

A dark, atmospheric landscape with jagged mountains and a glowing cave entrance. The scene is dimly lit, with a large, glowing orange light source in the upper right corner, possibly a full moon or a fire. The mountains are dark and jagged, with a prominent peak in the center. A cave entrance is visible in the foreground, with a bright orange glow emanating from within. The overall mood is mysterious and ominous.

REEL TALK

IT'S THE SEASON (A V)
HORROR

WELCOME TO THE REEL TALK SEASONAL HORROR ZINE

Thank you to everyone who helped make this zine possible. From our excellent zine production team, to the amazing contributions from students in our department. This zine contains a compilation of students in the departments favourite seasonal horror films, as well as a fun word search and a quiz to find out which seasonal horror final girl you are. A huge thank you to James Taylor for all the help he has given along the journey of making the zine and another thank you to both James and Tom Hemingway for helping us develop the zine from an idea into the final product you are now reading! I hope you enjoy our zine, we have all enjoyed working on this so much and are hoping you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it. Our zine production team have worked hard to provide the best zine possible, showcasing the diverse tastes of our students and we are so grateful that it is able to be seen in its physical form as we intended.



INTRODUCING THE TEAM...

Awais Fareed: Design Team/Writer/Editor

Hannah Byrne: Design Team/Writer

Char Taylor: Games/Design Team/Writer

Lanna Lau-Lau: Design Team/Writer

Jamie Pakes: Organisation/Planning/Writer

Beth Dykes: Organisation/Planning



HEART EYES

IS MURDER A LOVE LANGUAGE?
HEART EYES AND
THE VALENTINE'S HORROR FILM

When it comes to Seasonal Horror, our minds often jump straight to Halloween horrors, Christmas thrillers, or even the Summer Camp trope of slasher films. Yet, there is a holiday sometimes forgotten in the cold winter months of a new year, St. Valentine's Day.

Heart Eyes, dir. Josh Ruben (2025), is a Rom-Com Horror film depicting a serial killer who targets couples on Valentine's Day. We are introduced through the journey of Ally (played by Olivia Holt) and her failed attempt at marketing jewellery, she then meets Jay (played by Mason Gooding) as he comes into her work to save the day as an award-winning advertiser, after an adorably awkward meet-cute in a coffee shop.

This professional battle is stunted as they are forced to fight for their lives at the hands of this masked serial killer nicknamed "Heart Eyes". Targeted by the murderer despite the pair lacking any romantic involvement, this battle to survive however, becomes their first date. What the film lacks in its script and acting initially, is made up for by the film's brilliant action-horror sequences and special effects, creating some brilliant gore sequences. Heart Eyes showcases brilliant fight choreography and unique death scenes. Yet, as it is a Valentine's Day Rom-Com after all, we are also treated to a beautiful shopping montage as best friends try to decide Ally's outfit for her work date.

The connection between that February 14th Holiday and the Horror genre is undeniable, stay with me, as horror and romance share the same key values and iconography. What makes your heartbeat? Makes your blood pump or gives you butterflies in your stomach? Well both making eye contact with your crush, or being chased by a masked serial killer of course....



BY KATIE
CHADWICK

Well the mask may cause conflicting feelings for some people anyway, looking at you BookTok and Scream fans...

It makes you wonder, if there is more to this connection than just shared emotional responses, that perhaps the film is giving a commentary on the modernised dating scene which has undergone mass media convergence in the past decade or two, using dating-app optics to modernise the "couples under siege" trope. Perhaps the real horror is using algorithms to meet potential life partners.



As well as this, it could be providing a social commentary on the male loneliness epidemic and femicide. As women face huge threat and danger in the dating scene, often at risk of violence or assault. And for men, technology only reinforces their isolation and struggle to open up/be vulnerable with friends, instead of encouraging discussion and companionship.

Ruben's Heart Eyes offers a lovely break from the typical themed/seasonal horror films with a unique genre blend of rom-com and horror, centred on a holiday which celebrates love and romance. And if you can get past the direct-to-video nature of the film and certain cringeworthy scenes, it is well worth a watch. <3



TOGETHER (2025) - THE NEW VALENTINES DAY ROM COM?

BY HANNAH BYRNE

I have very mixed feelings about 2025's 'horror film of the year', *Together*, Michael Shank's directorial debut. It is a well filmed horror, with a fantastic concept, great suspense and lighting. The pacing is not the best. Everything is wrapped up in a rushed final half with a flat ending - which is a shame given the unique premise of the film.

Tim (Dave Franco) and Millie (Alison Brie) are a codependent couple, who have been together for so long they aren't quite sure what they liked about each other in the first place. Like all couples in this genre, instead of healthy communication, they move into a creepy house in the woods.



