

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: Some highlights of my trip to *Fangoria's Weekend of Horrors* 2004 convention – February 2004

This past January 9th, 10th, and 11th, Fangoria magazine (see previous TFTM column) teamed for the first time ever with Chiller Theatre to present *Fangoria's Weekend of Horrors* in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Prior to this, the *Chiller Theatre* convention (see previous TFTM) and *Fangoria's Weekend of Horrors* were serious rivals, competing for the horror crowd each year. Having attended both conventions numerous times in the past, I can definitely say that this new teaming was the best of both worlds.

My friend and I left for New Jersey on Friday afternoon and stayed until Saturday evening (the convention ran Friday, Saturday and Sunday), so we were there for most of the festivities. My favorite part of the *Chiller* convention is usually the dealer tables, while the biggest draw of Fangoria's annual show is the guests and panel presentations. We spent most of Friday evening browsing around a huge dealer room, before attending the panel presentations for the entire day on Saturday. This arrangement worked out really well because we were able to get all our shopping out of the way first, and then relax the next day and hear the guests speak. (Friday night had a lineup of presentations that we skipped due to shopping, while the much of Saturday's lineup - with some new additions as well - is repeated on Sunday for those who missed it). Fangoria had a table in the dealer's room, where they were selling their Fangoria Presents home video releases for \$15.00, which was a pretty good deal. I was also pleased to see quite a few independent filmmakers there promoting and selling their movies. Besides this there were the usual poster, video and DVD vendors, where you can buy anything and everything horror-related. As I've mentioned previously, the key is to look for out-of-the-ordinary and hard to find merchandise, because the more mainstream items are priced relatively similarly to what's in retail stores. There were some cool new posters this year

including a European **Jason X** which I hadn't seen before, and some teaser posters for upcoming flicks. I also stared for a long time at several great foreign **Nightmare on Elm Street** posters, but by then I had already spent too much to be able to afford them. Oh well. All in all, the dealer room offered a lot to choose from, which is what I've come to expect from a *Chiller Theatre* convention.

The Fangoria component of the convention featured some fantastic panel presentations which were hosted by Fango's ever cordial editor Tony Timpone and managing editor Michael Gingold. The packed auditorium was first treated with previews for upcoming theatrical releases, video releases, and even new TV shows. One highlight was the **Spider-Man 2** preview. This second entry in the series, once again directed by Sam Raimi, looks very impressive. The trailer is quick and action-packed, and to my delight they are putting Spiderman up against one of his more colorful enemies - Doctor Octopus. The second trailer I enjoyed immensely is what you might call a Fangoria staple. It is the trailer for the cult film **I Drink Your Blood/I Eat Your Skin**. This preview has been shown at previous Fango shows, and it is both disgusting and amusing at the same time. The movie is coming out on DVD from Fangoria video (a reissue I believe), so it should be interesting to see just how gross/funny this flick really is. As Mr. Gingold joked before running it, "watch out for the hose!" Some other trailers included **Resident Evil: Apocalypse**, and **Broken Lizard's Club Dread**. There was also a promo for a Fox TV show called *True Calling*, which stars Eliza Dushku.

The guest lineup for the remainder of the day did not disappoint. Of particular interest to filmmakers like me was the panel presented by representatives of The Horror Channel. This fledgling cable network, which is set to debut later this year, will be the first channel devoted solely to our beloved genre. The representatives in attendance seemed to really be devoted horror fans who want our input in order to make the network the best it can be. They spent the majority of their time on stage taking questions and suggestions from the audience. It was encouraging to hear that they appear to be open to all ideas (like accepting submissions from independent filmmakers), and also that they are being advised by many of the big names in horror, ranging from horror's directorial masters to experts in the field like Fangoria's own Tony Timpone. Horror fans should definitely keep an eye out for this channel to see if it winds up becoming the success they hope it can become.

There were also the usual panels featuring actors, filmmakers and others promoting upcoming movies. Two of these movies were the comic book derived film **Hellboy** and the upcoming (controversial) **Dawn of the Dead** remake (see previous TFTM column). While I'm not usually a big fan of comic book movies, actors Selma Blair, Ron Pearlman and comics' creator Mike Mignola were all very friendly and interesting to listen to. It was particularly fun to hear someone like Selma Blair, who is not usually associated with the horror genre, talk about her comical experiences on set acting against effects that would be added into the movie later. She seemed to genuinely be enjoying herself at the convention. Mike Mignola appeared thrilled (rightfully so) that his comic was hitting the big screen, while Ron Pearlman (with his low-key demeanor) is a screen veteran always worth listening to. I have to say however that even though I enjoyed the panel and their enthusiasm about the movie, to me the trailer still makes the film look like mainly a CGI flick. I could be wrong though.

