

## 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: Book Recommendation – *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* by Adam Rockoff - October 2010

*Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* by Adam Rockoff takes an in-depth, critical look at the slasher film, that most maligned subgenre of horror. The author focuses mainly on the years which are considered by most to be the heyday, or “golden age”, of slasher films, but also presents an overview of the genre as a whole, as well as a chapter on the resurgence of the form in the mid 1990's. The book begins on a strong note as Rockoff takes the time to discuss the question of “What is a Slasher Film?”, and talks a bit about the elements of this cinematic form. \* These include the Killer, Weapons of Choice, Setting, and Final Girl, among other things. For the uninitiated, this chapter provides a good framework for the rest of the book, which mainly deals with specific films. Following a chapter highlighting some early history of the form (in which influential precursor films like *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* are given their deserved acknowledgement), the book rightfully discusses “The Night He Came Home”, providing lots of good information about John Carpenter's classic *Halloween*. This material ranges from thoughts by the director, to history, to behind-the-scenes insights, to financial information which illustrate why this groundbreaking indie classic is considered to be the film which started the slasher cycle. From then on the author travels through the years discussing what he considers the good, the bad, and the ugly of slashers. Influential films following *Halloween*, which are also discussed with depth and attention to detail, include *When A Stranger Calls*, *The Driller Killer*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (and its sequels), *Prom Night*, *He Knows You're Alone*, *Terror Train*, *Motel Hell*, *Maniac*, *My Bloody Valentine*, *The Burning*, *The Prowler*, *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, among others. Lesser known and/or forgotten films discussed along the way include *The Redeemer*, *Silent Screem*, *Fade to Black*, *New Year's Evil*, *Mother's Day*, *The Funhouse*, *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Hell Night*, *Graduation Day*, *Night School*, *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*, *Final Exam*, *The New York Ripper*, *Alone in the Dark*, *Curtains*, and *The House on Sorority Row*, among others. I like the fact that while Rockoff doesn't hesitate in giving his opinions on how bad (or just insignificant) he feels some of these lesser-known films were, at the same time he also manages to be fairly objective and is quick to point out merits, or anything notable about them

as well. The book concludes with a chapter primarily dealing with how **Scream** revitalized the genre, paving the way for other successes such as **I Know What You Did Last Summer** and **Urban Legend**. Rockoff ends (in 2003) by conveying his optimism for the future of the genre, which reinforces the feeling that one has just read a book by someone who truly understands and respects the art form known as the slasher film.

Overall this is a very informative and entertaining book. \*\* It offers a comprehensive history of the genre, good tidbits of information even the most devoted fans might not have heard before, personal insights on and from some of the important names (actors, directors, producers, etc.), as well as a balanced opinion from someone who obviously appreciates the subject matter. \*\*\* For those who grew up with, and/or have a fondness for these films (of which I am one), *Going to Pieces* is a fascinating 200 or so pages of reading material, with some fine b&w photographs as an added bonus.

\* For those who want an even more in-depth theoretical (and psychological) analysis of the elements of the slasher film, I highly recommend Carol J. Clover's 1992 groundbreaking book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. In particular, Clover is credited as having coined the term "Final Girl".

\*\* Other subjects discussed include critics disdain and reaction to certain films, the works of foreign horror directors (notably Dario Argento), the lack of serious scholarly writing on slasher films, the "video nasties" controversy in England, and the rise of special effects artists, among others. The book also includes a list of alternate titles for the films discussed, as well as an extensive bibliography which is sure to encourage further study of the genre.

\*\*\* To read my review of the documentary film ***Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*** (which was based on this book), see the April 2007 TFTM column.