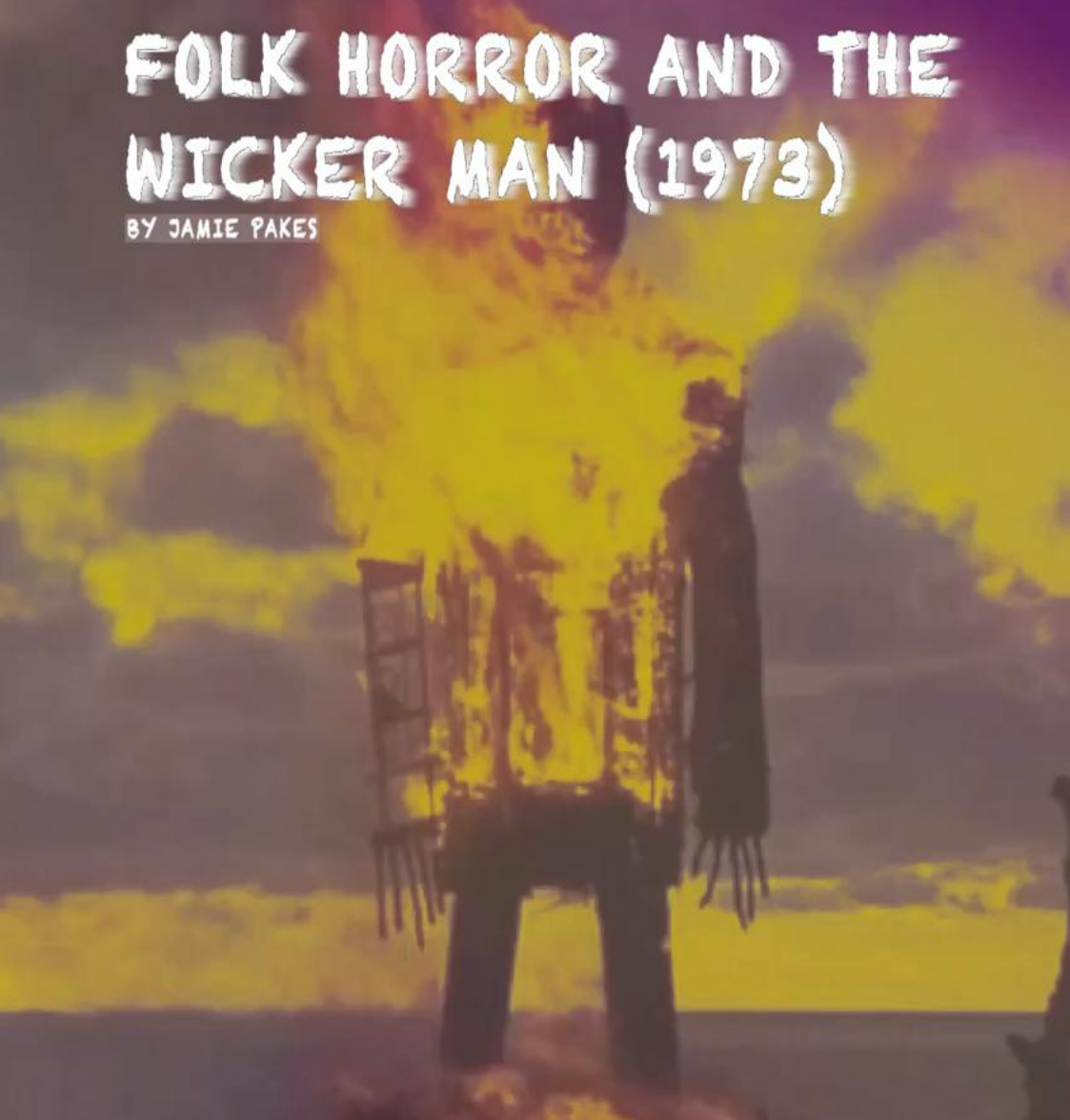


After drinking some strange water in a cave on a hike, as you do, they begin to slowly start to fuse together.

There are some fantastic moments of body horror which are absolutely cringe inducing. Have you ever made a joke about a couple you know fusing into one person? This takes that very literally, making it the perfect dark Valentine's film! If you're single, you can revel in the film's humour as it pokes fun at toxic codependency. If you're taken, there may not be the same appeal, but you can be relieved that Franco and Brie's marriage survived while filming this.

FOLK HORROR AND THE WICKER MAN (1973)

BY JAMIE PAKES



Spring may seem a strange season for horror, associated far more with rebirth, nature and Sunshine than death, danger and darkness. But this is where folk horror can step in, a genre which often takes the beauty of a Spring or Summer landscape and laces it with an ominous edge. *The Wicker Man* is generally regarded as one of the earliest and defining folk horror films, forming an unholy trinity along with *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *Blood On Satan's Claw* (1971). Police Sergeant Howie is sent to the remote island of Summerisle to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a little girl. He arrives on the idyllic island expecting full cooperation, but is told by locals that the little girl never existed. This is impossible, and soon his investigation spirals into paranoia that the whole island is in on some sinister plot to sacrifice the young girl to their Pagan Gods.



Everything about the island seems slightly off. It is perhaps too idyllic. The people live too harmoniously, they are too happy, and the island's leader, Lord Summerisle, seems almost too beloved, emphasised by Christopher Lee's off-putting but undeniable charisma. This creates a unique kind of horror less interested in jump scares than in making the viewer question their own sanity. Since the horror is so hard to locate, impossible to directly put a finger on, the viewer can never fully confront and therefore dispel it.

As the film goes on and the island seems to remain the joyous, peaceful bastion of an older Scotland, the viewer begins to question their own judgment of this place. The best of folk horror often comes when faced with the notion that the dichotomy between monster and victim isn't as clear-cut as it may at first seem, forcing the viewer to question the ideals that have made them judge this seemingly innocent Pagan community so harshly. The Spring setting only emphasises this, associating the islanders with Sunny days and blooming flowers rather than the typical darkness and decay. By the time the film was over, many viewers found themselves siding with the islanders, identifying with them far more than the stuffy, rigid, moralistic Howie. Based on interviews with director Anthony Schaffer, it seems that this was not the intended effect, which only serves to make it more fascinating, as if the islanders have taken on a life of their own and are reaching through the screen to the viewer.

Is Summerisle really just a tranquil, slightly eccentric Pagan community? Or is there something evil lying behind those rolling hills and smiling faces? It is this question that haunts the film and makes it so memorable that it became instrumental in spawning a whole subgenre of horror. As to its answer, I will leave that up to you.

THE HORROR OF SUPER DARK TIMES

BY HANNAH ALON



Being halfway into November, and having said our last farewells to Halloween, we can throw out our jack-o' lanterns for flashy festive lights in preparation for the festive month of December. The dark coming-of-age film *Super Dark Times* feels especially fitting for the transition between the two holidays. Much of the film's spectacle is anchored in its blending of seasons; muted yellow tones and golden hues of autumn overlay the wintry overcast skies and bare branches.

Set in 1996 in an atmospheric suburban American town, best friends Zach (Owen Campbell) and Josh (Charlie Tahan) are just two typical teenage boys; endlessly hormonal and carefree. It is then no surprise that one day their mindless antics, involving a katana, ends in a blood-stained tragedy. This turns a seemingly innocent coming-of-age story to a malevolent tale that embarks on revealing the dark side of the human psyche. For the rest of the film, what ensues is the unravelling of a friendship, one's mental descent into darkness, and even more blood-shed.

