

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: ***Friday the 13th (2009)*** – March 2009

*Note: The following review of ***Friday the 13th (2009)*** may contain details that could be considered spoilers.*

So far 2009 is shaping up to be another big year for the horror genre, which is why I have for you yet another movie review here in March. This time it's the Michael Bay-produced remake of Sean Cunningham's 1980 slasher classic ***Friday the 13th***. This "re-imagining" of the gory fright tale about doomed teenagers at Camp Crystal Lake opened to big box office numbers over President's Day weekend (opening on Friday, February 13th), providing yet another example of how horror continues to be hot at the box office. As a horror devotee and someone whose curiosity usually gets the better of him as far as remakes are concerned, I headed right out on Friday evening for the new film. So now let's take a discerning look at this modern horror classic revisited in the new millennium.

Had I written this column right after getting home from the movie Friday evening, or the next day, you would be reading quite a different review from the one which you are about to read. You see that's because ***Friday the 13th (2009)*** is, I believe, one of those rare movies that's not what it appears to be upon first viewing. Let me explain... As anyone who has read my biography page knows, I'm a huge fan of the ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** series, having thoroughly enjoyed the original movie as well as all its sequels. And while most would agree the first film is an indisputable modern horror classic (myself included), in terms of box office receipts and overall series popularity the sequel ***A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*** remains king. Freddy's fourth trip to Elm Street was arguably the most mainstream entry, firmly establishing Mr. Krueger as the premiere boogeyman of the 1980's and beyond. I saw that film seven times in the theater (my own personal record), so I know it quite well. Given the

overwhelming success, New Line Cinema not surprisingly followed it up quickly the next year with ***A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child***, which continued the storyline set forth in part four. I remember being particularly excited about the opening of *The Dream Child*, anticipating another entry similar to *The Dream Master*. As it turned out however, such was not to be the case. I say this because although *The Dream Child* did indeed follow the same story and main characters - namely Freddy and Alice Johnson - and despite the presence of actress Lisa Wilcox (Alice) throughout the entire film, this movie was stylistically miles away from *The Dream Master*. While *The Dream Master* was very straightforward and easy to digest (so to speak), *The Dream Child* seemed to me upon first viewing to be disjointed, overly fast-paced, abstract, and generally difficult to understand. In other words I just didn't get it. This was a major disappointment, because I had really liked all the previous entries. Fortunately though, I was such a devotee of the series that I felt compelled to go see the movie again, in the hopes that perhaps I had missed something. And lo and behold that was exactly the case, because when I went again scenes that had seemed garbled and hadn't made sense before suddenly clicked. I really enjoyed the film upon repeat viewings (I believe I saw it a couple more times after that as well), and in fact came to appreciate it as being one of the most richly visual and artistic entries in the series. In other words *The Dream Child* was one of those rare movies that required at least a second viewing to absorb. This brings us back to the discussion at hand... After heading out opening night for the new ***Friday the 13th***, a friend asked me to go again on President's Day. Being that it was a holiday weekend, I figured why not.

Friday the 13th (2009) is broken up into three segments. There is a short opening scene interspersed with the main credits which basically reenacts the very end of the original ***Friday the 13th*** movie, showing us one surviving camp counselor (Final Girl) dispatching the vengeful Mrs. Voorhees with a machete as a young Jason watches. Following that brief action we meet a group of teens heading up to the area of Camp Crystal Lake looking for a hidden crop of cannabis plants and a good time (sex in the woods). This part of the movie also has a campfire scene where one of the teens gives us the (obligatory) re-capping of the whole Jason Voorhees legend. We are then introduced to a full-grown Jason (Derek Mears), who has taken up residence at the long-abandoned campgrounds and set up deadly traps for any intruders. This madman-with-a-sack-on-his-head dispatches all but one of the hapless youths, with the remaining girl's fate being left undetermined (for awhile). Next we flash-forward to the "Present Day" where another group of attractive young people are heading up to a remote summer home near Camp Crystal Lake for a weekend getaway. Their story comprises the rest of the movie running time.

Although I'm a big fan of the first ***Friday the 13th***, I had resolved not to go into the remake comparing it to the original, and in fact was rather excited about the prospects of this particular redo. This may have actually worked against me however, because on that initial viewing I had high expectations and kept waiting for the movie to impress me, which it didn't. If there is one area where the new film diverges from all previous ***Friday the 13th*** entries, it's with some of the Jason scenes. There are several sequences with Jason lumbering around through underground caverns beneath the cabins, where he apparently lives and has set up rudimentary surveillance systems alerting him to when intruders are roaming the grounds above. In fact he takes the remaining girl mentioned above prisoner there for reasons only he understands. I believe this underground cavern setting was introduced by the writers and producers to more sharply define, and perhaps redefine, the character of Jason for today's young horror audiences. (They also devoted

