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Macedonian-Polish action script wins 1st Central European Pitch Forum



Veteran Macedonian-born Swiss writer-director Mitko Panov took first prize and 5,000 euros along with it at the closing event of the 2007 Fade In Central European Pitch Forum, the continent's first story market, for his script for an action-drama called **Witness**.



The special jury prize, worth 2,000 euros, went to Paolo Poti from Italy for his screenplay *The God of the Hills*, while the award for the best Eastern European screenplay was given to Hungarian writer team Péter Gál and Csaba Tóth for their chiller *Weekend*. Young Hungarian director István Madarász got the Best Pitch award for the presentation of his unique action thriller *Loop*.



The lavish awards ceremony and networking dinner, attended by 100+ film professionals from all across Europe, closed a very intense three days in Pécs, south Hungary. Beautiful weather was kind to the organizers, as



the picture-perfect city – slated to be a so-called “European Cultural Capital” in 2010 – showed its most stunning faces to attendees of the Moveast international film festival and its flagship event, the pitch forum.

Thirteen screenwriters from all over Europe showed up with eleven projects, all written “on spec”, meaning the authors developed them independently in the hope of selling their screen stories to the attending producers. During a very intensive two-day workshop, **world class coaches Jurgen Wolff and Rupert Widdicombe** from the UK prepared the participants for their presentation, also known as “pitching”. On the third day, in front of 15 international producers and a host of other industry guests, the writers finally got the chance to kick start their careers by pitching their stories to the decision makers.

Meanwhile the jury, led by European Federation of Screenwriters president **Christina Kallas** and comprised of such acclaimed personalities as Polish Film Institute deputy director **Maciej Karpinski**, writer-director **Giovanni Robbiano**, Genoa University professor and BAFTA-winning writer-director **Richard Kwietniowski**, decided which screenplays would be awarded.

Finnish filmmaker **Maria Lappalainen’s** story, Red Diploma, merited special mention for its emotional plotting. The skillfully-written melodrama tells the story of a young orphan in Russia and her impossible romance with a street thug.

Italian scribe **Poti’s** masterfully developed The God of the Hills is a drama set in war-torn Sarajevo about a sniper and the way he tries to save a young boy from the distance of the hills over the city. The 2,000 euros that came with the special jury award was sponsored by Allianz.

Weekend, by Hungarian writer team **Gál and Tóth**, is a slowly building, passionate and tense thriller about an arrogant criminal and his entourage who turn the life of a tiny Transylvanian community upside down, leading to a gory showdown. The story thrilled the jury so much that they awarded it with

the 2,000-euro prize for the **Filmjus Best Eastern European Screenplay**.

István Madarász's enthusiastic presentation of his twisted time-traveling action thriller *Loop* impressed the 15-strong producers' panel enough to secure him the **Best Pitch Award**. It comes with 1,000 euros and is sponsored by Oberon Studio.

American-educated **Panov** developed his screenplay with his writing partner, renowned Polish filmmaker **Wladislaw Pasikowski**. Their pitch for *Witness* depicts an action-drama set in the Balkan hills, where an envoy from the Hague Tribunal of War Crimes arrives to persuade a former soldier to testify against an alleged war criminal. Getting out of the hills is not as easy as it sounds, as locals do not want the soldier to go to court and testify against whom they perceive as their national hero. Their bloody escape teaches the envoy an important lesson about life. The script moved the jury so much that they unanimously voted it the **Best Screenplay of the 2007 Fade In Central European Pitch Forum**. The 5,000-euro prize is supported by MTV, the Hungarian National Television network.

In addition to the winners, the other participating writers left with high hopes, as all of them were approached by producers eager to read their screenplays. The organizers of the Central European Pitch Forum, Fade In Script Consulting, promised the writers they would keep track of all the participating screenplays and continue with their efforts to help sell them.

More info: www.fadein.eu/pitchforum
Photos: Laszlo Simara