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# Horror is the Maine attraction in Portland

Singaporeans will be the first outside of America to watch an anthology of short films from the horror capital of the world. **BY DYLAN TAN**

**T**HE people of Portland love a good scare – no wonder since horror writer Stephen King is its most famous resident.

It comes as no surprise that the largest city in the state of Maine also plays host to an annual scare-fest called *Damnationland*, a movie event which pays tribute to the genre.

Screened during Halloween and now into its sixth year, it features 10 short films by Mainers who each give their own take on what horror means to them. Not everything in the showcase will make you jump out of your seats because it is creepy or outright scary, some border on the surreal while others even have a touch of comedy.

Last year's edition of *Damnation-*

*land* will be shown in Singapore later this month as part of SCUMSCOPE, an alternative film festival put together by organisers SCUM (Society for Cult & Underground Movies) Cinema. The collective has been holding mostly free bi-monthly screenings of previously-unseen genre movies for about two years now.

The festival's line-up also includes *Dark Star: H.R. Giger's World*, a documentary about the late surrealist artist; and a double-bill of two classic 80s horror films, *Basket Case* (1982) and *Without Warning* (1980).

The event also marks the first time *Damnationland* has been invited to travel outside of America. Co-founder Eddy Bolz says: "I didn't expect this to happen in a thousand years – we're very independent and my goal when I

first started *Damnationland* was to get the people in Maine to come watch it."

The 36-year-old admits Maine isn't particularly well-known for producing Hollywood filmmakers, but the talent is definitely there. That, plus the Stephen King influence, looms large so the horror genre is pretty much ingrained in its residents.

One of the directors featured in last year's *Damnationland*, Corey Norman, has already gone on to make his full-length feature debut, *The Hanover House*. It has won over 20 awards at film festivals and is co-written by his wife Haley Norman, who also wrote *Tickle*, his contribution to *Damnationland*.

The short revolves around a troll – "think *Critters* (1986) and *Ghoulies*

(1984)", says its director – that attacks people's feet and is inspired by horror films from the 80s.

"My wife and I actually got into a big fight the way married couples do because I wanted the creature to look like a puppet from *Bad Milo!* (2013) while she wanted it to be a little person; the compromise was we made it look like something out of a fairy tale," the 34-year-old jests.

Norman also jokes how his obsession with the horror genre grew after his father took him to watch *Cujo* (1983). The film is about a friendly St Bernard who goes wild after contracting rabies.

"I was scared not because the dog was killing people but because I didn't want them to hurt it," chuckles the college professor by day. "My dad

showed me a movie every five-year-old shouldn't be watching but since then, watching horror films reminds me of the great times I've spent with him."

The film is incidentally based on the novel of the same name by King and needless to say, Norman is a life-long fan of the writer.

"Growing up in Maine, you can't go anywhere without hearing the name Stephen King," he says, "King is the reason I love good character-driven horror stories; he always develops them solidly before he tries to kill them so you'll care about what is going to happen to them."

Mr Bolz, who got hooked on the genre after watching *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) when he was about six years old ("It scared the

hell out of me but it also made me come back for more!"), likens a good horror film to the rush one experiences while riding a roller coaster: "When it's over and you know you're safe, it should be like, 'Oh god, I survived that!'"

He admits most of his favourite horror films come from outside of America so he's excited to return the favour and show Singaporeans what Maine has to offer as moviegoers in the genre.

Likewise, Norman cannot wait for local audiences to watch *Tickle*. Speaking like a character straight out of a horror film, he says: "You know, I'd kill to be there!"

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