

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: The Independent & Underground Film Scene in 2003 - Some random thoughts - January 2004

My initial idea for my first column of 2004 was to repeat what I did last year, which was to give a "best movies of the year" list. However, upon considering the matter, I realized that I pretty much covered my favorite movies over several previous columns. The past year was such a great time for the horror genre that there was never any shortage of material to write about. I can only hope that the tide will continue into 2004. That having been said, I'd like to turn my attention now to the independent and underground movie scene in 2003.

While studio pictures like *Freddy vs. Jason* (see previous columns) triumphed at the box office, the independent movie scene flourished as well. Two notable independent horror films found wide theatrical distribution in 2003. The first was rocker **Rob Zombie's House Of 1000 Corpses** (see previous column), a throwback to gritty 70's-style mayhem in the tradition of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The second movie was *Cabin Fever*, from director Eli Roth. This also had the feel of a 70's-style picture, with liberal doses of visceral carnage thrown into the mix. These movies are proof that lower budget "hardcore horror" still has a place at the multiplex alongside slick studio fare.

Going down the budgetary ladder one step further, we come to what I like to call the underground movie scene. (This is where I and many other filmmakers reside.) The past year also saw lots of activity here. In my own area (Upstate New York) for instance, several filmmakers began work on new projects, finished and screened movies, or signed distribution deals for their pictures. (See my links page to check out independent filmmaker sites including archangelproductions.com, fountainheadpictures.com,

knightfallsproductions.com, and raisinghellthemovie.com, among others) I myself completed and premiered a feature, wrote and directed a short film, and edited two pictures for other area filmmakers. I look forward to 2004 when these movies will hopefully achieve wide distribution.

In addition to all the film activity in my area, 2003 seemed to be the year when internet interest in underground moviemaking flourished. Several new sites spotlighting the independent and underground movie scene appeared on the web. * One example is microcinemascene.com (see my links page). This site - "where moviemaking matters most" - is all about underground filmmaking. Here you can read up on the endeavors of filmmakers and be the first to know when a new trailer is online. They also feature reviews of underground cinema, and have an extensive links page of independent production companies. (I'm happy to be able to report that the announcement of my online trailer for **The Temptress** was a very early addition to their Media section when the site first started.) I believe the best thing about this site however is that the people running it really seem to be dedicated to micro cinema movies. Not only does the sight offer promotion for filmmakers, but the writers/reviewers feature many columns where they discuss in detail the various aspects of moviemaking at this level. Many of the columns I've read have been very informative and useful.

While Microcinemascene.com was one of the first sights dealing with underground cinema (that I am aware of) to appear on the web, they are just one indicator that interest in this type of moviemaking is continuing to grow. I'm happy to say that over the past year I've corresponded with many diverse and interesting people, ranging from independent filmmakers, actors, musicians and writers, to website owners and film fans. And most people seem to have the same goal: to have their voices heard and to get their work out to the world. I've always believed in what I call "the democratization of filmmaking", which is to say that filmmaking should be as democratic as everything else in our society. As I've discussed at length previously, with all the digital technology available today, moviemakers can now produce high quality pictures that weren't previously possible. The next step is for the movies to be seen. Like Hollywood movies, underground cinema should have the potential to reach a global audience. I believe viewers will always be hungry for new movies (and music, books, etc. as well). Websites such as ifilm.com that offer independent/underground movies for viewing illustrate this. ** I believe that in the future the underground movie scene will continue to expand and be more recognized by mainstream moviegoers who at present are only aware of what the studios are offering. Underground cinema can be seen not as a future replacement of Hollywood movies, but as another alternative for viewers. The goal is to expand the possibilities of cinema and give viewers more diverse choices.

* Throughout the past year, many other sites primarily or partially devoted to underground cinema have also appeared on the web (see my links page). Some of these sites spotlight all movie genres, while some focus on specific genres such as horror. One sight for example (unfilmable.com) focuses exclusively on the cinematic adaptations of writer H.P. Lovecraft.

** For example, while there was a lot of independent film activity (some of which received media coverage) in my own area over the past year, many people still don't seem to really understand it. This is probably because the concept of movies and moviemaking is so historically deeply tied to Hollywood (and only Hollywood).