time to emphasize the signature hockey mask by including a scene where Jason finds it and makes a decision to wear it. In the original series that was done off-screen after he took it from one of his victims, and my guess is the producers didn't know it would become such a hallmark of the series). It also makes sense from a marketing standpoint as well; remember for example that Freddy became an underground sensation within a certain demographic in the first ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** movie, but not a worldwide mainstream horror sensation until ***A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 3***, when he was seen much more and took center stage (another reason this ***Friday the 13th*** film wasn't a straight remake of the original). And it is something I completely understand from a narrative standpoint as well, and in many ways works in terms of fleshing out (no pun intended) and strengthening the story. In fact one of the main criticisms constantly leveled against the ***Friday the 13th*** movies over the years (mostly by non-horror fans) is that there is nothing to the Jason movies other than people being hacked up in various gruesome ways one at a time. However I've always thought these films worked for precisely this reason; primarily because they are lowest common denominator escapist movies with Jason being like an unpredictable force of nature. * You never know when he is going to pop up next and his whole existence at the camp is a mystery – the stuff of urban legend – with only occasional discussion about the nature of his existence being made. (In fact a friend of mine would often joke and ask what he does the rest of the time - when he's not killing teens.) Putting in these underground cavern scenes demystified this enigma, and made the movie feel more like a serial killer yarn in the vein of Michael Bay's previous remake of ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre***. Put another way, the remake tried to explain Jason rather than keeping him the blank slate he has traditionally been. It also put him onscreen (or so it seemed), much more than in other entries. I personally felt there was a bit too much Jason in this movie, if that's possible. This aspect in turn made the remainder of the film also feel less like what I was expecting in terms of a ***Friday the 13th*** movie, thus initially leading to my being unimpressed with the movie.

However the above notwithstanding, on my second viewing I started to see how the producers really did capture much of the essence of ***Friday the 13th***, particularly in the scenes involving the "Present Day" group. For example in one long sequence towards the latter part of the movie Jason makes a siege on the summer home, picking off people in and around the house one by one in some very imaginative ways. This reminded me of some of the sequels quite a bit; scenes of a girl being impaled on antlers on the wall and a young man being gutted and attached to the back of a moving truck were definitely standouts here. Also a scene near the film's climax in an old barn involving some chains and a wood chipper reminded me of several different ***Friday the 13th*** "best of" moments. ** It has been said the producers incorporated bits and pieces of the first four ***Friday the 13th*** movies into this film, and moments like these (and several others) show that to be the case.

*** Another prominent element in this remake was the abundant gratuitous nudity on display. Nude scenes involving horny teens in ***Friday the 13th*** movies have become something of a tradition to horror fans of course, and this exploitation wasn't surprising as I expected the producers to highlight the sex scenes along with the graphic carnage in this update for the new millennium. Standout moments in this category include some topless waterskiing and a bedroom scene with an arrogant but ultimately funny guy and a "stupendously" hot chick (you've got to see this scene to understand).

There were also some singularly distinctive touches in the movie which I initially was undecided on but ultimately decided were kind of interesting. **** The first was the opening segment involving Mrs. Voorhees (an unrecognizable Nana Visitor). This brief scene really was a pretty ingenious way to wrap up that tale quickly, pay homage to the original film, and introduce Jason as the main character all at once. And as mentioned we then join another group, where one of the horny teens rocks out to Night Ranger's *Sister Christian*, of all things! All I can say is I never thought I'd hear that song in a ***Friday the 13th*** movie (or any other horror film for that matter), and it definitely had me grinning ear to ear.

So the final question is whether this remake makes the cut (so to speak)? I think it ultimately does capture much of the essence of the previous films while incorporating some new ideas aimed at today's audiences. Like I said I wasn't thrilled about the underground cavern scenes, but in all fairness that's probably more a matter of personal taste than anything else. And admittedly those scenes were fast-paced and suspenseful. ***** And also it should be noted the very end of the movie was right in line with how Jason movies usually end, while being done smartly to boot. So given those considerations I'll just say this film is a worthwhile addition to the ***Friday the 13th*** series, and in fact could almost be seen as an alternate sequel to the original classic. Personally however I'm still hoping to see ***Friday the 13th*** Parts 11, 12 & 13. Thirteen films in this series would just be so... stupendous... don't you think?

* In ***Friday the 13th Part 2*** the character of Ginny (Amy Steel), the Final Girl in the film, talks about how Jason must have survived in the woods by himself over the years by feeding on animals.

** Some other scenes incorporating bits and pieces of the previous movies include a brief shot of a light swaying back and forth that is very reminiscent of a famous kill scene from the original 1980 film, and a character looking for his missing sister like in ***Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter***. Also the sleeping bag-tent scene with the 2nd group of teens was similar to the famous sleeping bag kill scene in ***Friday the 13th Part 7: The New Blood***. And the bit involving the wood chipper was very reminiscent of the ending of ***Friday the 13th Part 3***, with Jason being hit by an ax but still coming back to life with outstretched arms.

*** Or as it was eloquently put by Staci Layne Wilson of horror.com in the extended online trailer for the recent ***My Bloody Valentine 3-D***, "lots of obligatory naked chicks". Of course as mentioned in the review of that movie (see the February 2009 TFTM column) the nude scene there was one of the longest in recent memory.

**** We hear the voice of Mrs. Voorhees in the trailer, and it has been reported that much of the Mrs. Voorhees footage was cut from the final edit. This leads me to believe that there may be extra scenes included when the DVD is released.

***** I thought the very end was done smartly because while it was in line with previous ***Friday the 13th*** endings, it nevertheless still managed to surprise me.