

THE LAPLACE'S DEMON
REVIEWS



FANTASIA 2017, DAY 7: “THE LAPLACE’S DEMON”

by *Brian Tallerico*, RogerEbert.com, July 21, 2017

[...] Similarly mindblowing but in a totally different way is Giordano Giulivi’s delightful “**The Laplace’s Demon**,” a low-budget affair that recalls “Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow” mixed with Agatha Christie and Guy Maddin. A group of Italian scientists have been summoned to an island in the middle of the ocean by a mad scientist who has discovered their research. The group has been trying to do the impossible—predict the future. They believe they have devised a program that can tell you exactly how many pieces a glass will break into if it hits the floor. Immediately, Giulivi is playing with fate vs. free will and how much we can truly know about the future. And he’s doing so in a style that recalls classic Italian filmmakers like Mario Bava, updated in a world of green-screen backgrounds and CGI effects.



When the scientists arrive at this mansion on an island, they discover a scale model of the house in which they’re standing. The model would be interesting enough, but what’s more fascinating are the eight pawns standing in the living room, which soon move in unison with the people in the house. Is someone watching them and moving the pawns to coincide? Not exactly. It turns out that someone has taken their glass experiment a level further, able to predict every human action correctly. And then the house unleashes the Queen.

“The Laplace’s Demon” hits that soft spot for me critically that was cultivated by “The Twilight Zone” and “Ten Little Indians.” It is a low-budget affair that gets a ton of mileage out of canted angles, creative lighting, and clever effects. And it has more than a little going on thematically as, not unlike “The Endless,” it examines the patterns of human behavior. Perhaps it’s telling that these are the two best films I’ve seen related to my Fantasia Festival coverage. There’s nothing scarier than human behavior.

Link: <http://www.rogerebert.com/festivals-and-awards/fantasia-2017-day-7-the-endless-the-laplaces-demon-lowlife>

Fantasia Film Fest: The Heady, Philosophical Horror of THE LAPLACE'S DEMON

REBEKAH MCKENDRY @RebekahMcKendry, July 21, 2017

I have always been a huge fan of horror films that involve a puzzle. Think SAW, but specifically films that also require some prior nerd knowledge. Examples of this small sub-genre include CUBE and FERMAT'S ROOM, both of which involve deep philosophical theories and victims trying to outsmart captors with math, science, and other classes you likely questioned if you would ever need in real life. The Italian film THE LAPLACE'S DEMON (directed by Giodana Giulivi) is the newest addition to this group of fascinating films, and it involves a heady scientific theory that has been confounding folks for over one hundred years: can we use scientific equations to predict the future?

Laplace's Demon is not just a catchy movie title, but it is a real science theorem from 1814. Laplace's Demon proposes that since we can predict how certain things will behave based on science (ie- atoms, weather, gravity, general physics), we could potentially predict the future if we could in some way grasp the behavior of everything, every molecule in the whole universe. For example- if you drop a glass in a controlled environment and happened to know all the variables (the strength of the glass, position of how the glass would land, speed at which it was falling, etc), it could be feasible to predict how the glass would break based on a fuck-load of mathematical equations. Laplace's Demon theorizes that if you could continue beyond the glass and capture these



formulaic patterns for every object, person, and molecule in the universe, you could predict what will happen next. This theory was relatively dispelled by scientists in lieu of several other theories including "the chaos theory" which became the basis of JURASSIC PARK, asserting that nature is capable of changing and adapting in unpredicted

ways, so therefore you can never predict life. But what if you could find a formula for everything? Is everything in the universe just a reaction to some other action, thus making it possible to predict every movement?

LAPLACES DEMON (2017) takes this theory and weaves it into a captivating and frightening film. A group of scientists are called to an isolated mansion. Once there, they discover their host is nowhere to be found, but they have all been locked in. They also find a massive model of the mansion with chess pawns that move in the exact same manner as they do, eventually realizing it is a toy model, and through clockwork the model is showing their exact movements as they happen. The game is then revealed. An anonymous host announces via VHS tape that he has solved

Laplace's Demon and is using these scientists as his guinea pigs to test his theory. He has predicted all their responses and movements for the next several hours, and he has automated the house to kill them one at a time, asserting that if his theory works, even while the group's most unpredictable survival instincts kick in, then his work is a success. As the mechanized house begins taking them down one-by one, the remaining scientists race to try to break their own patterns and outsmart that which they have been predetermined to do. It sounds complicated and deep, but director Giulivi cleverly weaves all the scientific info into the plot, making the more abstract science theorems much easier to swallow.

The filming style is quite unique and makes the film even more charming. Shot entirely in black and white, the movie looks and feels retro, blending in elements of film noir and channeling the horror films of Val Lewton. Somehow the movie also feels like a Victorian Gothic horror, turning the house and environment into terrifying characters. *THE LAPLACE'S DEMON* blurs the element of "time". Characters whip-out cell phones attempting to get a signal at the isolated mansion, but all the décor and even their dress is from prior decades, creating a feeling that past and present become meaningless when you already know the future. The cinematography feels like an old *TWILIGHT ZONE* episode, using a copious amount of close-ups in confined spaces. The filming style also utilizes a more arthouse (even German expressionistic) style including off-putting camera angles and smartly bouncing seamlessly back and forth between the live action and the grandiose model. The music and acting also feel dated and overly dramatic, but they help to further blur our awareness of the time period, or lack thereof. In this regard, even though characters use computers and cell phones, by half way through the movie I had forgotten this was set in modern day.



I suspect that *THE LAPLACE'S DEMON* will be rather polarizing amongst genre fans. The film does boast thrills and a Hitchcock-level of suspense, but there is no gore, and the big reveal (though very effectively set-up and executed) could be perceived as "campy" by some viewers. But again, the film is meant to feel retro, so a retro climax seems validated. I must also applaud the director on being able to create some of the best tension and scares using only the model of the mansion and the pawns moving about the floor. These segments were skillfully crafted, making the toy model of the house seem scarier and more foreboding than the real thing.

There is no word yet of when *THE LAPLACE'S DEMON* will be released to the US or in what format. Right now, it is playing at the Fantasia Film Festival in Montreal, Canada, and Blumhouse.com will keep you posted of other updates as we get them.

