

## HALLOWEEN: TWENTY YEARS LATER

The new Halloween movie is confusingly referred to as *Halloween H2O* on the posters. Don't worry. It's not *Halloween at Sea*. Rather, H2O is the marketing department's catchy abbreviation for its true title, *Halloween: Twenty Years Later*. I'm delightfully surprised to say that it's a relentlessly entertaining and extremely well-made film.

I was expecting a cheesy cash-in on the original, John Carpenter's nerve-shattering *Halloween* (1978). Rather, the filmmakers have recognised that *Halloween Three* through *Halloween Six* have been just that, should never have been made, and have conveniently decided that they don't exist. *Halloween* and *Halloween Two* (1982), both starring Jamie Lee Curtis and Donald Pleasance, have been considered authentic, and this new one effectively - extremely effectively - concludes what can now be considered a terrific terror trilogy.

The ace in the hole is Curtis. She is so convincing in this movie as to give it the air of a truly high-class venture. Her character Laurie Strode has become an alcoholic paranoiac due to the terrors of twenty years ago, when she was stalked and almost murdered by her deranged brother. Now, although she saw him burn savagely at the end of *Halloween Two*, she cannot escape the feeling that he is alive and continues to want to kill her. Of course, she's not wrong.

Curtis is so good at making her character's vulnerability believable that you want to leap into the movie and hold her hand (and indeed, share one of her comforting vodkas with her.) It's not a stalkee's vulnerability - this movie is above and beyond that. It's the vulnerability of the seriously emotionally damaged. She has become successful in her new identity (a ruse taken to hide her, "like someone in a witness identification program," from her brother) as the Head Mistress of a prestigious private school in Northern California. However, she is fragile and brittle. She can't let her seventeen year old son (a terrific debut from Josh Hartnett) lead a free life due to her stores of terror and paranoia. More devastatingly, she finds it extremely difficult to let into her life a lovely man who obviously cares deeply for her, the school's guidance counselor (Adam Arkin, in a gentle and charming performance.) In one of the film's many genre-busting well-acted and well-written scenes, she sculls a chardonnay and replaces it with another while he's in the bathroom. She's afraid of everything, including letting him know how damaged she is.

And of course, she's afraid of Halloween - the thirty-first of October. And of course, it's Halloween again. And of course, she has good reason to be afraid. But don't be afraid of this film being predictable. The remarkable thing about it is that it honours the spirit in which the first Halloween was made without repeating the story. This is a character study first and foremost - a star turn for Curtis - that is also completely terrifying like its inspiration. It is also an adrenaline rush. The director, Steve Miner, essentially never lets the suspense drop. It's a remarkable feat and it comes off without a hitch, without a single boring or superfluous moment. Most horror films of this variety ("slasher" pics, as opposed to ghost stories or other supernatural excursions) contain plenty of filler, scenes simply there to pad out the running time between shocks. Instead of filler, we get terrific honest scenes that only add to the

suspense - indeed, are absolutely intrinsic to the suspense. This is a terrific film that happens to contain violent murder (though to its credit it is not particularly gory.) The soundtrack, based on John Carpenter's original, is superbly deployed throughout. The acting is first-rate. If you liked *Halloween* (who didn't?) you can't be disappointed. If you've never seen it, rent it first and then give this one a whirl. If anything, it's even better than the original, and John Carpenter must surely be pleased.