



# HALLOWEEN: A HORRIFIC FILM SPACE

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Nowadays Halloween Night is popular around the world. It is associated with America, pranks, costumes, spooky candies, witches, and ghosts. Cinematically, this night took center stage when John Carpenter's *Halloween* was released on 25 October 1978. This film presented a new kind of faceless monster that was "purely and simply evil."<sup>1</sup> This is "the bogeyman;" an antisocial person who cannot stop murdering and destroying everything. In *Halloween*, Michael Myers is the dehumanized bogeyman character who returns to his hometown, Haddonfield, to massacre its citizens. The Halloween costumes concealing identities through masks, which allow Myers to move undetected, reinforce a sense of danger. The film alludes to prejudice toward the Pagan origins of Halloween (Rogers 2002, 11).

According to David J. Skal, the simultaneity of John Carpenter's work with Halloween urban legends like poisoned candies or razor blades in apples can be explained because "Halloween, the one major holiday that was unofficial and therefore uncontrolled, was a natural magnet for American anxieties about social disconnections. It was also a despiritualized holiday ripe for new myths and rituals" (Skal 2016, 163).

In this article, I will analyze three narratives based on the horrors of Halloween: the hybrid technological-supernatural (*Halloween III: Season of the Witch*, Tommy Lee Wallace, 1982), the satanic (*Night of the Demons*, Kevin S Tenney, 1988) and the realistic (*House of 1000 Corpses*, Rob Zombie, 2003). These movies show that anxieties around this day are influenced by their historical context. *Halloween III* focuses on Irish witchcraft and technology which is a contrast with the first two films of the franchise. In *Halloween III*, the danger originates in technological dark arts that harm children via TV commercials. In the 1970s, pseudoscience had intermingled scientific ideas with

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Samuel Loomis (Donald Pleasance) describes Michael Myers using those words which highlights the dehumanization of the monster (JazzyUte, 2007).



the paranormal, leading to preposterous claims of (Burnham 1987, 227-229) alien arrivals or astrology. The invasion of demonic pagan forces by TV blurred the frontiers between monstrosity and normalcy (Pinedo 2004, 93), reflecting a new postmodern horror.

*Night of the Demons* is also set on Halloween and follows the 1980s horror formula of a group of teenagers celebrating a party without parental supervision in an isolated place. Furthermore, the film adds other ingredients like demonic possession, sexual temptation and empowered female villains able to transform young boys and girls into monsters. Thus, Halloween night transgressions and the Satanic Panic converged, leading to youths holding séances, invoking the demons, and devoting themselves to lesbianism.

Historically, the Satanic Panic was the North American obsession that pop culture provided youths different initiation rituals to become Satanism (RPG games, heavy metal music...). It also simplified complex social problems and spread fear throughout America, encouraging diverse individuals to join to fight against satanism (Victor 1993, 226). Consequently, several youth culture products like heavy metal and role-play-games were targeted as evil proofs of Satanic activity. *Night of the Demons* displayed the anxiety of these practices and turned demons into the embodiment of those paranoid fears.

Finally, *House of the 1000 Corpses* relies on the cultural trauma of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Set in the 1970s, the film tells the story of two couples who drive into the deep South to find information about serial killers, only to discover that the legendary Dr. Satan (Bill Moseley) exists and is the ones who they are spending Halloween with. Indeed, it is his and his family's house and lab where they are tortured and killed. Like John Carpenter's *Halloween*, the disturbing characters in *House of the 1000 Corpses* could move undetected on Halloween due to that night's scary atmosphere. The most striking instance of this in the film is the scene of the Firefly family forms a death-like parade while wearing white and red tunics. The protagonists, turned into victims, are dressed as rabbits and walking freely. Halloween night allows them to move undetected because sinister performances and practices are commonplace.

In *House of 1000 Corpses*, Halloween night also sets the stage for a 1970s redneck monster<sup>2</sup>. The use of this character type highlights the cultural trauma of 9/11. These monsters who threaten, torture, and kill middle-class American girls and boys destabilize the idealized nationalism linked to American Exceptionalism and reveal the inherent brutality within domestic settings (Blake 2008, 147). Rednecks, hillbillies,

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<sup>2</sup> They are inbred, savage rural Americans, stereotyped in movies like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) or *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972).



and backwardness recalled that poverty and inequality coexisted with progress and wealth. The illusion of security that was shattered after the 9/11 terrorist attacks unleashed strong fears of violence and Halloween was again portrayed as a dangerous night used as a staging ground for cultural trauma. Once more murders, torture and pain on Halloween night warn about the dreadful consequences of a lack of surveillance which could create social instability.

The pagan background of Halloween triggered various discourses that point out the danger of allowing the youth to be free. The malleable shape of Halloween fears (supernatural, demonic, and realistic) depended on historical contexts pervaded by conservatism, overwhelming violence and fear of external threats.

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