

Review of the 2004 Fantasia Film Festival - Fantasy Fan Fix For Those Who Missed It

Friedrich Mayr

It's been about four months since Montreal's *Fantasia Festival* drew to a close for yet another year, and for every horror and exploitation film geek, martial art and anime cinema enthusiast, it's back to the city's repertory hangout Cinéma du Parc for "Parc After Dark" or the local Boîte Noire or Succubus video store for a little something to assuage the dark, curious or adventurous side Fantasia caters to so well. But until next year's *Fantasia Fest.*, here is a short collection of reviews and comments on some of the films enjoyed this summer written in the format of the daily journal, taking you all the way back to July and August for those of us inclined to visit the immediate past of Montreal's premiere showcase for genre cinema just one more time.

This year's films cut across all genres, styles and themes; from Spanish horror to 60s freeze-frame anime; school kids with a sadistic edge to pugnacious seafood. Some of them worked and others didn't, but all were evidence of extraordinary imaginations willing to skip outside rather than goose-step behind the usual parade of Hollywood insipidity. They evinced an international cultural fecundity and the simple, enduringly human need to tell a story, albeit ones with a bit more viscera, manga and slashing katana than normal filmic fare.

Enjoy.

***Ritual* (Hideaki Anno, 2000)**

A film like *Ritual* is just one reason why Fantasia carves out its own distinct territory in the Montreal Film

Festival scene. It is one of those marginal East-Asian films that seems dinky and is under promoted, but succeeds in finding a new audience at a venue such as this.

Ritual is a delicately rendered art-film (as loaded and rickety as that term is) that attempts to manifest on the screen an eccentric, middle-class woman's attempts at assessing and treating her own spiralling madness. The physical setting is composed of the train tracks and abandoned warehouses of a hyper-industrialized Japan, with the lives of the Woman (Ayako Fujitani) and a man known only as Director (Shunji Iwai) intersecting. Once together, they navigate urbanity as a pair in an effort to make sense of their own lives, their immediate fates trapped in alienating environs.

If my description seems vague, it is because the film chooses to present, simply, a collection of daily episodes that demonstrate the peculiarities of two humans traversing modern space. Each sequence is limited to a single day, and each day is counted down by inter-title towards an unknown event, possibly the Woman's suicide or birthday. Consequently, the film functions as a repetition of vignettes that ostensibly do no more than present her attempts to flesh out and understand her own anguish; whether she is sitting on train tracks, curled fetal-like in a bathtub in a flooded basement or playing with her life on the roof of her warehouse home. Despite the monotonous quality of the Woman's daily ritual of attempted suicide (every morning she contemplates whether or not she should jump off her seven-story roof hanging onto a guardrail), the act does take on a more endearing tone – as her trust in the

Director grows, she eventually allows the guardrail she clutches to be replaced by the out-stretched hands of the Director. He won't stop her from playing with her life, but he can at least hold her hands as she decides.

Actor Ayako Fujitani has surely had enough of being saddled with the moniker of "Steven Seagal's Daughter," which is how she was introduced at her Thursday night appearance, only a few days into the festival. She has come into her own for her recent accomplishments, presumably without Seagal's direct involvement. With three novels under her belt, one of which *Ritual* is based upon, she has demonstrated that she is not only an accomplished actor, but also an inspiring novelist. In the Q/A following the film, Fujitani described the book, and the film, as an autobiography of sorts.

In turn, producer Amagi Omiro likened the film to a live-action form of anime, asserting that this is at least how the Japanese public received the film and digested it conceptually. Omiro insisted on describing *Ritual* with two words that are loaded in any cinematic context, regardless the country or culture: Art Film. *Ritual* does, in fact exhibit a number of the common characteristics of the "art-film," for example, existential angst and a narrative structure up for grabs. The film only played in a Photography Museum when it was released in Japan, and it was never intended to be distributed in commercial theatres. When it played in Japan in 2000 (the year it was originally released), about 50,000 people in only three theatres saw the film. It was only when the film was released on DVD that word of mouth among fans brought the film to the attention of distributors.

The use of real-life Japanese director Shunji Iwai as the character of the Director may be an obvious, if painfully ossified, nod at cinephiliac self-referentiality, but this nevertheless works well despite its flirtation with cliché. Because of Fujitani's over the top, unrestrained portrayal of the Woman as a hysterical eccentric, Iwai's presence functions as a desperately needed life preserver of rationality. This said, the archaic gender stereotypes represented by the Woman and the Director are perhaps too obviously Freudian.