Link: <http://www.blumhouse.com/2017/07/21/fantasia-film-fest-the-heady-philosophical-horror-of-the-laplaces-demon/>



The Laplace's Demon (2017) Screamfest Review

by *Michael Klug* on October 17, 2017

FULL REVIEW

The tagline for the Richard Donner-helmed *Superman* from 1978 stated, “You’ll believe a man can fly.” And this popped into my movie trivia-addled brain while watching the new Italian mystery/thriller, *The Laplace’s Demon*, screened at the 17th Annual Screamfest in Hollywood.

Seven scientists, working for the same company – take a boat across the sea, manned by a salty sea captain named Alfred – to take part in an experiment under the eye of someone named Professor Cornelius (it all feels very Agatha Christie). Naturally, none of these people actually know the Professor – but out of curiosity and obligation (led there by their head honcho Isaac) they go. Once inside this cavernous and mysterious mansion (with only one way out – a locked down elevator) they’ll gain clues via a VHS tape and more importantly, a detailed scale model of the mansion itself – with chess pieces representing each one of them. The thing is, said chess pieces move in the mini-mansion – in real time with the movement of the guests they represent. Mystery, danger, clue-solving and disappearances ensue.



And with the mention of the all-important chess pieces, I’m brought to my reminiscence of “You’ll believe a man can fly”. While there is some discussion in this film of “flying” (I won’t spoil it), I was more in line with stating this about *The Laplace’s Demon*; “You’ll believe that watching people watching chess-pieces will be the ultimate in suspense”.

And it's true. As things begin to happen, and they're mirrored by the movement of the chess pieces in the model – you'll see very little of the actual events being represented by the chess pieces. The film has you watching the chess pieces move and watching the reactions of those watching the chess pieces.

Get it?

If someone had told me this would be a central conceit of the film and that it would move you to the edge of your seat in the throes of suspenseful anticipation – I would have called them crazy!

And yet, here we are.

It's pretty clear that the filmmakers are fans of Robert Wise's classic *The Haunting*. The black & white cinematography, the placement of multiple characters at various levels within the frame – and the “the less you show, the more frightening it is” – all seem to call-out a deep love and appreciation for that seminal fright-fest.

There was a point (actually several) throughout the film, where I threw up my hands – not in exasperation – but in what can only be described as pure audience joyfulness. One moment of joy comes about when the group discovers a hidden painting. The entire sequence is utterly insane, but so well done – you too might throw your hands in the air with unbridled appreciation for what just happened.

I sometimes consider myself jaded – irritated by the sheer number of copycat horror nonsense (torture-porn, found footage, etc.) which comes across my desk – so when something this amazing falls into my lap, I can't help but gush over its brilliance.



I hate to be “that guy”, but I don't think this film will be for a wider audience. Not that they won't go into it with great intrigue and anticipation – but it's pretty high-brow, taking on subjects of free will and the magical world of mathematics and the science of trying to predict human behavior.

Naturally, there's a twist at the end – and I wasn't shocked per se, but it was a good time... until it became a great time. You think it is going one way, and then with a seemingly

throw-away bit from earlier in the film, revisited – it'll end up perfectly (and deliciously) shocking and you'll once again find your hands in the air. Bravo!

It's a large ensemble cast, and there's very little as far as character development. And my avid readers of 3 know how important such things are to me. But when you know that the focus of this film is the plot and the intricacies of the film's structure – you'll put aside the need to really get to know these characters. That's not to say they aren't all interesting – the actors play their two-dimensional parts with as much verve and gusto as possible. They're all seasoned performers and they understand this stylized film they are a part of, and that their characters are not the main focus. And in that, you'll appreciate the film even more – seeing that the filmmakers and all involved fully understand the proper way to guide and manipulate the audience to see and focus upon the most important things – the plot's wonderful twists and turns.

But for course, since the film keeps you so firmly on edge – we must care something about these eight souls, right?

It takes a bit of time to get going – for several reasons. One, it's mostly in Italian, so as with all subtitled films, you have to rewire your brain a bit to get into the groove. The film's also in black & white and is highly stylized on top of that. So with all of these bits thrown at you from the get-go, you'll need a few minutes to adjust. But once you do, and things in the film start to cook – there's no stopping this spiraling journey into awesomeness.

On that same token, this film is dripping with suspense. As time goes on and it becomes clear that at certain times – certain things will take place (we know it and the characters know it), you'll find yourself steeped in dread as each of these moments draws near. "I see you shiver with anticipation." Exactly.

Chatting with co-writer/co-star Silvano Bertolin after the film, I was told that the entire "Laplace's Demon" central idea was something of an afterthought. This concept – which feels so ingrained in the film's story and is so effortlessly included – was discovered and added – while they were already shooting.



Mind = blown.

Originally titled the very fitting *Clockworks*, I can't imagine the film without this theory at its core. And the fact that it was added late in the development of the piece makes the film all the more impressive and mesmerizing.

And so, with just days between this review and the previous one out of Screampfest – already, here's another 5-star rating. There's very little with which I can find fault (in fact – nothing comes to mind) – and so this highest of ratings is a no-brainer.

The Laplace's Demon is a (yet to be fully discovered) masterpiece in manipulation, style, nail-biting suspense and jaw-droppingly impressive story structure. Do. Not. Miss. It.

"You'll believe a man can fly" – or in this case – you'll believe that chess pieces moving through a scale-model mansion, will be the most exciting and breathless thing you've seen in years.

And yes, I realize how absurd that may sound – but it's the honest-to-goodness truth.

The simplest way to describe this movie experience? Wow.

The Laplace's Demon is still playing the festival circuit. So do yourself a favor – use your own free will (ahem) and seek this out.

Link: <http://horrorfreaknews.com/laplaces-demon-2017-review>

THE IRISH TIMES

Back from the dead: how horror is this year's rising film trend

The quality on offer at this weekend's Horrorthon festival shows why the genre is far from undead

Tara Brady Wed, Oct 25, 2017, 11:05

Last weekend, the \$4.8 million Blumhouse joint *Happy Death Day* went number one at the US box office with a bullet, crushing the \$150 million *Blade Runner 2049*, and confirming 2017 as the year when horror movies came out of the shadows. The numbers are appropriately monstrous and comparable with the post-Watergate horror vogue that yielded *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1975) and *Halloween* (1978).