The story centres around this one avoidable incident which seems to slowly consume the boys from within, especially Josh who was the perpetrator of the accidental killing of his friend, Daryl (Max Talisman). Following the death, the boys decide it is better to hide their crime, doing so by hiding the body deep in the forest among a bed of fallen leaves while chucking the bloodied katana in a hole in the ground.

Unlike the average tragedy thriller which might lose itself in the question of 'Will they get caught?', *Super Dark Times* solely explores the profound weight of guilt and trauma imposed on these characters. The film doesn't compel us to anticipate the characters' inevitable reckoning, as showcasing their downward descent into darkness makes for a much more intriguing watch - who doesn't love a bit of schadenfreude?

So if you're looking for a film that will keep you spooked while still channelling that late autumn feel, this coming-of-age-turned-thriller-turned-horror might be one to consider adding to your watchlist.

"IT WAS A FUCKING ACCIDENT"



ADAPTING HORROR: CLOWN IN A CORNFIELD (2025)

BY AWAIS FAREED



Clown in a Cornfield is a perfect Autumn and Halloween season watch or just a fun watch in general. The film is set during Autumn, which makes it a perfect addition to the discussion of Seasonal horror films. The film, which is based on the book series of the same name by Adam Cesare, revolves around seventeen-year-old Quinn Maybrook, who has just moved to the town of Kettle Springs after the death of her mother. This seemingly quiet town presented the perfect opportunity for a fresh beginning, with her dad being hired as the new town doctor. A lot of the tense terror of this film takes place in the town's Cornfield; a particularly terrifying scene from the third act springs to mind. The film uses the trauma of the town's factory burning down to its advantage, with the iconic figure associated with the factory and thus the town, Friendo the Clown, being the film's primary villain. Friendo the Clown goes from being the faux villain of Quinn's friends' horror YouTube videos to being a very real threat and villain. Without spoiling too much, the film takes some interesting and unexpected turns, has some pretty fun jokes, a distinguishable horror villain, likeable characters and tantalisingly creepy scenery. It is not the stereotypical "small town is evil" film I was expecting, but it is a rather distinctive slasher film that is a perfect entry into the teen horror canon. A pleasant surprise, and I hope to see the sequels getting adapted soon.

FOUND FOOTAGE HORROR AND LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL (2023)

BY SONIA NAOROZY



Late Night With the Devil (2023) is an independent supernatural horror film set in the 1970s. Through the use of found footage, it follows the late-night talk show host, Jack Delroy, and his attempt to revive his falling ratings through a special one-off Halloween broadcast, featuring multiple guests of supernatural association: a psychic/medium, a sceptic former illusionist and a parapsychologist, accompanied by her latest subject, a 13-year-old girl allegedly possessed by a demonic spirit.

This seasonal horror stands out for the interesting approach it takes in aligning the audience's perspective. Firstly, its prologue frames the film as a documentary, intended to show the 'master-tape of what really happened that night', through a mix of raw footage from the actual broadcast and clips of the set during commercial break. The film differentiates between what was broadcast on television and what we see as an audience today through black and white filters, which cleverly dictate the narrative as it pushes the limits of exploitation in the entertainment industry.





We'll Be Right Back

Its rich visual aesthetic emphasises a strong loyalty in the recreation of 70s television, which critics praised. However, it's hard not to acknowledge the film's use of generative AI, in animations aiding transitions between commercials and the show. The directors justify that "In conjunction with [their] amazing graphics and production design team, all of whom worked tirelessly to give this film the 70s aesthetic [they] had always imagined, [they] experimented with AI for three still images which [they] edited further and ultimately appear as very brief interstitials in the film". Having to reiterate how incredibly talented and hard-working your team is to justify using AI comes across as in poor taste. It's a disappointing fact to know, although hopefully it doesn't take away from the film's appeal elsewhere.



THE TIMELESSNESS OF I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

BY CHAR TAYLOR



I Know What You Did Last Summer, credited with reviving the slasher genre alongside *Scream* in the 90s, is a summer horror classic. Set in a small coastal fishing town in North Carolina, the film's promise of teenage freedom—fireworks, parades, late-night beach trips and drives—is quickly shattered by a drunken mistake made by four friends. They try to bury their secret, only for it to be unearthed a year later, threatening to put an end to their seemingly endless, magical summer.

Our protagonist Julie James (played by Jennifer Love Hewitt) returns from college to find that the tragedy has torn her friends and their lives apart, leaving them stagnated and lost. The film's bright coastal setting contrasts with the building sense of dread—no twisted forests, dilapidated houses—just the vast roads, beaches and a close-knit community, open and vulnerable to the tragedy that creeps in during the town's celebration of Independence Day. Whilst the villain of the film, a vengeful, hook-wielding fisherman, may not have reached Ghostface levels of iconicity, he certainly makes for a solid slasher killer. Loosely based on the urban legend of the Hook, his mystery identity, shrouded by a black Sou'wester hat, provides us with that extra special touch of mystery and teenage drama.



I Know What You Did Last Summer is more than just your typical, camp slasher with an all-star ensemble cast (Sarah Michelle Gellar as Helen Shivers is my perfect scream queen). It is a tale of consequences to foolish teenage actions, relying less on visceral horror and gore, and on the terror of lingering guilt and regret.





wordsearch

S W H Q I Y U P C M T E R R O R K E
U Y M V Q K X Y G O T H I C S J P Q
B S P I R I T Y X N Q S C R E A M U
L S V N F W P E F X M A S K P I U I
I E C V E C U H C U G Y D N B T Z N
M C G A S A M P T R I L O G Y A R O
E R F S T N P M K B E T R A Y A L X
Y E O I I D K L H I S P I R A L P Q
R T B O V L I I X M M G R A V E Z E
Q A G N A E N N I G H T M A R E K M
I X T I L K T M O N S T R O U S W O
A N C I E N T Q F I N A L E T S C H

word list!




ancient	grave	scream
betrayal	invasion	secret
candle	mask	spiral
equinox	monstrous	spirit
festival	nightmare	sublime
finale	pumpkin	terror
gothic	rat	trilogy



FESTIVE HORROR AND GREMLINS (1984)

BY AVA BISS



Gremlins (1984) remains one of the most memorable entries in the seasonal horror genre. Directed by Joe Dante and produced by Steven Spielberg, the film blends festive charm with chaos, using its small-town Christmas setting as a backdrop for themes of consumerism, responsibility, and the hypocrisy of small-town America. What begins as a cosy tale quickly unravels into pandemonium after the Mogwai, Gizmo, spawns destructive gremlins who turn the season of warmth into a comedic nightmare. What makes *Gremlins* enduring is its ability to balance tones: it is both a family film and a genuinely disturbing horror at times. This duality paved the way for other holiday-themed horror films, showing that the season's cosy atmosphere can make frightening moments even more impactful. From *Black Christmas* to the more recent *Krampus* seasonal horror uses the contrast between celebration and fear to heighten tension and humour.