Stunning imagery of an industrialised Japan abounds throughout the film. Director Anno frequently employs wide-angle shots that lend a distorted, surreal vision of Japan in the 21st Century, and plays, in scene after scene, with the lattice work of innumerable train tracks that grid the world of the Woman and the Director. Anno's images initially look navigable but they represent a metaphorical labyrinth that leads both the

characters and the viewer to a more uncertain place. Adding to the film's surrealism is the set design in the Woman's warehouse. Cavernous, stripped down, mono-coloured office spaces filled with red and white umbrellas, phones, refrigerators, mannequins, candles, all set against blindingly white walls further disorient the viewer. In terms of imagery, Anno achieves sparkling moments of poetic grandeur in his rendering of the city and the actors' navigation through different milieus (shopping thoroughfares, roadways and antique train-cars). One inspired moment has the Woman guiding the Director through each floor space of her warehouse home; Anno shoots this in fast-motion, lending the film an isolated incident of playfulness.

The interplay between digital video and film (played out as a visualized metaphor for memory and immediate reality), and the restrained performance by the Director, suggest the deeply meditative film this could have been had Anno not fallen for the clichés associated with the art-house film.

***Blue Spring* (Toshiaki Toyoda, 2001) and *Dad's Dead* (Chris Shepherd, 2003)**

On a Saturday night a small quiet crowd was privy to cinema that cast away any stereotypical notions one might have of modern Japanese youth groomed for, and content with, a complacent role in Japan's reputation as an ultra-capitalist country. If Toshiaki Toyoda's *Blue Spring* has any say, the cultural and social potency that drives Japan into the 21st Century is fuelled by bitter teenage nihilism. One of the trends in contemporary Japanese cinema about Japanese youth is the notion of dystopic future for the next generation, as exemplified by Takashi Miike's *Fudoh: The New Generation*. *Blue Spring* continues along this theme in the harrowing depiction of teenage angst in Japan.

Kujo, played by *Gobatto's* androgyne Ryuhei Matsuda, is the ring-leader of a busted-down, secondary school; the hallways are streaked with black graffiti and students run for their lives when the home bell rings. A despairing restlessness permeates the film, with the suggestion that the only way one can graduate out of secondary is by either joining the Yakuza, on hand to scout the grounds for the odd recruit, or by going murderously mad. Kujo, his best friend Aoki and their gang break apart towards the end of the film as everyone decides they've had enough debilitating life experiences for awhile.

The film's tragic ending is predictable, but there is still an intimation of hope throughout the film. A former bully

earnestly cares for the lieutenant he sadistically took for granted when the latter suddenly goes inexplicably blind. And Kujo himself decides to distance himself from the role of head ring-leader and sadist, a job he never really wanted, even if it does mean the sad end of a childhood friendship. Toyaoda's *Blue Spring* is a scouring, unapologetic film that hints at the barest of promise for the future of Japanese youth. While the film periodically glamourizes thuggery and criminals-in-waiting, it nonetheless addresses the problem of a distressed generation with candour and sympathy.

Dad's Dead, a short by Englishman Chris Shepherd that opened just before *Blue Spring*, set up the rather distressed tone for the evening while it carved out a distinct seven minute niche all its own. The film presaged the frustration of the teenage youths in *Blue Spring* with creepy live-action combined with rotoscopic digital animation. This combination found its most disturbing realization in the distorted face of a sociopathic teen named Johnno who represents at least one disturbing demographic of the modern Englishman in Liverpool, England. Again, like *Blue Spring*, this is leagues beyond the idyllic, if marginally realistic, world of Degrassi Junior High. *Dad's Dead* is Liverpoolian working class environs with a horror film flavour that chronicles a degenerating friendship between two lads; one, a possible criminal with a conscience, the other, a criminal with a growing penchant for killing animals and "caring" for the disadvantaged on the dole with the express purpose of robbing them ("He's a saint!" say the ignorant and easily duped). What makes this film so provocative is how it is related through the eyes of the protagonist whose reliability is suspect; the viewer is not entirely sure how much of the tale is a fabrication of the protagonist's own morbid desire to relate a story about his nasty best friend or the actual truth as seen through his own admittedly unreliable point of view.