To date, *Get Out* has grossed \$253.1 million, and *Annabelle: Creation* \$301.4 million. The newest incarnation of Stephen King's *It*, meanwhile, has proved that scary clowns are this year's superheroes with a \$630.5 million haul and counting. (The hotly anticipated *Saw* reboot, *Jigsaw*, is expected to scare up similar business later this month.)

It's not just that horror has provided the year's biggest hits: the entire genre is undergoing a renaissance. The brand spanking new Horrorthon programme, which takes place at Dublin's IFI from October 26th to 30th, is littered with both corpses and entirely original compositions. Around these parts we are crazy about *The Endless*, a new film written, directed by, and starring Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, the brilliant minds behind the 2014 breakout hit *Spring*.

Here, the dream team play the escapees of a UFO death cult. When they unwisely return to the isolated compound of their youth, they discover that the commune is even weirder than that description might suggest. Fans of the cerebral, lo-fi sci-fi of Brit Marling and Shane Carruth will enjoy the trip.

Another voyage worth taking can be found in Giordano Giulivi's *The Laplace's Demon*, the monochrome math-horror you didn't know you were waiting for. With a nod to Guy Maddin, this stylised adventure to an island that could well neighbour Dr Moreau's, plays with the 19th-century determinism of the French scholar Pierre-Simon Laplace. Here comes the science: if a demon knows the precise location and momentum of every atom in the universe, the past and future can be calculated from the laws of classical mechanics. Put simply: people in horror movies do such predictable (and dumb) things. Ever wondered what a slasher film would look like in the medium of chess? Here's your chance to find out.

[...]

© 2017 THE IRISH TIMES

Link: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/back-from-the-dead-how-horror-is-this-year-s-rising-film-trend-1.3268256?mode=amp>

SCREAMFEST REVIEW: THE LAPLACE'S DEMON DOES JIGSAW PROUD

Fred Topel October 15

The Laplace's Demon is based on the theory that human beings are so predictable, there is not actually free will. You just set enough things in motion and people behave predictably. This is what appeals to me so much about the *Saw* films. Jigsaw has the foresight to know how degenerates will react to his traps. He's thought several steps ahead. I used to think anyone was capable of outthinking the rest of the world if they put their minds to it, but now I wonder if this theory is true of all of us.

Eight scientists travel by boat to a remote mansion where the host doesn't show. There is a VHS tape which they play, and it seems to talk to them in present tense conversation. Whoever made it anticipated their questions to the tee. They are unwittingly in an experiment to prove that human behavior is like clockwork, and the host has anticipated their every move.



Now, of course a scripted movie is a lot more controllable than real life, or is it? Maybe the screenwriter can't actually write anything but the plot of this movie. Between that and the VHS fetish, *Laplace's Demon* is my jam.

The experiment is represented in a model of the mansion, in which pawns move via gears and springs to represent the scientists' movement throughout the house. A queen appears and starts killing the pawns, but the

human equivalent is off camera. *The Laplace Demon* follows the classic horror movie theory that what you don't see is scarier. The queen is the shark from *Jaws*.

Watching the queen stalk the pawns is genuinely suspenseful. The characters are smart enough to weigh all their options too. What if they just destroy the model? Well, the model isn't what's killing them. That would just eliminate their map. It's fun to watch them all discover everything that's been set up in the house for them. It's kind of a deadly funhouse like my all time favorite horror movie *The People Under The Stairs*.

The Laplace's Demon becomes a siege movie where the characters are second guessing their every move. This sounds like a good idea. But didn't the experiment count on us coming up with that idea? It's a real mind bender. Each character comes from a different scientific angle, although unfortunately I can't quite list off the characters and their scientific worldviews. Perhaps on a second viewing.

Shot in black and white in Italian with English subtitles, *The Laplace's Demon* was a nice surprise at [Screamfest](#). Screamfest continues through October 17 in Hollywood.

Link: <https://weliveentertainment.com/welivefilm/screamfest-review-laplaces-demon-jigsaw-proud/>

SCREENANARCHY

Fantasia 2017 Review:

THE LAPLACE'S DEMON, Philosophical Suspense and Dread

Directed by Giordano Giulivi, this Italian film plays like an old-school, extended TWILIGHT ZONE episode.

Shelagh Rowan-Legg - ASSOCIATE EDITOR (@BONNEQUIN), July 25, 2:00 pm

The Laplace demon is a mathematical theory, which supposes that, if someone knows the precise location and momentum of every atom in the universe, they could predict everything down to the smallest detail. Quite a creepy supposition (hence 'demon'), and the basis for *The Laplace's Demon*, a strange nightmare and philosophical exercise, a kind of extended *Twilight Zone* episode that evokes Rod Sterling, Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians*, classic gothic tropes, and Italian-style noir.

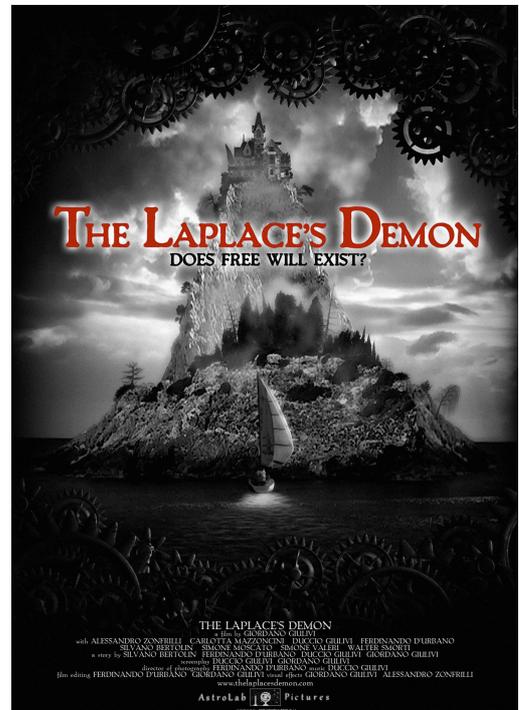
A team of scientists, who believe they might have cracked the code, are invited to the mysterious island home of the renowned and reclusive Professor Cornelius. Arriving at the luxurious mansion, their host 'introduces' himself via videotape, and tells them they are part of his new experiment, trapped in the mansion (along with their ferryman) until dawn. As they try to figure out the game, they begin to disappear one by one, literal and figurative pawns in the Professor's twisted game.

