Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Friday, 27 August 2010 16:04

Quite recently, a blog went up on FANGORIA taking a handful of legendary horror directors to task for essentially riding the waves of their legacy and failing to continuously and contemporarily put out excellent work. No doubt, it's an interesting theory worth debating and investigating. However in my eyes, its author made one fatal mistake (and no, it wasn't that confrontational opening line—although that was slightly devoid of taste). Nick sought to claim that Wes Craven neither is not, nor ever was, great. I'm under the belief that no matter how you feel about many of his films, that's simply a falsehood. So with seven weeks until the filmmaker's latest, MY SOUL TO TAKE, hits theaters, I've decided to look at one of his movies a week (excluding the landmarks like LAST HOUSE, NIGHTMARE and SCREAM) to showcase that even during misfires and his lesser praised works, Craven displays talent, chops and incredible imagination. Read on for week one—my look at THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS.

Having impulsively decided to go on this venture earlier this week, I needed something easily accessible for my first piece and, thankfully, Craven's 1991 darkly comedic and socially aware THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS is on Netflix Instant. In many ways, STAIRS is a great jumping off point for something of this nature. While not a perfect film (and really, what is?), it's a wonderful display of many of Craven's strengths, themes and interests: the darker side of suburbia and parenting, a wicked sense of humor and a bit of commentary on the world around us. Plus it has Roach (Sean Whalen) and Ving Rhames.

I hadn't seen the film in what must be over 10 years and even so, I can't ever be sure I'd seen it in its entirety at all. As a child, just the title (it really is an excellent name for a movie) conjured up such thoughts in my head that I dreaded the experience of sitting through it. It's a shame because I'm sure had I ever gotten the gall to actually dive in, I would've loved it in my adolescence just as much as I now do today.

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