***Cutie Honey* (Hideaki Anno, 2004) and *The Exorcist In 30 Seconds* (Jennifer Shiman)**

I vowed to myself that being relegated to the back of the line and, consequently, nose-bleeder seating at the rear of the Hall Theatre was unacceptable for a cinematic event hyped as being akin to Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* I queued up exactly one hour early for Hideaki Anno's *Cutie Honey*, arguably the fan favourite of this year's Fantasia festival – remember the still, which was easily the most circulated image in the press, of the demure little girl in a purple and pink S & M outfit with the sword on the cover of *Mirror?* Thought so. This was easily the most anticipated event for anime-devotees at

Fantasia no doubt due to its live-action depiction of a popular, 70s manga comic. The film features mangaynymph Cutie Honey who typically practises calisthenics in a bra and panties, and transforms into superhero fighting form with an exultant, "Honey-Flash!"

Young Honey Kisaragi, an android superhero, saves the world with her trusty Honey boomerang, eats rice cakes in order to activate her "Honey-Flash" (which, I think, is her unique "i-system" energy signature) and battles evil with her 70s-style hipster N.S.A. agent-buddy and a really cute, hard-nosed female detective who dresses exclusively in black suits. The soundtrack is a kaleidoscope la la la, late-60s swinger music cooed by adolescent teenage girls, whom I can only naively dream are the intended demographic for a movie like *Cutie Honey*. Regardless of whether or not manga come-to-life is your particular cup of tea (with honey), the film exudes an appealing frantic energy. Director Hideaki Anno pays rapt attention to detail in translating the spirit of the comic to the screen, and Eriko Satoh embodies Cutie with as much Honey-Flash as humanly possible. When Cutie does battle with an Alice Cooperesque Madame Tiger-Claw, who brandishes Wolverine blades and a wrist-mounted, multiple rocket launcher, the fight choreography and montage, combined with the computer-generated devastation and Satoh's irrepressible characterization, is, admittedly, spectacular.

Everyone, including myself, was tickled pink (which, incidentally, is the predominate colour-scheme of Cutie Honey's superhero outfit) by how much this film brings *Go Nagai* to dazzling life.

P.S. Before *Cutie Honey*, one of the shorts was an animated film called *The Exorcist In 30 Seconds* by Jennifer Shiman. I f@%\$#^& loved this film. It was exactly what the title said it would be: Friedkin's treatise on the dangers of lapsed Catholicism played out in thirty seconds. The only twist is that it is re-enacted by a cast of playfully rendered, animated rabbits. One would be at pains (I hope) to describe the last time one saw an exorcism adhering to 16th century Roman-Catholic doctrine, but just try to imagine one that enlisted a pair of bunny-wabbit Catholic priests that repeat in helium voices, "The Power of Christ Compels You!" to a floating, green-faced bunny version of Regan. Shiman expertly replicates scenes from Friedkin's film shot-for-shot. The most memorable one has to be the over-the-shoulder, two-shot of one Catholic priest lamenting, "I think I've lost my faith Tom," to another Priest, with the two of them sporting two prominent buck teeth,

white fur and floppy ears.

The Exorcist In 30 Seconds and other bunny shorts can be found at <http://www.angryalien.com>

Fantasia Festival's Paul Naschy Retrospective

The fact that I, a student of horror cinema, had never heard of Paul Naschy, King of Spanish Horror, before this festival, now makes me blush. He is an actor who has been honoured with Spain's Gold Medal Award ("Senor Excelentísimo") as a result of having acted in, directed and written close to one hundred and thirty films ever since he first appeared as an extra in a biblical drama back in 1961. Virtually all the films he's been associated with in any capacity are fixed firmly within the horror genre and throughout them all, he's managed to refresh in his own singular way over-represented stodgy juggernauts such as Dracula, Jack the Ripper, even Jekyll and Hyde. His most vaunted creation is the doomed, melancholic figure of the Wolfman named Count Waldemar Daninsky in human form. A recurrent character throughout Naschy's filmography, Daninsky has been crafted to resemble the typical tragic hero, albeit one cursed with lycanthropy in the same tradition as Lon Chaney, Jr.; that is, dressed in slacks and fashionable long-sleeved shirts, with the requisite fangs and hirsute make-up. Naschy's only edge over Chaney is his ability to drool; he can fill buckets with the stuff once he really gets going.

