

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 Ruins*** - A compelling and grisly horror tale not to miss – May 2008

*Note: The following review of ***The Ruins*** may contain plot details that could be considered spoilers.*

When I saw the trailer for the horror film ***The Ruins*** I thought it looked pretty compelling. The titles said the story was about an ancient Mayan temple from 1000 years ago that was a place of sacrifice... and still is today. The trailer also showed flashes of an attractive cast of young people looking like they were having a bad day indeed. They appeared to be inflicted with some kind of parasitic infestation that definitely wasn't good for the complexion. Whoa...creepy stuff indeed. Perhaps remote jungle expeditions aren't always the best way to spend one's time. From these previews *The Ruins* looked like it was going to be an intense and graphic movie that would perfectly suit a tried and true horror film fan like me. In this case I'm happy to say I was right.

The movie opens with a shock scene of a woman cowering in darkness, obviously in a really bad physical state, and terrified of something which quickly comes to devour her. From there we are introduced to our main players, which consist of two attractive young college couples vacationing in Cancun and another young tourist they meet poolside where they are staying. The couples are Jeff (Jonathan Tucker) and his girlfriend Amy (Jenna Malone), her best friend Stacy (Laura Ramsey) and her boyfriend Eric (Shawn Ashmore). Jeff is obviously the most level-headed and rational of the bunch and plans to head to medical school in the fall, while his girlfriend is more of a care-free party type judging from her flirtations on the beach. Eric and Amy are straight ahead fun-loving college types. While at the hotel pool they meet an affable young German tourist named Mathias (Joe Anderson), who after talking to them for a bit invites everyone to come along on an archeological adventure deep into the woods to explore a pyramid where his

brother recently ventured to. The brother hasn't been heard from since and Mathias is going looking for him. Our intrepid young couples decide to go along on the trek, despite some initial reservations by Amy. And so their troubles begin.

Yes I know this sounds like another typical film where attractive teens fool heartedly go exploring somewhere and get themselves into trouble. I would think if one were a young man sitting by the pool in Cancun with a gorgeous girlfriend in a string bikini by his side it would take a lot to get him to hike out into the middle of nowhere in the heat. But of course faster than one can shake a stick comfortable poolside lounge chairs and bikinis disappear and our intrepid adventurers head off into no-man's land. After ignoring several ominous signs and warnings they find a hidden path out to the temple deep in the forest and are quickly surrounded by armed natives who won't let them leave. After Mathias' friend is killed and Mathias himself wounded they are forced to seek refuge at the top of the temple. There the group finds the local people may be the least of their worries.

From this point on most of the rest of the film takes place atop the temple, where the college kids find other victims down in a dried-out well and realize it's the surrounding plants, specifically the vines, they really have to fear. Yes, this movie at its core is about killer vines. While that might sound on the surface like a very B-movie premise, here it proves to be truly terrifying as the vines slowly and methodically set about ensnaring their trapped prey. You see, these plants are able to burrow under the victim's skin and slowly eat away at their body, while at the same time understandably causing fear and terror in their host. They can also mimic the sound of their victims, as well as cell phones, in a most eerie way. So the unfortunate young people, who begin to run out of food and water, have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide from such a determined, patient and ultimately lethal enemy.

What makes this movie work so well is that the focus always stays on the characters, their situation and their reactions to the horror that slowly encapsulates them. It's not a movie filled with over-the-top CGI effects showing giant vines flying through the air ensnaring people, which would've undoubtedly put it into popcorn B-movie territory, but rather it's a downbeat, realistic and graphic tale. The actors all do a good job and portray their struggle for sanity and survival well, and it's sometimes difficult to watch them go deeper and deeper into desperation even as Jeff (who is a Type-A personality) tries to remain rational and optimistic. And when I say graphic tale I do mean graphic tale. As the vines begin to get under their skin (literally), the young people go to more and more extreme measures to get them out. This involves cutting off skin and eventually limbs in order to try and survive. Indeed the bloody carnage (much of it self-inflicted) on display in this film is on par with the most graphic entry in the **Saw** horror film franchise, while possibly looking even more disturbing because of the stark realism being portrayed. I think more casual movie fans might find this tale a bit extreme to say the least.

So to sum up, **The Ruins** is a horror film that has a compelling story and good acting along with plenty of action, terror and graphic carnage. (In typical R-rated horror film tradition the producers also threw in a hotel room nude scene early on in the movie - by lovely actress Laura Ramsey - undoubtedly meant to appeal to exploitation film fans). **The Ruins** also has a pretty satisfying ending as well. I won't give it away, but suffice it to say not everyone comes out alive. I might also mention several people have commented that the subtext of this movie is a cautionary tale about drugs. This may or may not be true and may or may not add to the overall appeal of the film, but in any case

this is a well-crafted, often times frightening horror tale to say the least. It's good to see films like this being made in addition to the plethora of unnecessary horror film remakes glutting the market nowadays. ***The Ruins*** is based on a best-selling novel by Scott B. Smith and is a movie I highly recommend to all horror film fans.