

## Leo roars for Stargate empire

BY PETER BIRNIE , VANCOUVER SUN MAY 10, 2009



Jim Sturgess in FIFTY DEAD MEN WALKING.

**Photograph by:** Colm Hogan, National Post

A controversial Canada/UK coproduction set in Northern Ireland during the worst of what were dubbed “the Troubles” took the top honour for film at Saturday night’s Leo Awards gala, honouring the best achievements in B.C. film and television.

Brightlight Pictures won the coveted prize for Fifty Dead Men Walking, directed by Kari Skogland and starring Jim Sturgess as a stoolie caught between the British Army and the IRA.

“It’s wonderful that B.C. has something to help celebrate local film,” said producer Shawn Williamson.

The project, which was shot on location in Belfast, “was fascinating to work on,” said Williamson, who lauded screenwriter and director Skogland.

“It was a marvelous creative experience.”

On the television side, Stargate Atlantis swept the top honours. In addition to capturing Best Program, the popular series also took Leos for best direction (Robert Cooper for the episode titled Vegas), best screenwriting (Alan McCullough for The Queen) and cinematography (Michael Blundell for Vegas).

“We did pretty good, we’re pretty happy with our showing,” said producer Brad Wright. “Our cast and our crew for Atlantis is among the best I’ve ever had an opportunity to work with. We were too flummoxed to say that on stage last night. We were shocked. We’re used to going to award shows and hearing other shows names being called. I guess last night was our night.”

Not only did Stargate Atlantis also win a slew of the technical awards, presented on Friday evening, but producers Brad Wright and Robert Cooper were honoured with an outstanding achievement award for the entire Stargate franchise.

Vancouver’s film and TV community has enjoyed tremendous benefits from this sci-fi monolith, which started (after the initial movie) with Stargate SG-1, includes two direct-to-DVD movies (Stargate SG-1: The Arc of Truth and Stargate Continuum) and carries on after Stargate Atlantis with the latest offshoot, a TV series titled Stargate Universe, which debuts in the autumn.

The icing on the cake for the Stargate team came in the feature-length category, as Stargate Continuum also captured Leos for Michael Shanks (lead actor) and Brad Wright (screenwriting).

Other top honours for feature-length drama went to Anne Wheeler for her direction of Living Out Loud, Attila Szalay for his cinematography in the Canada/China co-production of Iron Road and Vancouver actress Babz Chula for best actress in Mothers & Daughters.

Fifty Dead Men Walking was not only directed by Skogland, but written by her as well. She based the screenplay on the real-life story of Martin McGartland, who has always insisted that the tips he passed on saved at least 50 lives. He is still in hiding.

The Leo Awards were first presented in 1999.

Sun Theatre Critic

[pbirnie@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:pbirnie@vancouver.sun.com)

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