I say literal pawns, as inside the mansion they find a miniature of that mansion, and inside small pawns from a chess set; these pawns move exactly as the characters do, and they track each other's movements through the house, and attacks on them by the queen. This inventive production design, this film within the film, adds an ingenious level of mystery and fear. Add to this the use of rear projection, which is only noticeable at certain times and not in a bad way, this film becomes as much theatre as movie.

Evoking a bit of early Mario Bava-style giallo, in combination with noir sharp light and shadow, gives this film an unusual, slow burn flair. The acting style is slightly heightened, a bit of exaggeration in a particular Italian style, making the characters arguably somewhat one-dimensional, but this is not necessarily a detriment. It fits into the balance between philosophical discussion of fate and free will, and running for their lives.

At 107 minutes, the film does begin to drag a bit; in a suspense film, if the audience gets too many steps ahead of the characters' knowledge, it can be a bit dull to wait for them to catch up. And it does get slightly tedious when the Professor shows off his ability to predict everyone's behaviour (again, getting too ahead to be suspenseful enough at times).

But these are fairly minor quibble. With its use of old-school methods such as rear projection, practical effects, canter angles and low-key lighting to evoke its sense of dread, *The Laplace's Demon* finds interesting and creepy ways to explore human actions.

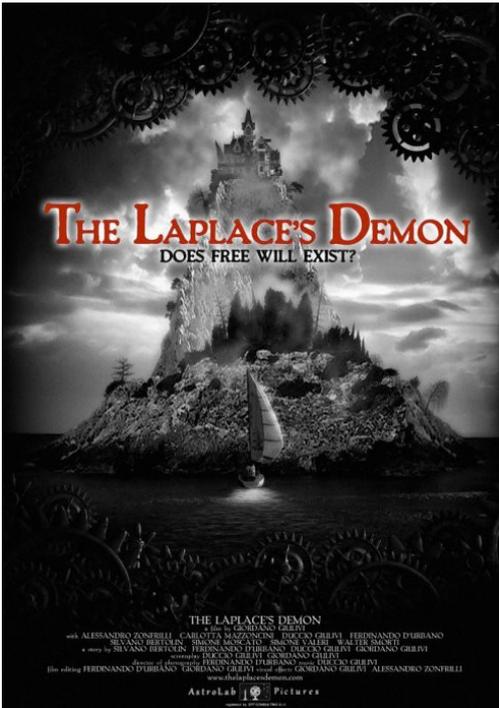


Link: <http://screenanarchy.com/2017/07/fantasia-2017-review-the-laplaces-demon.html#ampshare=http://screenanarchy.com/2017/07/fantasia-2017-review-the-laplaces-demon.html>

HORRORPEDIA

The Laplace's Demon – Italy, 2017

BY HORRORPEDIA ON 27 JULY, 2017



'Does free will exist?'

The Laplace's Demon is a 2017 Italian mystery thriller film directed by Giordano Giulivi from a screenplay co-written with Duccio Giulivi, based on a story by Silvano Bertolin, Ferdinando D'Urbano. It stars the latter three writers.

The Laplace demon is a mathematical theory, which supposes that, if someone knows the precise location and momentum of every atom in the universe, they could predict everything down to the smallest detail.

A team of scientists are invited to a remote island by a mysterious, eccentric man. The team discover a lift that leads up into the foreboding Gothic mansion perched on top of the sheer cliff edges that surround it and soon realise that they are part of a bizarre experiment themselves...

Montreal-based Fantasia Film Festival described the film thus: "*The Laplace's Demon* unfolds like an all-time

great *Twilight Zone* episode directed by the three-headed offspring of Guy Maddin, Mario Bava, and Val Lewton."

Reviews:

"...a film that may struggle with more general audiences, but even if you feel that you know nothing about physics or literature or art, you may well still appreciate its inherent creepiness and its effectiveness as an old fashioned horror thriller. The only thing it really lacks is Vincent Price, but with a host of capable Italian actors who play their parts perfectly to type (the standout being newcomer Carlotta Mazzoncini), it has plenty going its favour."

Jennie Kermode, [Eye for Film](#)

"...the art and set design, also overseen by G. Giulivi is absolutely crucial to the film's success. Most people would agree it is hard to pull off human-sized killer chess pieces, but Giulivi manages to do it. The ultimate implications of *Laplace* are depressingly scary, but unlike the instantly stale *The Circle*, the overall film is so smart and inventive, we really don't mind its philosophical upshot."

Joe Bendel, [J.B. Spins](#)

“Evoking a bit of early Mario Bava-style giallo, in combination with noir sharp light and shadow, gives this film an unusual, slow burn flair. The acting style is slightly heightened, a bit of exaggeration in a particular Italian style, making the characters arguably somewhat one-dimensional, but this is not necessarily a detriment. It fits into the balance between philosophical discussion of fate and free will, and running for their lives.”

Shelagh Rowan-Legg, [Screen Anarchy](#)

“The use of the model and the chess pieces seems like it should be awkward but actually works beautifully — a surprising amount of suspense can be derived from the clockwork performing its steady, impersonal duties. There’s an excellent build of tension as both pawns and characters disappear one by one, and the conversations on the independence of human thought never weigh things down. Under the monster-movie facade, it’s an intelligent film that doesn’t talk down to the audience even as it skilfully plays with the viewers’ minds.”

[The Movie Critic Next Door](#)

“*The Laplace’s Demon* is a (yet to be fully discovered) masterpiece in manipulation, style, nail-biting suspense and jaw-droppingly impressive story structure. Do. Not. Miss. It. “You’ll believe a man can fly” – or in this case – you’ll believe that chess pieces moving through a scale-model mansion, will be the most exciting and breathless thing you’ve seen in years.”

