

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: Some cool movies from 2001-2002

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As I mentioned in a previous column, I don't often use this space to recommend and review movies. However, when I was thinking about what to write for this TFTM column, it occurred to me that it might be fun to make a list of my choices for favorite movies of the year. As I began compiling the list of movies that I liked, and began using the Internet Movie Database to check spellings of titles and actors names etc., I saw that some of these movies are actually listed with the date 2001 next to them. Therefore, I will also put (2001) next to any of these picks. These are movies that stuck in my head more than a few minutes after I left the theater or turned off the VCR or DVD player. I'm not going to give a ranking, because I believe all of these pictures have their own merits and are too dissimilar to one another (whether because of budget, genre, or whatever) to be ranked in numerical order. I've always found alphabetical order to be a simple enough method for many things. I will also divide the list into two groups: Horror and Non-horror. So here it goes. Enjoy.

HORROR:

Forests Of The Dead (2001) - The story in this independent production follows two groups of friends who head to an isolated camp for some summer fun. However after a young girl appears at the camp looking not quite right, we know that trouble is looming ahead. It turns out that their campground is the home of great evil. What precisely this evil is or where it comes from is never really explained, but soon the first group begins to disappear, and with the arrival of the second group, the bloodshed begins. Campers are slaughtered by other campers who have turned into cannibalistic creatures. Victims are stalked, killed and eaten. As the box cover states, the movie has gut munching,

beheadings, dismemberments, pitchforks and scalplings. Gore hounds will definitely appreciate the graphic mayhem on display here. It's always refreshing to see a horror picture that goes all out and doesn't hold anything back. Also, another plus is the fact that the movie smartly takes the time necessary to introduce us to the main characters so we are involved with their plight when the action begins. And while there really are a few too many teens to keep track of after the second group arrives on the scene, this is just a minor complaint that is made up for by the quick pacing of the action right up until the end of the movie. My personal favorite moment is a rather intimate and bloody scene between two lovely young ladies in a tent. Hard core horror fans should definitely check this movie out.

For information on purchasing ***Forests Of The Dead*** visit www.onedayinapasture.com.

Halloween Resurrection - While I didn't think this was the best ***Halloween*** sequel ever made (*H20* was a bit better overall), the movie was entertaining and proved to be a solid entry in this classic franchise. If one can accept the explanation of how Michael survived his apparent demise at the end of ***Halloween H20***, the rest of the movie is smooth sailing. The high point of this picture is definitely the opening segment with Jamie Lee Curtis reprising her role of Laurie Strode for (supposedly) the last time. Her final moments with Michael are engaging to say the least. After this opening we move to the main story where a group of teenagers go into the old Meyers house with cameras for a live web cast. While this is supposed to be just entertainment, we all know who shows up to ruin the fun. Even though I wouldn't call much of what happens in this situation scary, the whole reality television setup with the teens is engaging enough to maintain interest. Rapper Busta Rhymes is good here as the head of the company putting on the show, and many of the kills are done well. I also liked Michael's demise at the end of this movie because it was the type of scene that reminded me somewhat of classic eighties slasher films. The only question left now is how long it will be before they begin working on *Halloween 9*.

Jason X (2001) - Unfairly overlooked in theaters (probably because everybody was waiting for ***Spider-man***), this tenth installment in the ***Friday the 13th*** movie series is definitely worth checking out on video or DVD. Put simply, the movie is fast-paced, clever and fun, with a lot of good death scenes. It also puts Jason into new surroundings, which I found to be a refreshing change from the usual Crystal Lake setting. (There is however a very cool Crystal Lake scene in the movie). A lot of people may have a hard time getting past the whole idea of Jason in space, which means this is probably the type of movie where you will either love it or hate it. I personally think it's a worth entry in the franchise. The DVD includes some great extras - the best being a documentary on the history of the ***Friday the 13th*** film series.

The Others (2001) - Nicole Kidman gives a fantastic performance in this moody and atmospheric ghost story. She stars as a strict, religious woman named Grace who lives in an isolated, huge mansion with her two light sensitive children. Because direct sunlight can hurt the kids, all the windows and doors are covered or closed, meaning their house is always kept dark. After some strange occurrences, she becomes convinced that her house is haunted. Giving any more details about the story might spoil it, but suffice it to say that this is a classic style horror/suspense picture. It is definitely not a loud and fast picture like many of today's crop of horror films. Because of the slow pace, this is the type of film that some horror fans will love and others will probably yawn at. If you missed it in theaters, I highly recommend catching it on video.

Queen Of The Damned - I know a lot of people will disagree with me on this one, but I really thought this was a pretty good vampire picture. It was the second movie based on a book (or in this case a couple of books) by author Anne Rice. This movie - just like ***Interview With The Vampire*** - features a bloodsucker named Lestat. Here he wakes up from a long sleep to discover that the world has changed dramatically. Lestat likes what he sees and hears, and decides to become a rock star. He winds up awakening a powerful vampire queen named Akasha (played by the late pop singer Aaliyah), who is bent on destroying all of humanity. The reason I liked ***Queen Of The Damned*** was simply because it was a lot of fun. Although ***Interview With The Vampire*** was generally highly regarded, I always found it to be a bit dull and subdued. To me, *Queen* is just more entertaining overall.

The Ring - This movie was a remake of a Japanese horror film simply called ***Ring***. Naomi Watts stars as a journalist investigating the origins of a mysterious videotape that apparently causes people to die seven days after they watch it. ***The Ring*** has a lot of great imagery and is an extremely moody and tense picture. It is also the type of movie that is not always clear cut. My friends and I were discussing the story for about an hour after we got out of the theater. This fact alone - that it gives you a lot to think about - makes it worth seeing. I was also surprised at the little bits of graphic imagery the filmmakers were able to sneak in under the PG-13 rating.

NON-HORROR

Ghost World (2001) - Despite the title, this is not a ghost story. This movie follows two young girls through the summer after their high school graduation. Enid and Rebecca are outsiders trying to find their way in an increasingly complex outside world. While Rebecca gets a job, Enid inadvertently finds a soul mate after the girls play a cruel joke on an older man. The leads in this movie - Thora Birch, Scarlett Johansson and Steve Buscemi - all give wonderful performances in this complex and moving story. Like the advertising tagline goes - "Accentuate the Negative" - and don't miss seeing this fantastic movie.

Moulin Rouge! (2001) - This musical is compelling and visually mesmerizing. Nicole Kidman gives another great performance (see the above summary of ***The Others***) as a beautiful courtesan, and Ewan McGregor plays a young poet who falls in love with her in this tragic tale. The movie uses many contemporary songs to great effect. For example, who would have thought that Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" would ever be sung in such an operatic style as part of a modern musical? Not to be missed.