Exhaustion doesn’t begin to describe it.

Over ten days, with 250+ films screened, countless parties, dozens of panels, hours and hours of networking and friend-making plus the usual posing and sashaying on the red carpet, the second year of Utah’s FilmQuest Festival wrapped this last Saturday.

As one would expect from an event such as this, there’s a helluva lot of networking going on. But from my perspective, this aspect of the festival was the most beneficial, exciting and fun. I ran out of business cards here – no joke. So on top of the great venue, the onslaught of power-house films, you will meet some very influential and busy people in the business – not to mention some of the nicest. And with this being only the second year, one can expect FilmQuest’s prowess in the film festival world to continue to expand, if not just explode.

While there were some awesome feature films, the strongest category was the short films. But first, let’s discuss the top features. I will point out that I did not attend either of the two screenings of *The House at the End of Time*. As you may or may not recall, I gave this film a glowing 5-star review last fall when it screened at Screamfest. I’ve yet to revisit it since then – not wanting to water down my original emotionally overwhelming and positive experience. I have no doubt it will hold up, but I’m just not ready to take that journey again. *The House at the End of Time* is certainly still beloved (holding court in my all time fave movie list), but I won’t rank it here. We already know how much I adore it.

**My Top Five Features (in order of preference):** *Savageland*, *The Last Survivors*, *Portend*, *Superbob,* *The Fear of Darkness*

**Feature Honorable Mentions:** *The Better Half* and *Australiens*.

**My Top Ten Short Films (in no particular order):** *3 Versos*, *Au Pair*, *Downstairs*, *Dead Hearts*, *Dust*, *One Minute Time Machine*, *The Peripheral*, *Total Awesome Viking Power*, *Waste Paper* and *Crow Hand!!!*

**Short Films Honorable Mentions (in no particular order):** *Home*, *Merv*, *RPG*, *Shi*, *Steven Caught a Star*, *The Smiling Man,* *The Light Thief,* *The Spaceman*, *Don’t Play with Your Food,* *The Black Forest*, *Boniato*, *The Ramens*, *My Life is a Dream,* *Bad Guy #2*, *Movies in Space,* *A Stranger Kind,* *Lifeline* and *Reaver*

**My Top Five Animated Shorts (in no particular order):** *Dinner for Few,* *Primordia*, *Slumberless*, *Toonocalypse* and *The Looking Planet*.

**My Top Five Music Videos (in no particular order):** *Come with Me*, *C.T.R.L*., *Rain Clouds*, *Turn It Up* and *When the World Ends*

While the film *The Dead, the Devil and the Flesh* (a legacy screening for this year’s FilmQuest) was a little heavy-handed with its religious messages, it was a “groovy” (borrowing that term from filmmaker Derrick Pete of *Waste Paper*) ‘70s movie experience, not to mention the first US screening of this practically lost 1974 picture. Writer/director Jose Maria Oliveira and his wife (and lead actress) Patricia Wright were in attendance for the showing. With some terrific imagery (including a “you have to see it to believe it” dance number) this cautionary tale was a massive hit in Spain during its original release.

One of the evenings included a 30th anniversary screening for *Back to the Future* – with a dress-up ‘80s night. The majority of audience members took the opportunity to dig out those moth-eaten parachute pants, finagle their pony-tail off to the side and roll up their pant legs. Such a joy to experience this film on the big screen (I didn’t back in the day). And it holds up amazingly well, and was surprisingly emotional when George McFly (Crispin Glover) finally stood up to Biff. There was a great big raffle and several trivia questions to give out ‘80s and *Back to the Future*-related prizes! I correctly answered the question, “Who did the score for the film(s)? And name another one of that composer’s scores.” My reply? Alan Silvestri. Another score by Silvestri? *The Abyss*. I won a Funko Delorean toy and a fanny pack full of ‘80s air! Score!

Obviously, film festivals are all about the films. It’s about celebrating the art, the joy of the process and the emotions associated with the final product. But there’s also the social summer camp atmosphere of such events. If you’re open to it, events like FilmQuest (indeed FilmQuest is a *fine* example) will introduce you to hard-working and overall fabulous people in this industry. So if you’ve got a film or a script or any other projects in your chosen festivals, I implore you to attend. Even if you’re just an audience member who also happens to be in “the biz”, put aside any insecurities or blocks and get to your local festival. You never know who you will meet, who will be a lifelong connection, or what amazing piece of cinematic art you may carry with you for the duration of the festival, or beyond into the rest of your days.

