccharine beats of Stereo Total and bathe your eyes in Doyle's gorgeous cinematography, making great use of light (as always) and of the vibrant greens of the Japanese countryside.

The kappa is given rubbery texture by ultra-prolific SFX maestro Yoshihiro Nishimura, which if my count is exact, has more than half-a-dozen films playing this year's Fantasia alone, making the film doubly attractive to lovers of off-the-wall Japanese oddities. UNDERWATER LOVE was apparently shot in a staggering 5 days, with no second takes and plays out like a quick, in-and-out, candy-pop musical play, with a tiny, yet excellent cast, flawless execution and little foreplay. It's a gem I highly recommend discovering and undeniably one of my favorites of this year's festival.

My friends and I made our way to the metro, already madly recalling the film, whistling the tunes and enjoying every opportunity to do the kappa stance. I realized it had been a long time since I had seen such a sweet, simple and pleasing film, one I didn't have to pick apart, theorize about, analyze, criticize or evaluate. One that filled me with unquestionable glee and that I could accept as such.

One week into the fest, fatigue just around the corner but not quite there yet, I found myself drifting home, perfectly content about this perfect day and anticipating the next, which promised to be equally great with Miike's NINJA KIDS!!! and James Gunn's SUPER.