

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 7 – September 2008
(Note: See the October 2007 TFTM for Part 1 of this continuing column, the November 2007 TFTM for Part 2, the December 2007 TFTM for Part 3, the February 2008 TFTM for Part 4, the March 2008 TFTM for Part 5, and the April 2008 TFTM column for Part 6).

After a long hiatus it's time now to return to this continuing column series about underground digital cinema and the companies that produce it. In the last installment I discussed New Jersey-based Ei Independent Cinema (see Part 6, April 2008), one of the most prominent producers of indie film fare on the scene today. And now as promised we'll take a look at some specific movie titles from their wildly popular Seduction Cinema series of films. As noted in Part 6 this product line mainly consists of sexy B-movie comedy spoofs of popular Hollywood films. * And since ultra-popular starlet Misty Mundae's name graces many of their titles, it's only fitting to start with one of her early high-profile spoofs - namely the 2002 **Tomb Raider** parody **Mummy Raider** (also known as **Misty Mundae, Mummy Raider**).

For those unfamiliar, **Tomb Raider** is a popular action film and video game franchise focusing on sexy female adventurer Lara Croft, made popular on the big screen by Hollywood A-list actress Angelina Jolie in the 2001 film **Lara Croft: Tomb Raider**, and the 2003 film **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life**. Lara Croft comes from a family of wealthy British aristocrats, and as such it's not surprising her adventures collecting ancient artifacts take her to various exciting and exotic locations around the world. Basically she's a collector for hire and pleasure seeker skilled in various forms of hand-to-hand combat (kind of like a female version of the Indiana Jones character), weapons expertise, and many foreign languages. And much to the delight of audiences Lara undertakes these escapades dressed in skin-tight, sexy outfits. In **Lara Croft: Tomb Raider** the story is about her quest to retrieve an ancient talisman sought after by

a secret society called the Illuminati. It's a good vs. evil tale where Lara must stop the powerful object from being used for the wrong purposes. A similar premise kick starts **Mummy Raider**, as the sinister Dr. Humboldt (Ruby LaRocca, credited as Esmerelda DeLarocca) attempts to resurrect an Ancient Egyptian mummy her henchmen have stolen in order to use its powers to bring about the Fourth Reich. However first she has to coerce the secret to reviving the idle mummy out of her captors Kristin Cleve (Darian Caine), and her archeologist father Professor Cleve (Bruce Hallenbeck, who also wrote the script). Will Dr. Humboldt revive the mummy and achieve her diabolical goal of world dominance? Will she do unspeakable things to poor Kristen and her father? Or will her plans be foiled by the legendary Mummy Raider Misty Mundaë? Those are the questions to be answered in this epic indie adventure of unrelenting action, furious gunplay and beautiful, scantily-clad actresses!

Those who have seen this movie might guess I'm poking a bit of fun using such over-the-top superlatives; however admittedly the film does contain those elements, albeit some much more than others (more on that later). **Mummy Raider** opens with a music video-style montage featuring shots of Misty firing guns, looking sexy and kicking butt (pardon my French). Following this intro we are transported (via on-screen graphic) to "Somewhere in Berlin", which turns out to be a warehouse location where Dr. Humboldt is holding her captives. These interrogation scenes are where a lot of the best comedic bits occur, buoyed by Ruby LaRocca's fun performance as the evil doctor. The tongue-in-cheek style really works in such moments as when the blonde vixen seductively threatens the whimpering Kristen with a Billy club, and when she exclaims in exasperation "what you've never been kissed by a Nazi before?" (This later piece of dialog has become something of a memorable phrase for the film). ** And Bruce Hallenbeck proves a good supporting player, giving a fun performance also as the befuddled archeologist valiantly trying to defend his not-so-innocent daughter from the German siren. Following this it's all Misty Mundaë, as the famed Mummy Raider takes on Humboldt's men using an array of guns and female charms before dealing with the bandaged mummy himself. Comedic gags here include Misty flashing a set of panties emboldened with the emblem "100 percent white trash", as well as a litany of campy, often feminist-tinged dialog delivered at the expense of the hapless male thugs. These bits also demonstrated the good comic timing of the leading lady and served as a prototype for other comedy spoof titles which would follow. Primarily though her quest to rescue Kristen is summed up nicely on the DVD box cover with the humorous tagline "Guns Blazing! Fists Flying! Skin Baring!" In other words in all aspects **Mummy Raider** is a stripped-down (pun intended), B-movie parody of **Tomb Raider** (set to techno music no less).

