During a Q&A session at this year’s Dam Short Film Festival in Boulder City, festival director John LaBonney revealed that the 12th annual edition had received a record 800-plus submissions. It’s a testament to the work of the festival staff that those 800 submissions were whittled down to 129 and then wrangled into entertaining and creative programming blocks that showcased thematic connections (including programs devoted to French movies, post-apocalypse movies and movies about hitmen). LaBonney also mentioned that putting together those cohesive blocks sometimes means leaving out otherwise worthwhile movies, but the overall quality of this year’s festival was high, and it even found organizers pushing boundaries on what has typically been a somewhat conservative slate (which plays to the small-town crowd).

The winner for best comedy was actually featured in the risqué Underground section: Andrew Laurich’s “A Reasonable Request” is little more than the re-enactment of a dirty joke, but the acting and the clever banter make an extremely uncomfortable situation into something very funny and even heartwarming. Elsewhere, shorts dealt smartly with sexuality and other explicit themes, often in powerful ways. The Australian drama “The Suburbs Go on Forever” is a sensitive, fascinating journey with a young woman drawn into the psychosexual games of an older married couple. “Don’t Watch Me Dancing” takes unexpected turns in its look at the rebellion of a teenage girl from an ultra-religious background. And “Symposium” is an alternately funny and sad take on the necessary ingredients for true love.

The DSFF is usually good at picking out genre fare, and the winner for the best sci-fi/horror short, darkly ironic survival drama “Grace” (from the post-apocalypse program), stood out for its uncompromisingly bleak look at human nature. Other genre highlights included stylish ’80s-horror pastiche “Night of the Slasher,” intimate sci-fi drama “Pact” and local horror film “Trivia Night,” which won a Final Draft-sponsored writing award.

Hunter Hopewell’s amusing but overlong comedy “Exchange” won the award for best Nevada film, but the strongest local offering was another effective take on love and sex, “Call You Later,” from versatile local veteran Adam Zielinski. Overall, the Nevada selections were impressively diverse, and the festival had so many of them that they expanded into programs beyond the local showcase. For the DSFF, an overabundance of quality is a good problem to have.

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