Naschy was on hand to answer questions prior to the unveiling of his newest vehicle *Rojo Sangre*, which he also wrote. The film is vigorously autobiographical in its telling of an aged, once great actor forced to compete with vapid young Turks and Hollywood silicone (he eventually decides the best way to deal with the competition is to murder it). Behind the film's rather high-gloss technical veneer, courtesy of director Christian Molina, there was a depressive, although at times satirical, cynicism woven within Naschy's onscreen embodiment, Pablo Thevenet. Thevenet understands he is a washed up thespian no one will touch. When they do dare to sully their manicured hands, it is to offer him humiliatingly base roles, that in his heyday, he never would have dreamed of entertaining. By film's end, Thevenet's decision to forgo his soul for revenge and his eventual re-emergence on top of the Hollywood game at the price of eternal damnation, obviously hints at Naschy's own Faustian thoughts of his role as a fading horror icon and the possible resting place of his falling star.

It wasn't until the Saturday night's double bill *The Werewolf Vs. The Vampire Woman* and *Dracula's Great Love*, that it was clear why Naschy has drawn so much praise for his work over the years. Naschy had an ability throughout the sixties and seventies to invigorate the tired and cliché conventions and characters inextricably associated with the horror film genre until then. Naschy's films are by no means lofty pieces of cinematic artistry. They mostly plumb the depths of exploitation with sadomasochism and apathetic soft-core pornography, but there were moments that were pleasures in the poetical, especially the slow-motion, midnight hunts by the two female vampires in *Dracula's Great Love*. While these films are enterprises in salacious exploitation, Naschy's screen presence as Dracula and the Wolfman manages to elevate itself far above the material, lending his characters an unlikely but communicable gravitas tragic to behold.

Band Of Ninja (Nagisa Oshima, 1967)

Being an avid fan of anime goes the proverbial long way at Fantasia, especially with films such as Moon-Saeng Kim's *Wonderful Days*, which made its Canadian premiere at Fantasia. But there was nothing like Nagisa Oshima's *Band Of Ninja* to cull the weak-willed from the strong, really testing the fortitude of even the most devout of anime cultists this side of the Atlantic. The reason was this: *Band Of Ninja* is composed entirely of fixed anime cells (it was inspired by the manga "Ninja Bugeicho") that are brought to life by camera pans and scans, which imbue the admittedly beautifully drawn images with the dynamism necessary to tell a particularly brutal and fantasy-driven tale of 16th century feudal Japan. True enough, some of the images in *Band Of Ninja* were arresting as certain depictions of the aftermath of Samurai battle clearly evoked Goya's *Los Desastres De La Guerra*. But for non-anime fans, the film could be a trying two hour experience of static anime. This was distressingly – and at times comically – evident when in the first minutes of the film, the arresting (and arrested) quality of Samurai and Ninja characters flash-frozen in action stances, swords slashing through the air, were presented in proto, black-ink rendered, black and white images that made one feel as if one were reading a comic book.

If this weren't enough to make a few in the audience wish they had read the Fantasia program a little more closely (like me), the flood of fervent Japanese that made up the soundtrack added to the confusion because of the lack of subtitles. After a few minutes of nervous audience giggling, a slick 60s American voice-over with

all the authoritative drawl of a “Duck and Cover” atom bomb propaganda reel began to relate both the story and dialogue. It became apparent the problem was that unless one knew fluent Japanese, the film was tough to follow because of the convoluted plot, multiple characters and inadequate translation. You know you are in trouble when it takes a translating voice-over ten seconds to relate three to four minutes of constantly changing scene, dialogue and narration. The two people who accompanied me to *Band Of Ninja* left after about 15 minutes, along with about ten others in the audience, but the theatre as a whole still remained full, perhaps just out of a curiosity to witness Oshima’s take on the medium of anime. This kind of dedication is no surprise considering he has demonstrated his mercurial skill with films such as *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence*; *In The Realm Of The Senses*; and *Gobatto*, all three of which attest to his mastering of cinematic craft and storytelling.

***Prayer Beads* (Masahiro Okano and others, 2004)**

Prayer Beads, a horror/occult television series imported for sampling at Fantasia, could be described as Japanese horror cinema’s interpretation of EC Comic’s *Tales From The Crypt*. But such a comparison oversimplifies the individuality of this imaginatively singular work. Created by Masahiro Okano (who has garnered an industry reputation for accomplished sfx work), the series comes across as exercises that traverse both the subtle and the out and out graphically horrific, at least in the three instalments I had the chance to see. As is the sometime trend with the presentation of episodic television work presented at film festivals, the audience was limited in the De Seve theatre to thirty or so patrons. But by their presence alone, the festival-goers who did attend the screening of the three episodes from *Prayer Beads: Echoes*, *Cat’s Paw* and *Apartment*, demonstrated the desire for Japanese horror in any media.

