

TER's Picks For EIFF 2013 – Struck By Lightning, Frankenstein's Army and Hawking



Chris Colfer and Rebel Wilson in Struck By Lightning

As the festival begins to wind down for another year, here are my recommendations for tomorrow.

Struck By Lightning

Screening as part of the festival's Not Another Teen Movie strand, Struck By Lightning (Cineworld, 6:10) is the story of Carson Phillips, a high school senior determined to become a writer in New York in order to escape his small town existence. As part of a college application, he starts a literary magazine and blackmails all the popular kids to contribute.

As plot synopses go, that does sound fairly unimaginative, but where this film succeeds is in the razor sharp script adapted by Chris Colfer from his own novel. The impressive cast helps too, of course. Alison Janney is great as usual as Carson's highly medicated mother, bringing real depth to what could have been a typically one-dimensional role. Girl of the moment Rebel Wilson plays Malerie, Carson's only friend and partner in crime, but Colfer is the driving force and the most indelible character. Leaving behind much of the exaggerated camp of Glee, he has created a central character who many may see as unlikable and mean, but I thought he was one of the most realistic portrayals of a smart but bitter high school kid that I can remember.

There are only so many places a story like this can go, but the predictability is outweighed by a sharp, sarcastic script and solid performances across the board.

Frankenstein's Army

Set during the closing days of World War II, a ragtag Russian squad in eastern Germany answers a distress call from some comrades in a nearby village, but when they get there they find something none of them could have anticipated: the grandson of Dr Victor Frankenstein, and his growing army of weaponised creations.

You probably already know if you want to see this movie or not. If you are anything like me, the title alone would have been enough to make your mind up. Dutch director Richard Raaphorst has given his wonderfully deranged mind free rein and the result is something that sticks to all the horror tropes while still trying to bring something new to the table. While its heart is in the right place, the movie can't quite reach the heights it is striving for. Also, be warned; this is another "found footage" movie. In this case, the conceit is explained away by the cameraman being a member of Stalin's propaganda unit assigned to this squad to commemorate the Russian victory over the Nazis.

Frankenstein's Army (Filmhouse, 10:30), while fun for the gorehounds, does have its drawbacks. The human characters barely get any differentiation, and they are not portrayed in any kind of heroic manner either. It's hard to know who we are meant to root for when the choices are so limited. And no amount of skips or transition effects can make crisp, digital photography look like it was shot in the 1940s.

Where the film succeeds though is with the production design and the creatures. Every location we see could have been a genuine, bombed-out building, while all you steampunk fans out there will likely get a real kick out of the fantastic monster designs.

Fun but flawed, Frankenstein's Army would have made a better video game than a movie.

Hawking

The life story of the world's Greatest Living Scientist, told in his own words. Filmmaker Stephen Finnigan was granted unprecedented access to Professor Hawking, his caregivers, and his family and friends – including, oddly enough, Jim Carrey – over the course of last year to assemble this documentary. The result is a film that is by turns moving, uplifting and hilarious. If you see only one film at this year's festival, I urge you to pick this one. Presented in cooperation with the Edinburgh International Science Festival, Hawking is being screened tomorrow at 6pm in the Filmhouse.

Other picks for Friday include Scottish documentary The Great Hip Hop Hoax (Odeon Wester Hailes, 8pm) starring Billy Boyd, Polish police drama Traffic Department (Cineworld, 6:05), and the British "gangster screwball black comedy" Everyone's Going To Die (Cineworld, 6pm).