Gremlins stands out because it understands that holidays are as much about unpredictability as tradition. By mixing sentimentality with subversive thrills, it helped solidify seasonal horror as a playful, imaginative space where filmmakers can explore the darker side of festivities without ever losing the magic that makes the season memorable.



SLEEPAWAY CAMP

CAMPY 80S HORROR OR
PRODUCT OF ITS TIME?
ANNA TILLEY

Released in 1983, in an off year for horror, *Sleepaway Camp* is about as camp as its name suggests. It has all the hallmarks of a low-budget indie horror film; men in crop tops and short shorts, terrible – but inspiring – practical effects, and some iffy morals. The characters are all stereotypes of themselves; the ‘slut’ camp counsellor who picks on the quiet protagonist (Angela), and the well-meaning adults who inadvertently cause more harm than good. While not initially well-received by critics, the film has since garnered a cult following within the horror community.

Sleepaway Camp hits the spot if you’re in the mood for some mindless violence and gruesome kills, all until its final scene. A haunting freeze frame of Angela naked and screaming reveals that she was never in fact Angela. Her brother was the one that survived in the opening scene’s boat accident, but their eccentric aunt didn’t want another son, so she raised Peter as Angela to satisfy her desire to have a daughter.



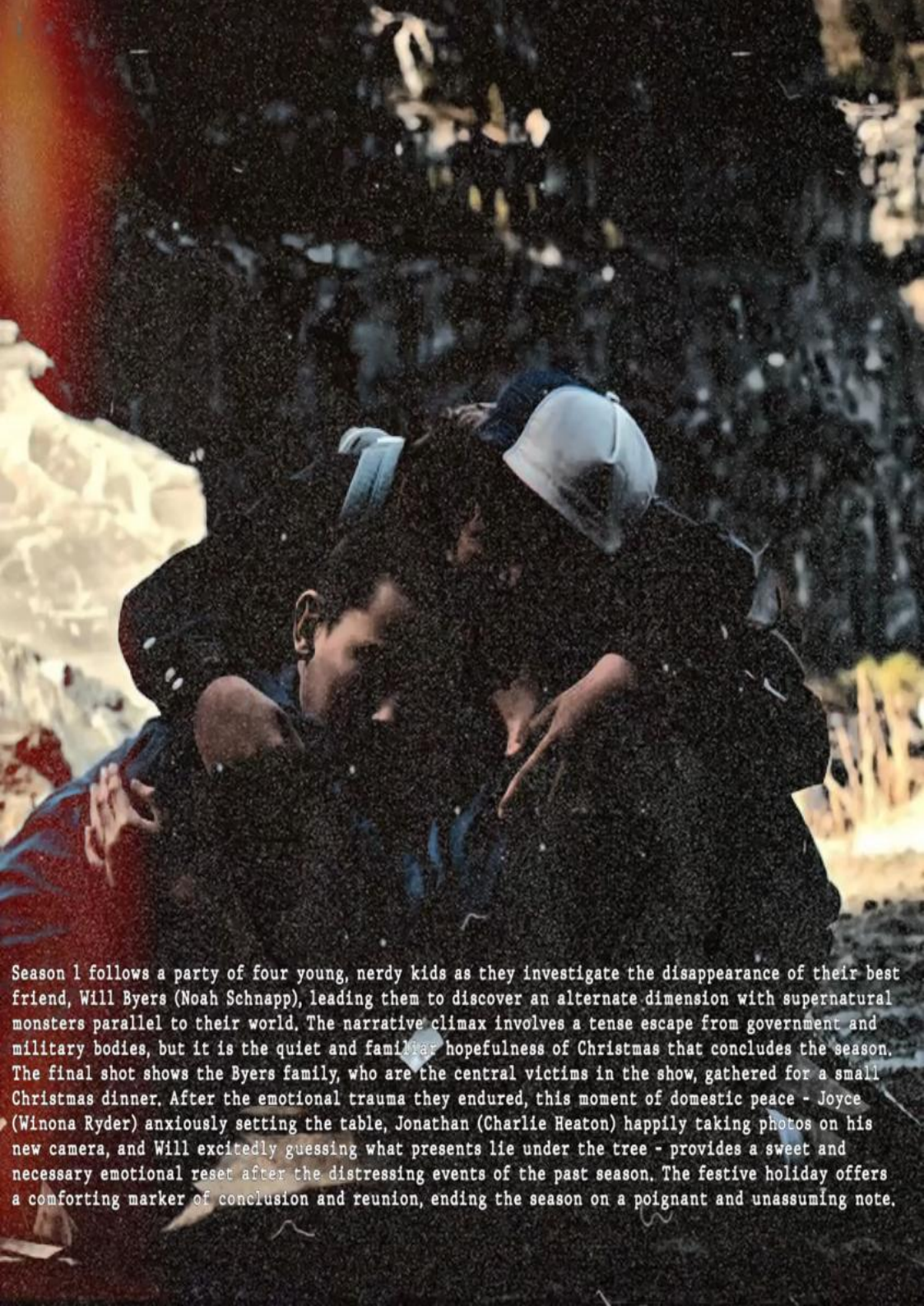
This can be read as an attack on transgender people because the film's antagonist, and murderer of at least ten people, was someone who doesn't conform to traditional gender expression (whether by their own choice or not). The fact that this revelation occurs in conjunction with Angela being outed as the murderer inherently links the two, implying that not truly being a girl is just as bad as killing children! Some argue that the twist could be blaming the strict gender roles enforced upon children for violent outbursts such as Angela's, or even just bullying. But, even so, the final scene's graphic nature uses Angela's body for shock value, suggesting that she is abnormal and freakish. As such, *Sleepaway Camp* is regarded as offensive by today's standards.

