

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: ***The Fog (2005)*** - Remakes don't get much worse than this.

Last month I mentioned that the movie trailer for the remake of ***John Carpenter's The Fog*** was one of the more interesting trailers shown at the Fangoria 2005 East Coast Weekend of Horrors convention. Unfortunately it turns out that this was yet another case of the trailer being better than the film - in this case a lot better. Simply put, ***The Fog*** remake is by far one of the worst remakes I've ever watched (and that's saying a lot) and also one of the worst movies I've seen this year.

For those not familiar with the basic story in John Carpenter's suspenseful 1980 original and this remake, it concerns spirits seeking revenge on the ancestors of the founding fathers of the small northern California coastal town of Antonio Bay. These vengeful apparitions are covered by a thick and eerie fog bank, thus giving the movie its title. Although some scenes in the original film are duplicated pretty closely in the remake, here is where the similarities end.

While it's difficult to decide just where to begin in discussing everything that was wrong with this film, the thing that stood out right from the start for me was the cast. In the original version actors like Adrienne Barbeau, Jamie Lee Curtis, John Houseman, Tom Atkins, and especially Hal Holbrook gave us memorable characterizations and made us be interested in the people of Antonio Bay. In the remake we are given attractive teen television stars that provide zero characterization and zero interest but get plenty of close-ups. Lead actors Tom Welling and Maggie Grace are especially bland despite their good looks, and the supporting players do nothing to elevate them, consisting mainly of annoying stereotypes (such as a "creepy" old sea captain). It's also worth noting that actress Selma Blair, who is generally very good in her roles, is totally miscast here in the Adrienne Barbeau part of radio station owner Stevie Wayne. It's not that she couldn't fit the part of a young mother who owns a radio station; it's just that in this film I believe the

filmmakers used her (like the other leads) mainly for sex appeal. This is obvious in the fact that they included a scene where she is scantily clad when her young son wakes her up in the morning. (Luckily for her at least the filmmakers didn't decide to put Stevie into a boring and pointless time-filler shower scene like they did the other lead characters.)

The second big thing wrong with this movie is the overall lack of suspense, or, for that matter, lack of any basic structure whatsoever. Although this remake and the original have the same central plot, the 1980 film moves smoothly from scene to scene, easily creating a sense of dread that increases as the film progresses. In the remake scenes are thrown together disjointedly, making the story hard to follow. This is made even worse by the fact that we are shown almost incoherent flashbacks which are supposed to tell the story of how the leper colony was betrayed by the founding fathers of Antonio Bay. In the original film this story is told captivantly (and coherently) by Hal Holbrook's character Father Malone without the need of visuals.

A final flaw with this film is the lame special effects. The ending in particular is filled with CGI ghost effects that are not scary and totally unimpressive. The apparitions in John Carpenter's 1980 original were much more menacing (and convincing). And while there are a few somewhat gory shots that were probably done with traditional prosthetics, there isn't anything that hasn't been seen before and done better in countless other movies. I believe however that even if the effects had been impressive, they couldn't have saved this train wreck of a film.

Although I generally like to maintain some level of objectivity and fairness when reviewing films and don't like to spend a lot of time trashing movies, I just can't find a single good thing to say about this picture. * As I've mentioned in previous columns, I have decidedly mixed feelings regarding remakes. In recent years I've written about several of them, and surprisingly enough some haven't been all that bad, which I suppose made this movie harder to take. ** And while the original version of *The Fog* is probably not in the same category as John Carpenter masterpieces like *Halloween* or *The Thing* (itself a remake), it was nevertheless a creepy little film with style to spare. Watching this new version however really made me angry that Hollywood would churn out something so insulting to the spirit of the first movie. One can only hope that *The Fog (2005)* will drift away quickly and be forever forgotten.

* For some of my thoughts regarding remakes in general, see the September 2002 TFTM column. The remakes I've reviewed to date are: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (November 2003 column), *Dawn of the Dead* (April 2004 column), and *House of Wax* (June 2005 column).

** I was disappointed to see John Carpenter's name in the credits of this film as one of the producers. What was he thinking?!