The **Dawn of the Dead** panel was very down-to-earth and friendly. They did their best to relay to audience members that they are horror (and George Romero) fans that have

good intentions with their upcoming remake. I have to say that I have not been a fan of this (remake) idea since hearing about it, and the trailer shown didn't really do anything to change my opinion. However, the filmmakers and actors did seem sincere in their intentions, and they apparently have the blessing of Tom Savini, who did a cameo in the new movie and sat in on the panel. During the Q & A the inevitable question came up of why they just don't call the movie something else if it is not a straight remake of Romero's original. The obvious answer was that the title ***Dawn of the Dead*** is too valuable to give up. So, when all was said and done I hadn't been convinced to support the upcoming film, but I possibly had a bit more hope for good results. We'll still have to wait and see on this one.

Other entertaining guests included the one and only Joe Bob Briggs, and the director and some cast members from the upcoming sequel ***Return To Sleepaway Camp***, who previewed some (rather extended) footage from the movie, which looks to be in the same vein as the original ***Sleepaway Camp***. Actress Felissa Rose was particularly energetic in talking about the new film and also her various upcoming projects.

Finally, the highlight of the show for me came in the last couple hours on Saturday in the form of a ***Friday The 13th*** extravaganza. First came a panel of Jason Voorhees movie actors featuring Ari Lehman (young Jason in the original film), Warrington Gillette (Jason in part 2), C.J. Graham (Jason in part 6), and, of course, Kane Hodder (who starred as the masked man in parts 7-10). This was followed by the women of ***Friday the 13th***, featuring stars Betsy Palmer & Adrienne King (Mrs. Voorhees and Alice, respectively, from the original film), Amy Steel (from part 2), and Lar Park Lincoln (from part 7). Next FX artist Al Magliochetti showed some extended footage from the ending of ***Jason Goes To Hell: The Final Friday***. And finally, a star of that movie and of the ***Friday the 13th*** television series made an appearance. Actor John D. LeMay had lots to talk about with fans of both incarnations of the *Friday* franchise.

All of these panels were excellent. While the guys were great to listen to as they relayed stories about shooting particular scenes (like Ari Lehman's famous shot coming out of the lake from the first film), and answered questions such as what their favorite kill scene was, it was the women who proved to be the most entertaining. As it turned out, the actresses who attended represented three of my favorite entries in the film series. It was exciting to hear Betsy Palmer speak, because I had read articles in the past that talked about how she really didn't like (to put it mildly) the script for the original classic, and how she only accepted the role in order to make money to buy a new car. I wanted to hear her talk about the movie in person to see if any of it was really true. Well, she told it just like I had heard it, even confirming that she had indeed been asked to appear in one of the recent entries in the series, but had declined because they wouldn't give her what she wanted in return. However, Ms. Palmer was extremely pleasant and outgoing and went on and on happily with stories about the shooting of the picture. It was particularly amusing to hear that she had slapped Adrienne King when they were filming a fight scene, and Sean Cunningham had had to step in and tell her that in movies they don't really slap, they fake it. The actress who so many have come to know as Mrs. Voorhees (even though she's appeared in many other things on stage and on screen) actually had so much to say that at one point I didn't think there was going to be any time left for the others to speak. But that was okay with me. It was a joy to listen to her reminiscing.

Adrienne King was also an interesting guest who seemed to be grateful for all the success of the first movie. She, like Betsy Palmer, was energetic and could go on and

on about her experiences. It was especially entertaining when she and Ms. Palmer would talk together about filming ***Friday the 13th***. We also learned that Adrienne basically dropped out of the movie scene after that film due (despite her appearance in part 2) mainly to a disturbing real-life experience she had. She was extremely emotional in talking about it, and you could see it was difficult for her. However bringing up the subject proved to be a good thing, because she was very happy to be at the show, and said that her attending the convention was a positive step. She thanked the fans for their support and for helping her to make her reappearance - so to speak. With any luck we will see her reemergence on the movie scene in the near future.

The other ***Friday the 13th*** heroines - Amy Steel and Lar Park Lincoln - were also both warm and friendly, reminiscing about their on-set experiences. Personally I think it would be great to see one (or both) of them reappear in a future ***Friday the 13th*** movie, especially Lar Park Lincoln's telekinetic Tina character.

After viewing the extended ***Jason Goes to Hell*** footage (which illustrated just how important music and sound effects can really be for a film), my convention experience was wrapped up nicely by the appearance of John D. LeMay. The actor was the first guest I've seen from the great ***Friday the 13th*** television series, and it was a pleasure to hear him talk about the (too short-lived) show and his part in the movie franchise. He (like most of the guests) was incredibly friendly and gracious, staying in the convention center at the end of the night to sign autographs and pose for pictures with fans. The only thing that would have been better was if they could have gotten the whole main cast together. Perhaps that will happen at a future show.

The first *Fangoria/Chiller* joint convention was incredibly impressive, and, judging by the packed auditorium, I'd guess it was incredibly successful. The event probably drew previous fans of both shows. If this convention is an indication of things to come, I look forward to my next trip to New Jersey. I'm just hoping that with any luck next time we will have warmer weather for that long drive up and back.