Stranger Things – the impact of seasons in narrative storytelling, and questioning the problems with streaming television and distribution

BY SOMIA MAOROZY

Since its debut in 2016, *Stranger Things* has become Netflix's most successful cultural phenomenon. Its compelling blend of 80s nostalgia, horror and coming-of-age drama has captivated millions globally. This article explores the show's portrayal of seasonal holidays and how they are used to contextualise and drive the narrative. I'll also investigate the show's narrative and structural development under distribution models, particularly in the more recent seasons which increasingly highlights the complex and sometimes problematic nature in which we consume streaming television. Each season of *Stranger Things* is strategically centred around one distinct time of year, demonstrating the impact that seasonal holidays have on narrative storytelling and emotional development.





Season 1 follows a party of four young, nerdy kids as they investigate the disappearance of their best friend, Will Byers (Noah Schnapp), leading them to discover an alternate dimension with supernatural monsters parallel to their world. The narrative climax involves a tense escape from government and military bodies, but it is the quiet and familiar hopefulness of Christmas that concludes the season. The final shot shows the Byers family, who are the central victims in the show, gathered for a small Christmas dinner. After the emotional trauma they endured, this moment of domestic peace - Joyce (Winona Ryder) anxiously setting the table, Jonathan (Charlie Heaton) happily taking photos on his new camera, and Will excitedly guessing what presents lie under the tree - provides a sweet and necessary emotional reset after the distressing events of the past season. The festive holiday offers a comforting marker of conclusion and reunion, ending the season on a poignant and unassuming note.



Taking place a year later, Season 2 jumps straight into Halloween celebrations. The holiday works to compound the cast as misfits, being the only ones who turn up to school in costume. Their matching *Ghostbusters* outfits provide an insight into their own personalities. The sequence in which they pose for photos cleverly demonstrates this, Lucas Sinclair (Caleb McLaughlin) flashes his muscles, Dustin Henderson (Gaten Matarazzo) proudly shows off his self-built prop, Mike Wheeler (Finn Wolfhard) scowls at the bottom of the staircase, and Will Byers grins widely, simply happy to be there. The Halloween setting provides other essential plot elements, such as when an infected pumpkin patches foreshadows a dangerous chemical leak at a lab, and when new student Max Mayfield (Sadie Sink) joins the party for trick-or-treating. Tensions are heightened when a group of Hawkins school kids torment Will, with one memorable scene showing us Will's first visions of the Mind Flayer as a bully trips him up. These moments are all specific to events that happen during the Halloween season, demonstrating the impact of the holiday to narrative storytelling. Intriguingly, the season's release on October 27, just 4 days before the actual date of Halloween, immersed the audience in the world of the show by mirroring the time of year and the holiday being celebrated in real life. This engaging distribution strategy sought to elevate the viewing experience.



In juxtaposition to the earlier seasons, Season 3 begins at the peak of summer vacation. The newly built Starcourt Mall becomes the popular hangout spot, adorned with teenagers and kids wasting away their days as mall rats. The setting serves multiple narrative functions: it introduces the fan-favourite and playful dynamic duo, Robin Buckley (Maya Hawke) and Steve Harrington (Joe Keery) as co-workers at Scoops-Ahoy!, whilst also crucially being the disguise to an underground Russian lab. The season finale culminates at Starcourt, where the characters meet for one final battle against the Mind Flayer, as they use fireworks (sold on display for July 4th) to fight off the monster in their own Independence Day celebrations. The vibrant, celebratory backdrop of the summer vacation is violently undercut by the supernatural conflict, making the destruction of the mall and climax of the season more impactful.

Season 4 opens with a new school year, as the core four navigate the newfound pressures of high school. As they struggle to grasp life as freshman, Mike and Dustin find comfort playing D&D with the Hellfire Club, whilst Lucas branches out to play basketball with the popular jocks. The climax in Episode 1, showing the parallel between the Sinclair siblings in their extra-curricular performances at the school (one at a championship basketball game, the other in the final fight of the campaign), is a clever device to highlight the new identities explored and changes within the group as they grow up and grow apart.



Ultimately, the seasonal structure of *Stranger Things* demonstrates how holiday celebrations act as both the backgrounds of and the foundations for narrative progression and emotional depth.

Focusing on distribution, the first three seasons follow a tight and compactly written structure, with eight chapters each, averaging around 50 minutes, being released on the same day. This format adhered to the streaming standard, being strongly catered to the binge-watching culture and can be credited for building the cult fan base surrounding the show. However, the approach to Season 4 was entirely different, raising questions about the nature of television production and consumption. Each episode exceeds the length of an hour, and the final two episodes, released later as a part of a separate volume, could easily be considered feature-length films. The last episode, 'The Piggyback', has a total runtime of 2 hours and 22 minutes. This unprecedented length of quality filmmaking begs the question: how and why is so much effort and resources being put into television?

With *Stranger Things*' production taking at least three years for a mere eight episodes, the lines between television and cinema have been blurred by the show's writers, the Duffer Brothers. When we consider the levels of filmmaking, writing, and production value, should we be classifying modern prestige streaming shows in the same regard as cinematic releases? The final episodes of season 4 being screened in select movie theatres emphasises this shift. Additionally, the release patterns of Season 5 complicate this. Split into 3 volumes, episodes are to be released in a 4:2:2 ratio, on 27th November, 25th December (Christmas Day), and 31st December (New Year's Eve) entangling the series finale with current holiday celebrations.



The highly anticipated finale is set to bring the story and world of *Stranger Things* to its conclusion. With the enormous scale of production and strategic use of holidays made to intensify and immerse the audience in their viewing experience, audiences are left to answer the question: will you be celebrating Christmas and New Years this year, or will you be celebrating the *Stranger Things* finale?