Of course fans of Seduction Cinema and Misty Mundaë movies know full well these particular independent films are all about the lesbian erotic scenes, which in **Mummy Raider** are placed at the end - when the adventure is over. (And one wouldn't dream of giving away whether Misty succeeds in her rescue mission). *** However ironically enough in this production the story generally moves at a brisk enough pace (during the scant 40-minute running time) to stay entertaining, therefore things are brought to an abrupt, grinding halt when the expected sex scenes commence. And while the actresses are indeed all quite lovely, it's still very typical (soft-core) material. Interestingly some comments on The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) have suggested these movies, which are now a staple on pay cable outlets such as Cinemax, are tame enough to be rated PG-13. This assessment is questionable, although there is no doubt the scenes are overly stylized and look more like nude modeling than anything else. However a PG-13

rating might be a stretch even by today's (often extreme) standards. Regardless one thing which can definitely be said is that technically at least this production is very accomplished, much like most Seduction Cinema titles. The high-end digital video is crisp and sharp, with almost no picture grain on display in the aforementioned end scenes, which (presumably) take place in a darkly lit space of the warehouse. This level of quality puts a professional sheen on the product, while at the same time never covering its shot-on-video indie roots. And the fact that most of the movie was shot in a warehouse further emphasizes this indie feel. The single warehouse location is used to good effect in keeping with the story, a skill often key to the success of low-budget B-movie indies. Also the constantly looping techno music and simple post-production visual effects gave the film a home-made feel as well. **** This was particularly evident at the end of the movie when another extended music video-style montage of Misty clips was presented. Watching all the sliding and flipping wipes, dissolves and spins made me think how many of the transitions in my editing system (in my case Adobe Premiere) I had yet to try out. ***** The montage also served to lengthen **Mummy Raider** and allowed the filmmakers to reuse almost all the action shots a second time. As stated, this is definitely a movie that stays true to its indie B-movie roots. Be sure to stay tuned for the next installment of this continuing column series...

* See the April 2008 column for more discussion about indie film starlet Misty Mundaë.

** Another thing that adds to the fun tone here is how Professor Cleve is dressed in what might best be described as very stereotypical archeologist attire – namely beige shorts and a beige archeologist hat.

*** The European version of the film is extended by around 30 minutes with an opening back-story segment (taken from other Ei Cinema movies) showing how Misty transformed from innocent young lady into the adventurous Mummy Raider. Here we get to hear an interesting British accent from the sultry actress, as well as see her cavort with a comically skinny mummy. Although the obvious purpose of this extra material is to show more skin, the opening actually loosely corresponds to the British aristocratic back-story of Lara Croft presented in the **Tomb Raider** films. This European version of **Mummy Raider** is part of a DVD boxed set called the *Misty Mundaë Euro-Vixen Collection*, which includes other B-movie exploitation titles such as **Roxanna** and **Vampire Vixens**, among others. The set also includes a DVD case insert highlighting "the international appeal of Misty Mundaë". And as mentioned previously, the actress has also made quite a name for herself as of late as a cult film and horror starlet because of her successful Shock-O-Rama and (under the stage name Erin Brown) Masters of Horror film appearances.

**** The now notorious bigger budget B-Movie **House of the Dead** from director Uwe Boll employed this same tactic of using seemingly every transition the editing program had available. For those who have not seen this inadvertently funny horror film, there is a giant zombie battle scene where the filmmakers really went to town with every manner of post-production digital effect and transition one could imagine.

***** Anybody remember the shot in cult film director John Waters' **Pink Flamingos** of the house burning that just went on and on? Now that was an example of a filmmaker making sure he got the most mileage out of his footage!