

Horrible movies abound this summer

Editor's note: Summertime is horrortime this time around. Calendar Clerk Bob Webb went on a horror-day weekend tour and lived to tell the tale. The following is his account of available horrors in Eugene/Springfield.

Intent counts for much in the making, promoting and viewing of a horror movie. Some films go straight for the gut (so to speak), while others reach for loftier ideas such as man's inhumanity to man, the monster in us all, etc. Criticism of any sort should always be measured against intent.

For instance, two of the films currently playing in town, *Friday the 13th, Part II* and *Happy Birthday to Me*, don't seem to be concerned with much more than amassing a series of messy, grotesque deaths (that they're also interested in your pocketbook should go without saying). One of the main attractions of these two films is how bizarre and believable can they make their murders without going so far as to obtain the deadly (as far as the box office is concerned) X rating for excessive gore and violence.

These films, after all, are made for young folks who basically are out for the thrill of a good scare and who don't mind a little gore thrown in as long as it doesn't make them lose their Milk Duds.

Both films are low budget would-be shockers with little known (read: low-salaried) actors. Oh, the first film does feature Betsy Palmer and the second has Glen Ford, but the latter has little more to do than look fatherly and compassionate while the former has only to grin menacingly before completely losing her head (as it were) in a flash-back to *Friday the 13th, Part I* which came out last summer.

Of the two, *Friday* decidedly has the more effective special effects people; it also manages to sustain some, if not all of its builds to satisfying ends. Its makers seem to have a pretty good sense of suspense and enough taste for the right amount of follow through.

The plots in such films don't really matter much, but for what it's worth: *Friday* con-

cerns a group of young camp counselors who return to a lake which has been closed off for five years due to another group of young camp counselors who were killed by a machete-bow-and-arrow-axe-wielding maniac (see Part I if you're really interested). The maniac's son, who has been hanging out in the woods all this time living on nuts, ber-

This movie is worthless by almost any measure. The effects are poorly done, the camera work is shoddy, the builds don't build, and the plot has more holes in it than the film's victims. This film is so laughable and silly, it's more to be pitied than censored.

On the upward swing are two other films now in town: *The Howling* and *The Fan*.

doesn't use any fades or double exposures, everything we see happening on film is actually happening while the camera is rolling, and the sound effects of bones snapping and grinding while realigning themselves is an inspired touch.

The film's problems are essentially three-fold: there are too many in-jokes and genre

genre on one bill of fare, *The Howling*, as of this writing, is playing at the North End Drive-In on a double bill with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. This latter film is a low budget cheapy which, because of what director Tobe Hooper did with almost nothing but a few friends and a desire to scare, is considered one of the classics of the field. It's not a film I would recommend to anyone, but if you're interested in viewing a cinematic exercise in sheer relentless terror which builds almost constantly from its ghoulish opening to its violent ending, this is the movie for you.

Another effective film in town is *The Fan*. It deals with a deranged young man whose life is wrapped up totally in his disturbed obsession with an actress (Lauren Bacall). The film presents a certain intelligence and a chilling logic as the young man goes deeper into his madness and becomes more and more bold in his attempts to get rid of the people surrounding and protecting the actress. It gives us characters we can believe and a plot progression we can accept. Even its violent moments are tasteful as they often rely more on sound effects than visual gore. It's also nice to see a maniac movie that actually spends more time building up its characters than it does killing them off.

As if these films weren't enough, other goodies to watch out for this summer are: the probable return on the drive-in circuit of *The Hand* (a quite effective psychological shocker starring Michael Caine at his frightening best), *The Wolfen* (more growling from the children of the night), *Fear No Evil* (about the cleansing of the earth's evils and the destruction of Lucifer no less), *The City of the Living Dead* (by Italy's Master of Terror Lucio Fulci, who also directed last summer's *Zombie*, one of the most gruesome films I've ever seen) and *The Hearse* (in which a woman is menaced by a mad 1953 Packard).

Happy horrors!

Story by Bob Webb



Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures

ries, and various small animals, discovers members of this most recent group invading his personal space and begins killing them off with machetes, ropes, spears, knives and an ice pick. That's it folks.

Birthday is about a young girl who has had an experience so terrifying (we are lead to believe) that she can't even remember it. While she's trying to do so, almost all of her school friends get strangled, slashed, skewered (remember the shish kabob ad?), and squashed.

The Howling is about an Esalen-type institute where people are allowed, even encouraged, to let out "the animal within us." It just so happens that the majority of these animals are werewolves — which is not really so surprising, as the resident werewolves keep biting visitors, thereby transforming them into werewolves as well. The film has a few good scares and contains one of the most visually and aurally amazing transformation scenes I've ever crunched popcorn through. This sequence

puns to keep any sort of suspenseful momentum going. The story gives passing nods to several interesting ideas, but fails to do anything with them. And it's too studied. Like Brian de Palma's film *Obsession*, it has all of the elements of the genre and even throws in a few new additions, but it lacks any sort of real fire. *The Howling's* style and sense of class (which are substantial and do much to make the film work on that level) completely overpower its punch.

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