Jamie Campbell Bower on playing the role of Vecna - written by Sonia Naorozy



In light of the highly anticipated season finale, I had the opportunity to attend a talk given by Jamie Campbell Bower, who plays the lead antagonist Vecna in *Stranger Things*

The actor talked briefly about his processes of highlighting and revising scripts, how he'd draw inspirations from both real and fake people to build the backstory and different personalities of his character, including Vecna, 001 and Henry. He also alluded to the mental prep required for the role and how he'd use music to isolate himself on set, often in dark corners away from the cast and crew.

It was a fascinating experience to hear an actor talk about playing the role of such a psychologically complex character. As I am currently studying Screenwriting and Film Production, having looked at how a writer develops a character through a screenplay and what actors contribute to that through their performance and own personal notes/interpretations, it was so inspiring to hear a first-hand account from such a talented actor as Jamie Campbell Bower. Now, I am even more intrigued to see the full extent of the character's arc in the season's last episode.

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WHICH SEASONAL HORROR GIRL ARE YOU?

You're throwing a party!

What's on the agenda?

- A. Alcohol.
- B. Spa day
- C. Costumes and dancing!
- D. Arts and crafts

*Choose a "faceless"
slasher killer.*

- A. Babyface (*Happy Death Day*)
- B. Ghostface (*Scream*)
- C. Dollface (*The Strangers*)
- D. Leatherface (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*)

Choose a female-led biopic.

- A. *Spencer* (2021)
- B. *Hidden Figures* (2016)
- C. *Priscilla* (2023)
- D. *I, Tonya* (2018)

*Are you a social
butterfly?*

- A. I have a lot of friends
- B. I don't trust a lot of people
- C. I prefer to be alone
- D. My loved ones are my everything



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**What are you like with
Halloween costumes?**

- A. I don't take it too seriously
- B. Last-minute DIY
- C. No one knows who I'm dressed as...
- D. I've been planning my costume for a year

**How do you cope under
pressure?**

- A. I'm a nervous wreck
- B. I can usually keep my cool
- C. Bring on the horrors!
- D. I lock in

r e s u l t s



MOSTLY AS
Spring (Sophie,
Bodies Bodies
Bodies)



MOSTLY BS
Summer (Ava
Brucks, I Know
What You Did
Last Summer)



MOSTLY CS
Autumn (Lisa
Swallows, Lisa
Frankenstein)



MOSTLY DS
Winter (Sienna
Shaw, Terrifier)

SEASONAL HORROR: THE GENRE OF HYBRIDITY OF EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (TIM BURTON, 1990)

As part of our theme in seasonal horror, I will be revisiting Edward Scissorhands, one of Burton's most renowned films, and how it can be considered both a holiday and a horror film.

The film is set in a suburban area that is dominated by vivid and bright colours that juxtapose the dark and monochromatic castle where Edward resides, resembling the aesthetics of German Expressionism. The shadows cast on Edward's eyes also cause him to bear a resemblance to the somnambulist Cesare from The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, a quintessential work of German Expressionist cinema. Both Cesare and Edward were depicted as uncanny and feared by the other characters, and were also seen as tools; for example, Cesare was controlled by Caligari to commit murders, and Edward was used as a commodity to pick locks for Jim. At the same time, both characters were also being portrayed as victims, where Cesare innocently holds a bunch of flowers. Meanwhile, towards the end of Edward Scissorhands, Edward attacks Jim out of protectiveness for Kim, depicting him in a more humanlike, emotional light.





What makes *Edward Scissorhands* conform to the theme of 'Seasonal Horror' is the symbolism of snow and Christmas. As an elderly Kim notes towards the end of the film, the neighbourhood would stop snowing without Edward's existence, believing that he is still alive. Edward, despite his resemblance to Cesare, had the ability to change and impact others through his childlike innocence and imagination, transforming the banal suburban area into a place filled with his creations, from unique hairstyles for the neighbours to ice sculptures during Christmas. Symbolising the purity and innocence Edward has brought into the neighbourhood, and his ability to influence others. The irony behind how Edward is separated and shunned from the neighbourhood during a festival revolving around family gatherings causes the ending to feel more tragic and allows the audience to sympathise with Edward, further conforming to the conventions of German Expressionist cinema, dipping into the anxieties of the average audience using looming shadows and the exploration of the strange and bizarre. In the case of *Edward Scissorhands*, the film taps into the anxieties of social isolation and alienation.

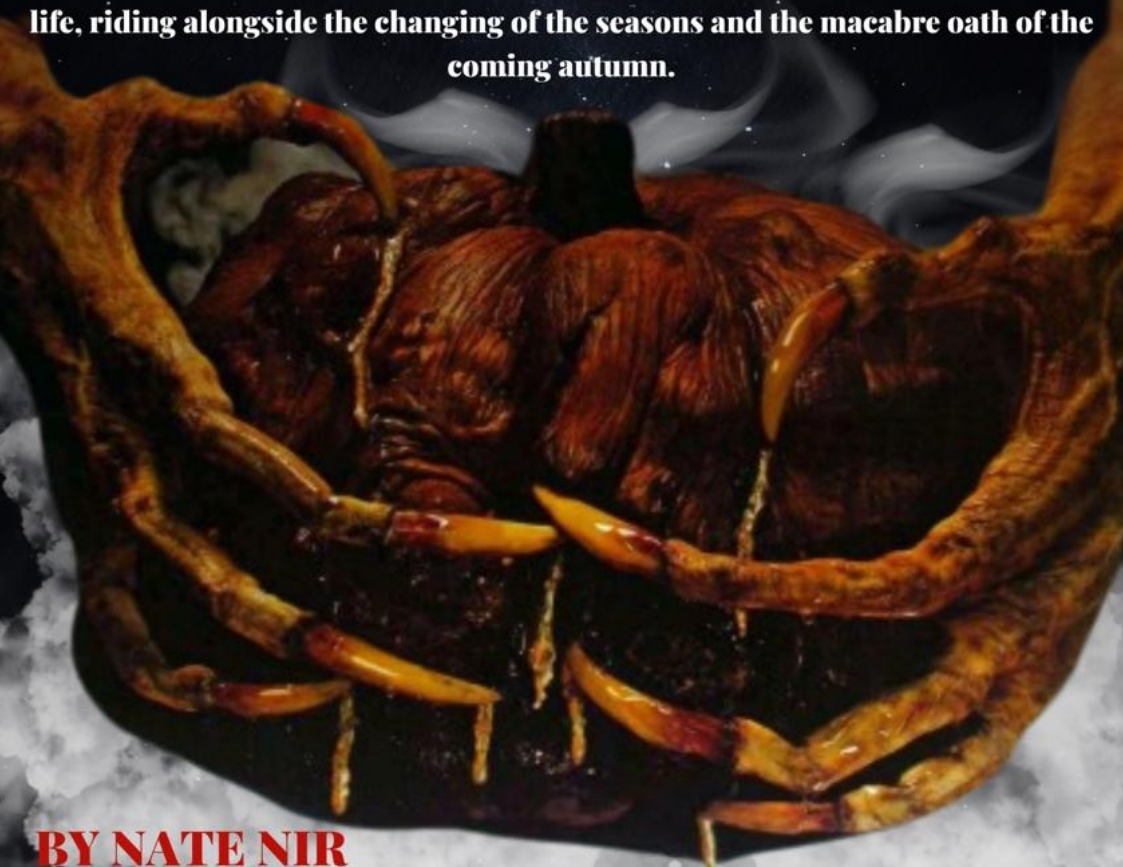
Whether you are already a pre-sold fan of Burton's works or are unfamiliar with his works, *Edward Scissorhands* is a film worth revisiting this Christmas, for its touching narrative and how one might resonate with Edward's alienation.

