

The Thursday

Film Series

Practical

Effects

Series

An American Werewolf
in London

The General

Jason and the

Argonauts

Mothra Vs. Godzilla

The Dark Crystal

Videodrome

Pan's Labyrinth

About the TFS

The Thursday Film Series is managed by a dedicated group of film enthusiasts. Each year, we curate five distinct series' for the Kamloops Film Society, with two in the Fall (September-December), one in the Winter (January-February), another in the Spring after the Kamloops Film Festival (April-May), and one in the Summer (July). Every series delves into a specific area or facet of cinema, such as genre, thematic connections, era, or director, like our upcoming series, "In Hitchcock's Shadow." We design each series as a compact film education.

Meet the Committee



Jaime Lintott is co-chair of The Thursday Film Series and has lived in Kamloops since 2018. A longtime film enthusiast, she loves sharing her passion for cinema and connecting people through movies.

Aaron Arseneau is one of the Co-Chairs of the Thursday Film Series committee. He took on that role in 2022 when the committee was overhauled and took on a new direction following covid. Aaron has loved film since he was a child, back in the video store days. He is at his happiest while exploring Asian cinema, the grit of Soviet and post-Soviet film and all the way to the delightfully weird and gooey world of B-Movies.



Kevin was born and raised in Kamloops and has never left. He has worked for Cineplex for almost 23 years. He first became associated with Cineplex in the Fall 1999 until the Cineplex Downtown location closed in the Fall of 2001. At this time The Kamloops Film Society and the Kamloops Film Festival events were held at the Cineplex Downtown.

In 2002, he volunteered for the Kamloops Film Festival, and that Fall he became a Kamloops Film Society Board Member. Since 2003 Kevin has been part of the Kamloops Film Festival Team, helping with setting up volunteers and making sure films made it to Kamloops.





Wade Hooper is from the city of Kamloops and has been attending the Paramount theatre frequently since he was a kid, so he is excited to be a committee member of the Thursday Film Series at the Kamloops Film Society. Wade has a ton of passion for storytelling through film and is grateful to contribute to playing and discussing diverse and quality films from across time and around the world with this community. Outside the theatre he is usually busy playing basketball, reading, playing board games, and scrolling Letterboxd.

Paul Garrison attended the Vancouver Film school and worked in the film industry in Vancouver for 12 years, starting as a production assistant and working his way up to second assistant director. Paul's introduction to Kamloops came in 2004 when he worked on a TV mini-series for German television called, "Miss Texas". He moved to Kamloops nine years ago and joined the Thursday Film Series committee last year. Paul has really been enjoying his time on the committee. Paul enjoys that the committee members have different films that they like, so committee meetings bring out a lot of interesting ideas, which has given him a chance to revisit some old favorites and to also discover films that he hasn't seen before.



Shay Paul is a Secwépemc multimedia artist who wears many hats but always enjoys sitting back to watch a movie. Her film taste is unfairly dictated by how pretty it is to look at, but she loves chatting about all the other cool stuff that happens too. Shay is particularly fond of period dramas, psychological thrillers, and dark suspense. Some of Shay's top films this year are *The Beasts* (2022), *The Fall* (2006), *Dahomey* (2024), and *Sinners* (2025).

An American Werewolf in London

October 30

Walking Meatloaf

By Aaron Arseneau

We're kicking off the Practical Effects series with a bang — and with a movie that perfectly encapsulates what we're celebrating: those tactile, in-camera effects that make movie magic feel real.

An American Werewolf in London follows a long and hairy lineage of werewolf movies, the most famous being Universal's *The Wolf Man* (1941). The genre has fascinated audiences since the dawn of cinema. The idea of physically transforming into a creature of pure instinct and bloodlust terrifies us — because deep down, the werewolf is just the messy, violent side of the human psyche set free. It's all the stuff we try to repress, made horrifyingly literal.

And of course, the crown jewel of any werewolf movie is the transformation. I feel very confident saying *An American Werewolf in London* has the best one ever put to screen. That's thanks to two men: director John Landis and makeup maestro Rick Baker. Let's start with Baker. One of his first gigs was assisting the legendary Dick Smith on *The Exorcist* (1973). That same year he met John Landis on *Schlock* — but they wouldn't team up again until *American Werewolf* in 1981. In that decade between, Baker quietly became a powerhouse, working on *Star Wars* and *The Incredible Melting Man*, always pushing makeup effects further. *An American Werewolf in London* was the first time he got to lead his own team. The shoot lasted two months, with an entire week devoted just to the transformation scene. Landis and Baker wanted it brightly lit and brutally painful, no hiding behind shadows. Baker invented new, experimental techniques to make skin stretch, bones crack, and fur sprout in real time. It's still jaw-dropping today. The work was so impressive the Academy had to invent a brand-new category: Best Makeup. Naturally, Baker won. Baker a few years later was the lead of the makeup effects department on another film we are looking at this series, *Videodrome*.