Each episode begins with the series’ opening credits, a disorienting, invasive, spiral view of someone’s large intestine that could also very well be a vertiginous descent into Hell. Episode 7, *Echoes*, begins by occupying a space outside the common modalities of horror (these familiar settings replaced by the bucolic world of a geriatrics’ Japan), but the genre’s topography finally peeks through when a small child discovers a severed arm while on a fishing expedition and an elderly couple revive their long-dormant sixth sense/telekinesis when they discover a young relative of theirs has been murdered. The episode taps, if perhaps simplistically, the potentially aggravated WW2

generational gap between the elderly and the young in a disturbing fashion befitting the horrific. In one sequence, a grandmother and grandfather searching for their murdered grand-daughter meet an upstart with a possible role in the murder in an alley. It is to director/writer Naoki Kusumoto’s credit, that through a display of heavily nuanced direction, the couple are imbued with only the slightest taint of the diabolical as they educate the young hoodlum in the consequences of crossing their path.

Cat’s Paw, Episode 8, is just as much a stripped-down tale of revenge and comeuppance as *Echoes*, except it shifts its focus from the vengeful elderly to a young boy who just wants to live a better life (i.e. no bullies, no abusive fathers and everyone in happy spirits). This is accomplished through the unsolicited help of a computeranime pussycat named Ryanta in the boy’s home pc, but, predictably, problems never seem to be solved as easily in the real world as they are in animated ones. When a sadistic bully is dismembered and reassembled in Ryanta’s cartoon world at the request of the bespectacled protagonist, the real world properly translates this gesture with disturbingly gruesome results.

The final episode *Apartment* is a wicked little thriller that is, again, deceptively simple, but still sufficiently nightmarish. It is a dramatised study in patriarchal abuse as a teenage brother, sister and mother ride on the edge of emotional collapse when forced to endure the tirades of an abusive father. When a tense family dinner finally reaches its explosive apex, the reality of the family’s situation leaves the viewer speechless.

Certainly, when browsing a film festival program, one doesn’t immediately feel drawn towards watching grainy television episodes blown up on the big screen but *Prayer Beads* challenges the stereotype of television as the lesser sibling of the two media.

***A Tale Of Two Sisters* (Ji-woon Kim, 2003)**

This may sound like hyperbole but frankly, Ji-woon Kim’s superb *A Tale Of Two Sisters* is, by far, the most frightening horror film to come out of East Asia (or anywhere else) in recent memory (yes, it is even more shocking than Japan’s *Ringu* or *Jun-On*). Case in point: after the thirty minute mark when really bad things start to happen to the first of the two teenagers in the film, Su-Mi and Su Yeon, the two stolid-looking guys seated to my left were reduced to embarrassed schoolgirl whispers after crying out in bald horror

(along with the rest of the theatre) at the first set-piece: a young heroine receives a visit from a vaguely human something in a young girl's dress, creeping about on all fours at the foot of her bed. I have to admit that while I didn't technically scream at any point during *A Tale Of Two Sisters*, I did let out what was in retrospect a mixture of a bark and a yelp, prompted by Scare #2: a quick peek at something covered in slime lurking underneath the kitchen sink cabinet. The film was so scary that I actually caught myself with my book-bag clutched in front of me shield-like, as if to ward off any unwelcome ghosts that might accost me in my seat from the direction of the screen.

A Tale Of Two Sisters was as uncanny as Freud ever intended. The first half-hour establishes an utterly fractured familial dynamic (one sister hates the father, the other sister is too scared to choose sides, the father exists somewhere inside his own emotionally distraught world and the step-mother is a harridan who only wants the father to herself, etc.) sequestered inside an old country house that becomes more and more unheimlich as the plot progresses. South Korean horror cinema became well-known with *Memento Mori* back in 1999, proving that Korea was more than capable of taking on Japan with its own brand of horror (Japan's *Ringu* series crept onto the screens in 1998 garnering a then unforeseeable amount of popularity). The resultant East Asian buzz has prompted more of the cinematic same over the years and fuelled in part the frisson surrounding the premiere of *A Tale Of Two Sisters*. I arrived one hour prior to showtime but was still significantly waaaaaay back in line with hundreds camped out in front of me.

