

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!

Topic: New Projects, New Beginnings - some random thoughts – July 2003

In this column I want to reflect on what it has been like to begin shooting a new movie after not having done any *filming for close to a year. This essay will be different from most of my previous TFTM columns in that I'm not going to offer an in-depth analysis of a particular topic, but rather just write down some random thoughts about my experiences to date on my most recent production. I would ask regular readers of the column to indulge this attempt at "off-the cuff" writing.

I just began work on a new short comedy titled ***Of Theatre & Bikinis***. Having worked on it for a couple weekends now, what strikes me the most is how different each production can be from the previous one. My last picture ***The Temptress*** was filmed mostly on weekend nights over a period of about two years. This movie is also being shot on weekends, but there are no night scenes involved. Instead of beginning at 8 or 9 P.M. and going into the early morning hours, we're now shooting scenes on bright sunny afternoons. Our shooting schedule is also more compressed, as we're planning on wrapping this movie by the end of the summer, which means long shooting days. With ***The Temptress*** there were many big scenes, or what might be called *set pieces*, often involving a lot of action and makeup FX. This comedy is mainly comprised of smaller scenes involving quite a bit of dialog. While framing MCU's (medium close-ups) on actors for a back and forth conversation is technically easier than doing fancy camera moves for an elaborate fight scene, straightforward dialog scenes pose their own unique challenges. In a comedy, interactions between characters at certain moments can really make or break a scene, because many lines and moments exist solely to get a laugh out of the audience. If the lines or character interactions aren't funny, the scene can fall flat, having nothing else to support it. This is a unique challenge of comedic material. While this isn't to say scenes can't fall flat in other types of material, it just seems more

noticeable when comedic elements don't work. This is quite a contrast to many of the challenges posed in making a horror picture, such as (in my case) choreographing a fight scene between two elaborately-dressed and made-up vampires taking swings at each other and trying to tear out each others throats with their teeth.

Another thing that makes each production unique is working with different people. Since I began making movies, I've been lucky enough to work with several of the same talented and dedicated people over different projects, but I've also usually managed to add at least a new face or two to each picture. In ***Of Theatre & Bikinis*** I'm working with several new people. Each new actor brings a unique presence to the screen, and adds to the moviemaking experience. Each new person brings a new dynamic to the shooting situation and helps to keep the production fresh. I always look for people who are enthusiastic and committed to their endeavors. I have several new actors in this production that fit that description.

Finally, I'd like to make a quick note about the technical side of this production. One big advantage of this picture over the last one is how much easier the shooting is from a technical standpoint. Most of this movie is set outdoors in the daytime, which means there is no lighting involved (except natural light), and no cables involved (the camera is powered by a battery.) I wrote the new script with these conveniences in mind. Working within the confines of an artificially-lit area in the middle of the night is much different than shooting cable-free in a sunlit park. I'm glad to have the opportunity to be involved in a different type of shooting experience. Time will determine what happens with this movie, but one thing I've learned is that each picture takes on a life of its own at some point during shooting. This is something I've often heard filmmakers say, and I totally concur with it. Ideas are added during the shoot and script pages are sometimes altered. **Unexpected events and challenges can develop on any shoot no matter how much it is planned out in advance. Each movie truly is a unique entity.

* The term *filming* is widely used today to describe making movies on both film and video. Technically (as one of my former college professors would often remind us during video production class) the term that should be used for producing material on video is *taping*. This is because film involves a chemical process, whereas video is more or less electronic moviemaking.

** Although unexpected events and challenges can alter well-made plans, I recommend outlining every shoot ahead of time on paper whenever possible. My practice is to write a detailed shot list for every scene, spelling out such specifics as who will be acting in the scene, what wardrobe and props are needed, and my chosen angles for each shot. The process of doing this helps to keep me focused on what is involved in a particular scene, because it forces me to reread the script pages. This way it is less likely some important detail will be forgotten, and even if nothing goes exactly as planned when we actually shoot the scene(s), at least I'm well-prepared and I don't feel as if I'm just "winging it".