

## 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!

Movie Review: ***Alien Vs. Predator (AVP)*** – October 2014

Arriving about a year after the successful pairing of knife-fingered Freddy Krueger and silent, hockey-masked killer Jason Voorhees (in the excellent ***Freddy Vs. Jason\****), comes the much talked about ***Alien Vs. Predator (AVP)***. First, I'll say right up front that I've never played the video game, so I can't compare the movie to that. However I have seen all the ***Alien*** and ***Predator*** films and unfortunately this teaming between the two otherworldly species fails to be as compelling as even the weakest sequel in either franchise.

In ***Alien Vs. Predator*** billionaire industrialist Charles Bishop Weyland (Lance Henriksen) uses thermal imaging satellites to discover an ancient pyramid temple buried deep beneath the Antarctic Circle. He then quickly assembles a team of archeologists to cut through the ice and explore the temple. Led by the resourceful Alexa Woods (Sanaa Lathan), the group soon find themselves in the middle of a battle between the two species. It turns out the pyramid has been used for centuries in a coming of age ritual where young predators must hunt down hives of aliens and claim their skulls in order to prove themselves as warriors. Of course the hapless humans become the unfortunate victims of both the Aliens and the Predators.

There are some big problems with this movie. First and foremost is the fact that the film is inhabited by cardboard characters. With the exception of Alexa Woods, who is set up right at the outset as the tough and capable female heroine, it's obvious that the rest of the cast is just monster fodder. The filmmakers compound this flaw by making Lance Henriksen's character a weak, sick man who becomes out of breath and tires easily. This effectively takes Henriksen out of the action. Even though I don't believe it would have completely turned the film around, giving a capable actor like Henriksen a stronger

role would most likely have helped. Sanaa Lathan gives a believable performance as the stand-in for Sigourney Weaver's heroic Ripley from the previous Alien films, but her performance alone isn't enough to make up for the shortcomings of the stock characters surrounding her.

Another big weakness in the film is that it doesn't deliver as a horror movie. As mentioned above, the stock characters provide numerous deaths, but unfortunately they are mostly quick-cut or off-screen. There is little tension or suspense in these scenes and almost no visceral elements to speak of. The fight scenes between the two species are equally ineffective because they are murky and difficult to see. While PG-13 movies can provide creepy chills with effective brief touches of visceral imagery, such as in **The Sixth Sense** or the American remake of **The Ring**, *AVP* is a PG-13 effort that feels completely watered-down, especially when compared to any of the previous films in either the **Alien** or **Predator** series. The film just doesn't give us anything we haven't seen before in better movies. The slimy, chest-bursting Aliens and the athletic and menacing Predators are still cool cinematic creations, but their presence alone does not make a compelling feature. Even the appearance of the impressive Alien queen only made me wish I were watching **Aliens** instead. And the back story about the Predators being worshipped by the ancient Aztecs and about how these coming of age rituals have gone on for centuries was a tale that just sounded a bit too extravagant for what is essentially a giant monster movie. The tagline for **Alien Vs. Predator** states that "Whoever Wins... We Lose". I'd say with this movie the audience definitely loses.

\* For my thoughts on **Freddy Vs. Jason**, see the December 2002 and September 2003 TFTM columns.