

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: Movie Review: ***The Devil's Rejects***

A look at the extreme, violent sequel to ***House of 1000 Corpses*** - September 2005

Caution: This review contains some plot details and spoilers.

In 2003 rocker Rob Zombie made his directorial film debut with the extreme shocker ***House of 1000 Corpses***, which told the tale of the ruthless Firefly family and their deranged, murderous escapades. Now, two years later, he continues the story with the equally violent sequel ***The Devil's Rejects***.

The Devil's Rejects picks up shortly after the events from ***House of 1000 Corpses*** and finds the Firefly family under siege in their own home by the Texas State Police. This intense standoff starts the film with a bang and introduces us to a ruthless sheriff (played with relish by William Forsythe) bent on not only capturing the Firefly clan, but also exacting bloody revenge on them. It turns out his brother was one of their victims (in the first film), and now he sees himself as doing God's work in eliminating them. After Otis and Baby Firefly escape and join Captain Spaulding, the remainder of the film follows them as they leave a trail of bloody bodies in their wake while being pursued by the authorities. Along the way the trio takes refuge with Captain Spaulding's half-brother (Ken Foree), who offers them shelter for a while.

One thing that really jumped out at me in this movie was the interesting casting. * In my ***House of 1000 Corpses*** review I criticized the film for being too similar to ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre***, and noted that having Bill Moseley (from ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2***) in the cast added to this feeling. However on the other hand having cult stars like Moseley and Sid Haig in lead roles, rather than the usual Hollywood A-list types, was a fresh change of pace. Here many diverse talents are added to the ensemble cast.

** This film features appearances by Priscilla Barnes, Diamond Dallas Page, Ken Foree, P.J. Soles, Deborah Van Valkenburg and Michael Berryman, among others. That's quite a list in my book, and I have to admit I was surprised to say the least as these people appeared one after another throughout the course of the movie. Granted this might not be noticed by the more casual film viewer, but to a horror and cult film fan like me it was definitely interesting. At the very least it should help in the next Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon game I take part in.

Another thing I liked about the film is the fact that the supernatural elements from ***House of 1000 Corpses*** were eliminated. Here there is no mention of local legend Dr. Satan, which to me was a real weak point in the first movie. The tale of the Firefly family seems to work better as a killers-on-the-road movie than as a supernatural creature story. Also all the weird, surrealistic images that Rob Zombie used in the first movie were not present this time around. As mentioned in my ***House of 1000 Corpses*** review, I didn't think much of that really worked well.

What I didn't like about ***The Devil's Rejects*** was how predictable it often was. For example it's immediately apparent most of the people Otis and Baby take hostage are doomed, even though the film presents sequences that are meant to be suspenseful and make the audience believe they have a chance of escape. As crazy as the killers supposedly are, they're always one step ahead of their victims and really just methodically playing with these hapless people. In fact the killers seem almost invincible and superhuman. This one-sidedness is most on display in a scene where Otis is hit over the head with a large chunk of wood by one of his potential victims, yet manages not to be affected by it. For me this didn't seem plausible, and while I realize that other types of killers (such as supernatural stalkers) are also portrayed as invincible, I believe here it takes away from the suspense. The film treats many of the characters like dead meat from start to finish, and after awhile this just becomes monotonous and boring.

Given the above observations I would say this movie was better than its predecessor. The unevenness that ***House of 1000 Corpses*** suffered from was replaced by a more skilled and refined directorial hand, which is something I commend Mr. Zombie for. At the same time Rob was still able to get his extreme, uncompromising vision to the big screen intact, which I also applaud. And while there have been movies made about families of psychos going on killing sprees, ***The Devil's Rejects*** didn't strike me as being a retread of any particular movie, which was one of my biggest criticisms of his first film.

However despite all this I still can't recommend the movie simply because overall I really didn't enjoy it very much (despite the cameos). As was true with ***House of 1000 Corpses***, as crazy as the psychos were they really didn't have much substance. The actors were once again simply chewing the scenery in a series of elaborately designed set pieces.

*** And while the film presented moments that were intended to humanize the Firefly family and create sympathy for them, these sequences seemed incredibly shallow and were obscured by the endless carnage throughout the film. Basically ***The Devil's Rejects*** amounts to a couple hours of pointless random acts of violence. My ***House of 1000 Corpses*** review concluded with a recommendation that fright fans check the film out and decide for themselves whether it was a new masterpiece in horror cinema or just

a series of disturbing sequences not amounting to much. That recommendation also applies to ***The Devil's Rejects***.

* ***House of 1000 Corpses*** was reviewed in my June 2003 TFTM column.

** For those not familiar with some of the diverse ensemble cast, here's a quick rundown: (For a comprehensive biography of these actors visit the Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com)

Priscilla Barnes has appeared in numerous movies and on television since the late 1970's. I fondly remember her as Terri, (attractive roommate #3) in the hit sitcom ***Three's Company***, which starred John Ritter and Joyce DeWitt.

Ken Foree has also appeared in numerous movies and on television since the late 1970's. One of his most memorable parts was his starring role as Peter in filmmaker George A. Romero's 1978 zombie classic ***Dawn of the Dead***.

P.J. Soles is another actress who has been around since the 1970's. She played the ill-fated Lynda in John Carpenter's 1978 horror classic ***Halloween*** and also appeared in the Bill Murray comedy classic ***Stripes***, among other things.

Upstate New York native Deborah Van Valkenburg has appeared in films and on television since the late 1970's and is well known for her role as Jackie Rush in the 1980's sitcom ***Too Close for Comfort*** starring Ted Knight.

Cult star Michael Berryman has also been around since the 1970's. He has appeared in such horror movies as ***The Hills Have Eyes*** (parts 1 & 2), ***Deadly Blessing*** and ***Invitation to Hell*** (all of which were directed by filmmaker Wes Craven).

Diamond Dallas Page is a professional wrestler in addition to being an actor.

*** It's interesting to note that apparently many viewers saw this film quite differently. In a recent look at the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) message boards for ***The Devil's Rejects*** I saw a lot of posts where people were talking about how they felt sympathy for the killers and saw them as being a very human, loving family in spite of their atrocities. Some noted this was illustrated by moments such as when Baby and Captain Spaulding stop for ice cream and when a montage of images near the end of the film shows the trio laughing and having a good time together. More than one person suggested the film was stylistically similar in this respect to Oliver Stone's ***Natural Born Killers***, which is something I agree with. Like in that film however, I didn't sympathize with or see the killers in any kind of positive light. To me most of the victims in ***The Devil's Rejects*** (despite their often relatively short screen time) were much more human than the sadistic Firefly clan.