Michael Klug, [Horrorfreak News](#)

Link: <https://horrorpedia.com/2017/07/27/the-laplaces-demon-italy-2017-mystery-thriller-film-overview-cast-plot-reviews-trailer/>



Fantasia 2017, Days 7 to 9: *The Laplace's Demon*

Tuesday, September 5th, 2017 | Posted by *Matthew David Surridge*

After two days off, I returned to Fantasia on June 21 fit, trim, and rested. Randomness defines my festival schedule — it happened that the previous two days had nothing I wanted to see. But that Friday afternoon I was looking forward to one of the most intriguing movies listed in Fantasia's catalogue: *The Laplace's Demon*, directed by Giordano Giulivi.

A team of scientists has worked out how to calculate the complexities of glass shattering. Their mathematics imply a deterministic universe, if the code can be more fully cracked. The movie begins with them on their way to a mysterious island, summoned to the mansion of a reclusive genius. There, in his empty mansion, they find the terrible truth — their host, speaking to them by videotape, is playing a terrible game. He's gone further than them, pushed the math beyond human sanity. Now the researchers are elements in a vaster experiment: the horrific mechanisms in the isolated house will eliminate them, one by one, if the equations are correct. Can they find a flaw in the math and save themselves? Is there room in the universe for free will?

Watching the film play out I saw science-fiction and mystery and horror blend in a classic plot framework. The movie feels like an artifact from Hollywood's Golden Age, some previously-unknown Val Lewton piece, a



forgotten film by James Whale. It's shot in a heavily-shadowed black and white, much of it in one elaborately-furnished room filled with dark corners and rich art-nouveau details. Close-ups and odd foreshortening adds to an air of unreality, fostered by an unusually tasteful use of CGI. The characters here are caught in a metafictional plot, which can be predicted but not evaded. Clever, well-crafted, it evokes Halloween frissons of delicate horror, surprising while generating a sense of inevitability, moving to a creaky but effective plot climax that resolves its themes with the bleakness of a death's-head inevitable grin at a deterministic universe.

The Laplace's Demon was created by a small group wearing many hats. The four producers were director Giordano Giulivi, his brother Duccio Giulivi, Ferdinando D'Urbano, and Silvano Bertolin. The same four men were together responsible for the script (the Giulivis both have "writer" and "story" credit at the IMDB, while the other two are credited with "story" alone). D'Urbano was the film's cinematographer, played one of the scientists, and edited the movie with Giordano Giulivi — who was also responsible for production design, art direction, and special effects. Duccio Giulivi, meanwhile, played one of the main roles, and handled the music for the film. Bertolin starred and was production coordinator. Look over the IMDB crew list, and you see these names (along with Tamara Boggiano) recur again and again. This wasn't a large production, in other words; but it feels larger than it was, with scope born from good planning and careful use of visual effects.

Set in modern times — we see a laptop running wirework simulations of the scientist's breaking glass — there's an old-fashioned sense to the film. Cell phones don't work here, as in so many contemporary horror movies, but there's logic to that: the malevolent Professor Cornelius has built his home on an island. So we watch the black-and-white images and listen to the symphonic soundtrack, and recall the plot mechanisms of times past. D'Urbano's cinematography fits the proceedings to perfection, wielding shadows and contrast expertly. The lighting's obviously dramatic, unreal, and yet perfect for a story set in a mansion designed like a set out of the 1940s; as though Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce might wander in at any moment and set things right.



Neither they nor anyone else does. The story's straight, a plot-driven horror story that finds its twists in the inherent logic of its premise. Characters are developed enough to be credible and to establish their various roles in the story: this one the dreamer, this one the man of action, this one the analytic scientist. One notes that the old-fashioned sense extends

to the inclusion of only one woman in the eight-strong group bound up in Cornelius' plans. It also extends to the technology in the movie. The characters watch Cornelius deliver his message on videotape. They listen to music on a gramophone. A grandfather clock ticks away moments: symbolically important, a clockwork mechanism providing a central image for the struggle with determinism. Even more central is a huge model of the house, in which the characters are represented by a group of pawns, which move as a complex network of gears and pistons drive them in perfect synchronicity with the actual movements of the characters through the house. At intervals, a mysterious black queen emerges; the house shakes; and a pawn isolated on its own is taken, as the other characters and we in the audience watch the model. When we finally see what the queen represents the image is perfect; but the point is that everything the characters might do to escape it has been worked out mathematically in advance. Can they find a way to defeat it, against all reason?

There's no gore in the film, no violence to speak of. Its suspense comes from a mastery of classical technique. Yet CGI provides backgrounds, and is used to make the machine model of the house. That adds to the artificiality of the film, perhaps, but also enforces the ineluctable quality of mathematics. Computers have worked out the nature of the house and of the model in which the characters are trapped; how can you fight science?



Can they find a way to defeat it, against all reason?

That's the central question of the film. The 'Laplace' of the title is (whatever its relevance to a largely one-location movie) a reference to Pierre-Simon, marquis de Laplace, an 18th-century scientist who was a strong proponent of mathematical determinism: the idea that if you knew the starting point and driving force of everything in the cosmos, it would be possible to predict mathematically every motion that followed through to the end of time. Human history would be only one branch of this ur-mathematics, all our beliefs and dreams and fictions



only a byproduct of inevitability and the laws of physics. The mind which Laplace imagined, capable of grasping the entirety of the universe and calculating forward, has become known as "Laplace's demon."

This a movie, then, in which the monster is math. Practically, though, there are no equations or calculations. The math's a plot point, not important in itself but a way to tell a story about freedom and tragedy. Can the characters find a way to freedom? Can they do something truly unpredictable? As characters in a tightly-machined script, it seems impossible. The tragic is born out of the inevitable. And yet the idea of such an all-encompassing mathematics is so counter-intuitive the attempt to find a way around it is just as inevitable; which, I suppose, is what makes for any tragedy, a futile attempt to escape the inevitable.

Only, if classical tragedies have shown characters dying for offending God or the gods, this is tragedy's Deist. Cornelius, the Prime Mover, set things in motion and then absented himself from the scene (presumably). Everything that follows, follows from that. Characters brought face-to-face with this reality, which claims to be a kind of model of the larger mathematical reality of the universe, don't believe it. Yet the model house is perfectly in tune with the real actions that take place in the house. And, symbolism aside, there's a monster afoot that makes breaking the equations an immediate task.