It may seem that I’m overstating it, but from a very personal perspective, FilmQuest has been an absolute joy. Some truly amazing films were screened, and there’s a sense in the air that Jonathan and Jonna and this epic love-in of sci-fi/fantasy/horror films is about to explode. With good people like this, it’s inevitable that the good word of the friendly, inviting environment will spread far and wide. It wasn’t all roses and puppy dogs, however. There were some technical glitches at some of the screenings, but let’s call them growing pains. The remarkable thing is that when such minute dramas occurred – staff, filmmakers and audience just shrugged it off. All were there to have fun – so who cares about such things.

And speaking from a perspective of someone who hasn’t attended a ton of festivals (sure, a fair amount), it was striking how many quality pieces screened here. Generally, there are a generous amount of clunkers in every festival, or in some cases, in every block. With the exception of a few not-so-great films, here at FilmQuest, each picture had something of value. If the acting didn’t work, the picture was gorgeously shot. If the score distracted from the film, the make-up effects blew your mind.

And now, here’s what you really wanted to know – the winners! For a list of all the nominees, please check out the website ([www.filmquestfestival.com](http://www.filmquestfestival.com))

**Best of Fest** – First Place: *Dust*, Second Place: *Superbob,* Third Place: *The House at the End of Time*

**Best Feature Film:** *The House at the End of Time*

**Best Director:** Thomas S. Hammock (*The Last Survivors*)

**Best Screenplay:** *Superbob* (Brett Goldstein)

**Best Actress:** Kathleen Rose Perkins (*The Better Half*)

**Best Actor:** Brett Goldstein (*Superbob*)

**Best Supporting Actress:** Natalia Tena (*Superbob*)

**Best Supporting Actor:** Keith Lee Castle (*A Stranger Kind*)

**Best Comedy Short Film:** *One Minute Time Machine*

**Best Fantasy Short Film:** *Dust*

**Best Horror Short Film:** *3 Versos*

**Best Sci-Fi Short Film:** *Reaver*

**Best Director – Short:** Eva Daoud (*The Light Thief*)

**Best Screenplay – Short:** *Dead Hearts*

**Best Actress – Short:** Kathleen Gati (*Lifeline*)

**Best Actor – Short:** Kirk Johnson (*Bad Guy #2*)

**Best Supporting Actress – Short:** Marina Alegre (*The Huckster*)

**Best Supporting Actor – Short:** Jack De Sena (*Movies in Space*)

**Best Documentary Film:** *20 Years of Madness*

**Best Animated Film:** *The Looking Planet*

**Best Music Video:** *Come With Me*

**Best Web-Series:** *Acting Dead*

**Best Fan Film:** *Pirates of the Caribbean – The Edge of Oblivion*

**Best Youth Film:** *Alien Communications*

**Best Student Film:** *Home*

**Best Commercial:** *Jealous Explorers*

**Best Cinematography:** *Devil Makes Work*

**Best Score:** *Mythica The Darkspore*

**Best Sound:** *The Fear of Darkness*

**Best Editing:** *20 Years of Madness*

**Best Production Design/Art Direction:** *Dust*

**Best Costumes:** *The Huckster*

**Best Visual Effects:** *Dust*

**Best Make-up:** *Come With Me*

**Best Unproduced Screenplays -- Features:** First Place – *Ardent* by Joseph Ramuni, Second Place – *After Ares* by Hunter Hadfield, Third Place – *Eden’s Valley* by James Christopher

**Best Unproduced Screenplays – Shorts**: First Place – *Z-Boy and the Revenants* by Kevin Walsh, Second Place – *Vodoun* by Stuart Creque, Third Place – *The Giver of Secrets* by Kris Theorin

And finally, the awards for the **FilmQuest Express Film Challenge:** *The Black Box* (1st Place Film) *Skybound Entertainment* (2nd Place Film, ) and *William & Theodore’s Sci-Fi Adventure Part 2* (3rd Place Film).

With many thanks to our host (festival founder & director Jonathan Martin) and hostess (assistant director Jonna Jackson) for their hospitality and quality programming in 2015, we’re already making plans to see you all next year!

And if you horror/sci-fi/fantasy geeks are looking for a good time – full of great films you’ll forever hold dear and being surrounded by great people – make your own plans to check out FilmQuest in 2016! Get on board now!