As for Landis — the man was riding high from *Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers* when he dove into horror for the first time... sort of. *American Werewolf* is equal parts nightmare and absurd comedy. Landis's clout got him permission to shut down Piccadilly Circus for several nights, something no one had managed in 15 years to shoot the film's chaotic, stunt-filled finale.

Unfortunately, Landis's next project, *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, ended in tragedy when a helicopter crash killed actor Vic Morrow and two child performers Myca Dinh Le and Renee Shin-Yi Chen. The disaster reshaped Hollywood stunt safety, but Landis's reputation never fully recovered. (And don't even ask about his son and canceled director, Max Landis, that's a whole other horror story.)

Still, *An American Werewolf in London* remains their masterpiece.

The General

November 6

On the Right Track: The General and Rail Rodder

By Paul Garrison

If anyone was born to be a performer, it was Joseph Frank Keaton. His birth coincided with the birth of cinema, and his legacy would cast an oversized shadow: his dead-pan comedy style would influence Bill Murray, his brand of physical comedy would influence Jackie Chan and his directorial use of the stationary camera would influence Wes Anderson. He was born into a family vaudeville act, and after having fallen down a flight of stairs unscathed and apparently unbothered, at six months of age, Harry Houdini – who was part of the family's act, observed "that sure was a buster" and the name stuck. Keaton never received a formal education and would learn his craft on the stage. In defiance of child labour laws, his parents would pass him off as an adult little person, and the act was physically demanding, with Keaton sometimes being thrown into the scenery or the audience – and occasionally injured.

Keaton would get his start in film at the age of 21, and his stage training made him one of the most athletic and acrobatic performers in the cinema – a skill set that made well-suited for physical comedy. Keaton got his start working with actor/director, Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle often in supporting roles or as a stunt double for other performers. When working as an actor, Keaton would perform his own stunts and would later claim that when he made independent films, he had a stunt double only once: in the film *College*, when world-champion pole vaulter, Lee Barnes doubled for him as he vaulted into a second story window. Later when he signed with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, he would be required to have a stunt double per studio policy. Keaton learned a great deal about filmmaking from working with Fatty Arbuckle and would consider Arbuckle to be his greatest influence and greatest friend. Arbuckle's career came to an end following a 1921 trial in which he was acquitted of having raped a woman at a party, who later died in hospital.

Starting in 1917, Keaton would star in and direct comedies – starting with short films, and by 1923 feature-length films, priding himself on using title cards sparingly, and instead telling the story visually. Keaton believed that a gag should never be faked, so to make it believable he would actually perform the gag – although with some safety measures in place, and if a gag didn't work when it was executed, he would usually build on the failed gag anyway. Years later, he would explain that only about half of his gags were planned in advance of shooting them, while the others were improvised. For many of Keaton's sight gags, the camera remained stationary, often with the audience only able to see what Keaton's character could see, or with something being revealed to the audience just before Keaton's character would see it. In Keaton's short films, he sometimes employed what he called, 'impossible gags' – visual magic tricks, but in feature length films he felt that his gags had to be believable, so he would employ 'natural gags' – jokes that developed organically from a character or a situation.

The General

November 6

Of all the films Keaton made, *The General* was his favourite – and while not initially embraced by audiences and critics upon its release, it has become a favourite of critics and audiences alike. The film was inspired by an incident during the Civil War where members of the Union Army in Georgia commandeered a train called *The General* and took it to Tennessee, damaging Confederate railroad and telegraph infrastructure in the process. Keaton modelled the look of the film on photos taken during the Civil War, insisting that it look authentic – including retrofitting locomotives and recreating cannons on rolling stock, to look like they would fit the era. While the film took place in the Southern United States, it was filmed in Oregon with members of the Oregon National Guard playing soldiers – wearing grey uniforms or blue uniforms depending on which army was depicted in any given scene. In many cases, Keaton would shoot the rehearsals.