It seems right that the scientists first drew Cornelius' attention by modelling the way a drinking-



glass shattered. A glass knocked off the table is a recurrent image in the film, as is the image of a glass sitting on a table, awaiting its potential fall like an angel awaiting its inevitable plunge into demonhood. We see the accidental drop and breakage several times. The point, I think, is that the falling glass *is* an accident, a thing unpredicted by the human

intelligence that precipitates the fall. In this movie a greater intelligence can predict its destruction. Accident disappears. The cold equations of destiny are all.

And yet one of the characters, Duccio Giulivi's Jim Bob, daydreams of flying. Of escaping the gravity that pulls at the glass. Never mind whether the daydream can be made real; or, if it could, whether it would simply recapitulate the tale of Icarus. I wonder whether the point is the daydream itself. In the big picture, Laplace's mathematical demon must be able to predict daydreams and fiction; they're a part of destiny. But predicted or not, the dream and the art have meaning. What happens to the dreamer? What happens, in the end, to the intelligence capable of predicting all the universe? Can the intelligence predict itself, and if so, can it really escape its own predictions?

These things may appear abstract. The film works because it makes them vital. It's a well-told suspense story about a group of characters trapped on an island being whittled down one by one. And it's a philosophical drama about free will. Both aspects succeed. It's one of the strongest pieces I saw at Fantasia this year.

After the film there was a question-and-answer session with the Giulivis, D'Urbano, and Bertolin. Per my handwritten notes, Giordano Giulivi took most of the questions, starting with the first



regarding the gestation of the project. He said the script came first, but that they spent a lot of time thinking about the idea. He said it took roughly two years to develop the idea and polish the screenplay to bring out all the paradoxical elements in it. Asked if the ending was always in place, he said it was a "Good question.

Very good." In fact they did not have the ending at first, but worked their way through the script chronologically until they found the ending that tied everything together — as he said, Laplace found the ending for them.

Asked how much of the film used miniatures as opposed to CGI, Giulivi said everything was CGI, which he personally created; the process took a lot of time. Asked whether there were any notable Italian film influences in the movie, as opposed to the obvious American influences, he said no. He was then asked why a script seen briefly in the film was in English, and he said they shot three versions of the scene, exactly the same except for the language of the script (Italian, English, and French). I was then surprised to hear him deny that the idea of the formula was meant as a metaphor for cinema.

Asked if the movie was filmed in sequence, Duccio Giulivi said yes, it was shot chronologically, and that it was difficult for him to get into character at the beginning; but everything came together. Bertolin observed that the ending was most difficult for him as an actor. The shoot itself, according to the director, was four years — long enough that it was difficult to keep the actors looking consistent. Duccio Giluivi, spear-bald in the movie, observed he personally needed a lot of help from the hairdresser. D'Urbano was asked how he kept the look of the film consistent over that length of time, and he said it was actually fun, and that it was more difficult to light the actors and then light himself using the director as a stand-in for his character.



Asked how it felt to finally show the movie after a 7-year production process, Giordano Giulivi said simply “Like a dream.” Asked why Duccio’s Giulivi had the not-terribly-Italian-sounding name Jim Bob, the actor said it was a long story, and that the character was carried over from their previous film; it was a name they like a lot. Asked about the image of the mechanism that the black queen represented, the director

said it symbolised the conflict of life and death, and the inevitable triumph of the latter. It was, he said, an explicit way to represent death.

That ended the questions and answers, and I set off for home. It had been a short day, but a rewarding one. Next came the weekend, always busy at Fantasia; not being an intelligence of the quality of Laplace’s demon, I could not predict what I’d end up seeing. Unspoiled by precognitive math, I had in fact just shy of two weeks of films left to me, the festival now well underway. How to predict not just one world, but the many different universes of so many different movies?

Link: <https://www.blackgate.com/2017/09/05/fantasia-2017-days-7-to-9-the-laplaces-demon/>



TALK FILM SOCIETY

Jul 23

Fantasia 2017: The Laplace's Demon

Sean Beattie

Director Giordano Giulivi's *The Laplace's Demon* opens with a team of researchers traveling to a remote island at the behest of a well-off professor, who seems interested in their work. Upon arrival, they receive word from the professor that his invitation was a ruse. Rather than look into their research, the professor intends the team to assist in his own proofing of a theorem that solves for probability in all things (and is also the source of the title—no supernatural proceedings here). To inject some immediacy to their evening, and to prove his theory correct, the professor has sent a monstrous mechanical creation to hunt them all down, one by one.

What we wind up with, here, is essentially an Italian-made, gothic suspense version of an Agatha Christie story. It's worth saying, though, that the suspense is well maintained with smart direction and suitably creepy special effects that mimic the uncanny valley of stop motion. The gothic mood is established via architecture of the manor in which the film is set and the gauzy black and white camerawork in which it's shot.

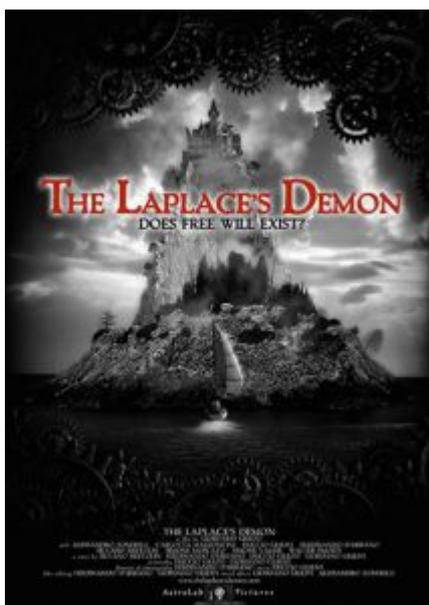
The research team's trip to the island by small boat is well used to establish their different dynamics and personalities, an economical and smart choice so that upon arrival, we jump right to the tense fun.

