

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: Fangoria magazine - still going strong after 200 issues - March 2003

This month I'd like to take the time to pay tribute to one of the best genre magazines around today: FANGORIA. For those not familiar with Fango (as it's often called for short), the magazine is a monthly publication covering all aspects of the horror genre. From its inception in the late seventies right up to the current issue, Fango has devotedly covered everything from American mainstream horror cinema to obscure Euro-horror pictures. Besides focusing on individual movies, the magazine regularly profiles actors, directors and other behind-the-scenes people involved in the production and distribution of horror movies. They also look at such topics as horror literature, horror film festivals and the horror theme park industry. However, the heart and soul of the magazine revolves around horror cinema.

There are many reasons why I have always liked this publication and continue to read it to this day. The prime reason is that the magazine has always had a level of quality which I rarely see elsewhere. Every issue is full of interesting and informative information with very little filler or wasted space. When I say wasted space, I refer to pages covered with advertisements, and also stories or articles that consist mainly of hype or superficial, *fluff* information. Too many movie magazines nowadays - whether they focus on the horror genre or, more often, general/mainstream entertainment - concentrate on either worshipping mega budget productions or their stars, or on "dishing the dirt" on celebrities.* I for one have very little interest in reading gossip about who's sleeping with whom in Hollywood. Call me a movie purist, but when I read about cinema or anything related to it, I'm generally interested in actually acquiring some real knowledge or insight into the subject, rather than reading eye-catching, superficial celebrity quotes. The pages of Fangoria never disappoint in this respect.

Now I'd like to talk in more detail about just some of what is covered each month in Fangoria. Hopefully for the uninitiated horror fan this will give a good overview of the magazine. As I mentioned above, Fango covers many different areas of the horror genre. Their articles on movies consist of breaking news, set visits, reviews and retrospectives. The breaking news articles, highlighted in a section called *Monster Invasion*, are usually one-page pieces that give an advance look at movies in production. These articles talk about the project and its origins, and feature short conversations with people involved in the production. *Monster Invasion* is a nice, detailed, first-look column that often sparks my interest in things to come.

Many of the movies from *Monster Invasion* are highlighted in future issues when the writers make a *set visit* to the production. These longer articles give readers a more comprehensive look at a movie and its key players. The interviews are primarily done during production, and the writers usually do such a great job in describing the people and places, that it feels like you are actually on set.

Fangoria has two main sections for reviews. The first is called *The Video Eye of Dr. Cyclops*, which focuses on video releases, and the second is *DVD Dungeon*, which focuses on DVD releases. The video review section is especially entertaining because their reviewer (the Doc) has a very humorous (and sometimes cynical) way of putting things. I often laugh at even the worst reviews. In relation to this, I should mention that I feel many mainstream movie magazines still, to this day, seem to have an underlying disdain for the horror genre. I won't name anybody, but so many reviews I've read in these publications are just merciless towards all but the biggest budget horror films. Their writers just don't seem to see the genre as anything worth serious consideration. To these publications, B-movies are treated like a joke. (I've even read some very offensive reviews where these hack writers spent most of the column making personal insults to the actors and barely mentioned the movie's plot). Luckily many of us out there don't see it that way. Fangoria may give a bad review, but there is always a good amount of respect and objectivity involved in everything they write.

The final type of Fangoria movie article is the *retrospective*. This is an overwhelmingly exhaustive look at a movie from the past. Writers try to interview as many of the key people involved with the production as possible. As with the article types mentioned above, the interviewees generally have something of substance to say and are usually very happy to speak in detail about their involvement with a particular movie. Directors may talk about their inspirations; actors may talk about their character motivations and experiences on the set; makeup artists talk about their contributions to scenes in the movie etc. These articles provide some of the most thorough coverage I have ever read. I should also note that the retrospectives sometimes serve to complete a cycle of coverage for the really great movies. Movies that go on to stand the test of time - for example *Friday the 13th* - are often first mentioned in *Monster Invasion*, then covered more extensively with set visits, later reviewed, and finally, years later, covered in a giant retrospective. Fangoria goes the distance in their coverage of horror classics.

As I mentioned earlier, another great thing about Fango is the wide range of their coverage. This is especially apparent in a section called *Notes from the Underground*. Unlike other articles, which cover bigger budget productions and the people involved with them, *Notes from the Underground* is written by low/no-budget filmmakers. Being that I fall into this category of artist, these articles are of great interest to me. These filmmakers generally tell a story about their movie experiences. They talk about exactly

the kinds of trials and tribulations I've experienced in making these types of pictures. I often smile knowingly when these filmmakers speak about lack of budgets, problems with scheduling, crazy experiences on the set, etc. For anyone interested in getting a feel for what a no-budget production can be like, I would suggest reading one of these articles. Mainstream movie magazines almost never give any space to people making movies on this level.

In summary, Fangoria magazine (which, I should mention, is always nicely presented with its lavish, often blood-red photos and artwork) is one of the most entertaining, informative, and comprehensive genre publications out there today. It is an extremely professional publication that manages to have a truly personal feel. Reading each issue is like reading a newsletter written by and for people who truly love and appreciate the horror genre. Here's to the next 200 issues!

* I should note that Fangoria now has one very small column called *Skeletons in the Closet* which talks about appearances by famous actors in low-budget/bad horror movies. Usually these are things actors did early in their careers before they became famous. This column is something I actually enjoy reading because it is very lighthearted and humorous and is not there to trash anyone. If nothing else it gives some good trivia information.