One could argue that with *A Tale Of Two Sisters*, director Kim establishes bit by bit the generic boundaries of a Gothic imaginary. With sensual cinematography that teases out the subdued palette of a haunted home, something as simple as the manse in *A Tale Of Two Sisters* seems to seethe a barely restrained malice, never mind the strikingly photographed horrors themselves that coax home all the grotesque ingredients perfect for an unnerving film such as this worked in dark wood and bitter malevolence. Is the house itself evil or is the evil fuelled by a maleficent girl in a funeral dress? With the image-track already heightening the tension to a crescendo, the soundtrack, reminiscent of a Lynchian soundscape always throbbing in low rumble register, makes the overall film unnervingly vivid. Clearly, Kim excels at constantly intimating the abject: one drawn out sequence has the camera slowly drift past the dark floor boards of the house to follow a trail of blood

leaking from a burlap sack, the contents of which are as jolting as they are bizarre.

A Tale Of Two Sisters does well in allaying any fears as to the future of horror, East Asian or otherwise. I constantly ask myself if I can still be truly scared by a horror film, after having been disappointed by so many uninspired efforts. After having seen *A Tale Of Two Sisters*, the answer is yes.

***The Calamari Wrestler* (Minoru Kawasaki, 2004)**

It may have been the lamentable fact that the end of Fantasia 2004 was close to final curtain, but the euphoria shown by the crowd on July 30th in the Hall theatre was surprising to say the least. But then again, when an audience is about to witness a spectacle entitled *The Calamari Wrestler* with the director in attendance, present to provide a clue as to where he got the idea for a film about a wrestler who happens to be a squid, it's no surprise the audience seemed unusually excited. Yes, Minoru Kawasaki's *The Calamari Wrestler* is about a WWF-style Japanese wrestler who happens to be a bipedal cephalopod in calf-high wrestling boots. And yes, this squid pits his grappling acumen and four-corner stylin's against assorted adversaries including an octopus and a pugnacious squilla. But despite, and because of, all its unashamed inanity, *The Calamari Wrestler* slithers with ease past whatever doubt a viewer might have about creature-suit molluscs in a fight billed as a "Seafood Smackdown."

Before the film began, writer/director Kawasaki, still visibly moved by the adoring applause that greeted his entrance at the front the theatre, took pains to remind the audience that this film was in the tradition of the Japanese-Monster-Character-Rubber-Suit movies made most famous by Godzilla. He urged the audience not take the film seriously in any way, except during the love scenes between the eponymous squid and his paramour Miyako. In fact, he wanted the audience to "laugh as much as possible." He, himself, acknowledged the frantic goofiness of the project, and even admitted that he had to perform some Machiavellian manoeuvring to secure sufficient investment for the film.

Kawasaki admitted that the culturally-entrenched popularity of the Ultraman series was his impetus to become a filmmaker, but an obscure Prawn-Shrimp boxer movie made in England sometime in the 60s was the motivating reason that lifted *The Calamari Wrestler* out of the sphere of Kawasaki's private imagination and on to screen. Surpassing its own considerable hype, *The*

Calamari Wrestler is as enjoyable as Kawasaki promised, with a self-reflexive, satirical sensibility throughout.

Plot-wise, it turns out that the Calamari Wrestler is in fact a reincarnation of a famous wrestler who has come back as a squid after he purges all desire through a rigorous Zen satori ritual. Eventually he rediscovers true love, finds out who his father and brother really are, and becomes the proud father of a healthy, baby squid. What is especially amusing about the film, besides the Calamari Wrestler himself and the vaguely disturbing dayglow sex sequences involving said Calamari and his girlfriend are repeated sequences that have wrestling pundits, businessmen, and aficionados in the film complaining about the degeneration of the sport of Japanese professional wrestling due to the participation of a cephalopod. For all the characters in the movie, the simple fact is that yes, this squid's a good wrestler, BUT HE'S A SQUID! The character's consternation is portrayed in such a straight-faced manner that it is obvious that Kawasaki has a superb understanding of farce and satire. Shot on digital video, *The Calamari Wrestler* looks cheap because it is cheap. In this case cheap doesn't mean bad, because Kawasaki lifts farce to the level of the sublime with his instinct for what makes entertaining film.

Friedrich Mayr reviewed Day Of The Dead in Synoptique 1.