

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 - **Vacancy** - An extremely efficient little thriller – June 2007

In the new thriller **Vacancy** Luke Wilson and Kate Beckinsale play David and Amy Fox, a young married couple on the verge of divorce who find themselves stranded at a rundown old motel in the middle of nowhere after their car breaks down. The dirty, bug-infested hotel room looks to present nothing more than one night of annoying inconvenience until David starts watching some old VHS tapes he finds near the television. Rather than the adult entertainment he's expecting to see, David is soon staring wide-eyed at images of grisly murders being committed in the very room they are in. It doesn't take him long to realize there are cameras taping their every move and that they need to leave quickly. However as one might guess, simply hightailing it away doesn't prove to be so easy. David and Amy soon find themselves in a fight to survive the clutches of masked assailants who want to add a new tape to the hotels grisly collection.

If all this sounds pretty straightforward, that's because it is. In fact I found **Vacancy** to be one of the most straightforward and to-the-point suspense films I've seen in quite some time. The movie introduces us to the main characters, quickly sets up the circumstances, and goes full throttle from there. And despite the shock and horror of the situation there is very little mystery involved as to who's orchestrating the nasty killings. Furthermore the motive behind the murders is as simple (but still chilling) as one could imagine. Given this simplicity one might not think **Vacancy** has much to offer. The fact however is that while this is the type of film that's undoubtedly going to be thrashed by critics for its lack of intricateness and complex plotlines, it is also a movie that delivers solid suspense for most of its 80-minute running time.

In terms of specifics, I liked both the characters and the setup. *Luke Wilson and Kate Beckinsale are both very believable in their roles, and Frank Whaley, who plays hotel

owner Mason, the third major character in the film, is as eccentric and creepy as one could imagine. The principle setting of the old motel also worked well, giving the movie the feel of such claustrophobic classic horror films as ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre***. (The fact that the place was essentially a deadly tourist trap made me think of this film in particular). And like that film, ***Vacancy*** definitely packs a punch despite a relative lack of over-the-top on-screen carnage or gore. In short, it is a minimalist thriller that delivers the goods.

*I especially liked the three lead actors in this movie because their roles contrasted quite a bit from the role(s) I had previously associated them with. I knew Luke Wilson mainly from such outrageous comedies as ***Old School*** and ***Anchorman***, and Kate Beckinsale as the sexy and tough vampire Selene from the ***Underworld*** films. Here she shows her range by playing the vulnerable and very human Amy Fox. And Frank Whaley I hardly recognized in the role of weirdo motel manager Mason. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) he's done lots of movies and television throughout the 1980's and 1990's. However I primarily remember him as smitten store clerk Jim Dodge roller-skating through the aisles past voluptuous Jennifer Connelly in the 1991 (John Hughes-written) comedy ***Career Opportunities***.