Genre legend—in every sense of the word—Sir Christopher Lee will be honored at Britain's BAFTA Awards this Sunday with an Academy Fellowship, an award honoring his lifetime achievement in cinema. The 88-year-old actor is all over the place these days, including a cameo in the recent SEASON OF THE WITCH. Here in NYC alone, fans will get to see Lee on the big screen courtesy of Fango's February 22 screening of his Hammer return THE RESIDENT (1st photo below; see here) and Lincoln Center's special showing of John Landis' BURKE AND HARE on March 3 (see here).

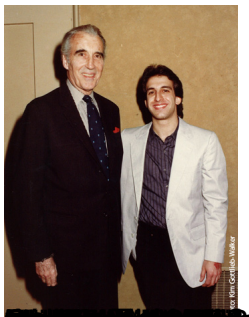
The indefatigable Lee just wrapped HUGO CABRET in the UK for longtime fan Martin Scorsese and may be off to New Zealand soon to work with Peter Jackson again on THE HOBBIT. Not bad, huh, when most people Lee's age (and younger) can't even get up and make it to the bathroom in time anymore. While the octogenarian continues perhaps the most fruitful period of his professional life, I thought I'd share some of my own experiences meeting this British icon.

My parents (God bless 'em!) took me to my first Christopher Lee movie at age 6 (!), when I witnessed—and cowered at—his towering persona in 1968's DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE at Long Island's towering Green Acres Drive-in (now a mall, sadly). Throughout my adolescence, I'd catch many of Lee's horror movies on TV, especially his great Hammer and Amicus pictures. Thanks to *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, I began to familiarize myself with Lee's work, so when one of his '70s-era movies came out, I'd hit local Queens or Manhattan movie theaters to see the likes of THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN, THE WICKER MAN, AIRPORT '77, the cheesy END OF THE WORLD and even 1980's SERIAL, a comedy where he played a motorcycle-riding queen. During his tenure in the States, the actor even laughed it up with the original Not Ready for Prime Time Players on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, which had me in stitches.

Of course, I always longed to meet Lee in the flesh one day, and thanks to my awesome job of editing FANGORIA and co-producing our FANGORIA *Weekend of Horrors* conventions, that dream became a reality in January 1990 at NYC's Hotel Pennsylvania. This was back when conventions were fun and meaningful for the fans, not celebrity cattle calls where has-beens demand $25 or more for their scribble on a dirty napkin.

Even without Lee, our annual Big Apple winter conventions were amazing. Throngs lined up outside the hotel on 7th Avenue hours before we opened, and the crowd would stretch all the way around the corner on Sixth Avenue. Besides Lee, that 1990 East Coast roster included Clive Barker, Bruce Campbell, Tom Savini, Linnea Quigley and Gunnar Hansen—and no one charged for autographs in those days. Creation (our partners on the event) did these shows better than anyone and set the standard. Lee was making his first-ever convention appearance, and to say everyone was stoked—even his fellow guests—was an understatement. The actor flew over, first class, on the Concorde, an experience he later told me he relished. Genre consultant Jeff Walker, who helped market countless sci-fi and horror flicks to the fanboys during this period (and still does today) and a personal friend of Lee's from his '70s LA stay, had arranged the monumental visit. The goal: to ballyhoo Warner Bros.' summer release GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH, where Lee played a mad scientist for pal Joe Dante.

Word spread to Creation convention staff that Lee would need extra security, as a few nutty buffs had already made their presence known. About an hour before Lee was due on stage, the tall thespian had been secretly led to an adjoining ballroom next to where he would be doing his Q&A. During this break, a select few of us passed through those guarded doors, and I still recall that initial moment of awe and excitement when I first laid eyes on Lee. Talk about presence! He was standing in the middle of the room holding court, wearing a gray overcoat, his baritone voice echoing in the mostly empty room. STARLOG's Dave McDonnell, Jeff and wife/photographer Kim Gottlieb-Walker, Savini and assorted others stood in rapt attention, listening to every word that spilled from his cultured mouth. Jeff introduced me to Lee, and I gushed, "Gee, Mr. Lee, when I was a kid, I told my parents that I wanted to be you when I grew up."



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