It's clearly a labor of love, with *The Laplace's Demon*, and it comes through in every choice. Costumes and set design harken back to previous decades' styles, but the main characters have modern technology with them. This melding of periods onscreen lends an "out of time" quality to the film, and that quality works to its benefit. It's not a high-budget affair, but the charms shine through nonetheless. The design of the thing that hunts down the cast is at once over-the-top and fearsome, and I got flashes of Maximilian the evil robot from *The Black Hole* in how it's "face" came across on screen. *The Laplace's Demon* doesn't try all that much new with the formula it cribbs from Christie, but the originality and attention to detail in the smaller effects and in the "hunter" are clear, and they justify the price of admission alone if you're into that (I was).

Link: <http://www.talkfilmsociety.com/reviews/fantasia-2017-the-laplaces-demon>



Goomba Stomp



The Laplace's Demon

Directed by Giordano Giulivi

Written by Giordano Giulivi and Silvano Bertolin

2017/Italy

The Italian film *The Laplace's Demon* unfolds like a lost episode of the *Twilight Zone*. Based on the scientific theory of the same name, the film follows seven researchers who are working on a system to predict the future. To test their own version of the titular mathematical theory, the team focuses on predicting how many pieces of glass there will be when a glass is deliberately broken. After completing their experiment, the team of scientists – who believe they have done the impossible and cracked the code of chance and probability – are awarded an invitation to visit the famous professor Cornelius, who lives and

works on a remote island in the middle of nowhere. When the group arrives at the mysterious isolated mansion, they are greeted not by their host, but rather by a videotape recording left behind by the mad doctor himself. His silhouette on the television explains the rules of the game, and a model replica of the mansion which sits in the middle of the room reveals that the researchers have become pawns in a unique experiment: a real life game of chess. Finding themselves pawns in a



death trap programmed with a revolutionary equation that anticipates their every move, the team must work together and do everything in their power to survive the night – only thanks to science, there is a good chance that they're all doomed.

The Laplace's Demon toys with the idea of fate vs. free will – and it does so with impeccable style! Giordano Giulivi's film is a unique movie indeed – a gorgeous, low-budget labor of love that evokes Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* and the classic horror films by Mario Bava, Val Lewton, and French auteur Jacques Tourneur. Giulivi beautifully balances pastiche, homage, and genuine suspense, crafting a gorgeous thriller that blends classic gothic horror, film noir, and probabilistic science-fiction in

unprecedented ways. It took seven and a half years to make but this hauntingly beautiful work, but it was well worth the wait. *The Laplace's Demon* is not only one of the best films that screened at the Fantasia Film Festival this year, but also a tense, thrilling love letter to classic science fiction and horror cinema of yesteryear. Ferdinando D'Urbano's black-and-white cinematography is simply dazzling, and the use of old-school filmmaking tricks such as rear projection, creative low key lighting, practical effects, canted angles, beautiful miniatures, and even a clockwork machine goes a long way in evoking its sense of paranoia and dread. Meanwhile, the ensemble cast is terrific, and Duccio Giulivi's evocative score fits the proceedings perfectly.



Fans of thought-provoking science fiction and those who prefer to simply be entertained will find plenty to enjoy in *The Laplace's Demon*, as Giordano Giulivi (who co-wrote the film with Duccio Giulivi) manages to take what could have been a rather complex screenplay and somehow makes it wholly accessible. There's tension throughout, as *The Laplace's Demon* finds interesting and clever



ways to explore the patterns of human behavior, and while the use of the model and the chess pieces on paper sounds like a ridiculous concept, it actually works beautifully on screen. Under the monster-movie facade, it's an intelligent film that successfully builds tension as both pawns and

characters are killed off one by one. More importantly, the film never feels the need to talk down to the audience, even as it skillfully toys with our expectations.

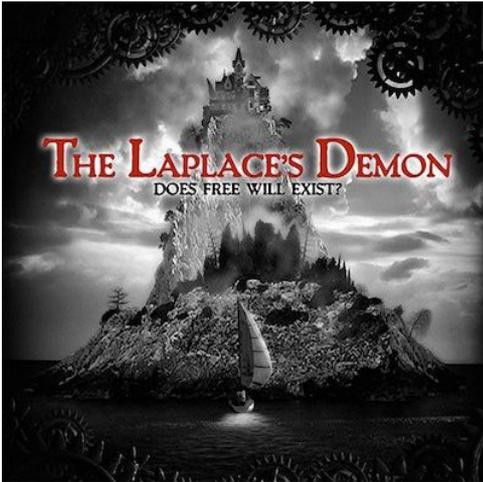
The Laplace's Demon is a bizarre but wildly distinctive film that represents a leap forward for Giordano Giulvi as both a writer and director. This wonderfully original little film is a work of curious and unsettling beauty – an inventive, gently surreal movie that should please those looking for a strange mix of horror, science-fiction, drama, comedy, and mystery.

FANTASIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL • JULY 13 – AUGUST 2, 2017

Link: <https://www.goombastomp.com/fantasia-2017-laplaces-demon-smart-stylish-utterly-unique/>

The Laplace's Demon (2017) Review

By: C. Rachel Katz



Directed by Giordano Giulivi

Starring: Brian May, Monica May, Kass Visokey, Romy Valentina

What if everything you did was predetermined? Every decision you made, every action you took carefully calculated and plotted ahead of time? Could you change the outcome? Or is that part of the equation? *Laplace's Demon* posits no, you can't fight fate.

It goes something like this: Say you were able to calculate how someone would act or react in a certain situation. If it were possible, then it would mean that person's fate is predetermined, that agency is an illusion and free will doesn't exist.

Giordano Giulivi's *Laplace's Demon* pits a group of researchers against a mysterious figure who claims to have done the math and calculated their every move. Trapped inside a hilltop mansion, the unfortunate group is forced to become part of a deadly experiment in determinism. To make matters worse, there is a replica of the mansion in the room with them, a mechanical model in which they can watch themselves and witness their movements in real time.

The titular demon is the person controlling the experiment, the one who already knows how it will end.

Speaking to the group through a videotape, he torments his guinea pigs by proving, time again, that he knows exactly what they're going to do. The researchers bravely try to outsmart their fate, but it's a losing proposition. Inevitably, death comes for them all.

Shot in black and white before a green screen, the film blends expressionist and noir aesthetics to create a beautiful atmosphere of mystery and dread. It's a slow burn, punctuated by periods of suspense as the lights in the mansion flicker and the test subjects are eliminated one by one. Absent are the petty squabbles and bickering that run through a lot of contemporary genre cinema. Instead, characters work together to understand the situation and the film doesn't waste time or insult the audience by burying the lead.