By Lanna - Lau Lau



A FABLE OF BLOOD: PUMPKIN HEAD (1988) AND THE HARVEST OF SEASONAL HORROR

Pumpkinhead is a strange but fascinating film. On the one hand, it's a narratively predictable, half-baked revenge story that pits the usual immortal, unstoppable embodiment of evil against a group of helpless and very irritating teenagers. However, beneath the dust of its conventionality and simplistic storytelling, something deeper and far more engaging resides. A heartbreaking tale of morality — one that revolves around anger, grief and the influence of paganism and seasonal shifts. My fascination with this film does not rely on jump scares or bloody violence, but rather in its early autumnal atmosphere, the imagery of gentle dust clouds crawling along desolate roadsides, a dry heat that cracks and rusts finicky paint jobs on passing trucks and the basking of the environment in the glow of a setting sun. A campfire ghost story brought to life, riding alongside the changing of the seasons and the macabre oath of the coming autumn.



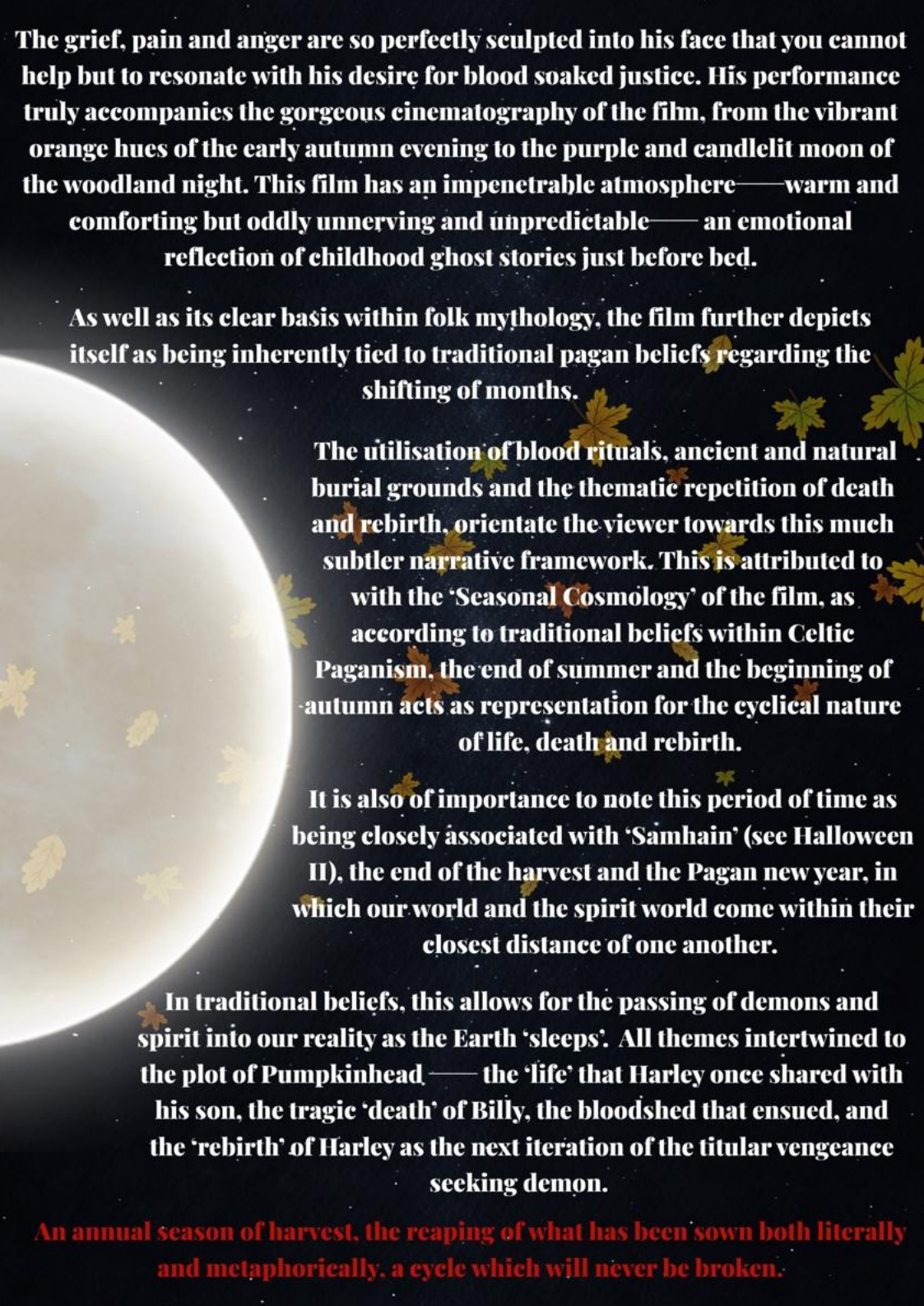
BY NATE NIR

A production of the De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, best known for *Evil Dead II* and *Blue Velvet*, the film was the directorial debut of Stan Winston, the special effects mastermind behind everything from *Aliens* to *Jurassic Park*. The plot itself was born out of a poem of the same name by Ed Justin, written specifically as the basis for the film, and with this angle *Pumpkinhead* frames itself as a tale as old as time. It tells of a promise of vengeance granted to a wronged spirit through supernatural justice, though the price required remains unclear, ultimately laying the foundations for the dark and twisted folklore which the film dances with beautifully.

The narrative's strength comes from its presentation of the distinct relationship between the natural world and the ancient, primal secrets it holds. Magic, witchcraft and rituals remain unexplained and readily accepted, the oaths that come with wrongdoings always require blood. The titular *Pumpkinhead* is not a creature from space or a result of nuclear experimentation, but rather something born from the soil of the Earth itself—a dark and forgotten force and an embodiment of the hidden rage found within the human spirit. *Pumpkinhead* is truly at its best when it embraces its folk influence, acting as an atmospheric and haunting piece on the price of revenge.

The plot follows Ed Harley, a widowed father and shopkeeper deep in the backwoods of America where he looks after his young son Billy. One late evening, while playing with his dog Mushroom, Billy is accidentally struck down and killed by a group of camping teenagers who are dirt biking in the local area.

With the help of a local witch, Ed summons the vengeful spirit *Pumpkinhead* to exact his revenge upon the teenagers, unaware of the cost that such an action will have on his own soul. The standout performance of the film comes with Lance Henriksen, who delivers a truly chilling performance as Harley.



The grief, pain and anger are so perfectly sculpted into his face that you cannot help but to resonate with his desire for blood soaked justice. His performance truly accompanies the gorgeous cinematography of the film, from the vibrant orange hues of the early autumn evening to the purple and candlelit moon of the woodland night. This film has an impenetrable atmosphere—warm and comforting but oddly unnerving and unpredictable—an emotional reflection of childhood ghost stories just before bed.

As well as its clear basis within folk mythology, the film further depicts itself as being inherently tied to traditional pagan beliefs regarding the shifting of months.

The utilisation of blood rituals, ancient and natural burial grounds and the thematic repetition of death and rebirth, orientate the viewer towards this much subtler narrative framework. This is attributed to with the ‘Seasonal Cosmology’ of the film, as according to traditional beliefs within Celtic Paganism, the end of summer and the beginning of autumn acts as representation for the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth.