Like so many of Keaton's films, shooting *The General* involved overcoming unique logistical challenges. To shoot footage that took place on a train, the camera was often mounted on another train running on a parallel track, and in a scene which involving the firing of a cannon into a locomotive, several takes were required to get the shot, as too much gunpowder resulted in overshooting. Finally, the proper range was achieved by using only a miniscule amount of gunpowder. At one point in production, sparks from a locomotive set the dry forest on fire, with production coming to a halt until a healthy rainfall could clear the smoke.

The film didn't employ the kinds of elaborate stunts as some of Keaton's short films, but one stunt early in the film – where Keaton rides on the locomotive's crankshaft, was quite dangerous: the engineer indicated that too much steam would cause the shaft to go too fast – and kill Keaton in the process, so the engineer tried the maneuver four times to get it right before shooting it with Keaton. The film would include the most expensive scene shot during film's silent era: a bridge collapsing under a train – a spectacle that locals gathered to watch. The film also included a battle scene that was covered by six cameras, with nine men injured – some as a result of explosive charges used in the scene.

With the introduction of sound to films, Keaton's career would suffer, and his personal life would be strained as result, but he would continue to work sporadically – albeit with less creative control, until *The General* was re-released in the early 60's and his work was introduced to a younger generation. He would work quite regularly, including in the short National Film Board film, *The Railrodder*, which we will be screening along with *The General*. Despite the fact that Keaton was nearing 70 when the film was shot, he insisted on disregarding his comfort – and at times safety, to get a shot, including emerging from the chilly Atlantic Ocean despite suffering from chronic bronchitis. The film was shot in locations across Canada, with Keaton and his wife staying in a private passenger car as the production travelled across the country.

With *The Railrodder* and *The General*, the Thursday Film Series is proud to share Buster Keaton's work with yet another generation of filmgoers.

Jason and the Argonauts

November 13

Stop Motion Commotion

By Aaron Arseneau

My love for Ray Harryhausen started when I was very young, long before I even realized just how special what I was watching was. My Grandpa is largely responsible for my current love of film. He had an entire room with wall to wall shelves full of VHS and later DVD's. This is where I first picked out the Seventh Voyage of Sinbad (another Harryhausen movie) to watch as a little hyperactive 7 or 8 year old. I fell in love instantly. It was like nothing I had seen up to that point and I was sold a bill that unfortunately would never come true as I am still not a pirate, living free and adventurous on the high seas. That sense of adventure and the beauty of the animation gripped me and never let go. Jason and the Argonauts represents the elegant clay and wire epic side of practical effects, dreamed up by the one-man effects department himself, Ray Harryhausen. Harryhausen didn't just make monsters. He gave them life. Working alone on a miniature set, he'd move an arm a fraction of an inch, click the camera, and repeat thousands of times. Out of that patience and insanity came movie magic. His creatures had attitude and weight. No matter how advanced digital effects get, nothing moves or feels quite like a Harryhausen creation.

Jason and the Argonauts is one of his many masterpieces. Full of amazing monster magic. The pinnacle, I think, is a skeleton battle. The skeleton battle took four and a half months to animate for three minutes of screen time. Most people would call that unreasonable but Harryhausen new better. He called it art and cinema.

Harryhausen dubbed his process "Dynamation," which basically meant combining stop-motion creatures with live actors through clever compositing and rear projection. Nobody had done it quite like that before, and nobody's really done it the same way since. At least not to the same calibre.

I love the detail that you can see and feel. The shine on a tiny sword, the texture of a clay monster, the sense that someone made this by hand, one frame at a time. Some would say it takes them out of a movie but I completely disagree. It's these fun things that bring you into a movie and help you realize that you are experiencing cinema.

Harryhausen's work inspired generations: George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Tim Burton, Guillermo del Toro, Sam Raimi, Rick Baker and Phil Tippett, the list goes on. Without him, there's no Star Wars, no Jurassic Park, and certainly no reason for so many of us to fall in love with monsters in the first place.

Jason and the Argonauts isn't just adventure cinema, it's a masterclass in imagination, and the beautiful weirdness of doing things the hard way.

Mothra Vs. Godzilla

November 20

Big Bugs, Bigger Feelings

By Aaron Arseneau

Now we're diving into some of Japan's absolute best contributions to practical effects. In Japan, "effects" often means sweating inside a rubber kaiju suit while drop-kicking a papier-mâché power plant or rubberized Alien invader.

Mothra vs. Godzilla was directed by the master of monsters himself, Ishirō Honda. Honda directed 11 Godzilla films in total, including the original. By 1964, Godzilla was already Japan's biggest celebrity, towering over Tokyo and box offices worldwide. Honda, who had lived through real-life devastation, used his kaiju chaos to sneak in surprisingly thoughtful messages about humanity's knack for wrecking everything it touches.

