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V DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

By Pete Roche

1982: The Greatest Geek Year Ever! MVD Rewind Collection

Originally broadcast two years ago as four-part documentary on CWS (and featured at 2022 San Diego Comic Con), the Kickstarter-funded (\$132,000) 1982: The Greatest Geek Year Ever! is both a video valentine to cinema's benchmark dork summer and 40th anniversary invite to the now-middle-aged moviegoers whose enthusiasm gave rise to the sci-fi / superhero fandom of today.

Writers Roger Lay, Jr. and Mark A. Altman (Free Enterprise) take a surprisingly deep dive into the most notable pictures of '82 by interviewing the directors, producers, actors, and special effects artists who brought them to life. Rather than impose their judgment on viewers, the duo lets insiders like Ron Howard, Nicholas Meyer, Amy Heckerling, and Cameron Crowe tell their stories and explain just what made the year so gosh-darn special.

The consensus? '82 was a turning point where a robust economy overlapped with a rapidly evolving culture, giving filmmakers, studios, and distributors the confidence to take more chances on original ideas. In the wake of the 1975 blockbuster Jaws and groundbreaking 1977 epic Star Wars, Hollywood movers and shakers knew the time was right to push auteur films and genre pictures into the mainstream.

"For whatever reason, the nerds accidentally won!" exclaims one commentator.

We're treated to clips and outtakes from popcorn pics E.T. The Extraterrestrial, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, Blade Runner, The Thing, Tron, Poltergeist, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, First Blood, Rocky III, The Road Warrior, The Dark Crystal, Conan the Barbarian, and Creepshow and enjoy insights and anecdotes from directors, producers, screenwriters, and actors Roger Corman, Dave Filoni (The Mandalorian), Bruce Campbell (Evil Dead), Keith David (They Live), Darin Scott (Menace II Society), Anselm Richardson (The Boys, Agent X), Zak Penn (Ready Player One), Jon Cryer (Pretty in Pink, Dudes), and Josh Miller (Sonic the Hedgehog). Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and The Fonz (Henry Winkler) share their experiences, hot movie moms Jobeth Williams and Dee Wallace discuss Steven Spielberg's childlike sense of wonder, Adrienne Barbeau reminisces about Swamp Thing, and "android" Sean Young throws shade on Ridley Scott and Harrison Ford.

We learn how T.V. critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert unwittingly created "aggregate" movie reviews (a la Rotten Tomatoes) with

their thumbs-up (or down) assessments, and Entertainment Tonight's Leonard Maltin slams "four-quadrant marketing" in an argument for a return to smart, emotive storytelling with likeable characters extraordinary things in cool settings: If it's truly good (and blends fantasy with just the right amount of verisimilitude), then it'll appeal to everyone—which the movies of '82 most certainly did. Atari programmers talk arcade culture... and the folly of landfill-bound E.T. The Game. In a behind-the-scenes clip from E.T., Spielberg discloses his personal favorite video game to Henry Thomas and other child actors.



In its third hour the documentary shifts from science fiction and sword-and-sorcery to horror (Friday the 13th Part III, Cat People, Slumber Party Massacre), drama (Sophie's Choice, The Year of Living Dangerously, An Officer and a Gentleman), and comedy (Porcky's, Airplane II, Night Shift). Even stinkers, cult flicks, and "anti-classics" like Grease 2, The Toy, Beastmaster, and Megaforce receive honorable mentions... and a self-effacing Barry Bostwick (Spin City) disavows Ace Hunter's gold lame unitards and flying motorcycle.

Speaking of bikes, where's the love for Fred Ward actioner Timerider?

So potent and pervasive was the nerd factor of '82 that—when pressed—many of the guest speakers can't even remember what won for Best Picture. We won't divulge it here, but the pick only underscores just how out-of-touch with popular opinion the Motion Picture Academy was (and continues to be).

Here's hoping Lay and Altman set their sights on other multiplex moments from the Big '80s. Greatest Geek Year Ever is the most enjoyable movie about movies we've seen since Electric Boogaloo: The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Films.

Available for streaming now on amazon.com and roku.com.



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