

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: Movie Review – ***A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)*** – May 2010

When writing movie reviews I always strive to be as objective as possible and not begin with any predetermined views on the subject. This of course is not always an easy task, because opinions and feelings are integral parts of human nature, and so sometimes it's difficult to be totally objective. I make this point at the outset of this review because the 1984 movie ***A Nightmare on Elm Street*** is without a doubt my favorite horror film. Many horror fans find it difficult to pick a favorite, as undoubtedly there have been many great horror movies made over the years. However in my case, I can say unequivocally that I have this favorite. ***A Nightmare on Elm Street*** was the movie that grabbed my attention and got me interested in the horror genre to begin with so many years ago, and to this day it still holds a special place in my cinematic heart. That is why I was saddened to say the least when it was announced that the movie was going to be remade. Although I realize I shouldn't have been surprised, given the unrelenting slate of (mostly unnecessary) cinematic remakes marching into theaters nowadays, it still didn't seem real that they were going to remake the Wes Craven classic.

* When I wrote my first Thoughts For The Month column back in 2002, the subject was needless remakes of classic horror films. And I've talked a lot about the subject since then, both in subsequent columns and in interviews. Generally speaking, I think remakes are a bad idea for several reasons. The first, and most obvious, is that the majority of films being remade were done right the first time. Therefore the only motivation for remaking them is money, and doing it because it can be done. And secondly, I believe horror remakes do younger audiences a disservice, because those not familiar with a movie or franchise may very well believe that the new version is the only version. Given our fast-paced world, time constraints, short attention spans, and the plethora of things vying for our attention, this is much more likely than the idea (often presented in defense of remakes) that younger audiences will be motivated to go back and see the original films. And related to this is the fact that these remakes, if readily embraced, come to define a generation the way the original films defined past generations. ** Put another way, today's young audiences are missing out on having their own slate of seminal horror films to define their generation. And this to me is sad.

In spite of these reservations, in recent years I've come to (perhaps necessarily) become a bit more accepting of the whole phenomenon, and have in fact have reviewed many remakes here in this monthly column. I've reviewed remakes such as *The Fog*, *Black Christmas*, *House of Wax*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, and *Friday the 13th*. And as one might expect, they have ranged in quality from downright dismal to respectable. When Michael Myers and Jason were given their respective reboots I had mixed feelings, because those are characters whose films I like quite a bit. However, I LOVE the *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies. So once again let me stress that the idea of a "re-imagining" of the first film in the series was a tough pill to swallow, to say the least. Now with all that having been said, on to the review...

I've read the comments and reviews of others who went to see *A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)*, and generally speaking I've seen primarily extreme reactions in both directions, with the majority of them being on the negative side. This is what I figured would be the case, because the original film was undoubtedly one of the most interesting, unique and beloved horror films of its kind. So of course I expected I would have the same kind of extreme reaction to the reboot; however this turned out not to be the case. To put it simply, I sat through the majority of the movie feeling rather neutral about the proceedings. I liked parts of it, disliked others, and in the end felt I had watched a well-made movie that I would've enjoyed much more had I not been familiar with the material already. Let me elaborate...

First, the acting in this movie was overall quite good. Jackie Earle Haley presented us with an interesting and different Fred Krueger – not better, not worse, just different. I've heard much talk about the fact that he's a good actor, and it definitely showed here. His Fred Krueger is not the wisecracking, theatrical Boogeyman from the past Robert Englund sequels, nor is he the dark, mysterious figure from the 1984 original; but he does have his own menacing style with just a touch of dry humor under the surface. And similarly Rooney Mara definitely has some acting chops, and she also presented a totally different take on the character of Nancy from that of Heather Langenkamp. Whereas the original Nancy is a middle-of-the-road, generally likable college girl, this new Nancy is a dark, brooding loner played to perfection. (In fact Mara plays this persona so convincingly that it almost works against her, making the character hard to identify with much of the time). And overall the rest of the cast does well enough, although it's obvious some of these actors are (or at least look) well beyond the high-school age.

As far as the story goes, those who know the original film well will immediately recognize the changes made in the remake. I won't go into discussing them all in detail, but one big one is that here Fred Krueger is not a child murderer, but rather, possibly, a molester. In fact the film throws some doubt on whether he actually did anything or not, making him a sympathetic character, at least for awhile. This I thought was an interesting change that gives the movie a uniqueness and originality separate from anything which has come before. However I also believe it made the whole idea of the finger-knife glove confusing, because if he didn't murder anyone in life, why would he have such a weapon in death (other than the fact that the character is iconic and the glove is expected)? Also several other characters are switched around from who they were in the original, both in terms of names and relationships. *** These changes mostly lead to weaknesses, in that now it takes quite awhile to focus in on Nancy as the main character, giving the audience nobody to identify with for a good portion of the film. Additionally, the teens never seem to be a cohesive group like they were in the original, which I think put them more into the standard victim roles common in today's horror films.

Aside from the aspects of character and story described above, one big thing that jumped out at me watching this film was how lackluster the duplicated famous scenes were. Scenes such as Tina being dragged across the ceiling in the bedroom and Freddy's glove coming out of the tub which were so memorable in the original film were half-hearted here. It felt like the only reason those scenes were put in was because the filmmakers felt obligated to include them. And they were lackluster both in terms of story and in terms of onscreen carnage. For example the glove-tub shot was brief, not prolonged and not scary, and the bedroom scene didn't come close to matching the blood-drenched original. Conversely, some of the original nightmare sequences in this film weren't half bad. One that comes to mind is a scene in a pharmacy where Freddy appears and is closing in on Nancy as the surroundings flash back and forth from store to boiler room.

My final conclusion on this film is that, as much as I might like to, I can't say it was terrible. It was well-made with some good actors and some good scenes sprinkled throughout, and it kept my attention. However that having been said, I'm guessing that the majority of those who are fans of the original will not be overly impressed with it. It's very difficult to be excited by this new version when you've become so familiar over the years with Freddy Krueger, Nancy Thompson and some of the other famous Elm Street characters and the people who have played them. The question then becomes whether this new version will become the phenomenon the original was and revitalize the Elm Street franchise for another twenty years? That's a question where which is yet to be answered.

* Read my September 2002 TFTM column for a discussion on needless remakes of classic horror films.

** This goes not only for horror films, but for other genres as well. Comedies and dramas such as **Fame**, **The Karate Kid** and **Footloose** (all seminal films from the 1980's) have already been remade or are slated to be soon.

*** In fact it can be argued that in the remake Quentin is just as much of a central character as Nancy is.