Beneath the smashing and screaming, there's massive Godzilla sized heart and a giant moth trying to tell us to chill out.

This film hit just as Asian cinema started breaking into North American screens. While art houses showed Kurosawa and Ozu, drive-ins were packed with kids and discerning adults with appreciation for the finer things, cheering as Alien Gods and home grown mutant skyscraper sized monsters did battle betwixt miniature cities.

The effects you ask? Pure insanity in the best way. Model cities built with obsessive care, tanks cobbled together from toy kits, and a Mothra puppet so elegant and majestic that it makes you want to give up your worldly possessions, move to Infant Island and become a Mothra Cult devotee. Haruo Nakajima, the Godzilla suit actor, reportedly lost ten pounds a day in sweat alone, this is what they had to do before Ozempic. These weren't stunts, they were feats of heroism in foam rubber.

Mothra vs. Godzilla is everything we love about practical effects, handmade, heartfelt, and gloriously ridiculous. Strings, miniatures and rubber suits are what we came for. Sometimes movie magic isn't about hiding the illusion, it's about celebrating it, rubber scales and all.

The Dark Crystal

November 27

Another World, Another Time: The Dark Crystal

By Paul Garrison

The Dark Crystal marked a new chapter in the creative journey for Jim Henson. Henson, a son of Christian Scientists raised in rural Mississippi, got his start when he answered an ad for a puppeteer at a TV station. Henson, who had been fascinated by television since his parents bought one when he was a child, saw it as a window to a whole new world. He and his future wife went on to create a show called, *Sam and Friends*, featuring puppets they created (including Kermit the Frog), using scripts that Henson wrote and sets that he created. The show was not initially oriented toward children, but his work would soon expand with shows oriented toward children – but often featuring archetypal-type characters that would be relatable to adults, with his work on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show* – both shows where he collaborated with fellow puppeteer, Frank Oz.

In addition to puppetry, Henson had also directed experimental films, and as the design of their puppets became more complex, Henson and Oz were interested in trying projects that would be quite different than what they were creating on television, so as not to be boxed in as children's entertainers. Henson had seen the work of British fantasy illustrator, Brian Froud, which featured exotic, mythical creatures in a mythical world, and wanted to bring Froud's vision to the screen, thus *The Dark Crystal* came into being. Henson and Oz would co-direct the film, with Henson seeing his own strength being camera composition, while Oz's strength was character dynamics. Having two directors on a film is unusual, but Henson and Oz had a good chemistry rooted in their long working relationship.

Jim Henson visited Froud's home in Dartmouth, which is in Devon in Southwestern England, near the North Atlantic Ocean, where they went for a walk in the countryside, amongst the twisted trees and moss. Henson indicated to Froud that he wanted the film to have the rich, organic feeling of the Devon landscape. There would be no humans in the story and Froud designed the creatures – starting with their eyes, with all the characters being puppets or performers in elaborate costumes. He also suggested to Henson that all the characters be created with a past and a sense that they would continue to exist after the story had ended. Froud would work with Henson again on the film, *Labyrinth* – which would include Froud's son, Toby portraying the baby brother. The two central characters – those that the audience was intended to identify with were elf-like creatures called, gelflings. The skeksis were an evil race of creatures – the basis of which started by creating characters that were based on the seven deadly sins, were made to look partly like predatory birds, but also reptile-like. The mystics were gentle creatures that were made to look like they were part wizard, part animal, and Froud's inspiration for the pod people – who were intended to be from within the earth, was the shape of potatoes.

The Dark Crystal

November 27

Froud would create sketches of the characters then sculptors would create three-dimensional figures from them. Prototype puppets would be made, with the puppets being built and rebuilt until a favourable design had been created. Many of the puppets had moveable eyes, beaks and other body parts, which were attached by wires to handles to be operated by puppeteers, and the garthims – the soldiers which were inspired by crustaceans, had fiberglass shells, which had to be able to articulate. Some of the characters required more than one operator, and were equipped with a portable monitor, which was necessary for the performers to see what the camera could see, and to guide their movements.

A lot of the performers who were cast were dancers, mimes, clowns and acrobats, and were under the direction of Jean-Pierre Amiel, a Swiss mime. Because the characters needed to seem as though they were from another world, Amiel spent eight months working with the performers to devise how the characters would walk and move. The landstriders – fast moving creatures with four long legs, were played by stilt-walkers using stilts for their arms and legs, running while a cable attached to a moving crane above them prevented them from falling and injuring themselves. Henson and Oz would operate some of the puppets themselves, and Henson found that playing Jan was particularly challenging because he had to move very differently than the Muppets he had worked with previously.

