

## Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: A Classic Horror Film revisited - The return of **Halloween** to the big screen this past October - November 2006

Note: The following discussion of **Halloween** contains some plot details which could be considered spoilers.

This column looks very much like the last one you say? Well, that's because it is very similar. Just a month after the two-night only re-release of **A Nightmare on Elm Street** to theaters came the same deal for **Halloween**. It's a funny thing that this happened, as a good friend and I had recently been discussing movies and remakes, and he mentioned the idea of re-releasing older films to theaters. And now it looks like this could become a trend. We'll have to wait and see if more classic films follow these two, but I for one think this is a cool idea. After all, it's probably safe to say that most horror fans have a favorite film they either missed (for whatever reason) when it was originally out in theaters, or just haven't seen on the big screen in a long time. I say put those movie screens to good use. But I digress...

\* **Halloween** is rightly considered by many to be one of the most original, and influential, slasher films ever made, and arguably the movie that ushered in the golden era of this horror film subgenre which began in the late 1970's and continued through the late 1980's. For the uninitiated, the plot concerns a young boy named Michael Myers who stabs his sister to death one Halloween night in 1963. It's never explained what made him do this, and the opening scene ends with Michael's parents finding him with a blank look on his face holding the bloody knife. Following this he sits silently in an institution for fifteen years, before suddenly snapping out of his trance on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1978. He steals a car, escapes from the facility, and heads back to Haddonfield, Illinois, where he committed the first murder. Dr. Sam Loomis (Donald Pleasence), who was his doctor during his time in the institution, and who has come to believe that he is pure evil, follows

him to Haddonfield in hopes of stopping his impending murder spree. Michael's potential victims include a shy teenager named Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) and several of her more outgoing friends.

Unlike the visceral ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***, this film from director John Carpenter is much more subdued both in terms of violence and gore, and in terms of pacing. And by those markers it's also safe to say ***Halloween*** definitely is tame by today's horror movie standards. Yet despite the fact that it lacks buckets of blood, the movie still retains its power to be unsettling and compelling due mainly to the strong sense of atmosphere and the strong performances from the cast. Haddonfield, Illinois with its suburban houses and small town environment presents the same sense of underlying dread, the same sense of there being something lying just below the surface, as the town of Springwood does in ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***. This is a strength both films share. However the film ***Halloween*** is all about and tightly entwined with the season, and visions of leaves blowing across the sidewalks and children going door to door in costumes give this film an unforgettable backdrop all its own. Add to this the characters immersed in this setting and a gripping film quickly emerges. Laurie Strode and her friends are, as Dr. Loomis puts it, unknowingly lined up for the slaughter, with Michael Myers being the mysterious and seemingly unstoppable killing machine. The young actors all portray their roles well, with Jamie Lee Curtis being very convincing as a level-headed, intelligent, but ultimately naive young suburban teenager. However the most powerful presence in this movie is easily veteran actor Donald Pleasence as Dr. Sam Loomis. His compelling characterization as a man on the edge who will do anything to stop the evil is what really anchors the film. Suffice it to say the scenes where Dr. Loomis describes what he believes Michael to be are almost as powerful and frightening as the scenes depicting Michael's violent murders. Watching the good doctor race against time and against the odds to stop what is to come is at the heart of what makes ***Halloween*** a great film.

In addition to the atmosphere and strong cast performances, the movie (like all classic films) has some unforgettable moments and scenes. One particular scene that I still find to be incredibly effective takes place towards the end of the film when Laurie thinks she has killed Michael. Laurie is in the foreground with Michael lying on the floor in the background seemingly dead, when all of a sudden he sits up and very slowly comes after her again. This is a scene where no loud shock music is needed, and the brilliant filmmaking of John Carpenter really shines. Then, a bit later Laurie tearfully asks Dr. Loomis if that (Michael) was the boogeyman, to which Loomis responds "As a matter of fact... it was." This is another unforgettable moment to say the least.

While ***Halloween*** is certainly not a perfect film, it's safe to say the audience I viewed it with was very captivated by the movie. I was watching the film with a fairly full house and things stayed pretty quiet throughout much of the running time. The only exceptions I can recall were some instances of campy valley girl dialog from Laurie's friend Lynda (P.J. Soles). This however goes back to what I mentioned in the previous column about ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***, with dialog needing to be ultra-hip in order to avoid eliciting laughter from young audiences. All in all my experience viewing this horror classic on the big screen for the first time was a good one. So what's next? - Perhaps a Dario Argento film?

\* One influential slasher movie which predates ***Halloween*** is ***Black Christmas***. This 1974 film is a holiday-themed story about a group of sorority girls who first begin

receiving obscene phone calls, and then are terrorized by a psychotic murderer. Although not as widely recognized as ***Halloween*** (despite an upcoming remake being released by Dimension Films), it has been said the similarities between the two movies are undeniable.