

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 Recommendation: **Very Bad Things** - A bloody good little black comedy – March 2005

I recently sat down for a repeat viewing of the 1998 black comedy **Very Bad Things** -- a movie I originally saw at my local multiplex at the time of its theatrical release. After that first viewing I remember walking out of the theater being a bit shocked at just how nasty and graphic the film was. While I wouldn't put it into the category of an extreme gore film, the movie does feature an abundance of violence and blood, wrapped up in the form of a hilarious satire. Featuring (surprisingly enough) a cast of name actors, this movie is wickedly entertaining from start to finish.

The story centers on a young man named Kyle Fisher (Jon Favreau from **Swingers**) who's about to be married to an attractive young woman named Laura Garrity (Cameron Diaz). We see Kyle and one of his friends all dressed up and nervously waiting for the wedding to unfold when the movie opens. Before that happens however, we flashback to a few days earlier and watch as Kyle and several of his buddies take a road trip to Las Vegas for a wild bachelor party. What follows is a manically but stylishly-filmed hotel room scene which shows the five guys letting loose and going crazy with alcohol, drugs and a stripper. Unfortunately for this happy group the party comes to an abrupt end when a coked-up Michael (Jeremy Piven, playing one of two constantly squabbling brothers) takes the stripper into a huge bathroom for sex and accidentally drives the young lady's head into a towel rack, killing her instantly. At this point several of the guys think the thing to do would be to call the police, explain it was an accident, and hope for the best. However, their friend Robert Boyd (Christian Slater) has other ideas. He quickly takes charge of the panic-stricken group and explains that calling the police is only one option. You see, Boyd is a "take charge of your life" kind of guy. He explains that since he hired the stripper directly (not through any agency), nobody knows she was coming to

the hotel. Therefore he reasons their best course of action would be to clean up the place and dispose of the body. After a heated debate and vote, they decide to do it. However a badly-timed visit from a hotel security guard complicates their plans and produces a second corpse after Boyd kills the guy with a corkscrew. Following this the guys saw the bodies into pieces, clean up the blood-drenched room, bury these unfortunate people out in the desert, and vow never to speak of it again. The remainder of the movie follows the men as each unravels in his own way, leading to paranoia, extreme reactions, exaggerated behavior, and a large body count.

This movie worked for me for several reasons. First, while the events described above would probably be viewed as morbid in another film, here they are played, for the most part effectively, as sick humor. The violence and cruelty on display in this movie would be tough to watch if it weren't for this addictive humor. I found myself laughing hysterically at much of the satire, while at the same time being shocked at the depths of depravity these characters went to in order to try and bury their secret. While the bachelor party sequence is undoubtedly the most manic scene, the entire film has a frenzied energy running through it that is due in part to the solid writing and story and in part to the excellent performances from the cast. All the guys with the exception of Boyd are really what you might call Average Joes, each with their own particular and distinct character quarks. However it is evident that they are under intense pressures and demands in their everyday suburban lives. For example, Kyle is constantly being asked to handle all the wedding details by his demanding future wife. The others all have demanding families, jobs or money worries as well. The murder of the stripper and the security guard starts a chain reaction of events that push these men to the edge. Only Boyd seems immune to the stress because of his embracing of the principles of self-fulfillment and assertiveness training. But then again he also proves to be a vicious psychopath.

The actors all do an excellent job here, especially Christian Slater and Cameron Diaz. Although Jon Favreau is essentially the lead as the story centers on him, his bachelor party and impending marriage, it is really the manipulative, focused and heartless Boyd who drives the proceedings after the first death. Christian Slater delivers a compelling performance that admittedly reminded me quite a bit of his portrayal of teen psychopath Jason Dean in the classic black comedy *Heathers*. As in that movie, he plays a dynamic yet dangerous personality type. However the characters in these two movies have distinctly different motivations (and life situations), and here Slater does a good job portraying someone obviously well-disciplined in the practices of self-motivation, but lacking any moral conscience whatsoever.

Laura Garrity as played by Cameron Diaz is another unlikable character, but for different reasons. She is a whining and manipulative woman who could best be described as every groom's worst nightmare. She is also the other dominant personality in the picture. Although Diaz plays a smaller supporting role due to the fact that much of the movie focuses on the events of the Vegas trip, she's very effective and made me cringe every time she was on screen. Laura continuously asks her soon-to-be-husband if he loves her, and her sole purpose for existence seems to be to "walk down that aisle come hell or high water". She's so consumed with the wedding that she often looks mesmerized when speaking to Kyle. Diaz goes just far enough with the character to make her unforgettable, but stops short of being a caricature. This is a very impressive accomplishment indeed. Ironically enough, Laura proves to be just as vicious as Boyd

when it comes to the prospect of something (or someone) jeopardizing her wedding plans.

On the whole Peter Berg's ***Very Bad Things*** is a wild, sometimes uncomfortable, but often funny ride. The characters display sick, degenerate and repulsive behavior and make a terrible situation worse every step of the way. Surprisingly however, this chain of events still manages to feel very believable right through to the unexpected ending. Being a big fan of horror movies, it's probably easier for me to watch a movie like this than it would be for someone who has more mainstream sensibilities. Put another way, if you're looking for a feel-good, lighthearted, laugh-a-minute comedy, this is not the movie to watch. As the tagline proclaims, "They've been bad. Very bad." This couldn't be truer.