

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: A look at the evolution of Underground Digital Cinema - A discussion of some of my experiences, insights and perspectives - Part 1 – October 2007

This month's TFTM column is the first in a planned continuing series on the expansive topic of Underground Digital Cinema. Since my particular specialty is horror films, I'll focus on that genre quite a bit throughout the course of this discussion. As anyone familiar with my past columns knows, I've filled a lot of space writing about independent and underground digital video. I've talked about how once there was primarily only professional cinema (film), and how the average person who had ambitions about making a movie was pretty much out of luck - or at the very least relegated to the production quality of VHS or 8mm (analog) home video consumer-grade equipment. Of course that all changed in the mid 1990's with the advent of low-cost, high-quality digital video equipment, which put real power into the hands of would-be filmmakers everywhere. (My own evolution as a filmmaker proceeded right along those lines, with a progression from VHS and 8mm video to DV - with HDV on the horizon). The evolution of this new form of digital cinema has continued to have a dramatic impact on my experiences as both a film lover and filmmaker. I was first a fan of Hollywood and mainstream cinema, and then when the home video revolution took hold in the 1980's, I was gradually introduced to a wider array of viewing choices. As my interest in the horror film genre grew I eventually came to be exposed to many underground digital horror movies. Digital Cinema is what I produce as a filmmaker, and in this series of columns I'll discuss the evolution of this genre using my own personal experiences and observations as both viewer and filmmaker as a backdrop and point of reference.

Before delving into my own introduction to Underground Digital Cinema it might be a good idea to more thoroughly discuss my background as a film fan. Prior to the home video revolution in the 1980's, I was what might be described as a mainstream film fan. That is to say I went to the movies and watched all the current Hollywood offerings. Even

during my young teen years I had already developed a healthy appetite for cinema, and I can remember visiting the local multiplexes quite frequently. * In fact a friend and I would often go to see favorite films multiple times, due in part to the relatively low price for tickets during the glorious 1980's (as compared to the staggering ticket prices of today). Around the mid 1980's I acquired a VHS VCR, and soon after that my interest in horror films was aroused by watching director Wes Craven's groundbreaking, and very extreme cinematic shocker ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***. Aside from a viewing of ***Jaws*** as a child I hadn't had much of an interest in horror films before then, however something about the compelling story in ***A Nightmare on Elm Street*** grabbed me and the rest was history. ** Around the same time period I also discovered *Fangoria* magazine, which most genre film fans know is a publication that has long been dedicated to horror cinema, horror writers, horror-themed video games, and basically all things related to the horror genre. The publication initially grabbed my attention with a story on ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***, and soon after that I began reading it on a regular basis as my interest in horror films continued to grow. In the summer of 1995, after being in awe for several years of eye-catching ads showing pictures of horror film celebrities, I finally decided to take my first real road trip and headed to New York City for *The Fangoria Weekend of Horrors* convention. It's interesting to note that at the time I didn't have any friends who were as much into the horror film genre as I was, and as a result couldn't convince anyone to shell out the money needed for convention tickets, transportation and room and board (for the overnight, weekend stay). So I actually scraped together some extra cash, invited a friend to attend the show with me, and paid for his entire trip to the Big Apple! Looking back at it now is really humorous, and as it turns out this trip to the city turned out to be not only a memorable one, but also key to my introduction to the (then) upcoming new breed of underground digital horror movies.

I was inspired to go to this *Weekend of Horrors* convention because the ad for the show highlighted two big guests from the ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** film series. On the bill were director Wes Craven and actress Heather Langenkamp, which for me constituted a great guest list. This was 1995, not too long after the equally groundbreaking film ***Wes Craven's New Nightmare*** had played in theaters, so the timing was just right and I was incredibly excited about seeing some of my favorite horror film luminaries in person. I can remember sitting in the hotel auditorium watching and listening as actors, filmmakers and others in the horror film industry spoke, participated in Q&A sessions, and later signed autographs for admiring fans. This aspect of the *Weekend of Horrors* really was quite exciting, to say the least, and as it turned out proved to be only part of the appeal of the overall convention experience. The other draw for me was the dealer tables, which is where I had my first glimpse of truly independent horror cinema.

* Among the long list of movies I saw multiple times in theaters during the 1980's are: ***Desperately Seeking Susan*** - around five times, ***A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*** - four times, and ***A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*** - a whopping seven times. Those certainly were the days!

** See the March 2003 TFTM column for an in-depth discussion about *Fangoria* magazine.

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this series....