

On A Scale of Scream

To appreciate the movie *Urban Legend*, a viewer must be aware of elements that are only subtly hinted at in the final cut. Anyone ignorant of these brilliant, subversive twists would find the movie just plain stupid.

Far apart from the high-concept murderers in recent slasher flicks, the killer actually has supernatural powers. Serving the greatest convenience is the teleportation ability that enables him to step silently out of the closets his victims run past. Telekinesis allows him to move a wrecked car out of a heavily wooded area without leaving any evidence. The murderer in *I Know What You [Cleavage] Did Last Summer* may have had the posture of a robot assassin from the future, but the psycho in this movie truly possesses capabilities beyond those of a normal human.

Most viewers would be appalled at one expectation the director makes. As usual, the audience is supposed to believe that the authorities are blind to the murders being committed. At one point, the main character's roommate is strangled to death and has her wrists slit open. Her blood is used to scrawl a SCARY message on the wall. The dean's stance is that she committed suicide with an especially morbid sense of humor.

It is a horror movie, and the plot might not come to its climactic someone-jumps-in-and-shoots-the-killer-for-our-heroine conclusion if the authorities became involved before the final fifteen minutes. Still, the trick is to make sure this lack of participation is intelligently forced. In this film it doesn't seem that way... until you factor in that the college dean (John Neville) is the Well Manicured Man from *The X-Files*! He's the guy who was in charge of the conspiracy until the movie came out and he decided preparing the Earth for alien invasion would be bad for his grandchildren. Don't believe it's the same man? The character has a similar affinity for cars that he displayed in his other movie. Besides, what better place to orchestrate a conspiracy than on an isolated college campus?

Scrutiny also reveals that the character who takes credit for the murders isn't the culprit. Another actor is listed as the killer in the credits! What misdirection!

On a scale of *Scream* to 4, this movie rates a 2—for *Scream 2*. Though the film was professionally shot and mildly humorous, the irony was dull and heavy-handed. Just as in the *Scream* sequel, the identity of the murderer obviously depended upon a relationship to the main character that the audience was unaware of. The gore factor was better than in the second *Scream*, but the suspense depends on an audience's willingness to believe that everyone on campus owns the same jacket as the bad guy.

The victims were much more likable than those of other teen thrillers, with the exception of the Natalie (Alicia Witt), our heroine in hiding. It's worth noting that Witt bears a disturbing resemblance to the redhead telepath on *Babylon 5*—both actresses have eyes that turn black when their acting gets worse. Not to be outdone, after having their secret identities exposed, the killers in both movies crank up the silly. Call it the law of *The Craft*.

My mother's best friend knew a woman who saw *Urban Legend* and thought it was scary, intelligent and worth paying rental price for.