

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: Video rental stores – the end of an Era – April 2010

I recently read a story in my local newspaper about how many video stores in the area, particularly many locations for one of the big chains, are closing up shop. The reason for all the closings is because services such as Netflix, RedBox (DVD vending machines) and cable television Movies on Demand are eating away at the customer base for traditional video rental stores. This is something I was already very much aware of, as I've seen several stores close to where I live close recently. Being the huge movie fan that I am, and someone who has rented a plethora of movies over the years, this brought on a feeling of sadness. It also seemed quite ironic in a way too, because I remember not so long ago feeling the same sadness reading about how large video chains were forcing the independent (also known as the "Mom & Pop") video stores out of business. Of course what this latest news really means is simply that the next evolution of home video is unfolding, as the market slowly transitions away from physical media.

I remember a time when I confidently proclaimed that VHS video would never be replaced completely, even with the tremendous rise in popularity of the superior DVD format. This pronouncement was probably based more on emotions than hard facts, but I still believed it nonetheless. After all, VHS had a long and rich history, and one statistic claimed that over 95% of households had VCR's in them. * Back in the 1980's, home video revolutionized the movie industry by opening up new markets and shedding light on many films that had previously been passed over by traditional theatrical distribution. Yes VHS was certainly the savior for many films, turning obscure, independent horror flicks such as *The Evil Dead* (and its sequel) into instant cult classics. I can recall always being fascinated by horror films packaged in oversized boxes - those unknown (at the time) curiosities which more often than not were extreme gore films, such as Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive* (to name just one prominent example). Distributed by a variety of pioneering independent companies, they were kind of like the forbidden fruit at the video store and always brought a sense of excitement to the rental experience. And of course as I mention on my biography page, it was a VHS viewing of Wes Craven's classic

A Nightmare on Elm Street that got me interested in the horror genre in the first place.

Trips to local video stores such as Screen Gems, Mr. Movie and Blockbuster Video were a part of my youth, and I always felt they were places which provided a sense of community for movie lovers like me. This was the case, even if I never made any lifelong friends through trips to the video store. Then of course video stores also provided inspiration for aspiring filmmakers, given the fact that movies on video (particularly low-budget ones) seemed “closer to home”, so to speak, than multi-million dollar productions seen on the big screen. And a bit later on in fact, video clerks and film geeks turned-filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino and Kevin Smith proved that cinematic dreams were indeed possible.

As I mentioned at the start, this latest turn of events is simply evidence that home video is entering its next phase. I believe things are slowly moving away from physical media, and that the internet, downloadable and streaming video will be the prominent platforms of the future. The convenience of simply clicking a mouse and having a movie download or stream to a computer is hard to resist. Ditto the convenience of clicking a button on the cable remote control and having an ordered movie become accessible for a day or more. This transition may take awhile however, primarily because of the emergence of the new backward-compatible Blue-Ray high definition video players, and also because many people (myself included) are probably reluctant to part with their entire DVD-VHS collections. One way to sum it up is to say that right now several physical and non-physical video options are competing for consumer attention and dollars, and it may very well stay that way for awhile. For example I know with my own movies download sales have increased, but DVD sales are still higher. Personally I enjoy designing DVD box covers and holding the finished product in my hand, the same way I admired those oversized VHS boxes with their eye-catching artwork back in the day...

* See my April 2006 TFTM column for a discussion on the decline of the theatrical movie experience