

Rotted Pumpkin: "Halloween" and "Balls of Fury"

Written by Mike Schulz

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HALLOWEEN

On the list of 1970s horror films that absolutely, positively did *not* demand a remake, John Carpenter's spare, suggestive, and deeply frightening

Halloween

would have to place right near the top. If, however, a 21st Century revamp was inevitable (and, Hollywood being Hollywood, it was), I would have thought Rob Zombie the ideal choice for the task, as the director's

House of 1000 Corpses

and

The Devil's Rejects

were relentless, darkly funny, and unapologetically nasty entertainments with a low-rent style that captured the spirit of '70s exploitation terror to perfection. Who better suited to bring Michael Myers back to life?

Having seen Zombie's offering, I'm thinking the answer might be: just about anyone else.

Instead of employing his talents in the service of *Halloween*, Zombie has shaped *Halloween* to fit his talents, and this turns out to be a disastrous mistake; brutal but not the least bit scary, the

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movie is crude, senseless, and fantastically boring. If you want to understand everything that Carpenter got right with 1978's

Halloween

, watch Zombie's endeavor; he gets nearly every element in it shockingly

wrong

We may as well begin with the prologue, because - as opposed to Carpenter's sinister, five-minute preamble - it takes up a full third of the movie's 110-minute running length. In his previous works, Zombie displayed a gleeful complicity with his killers, so it was probably inevitable that he'd want to poke around Myers' brain and imagine just what it was that turned a 10-year-old boy into an unstoppable babysitter-killing machine. But what possible point could there be to "understanding" Michael Myers? Doesn't empathy just make the character *less* frightening?

Yet even with the director insisting that we see the character as human, Zombie gives us no reason to *believe* it. We see the pre-teen enduring abuse by his stepfather (a desperately over-the-top William Forsythe) and some kids at school, but despite the almost ridiculously vulgar insults directed at him, there's nothing here to suggest that Myers is

driven

to madness - he seems more than capable of defending himself verbally - and his mom (the director's wife, Sheri Moon-Zombie) is fiercely devoted to him; instead of clarifying Myers' backstory, Zombie's narrative additions just confuse the issue.

Zombie's wanting us to feel the character's pain is a major error in judgment, but almost nothing about this re-imagining of Carpenter's classic *isn't* one. Instead of making the adult Myers a bogeyman of average physical size, Zombie presents us with an enormous, hulking beast, which leads to all sorts of logistical questions. (How did that scrawny kid get so powerful after being locked in a cell for 16 years? How do his victims not see him coming from a mile away?) Instead of giving us a rooting interest in Myers' potential victims, so his monstrosity has some weight, Zombie makes everyone in the film - including heroic Laurie Strode (Scout Taylor-Compton) - a foul-mouthed, nattering bonehead, as deserving of their fates as the white-trash psychopaths in

The Devil's

Rejects

of using

Halloween

's signature piano score to increase the suspense, as Carpenter did so effectively, he employs it indiscriminately throughout the movie, even when nothing remotely spooky is happening on-screen. (You become inured to the music 10 minutes into the film.)

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There are moments in this *Halloween* that do make you jump, but only because the soundtrack blares at you whenever Myers "unexpectedly" appears from out of the darkness; it's the cinematic equivalent of sneaking up behind someone and popping a balloon. More often, though, you're likely to be laughing derisively: at the adult Myers' grunge-rocker hairdo, which makes him resemble *The Addams Family's* Cousin Itt; at the distracting emptiness of mental-hospital scenes, where Myers is apparently the only patient (was there no budget for extras?); at Malcolm McDowell, whose portrayal somehow manages to make Donald Pleasance's original performance as Dr. Loomis look like the model of acting restraint.

And whenever you're not giggling at *Halloween's* staggering ineptitude, you're cringing at its utter tastelessness; the word "gratuitous" doesn't begin to describe Zombie's penchant for fixing his camera on blood-soaked, naked teenage girls. (Zombie is doing an Eli Roth here, and not doing it particularly well.) Up until now - in the press, at least - Rob Zombie hasn't had fans so much as apologists, some of us who were determined to look beyond his films' carnage and T&A and applaud their underlying wit.

n *Hallowee*
is so
unremittingly awful that it makes me want to apologize for being an apologist.



BALLS OF FURY

You know how, in certain undemanding roles, Christopher Walken doesn't seem to be delivering a performance so much as a determinedly eccentric Christopher Walken impression? In the ping-pong comedy *Balls of Fury*, which features him as a vaguely Asian bad guy named Feng, he's doing even *less*; the actor's barely conscious mutterings suggest Christopher Walken doing Kevin Pollak doing Kevin Spacey *doing*

Christopher Walken. The entire, wholly unfunny movie feels similarly exhausted; *Balls of Fury*

's best joke concerns a dead panda, and ironically, he's the liveliest thing in it.