The attention to detail in the film was such that a map was created – with different ecosystems in each part of the world – to give the world substance. As is often the case with films that have a lot of complicated elements such as stunts or practical and visual effects, story boards were created for the entire film. Brian Froud created all the original sketches, and production designer Harry Lange use the sketches to create plans that would become the sets and scenery. Several art directors worked on different parts of the sets, and at one point 80 plasterers were employed, doing work that was akin to sculpting. Plants – unique to the film's world, were also created for certain sets, and sometimes glass matte paintings were created for wide exterior shots. All exteriors of the castle were miniatures with the surrounding landscape occupying a soundstage. Director of Photography Oswald Morris shot the film through a light flex on the front of the camera, to give a light-coloured tint to each scene to look like Froud's original paintings.

Henson, who died in 1990 at the age of 53, was truly an innovator in the art of puppetry, and The Dark Crystal is a shining example his creative vision.

Videodrome

December 4

Long Live the New Flesh!

By Jaime Lintott

Videodrome 1983-David Cronenberg

At a time when everyone was worried that TV, video, and media were rotting our brains, David Cronenberg decided to lean into the fear and make a movie about it.

Released in 1983, Videodrome asks a question that still feels unsettling today: what happens when technology stops being a tool and starts becoming part of us? What happens when the line between human and machine completely dissolves?

To bring those ideas to life, Cronenberg needed someone who could literally make flesh and metal merge on screen. Enter multi-award winning practical effects legend Rick Baker. The man and his team behind *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Nutty Professor*, and Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. There isn't a single frame of CGI in Videodrome, just hand-built nightmares brought to life by Baker's team.

The results are both gorgeous and grotesque: a TV that swells and breathes like lungs, a gun that fuses with a hand until it becomes part of him, a stomach slit that opens like a mouth hungry for videotapes. Deliciously disturbing stuff!

What makes Baker's work hit so hard is its tangibility. Everything you see actually existed on set, you could touch it and hold it. There's no digital trickery or polish, just ideas and flesh.

Videodrome arrived in the golden age of practical effects, alongside *The Thing* and *Alien*. But while those films made monsters, Cronenberg and Baker turned the horror inward. Here, the monster isn't an alien, it's your own body.

The film proved that makeup and animatronics could do more than create cool creatures, they could express ideas. They could be psychological, existential, or just deeply, viscerally disturbing. You can feel Videodrome's influence in everything from *The Fly* and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* to *The Matrix*. Every time someone plugs into a digital world or fuses with a machine on screen, there's a trace of Cronenberg's and Baker's living flesh.

Pan's Labyrinth

December 11

Real Shadows and Real Monsters

By Jaime Lintott

Pan's Labyrinth 2006

When Pan's Labyrinth came out in 2006, most fantasy movies were busy chasing bigger and flashier CGI effects. Guillermo del Toro did the opposite. He told a quiet, brutal fairy tale set during the Spanish Civil War and somehow made it feel both realistically magical and painfully real at the same time.

As usual del Toro went old-school and put actual creatures on the set.

Del Toro has always had a tenderness toward monsters. Growing up, he clung to creature features. While the world around him could feel unpredictable and violent, movie monsters had faces and emotions. He's said that, as a kid, he felt safer with the Creature from the Black Lagoon than with some of the adults around him. You can feel that empathy throughout Pan's Labyrinth.

To bring those creatures to life, del Toro teamed up with David Martí and the artists at DDT Efectos Especiales to create two uniquely beautiful and horrific creatures. Both creatures are played by legendary actor Doug Jones. Standing at 6'4, tall and skinny, Jones is a presence and perfect canvas for creature work.

While other fantasy films build whole new universes, del Toro likes to hold up a mirror. His monsters are never just monsters. They're symbols. And this is why practical effects are the soul of his films. His creatures and his worlds have weight. They cast real shadows. If they'd been computer generated, you'd feel safer. But del Toro is not interested in audiences feeling safe and fairy tales aren't supposed to feel safe. By the end, you realize the monsters in del Toro's films are rarely the dangerous ones. The real monsters are already here.

The Thursday Film Series

Movies for Movie Lovers

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the Kamloops Film Society for
all that you do.

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**THURSDAY
FILM SERIES**