

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: Needless remakes of classic horror films - September 2002

For this TFTM page I would like to discuss the continuing trend in the movie industry of remaking, and most often ruining, classic horror movies. In the past several years many dismal remakes have been paraded across American movie screens. However, what compelled me to write about this issue was the news that a remake of George Romero's ***Dawn of the Dead*** is in the works. I don't think I need to go into a long explanation of what an amazing piece of work Romero's movie is, as it has been discussed at length elsewhere, but suffice it to say that it's definitely a movie that was done right the first time. With the recent slew of terrible misfires like ***House on Haunted Hill***, ***The Haunting***, and of course ***Psycho***, as well as the merely unnecessary updates like ***Village of the Damned*** (even the great John Carpenter couldn't improve a nearly perfect movie), you would think that producers would leave well enough alone. Many pieces of fiction just don't become better by adding computer imagery – they simply turn into empty effects films. (Another perfect example of this would be the American version of ***Godzilla***, which took away almost all traces of personality and character from the world-renowned lizard and left us with scene after scene of mindless effects and explosions).

When asked in an interview about a bad movie adaptation of one of his works, a famous horror author once said that his books haven't been ruined, but are still sitting safely up on his shelf. While this is certainly a positive way to look at the situation (in his case pertaining to filmed adaptations of novels), it still does bother me to see the good reputation of horror classics tarnished unnecessarily. What bothers me even more is the thought that many people in their teens and younger today will grow up thinking of these new "updated" versions when they think of titles like ***Psycho*** and ***The Haunting***. That having been said, it looks likely that ***Dawn of the Dead*** is going to be added to the list.

While there are obviously several reasons why ***Dawn of the Dead*** shouldn't be remade, the only (somewhat) valid reason I can think of for a remake would be the fact that the original movie was made in the seventies and now may look dated to younger viewers. Since horror can be a hot commodity nowadays, the producers are likely thinking that by giving the story a modern sensibility (no doubt by using the aforementioned computer effects and probably some attractive teen stars as well) they will be able to cash in on the lucrative teen date movie crowd. In my opinion, this standard movie industry mentality just spells another disaster for everyone concerned. First, from what I've been able to gather by cruising around the internet, the general consensus on this project is that nobody asked for it and nobody wants it. (I even recently saw a commendable online petition to stop the remake). Now, it's safe to say that these opinions mainly come from people actively interested in horror – in other words hardcore horror fans like me. Since it seems the producers are forging ahead with the project despite the negative feedback, this looks to be yet another example of the mainstream movie industry looking down condescendingly at the core genre audience. Hopefully this will come back to bite them where it counts – in their wallets. Even though hardcore horror fans may not represent the majority of ticket sales for a movie like this, we are usually the first ones to go see the movie, and often are the ones who determine whether or not it expands beyond us. I think it is highly doubtful that mainstream audiences alone will grant a zombie movie big box office numbers. Recently the movie version of ***Resident Evil*** failed to draw big crowds, and this film supposedly had a large fan base of video game players. ***Resident Evil*** showed without question that zombies and computer effects don't mix, and also that without a decent script even good performances (like the one by Milla Jovovich) are wasted.

In the original ***Dawn of the Dead***, Tom Savini's brilliant prosthetic blood and gore effects splattered uncompromisingly across the screen to the delight of horror fans worldwide. Somehow I just can't imagine these sights being present in the updated version. To those who have already voiced their disapproval of the remake, consider this to be the addition of my voice to your cause.