

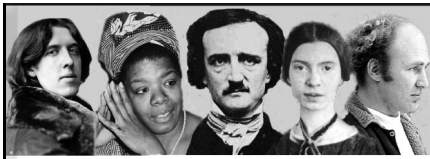
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movies

Genes for Comedic Genius

Like I said last time I spent two hours watching dudes hit each other in the junk, you either have the (probably recessive) *Jackass* gene or you don't. I don't know what combination of factors causes this: A prankster childhood? The lingering belief that dicks are inherently funny? A willingness to laugh at others' pain only when it's self-inflicted? Simple, maybe borderline stupid, curiosity?

Whatever (mis)fortune causes this, I have it. Even in the face of a shit volcano or the sight of Steve-O plucking a shiny red apple from between Preston Lacy's lower cheeks, biting it, and replacing it, I'm laughing (and maybe gagging a little). Super Mighty Glue-ing each other together; sending themselves through a gauntlet of stun guns and cattle prods; throwing snakes on the ever-put-upon Bam Margera in an attempt to make him cry – these guys are idiots. But they're just so game for everything. Pretty face/ringleader Johnny Knoxville doesn't seem quite as willing to risk himself in the service of our laughter as he once was, but his experience with an ass-biting dog does make for one of the less disgusting funny moments in the film. (Years of friendly pranking seem to have taken a toll on Knoxville, who stands with one hand in a protective position even when he's not involved in a stunt.)

There's a lot more shit – and as a result, a lot more vomit – in *Jackass 3D* than I remember in any *Jackass*-related project since the CKY bit in which Raab Himself ran down the road crapping at full speed (a stunt inspired by George Carlin). The 3D is less gag-focused than you might expect (though one party favor, jutting into the audience's face, is unforgettable), and there's not quite as much cleverness behind the skits as there has been in the past. But the more absurd things get, the better. Why put Chris Pontius upside down, his chin sporting a helmet, and let a scorpion sting his face? Because it's funny. To some of us. To enough of us.

For the record, *Jackass Number Two* is funnier, and I was wrong three years ago when I only gave it three stars. It's a four-star gagfest. This one's just not quite up to par. (♫ ♫ ♫ ♫ ♫)
– Molly Templeton



Urban Legends, or Not

To the credit of directors Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio, low-budget production values and a heavy reliance on stock footage don't keep the strange documentary *Cropsey* from being a fascinating look at the place where urban legend and human horror meet and blend. Growing up on Staten Island, N.Y., the directors, like the island's other kids, heard and told stories about Cropsey, a mythical escaped mental patient who had a hook for a hand, or maybe killed people with an axe – either way, he was out there in the imagination of the residents. (A great sequence shows different island kids, now grown, telling the Cropsey variations they heard.) There was good reason for the stories: Staten Island was home to Willowbrook Mental Institution, the subject of a horrifying 1970s expose by Geraldo Rivera that showed the terrible treatment of its patients. The remnants of the institution – shuttered buildings, lunchroom trays in the woods – figured heavily in the lives of area kids.

Cropsey seemed just a scary story for neighborhood kids – until a little girl disappeared. Eventually, a "drifter" was charged in the case, but the situation was far more complicated than one man and one child. *Cropsey* tells a complex, emotional story, and the filmmakers aren't afraid to get in the middle of it. As the arrested man, Andre Rand, nears the date of a second trial, they communicate with him, interview those who helped search for the missing girl and sit patiently outside the courtroom when things finally come to trial. The film doesn't serve up any more pat, satisfying answers than the trial could, but it does something far more interesting: It explores the way the stories we tell ourselves shape the way we interpret outside events. Watching witnesses explain what they saw, or conspiracy theorists talk about the possibility of Satanic cults, it's clear that no one really knows what happened to Staten Island's missing children. But everyone has a story about it. *Cropsey* (★★★☆☆) opens at the Bijou Friday, Oct. 21. – Molly Templeton



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