Laplace's Demon draws a lot of its strength from its design where some of the action is more implied than shown. As death comes for the researchers, those who will be spared this round must watch as their colleague's avatar in the model is hunted down and swallowed up. The effect is a powerful one, compounded by the realization that everything happening both in the mansion and in the model has been preordained. The only surprise is who will be next. Having fun with the baked-in postmodern elements of its premise, the film takes time to play with its characters. Bordering on meta, the story calls for people to interact with a pre-recorded message, and one character even encounters the script itself. Thankfully, *Laplace's Demon* stops short of devolving into self-parody and the film ends the only way it can, with the successful completion of the experiment. *Laplace's Demon* is maybe not for everyone. Its slow burn, mathematical philosophies, and artificial look and feel will test some audience members. But for those who are willing to take a chance on a think-piece about predeterminism, then perhaps you are destined to see this movie.

Rachel's Grade: B+

Link: <http://influxmagazine.com/the-laplaces-demon-2017-review/>



Review: The Laplace's Demon (2017)

George Noctarakis.

According to the mathematician Laplace, if someone used pieces of statistics and physics, would be able to create a "demon" that could, based on a mechanical model, predict any future event.

Including human behavior!

Based on this theory, a group of scientists will conduct an experiment that will attract the attention of a hermit professor.

Once they arrive in the villa of the professor, they know a real Demon, since this man claims to have perfected Laplace's theory.

And the result is a miniature of the building in which they are located and in which there are pawns that reproduce exactly their moves in real time!

What remains to be seen is if they manage to escape all this. But if their every move and every thought is predetermined, how will it be possible?

The idea behind this mysterious film coming from Italy is very interesting.

The director Giordano Giulivi with black and white photography and the artistic influences of the 40s and 50s, builds step by step a philosophical nightmare on free will.

Mystery and suspense grow, like directing, and even more interesting are the concerns that arise as the film progresses, and that little by little move from the actors to the public.

If the Laplace Daemon is true, then it can be called in various ways. Destiny? God? Everyone can give him the name he wants. But what impact does it have on us and our actions?

And free will? It's real? Do we control our lives through our decisions? Or, unknowingly, do we operate on a pre-programmed chess board?

The answers to you.

The film was screened at the 5th Horrort Film Festival 2018.



Link: <http://www.filmboy.gr/2018/06/laplaces-demon-2017.html>

BIRTH. MOVIES. DEATH.

What The Film Fest 2018 Review: THE LAPLACE'S DEMON

THE TWILIGHT ZONE meets SAW in this odd, nerdy passion project.

By ANDREW TODD Mar. 27, 2018

One of the most exciting things in cinema is when a film's ideas are echoed in the very methodology of its construction. You don't see it that often (*Tangerine* and *Escape From Tomorrow* leap to mind as recent examples), but when you do, it's borderline transcendental. *The Laplace's Demon*, by Giordano Giulivi, follows the same pattern: it's a flawed film, but the unusual, meticulous nature of its production serves to support its story in a foundational way.

Talking about *The Laplace's Demon*, it's hard to tell whether to start with the story of the film or the story of the production.

The story takes place over a single night, but the film was shot over seven years. Though set in a sprawling mansion on a craggy island, the whole movie was shot in a tiny basement, with the locations and sets created digitally and rear-projected behind the actors. This isn't green screen - it wasn't a case of shooting first and asking questions of



an effects suite later. Every backdrop in the film had to be planned out meticulously, including camera moves, so as to be projected on-set against the actors. It's an astonishing feat of filmmaking, a decision that curiously feels as naive as it does ambitious, and it lends *The Laplace's Demon* a considerably unique character.

The film's story centres on a group of probability researchers developing an algorithm to predict physical events, depicted in the story via a computer programme predicting how a dropped glass might break. They're invited to an island mansion by a mysterious professor, but upon arrival their host is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the mansion's central sitting room is dominated by a scale miniature of the building - a model in which chess pawns move about, controlled by a complex clockwork mechanism, mirroring precisely the movements of the visitors in the real house. It seems

this professor has perfected a device for predicting human actions and decisions - and soon, the appearance of a queen on the “board” heralds the researchers' deaths, one by one. Can they survive this deterministic nightmare?

No, they cannot, generally speaking. As the miniature machine - linked, seemingly, with machinery in the mansion itself - begins to kill everyone, the film kicks from its overly-talky, exposition-laden opening into a series of fantastic visual setpieces. Though the actual mechanism of death is a disappointing reveal that robs the film of much of its unseen menace, the sequences leading up to the deaths are superb, playing upon notions of determinism in clever ways. The characters gaze at paintings, watch VHS tapes, flip through photographs, and read written reports that seem to predict their exact actions, and each episode is more fun than the last. If only the whole film reflected this kind of visual invention, instead of laboriously talking us through the concept of determinism for the fifteenth time, it'd be a far stronger film.

The Laplace's Demon's core conceit feels like a *Twilight Zone* riff on Agatha Christie manor murder mysteries, but filmed in a way that places it entirely in a time and space of its own. Its complex, clockwork metaphysical trap could be compared to a *Saw* entry, if it wasn't shot in black and white with spare, expressionistic lighting; it'd feel like a Hammer film were it not populated with laptops and cellphones. The way in which its characters are offed one after another, presented as an inevitability, feels like a comment on the checklist-like structure of slasher movies; likewise, the obsessive, mathematically-focused story mirrors the process of the film's production. There's some strange alchemy going on behind the scenes here, and at its best, it's highly intellectually stimulating.

Viewed by itself, *The Laplace's Demon* is a weird scientific/supernatural thriller with rough performances and filmmaking that ranges from amateurish to masterful. But with a modicum of background knowledge, it transcends its flaws, becoming a truly unique motion picture. It's a testament to the importance of viewing art in context, of understanding where movies come from, of exercising more intellectual rigour than blindly watching whatever an algorithm predicts we want to watch next. Which, given the movie's subject material, is oddly perfect.

Link: <https://birthmoviesdeath.com/2018/03/27/what-the-film-fest-2018-review-the-laplaces-demon>