It is also of importance to note this period of time as being closely associated with ‘Samhain’ (see Halloween II), the end of the harvest and the Pagan new year, in which our world and the spirit world come within their closest distance of one another.

In traditional beliefs, this allows for the passing of demons and spirit into our reality as the Earth ‘sleeps’. All themes intertwined to the plot of Pumpkinhead— the ‘life’ that Harley once shared with his son, the tragic ‘death’ of Billy, the bloodshed that ensued, and the ‘rebirth’ of Harley as the next iteration of the titular vengeance seeking demon.

An annual season of harvest, the reaping of what has been sown both literally and metaphorically, a cycle which will never be broken.

However, this completely fascinating and unique basis for the film is also cause for much of my frustration. Instead of leaning into this unique and original Pagan influenced, folk horror revenge fable, *Pumpkinhead* rather spends much of its latter half following all the basic formula of a standard slasher from the 1980s — as was the craze of the time. Rather than focussing more deeply on Ed, the film falls back on the clichéd ‘final girl’ trope. A repeated formula of constant running from place to place as the killer stalks her and systematically mutilates her friends. Except, instead of a masked psycho murderer, it is rather a seven-foot organically grown pumpkin demon. Unfortunately the two just don’t quite mesh together.



Despite its shortcomings, I will continue to revisit and admire the narrative ambition of *Pumpkinhead*. I truly believe there is a much better film hidden beneath the layer of cliché that traps it. What I can say however, is that in terms of atmosphere, this film acts as a perfect capturing of an early autumnal period. Further valuable for its unique blend of folk and pagan mythology as a clear basis for its horror. The perfect seasonal piece for horror fans, completely scratching the itch of golden-hour haze and the lukewarm air that comes with it. *Pumpkinhead*, while by no means perfect, is memorable.





KRAMPUS

Whilst most known for his cult Halloween favourite, *Trick 'r Treat*, director Michael Dougherty has another holiday classic in 2015's *Krampus*.


Krampus follows Max (Emjay Anthony), a preteen who still believes in Santa Claus, and his dysfunctional family's attempt to have the perfect Christmas.

With the arrival of his extended family, Max is teased by his cousins for his beliefs and tears up his letter to Santa, unwittingly calling upon the monstrous Krampus to show them what happens when you lose the Christmas spirit.

Much like *Trick 'r Treat*, *Krampus* continues Dougherty's themes of respecting holiday customs and this results in an incredibly festive horror film where every single facet of Christmas is made deadly.

Like a modern-day *Gremlins* in its ridiculous mayhem, *Krampus* features killer gingerbread, vicious ornaments, demonic elves, and a disturbingly memorable jack-in-the-box with a detachable jaw, as well as the towering cloven-hooved Krampus.

BY ARCHIE DOUGLAS – HAMILTON



All these are brought to life by a talented design team, prioritising slimy practical effects (although there's some poor CGI here and there). A particular highlight in the film's visuals is a gorgeous animated sequence which neatly provides exposition regarding the titular monster.



The ensemble cast also helps by leaning into the absurdity and giving it their all. Toni Colette and Adam Scott, whilst not given the funniest lines, are great as Max's fighting parents, whilst David Koechner and Conchata Ferrell regularly steal the show as his foul-mouthed relatives. Not everything lands, but the overall sense of fun helps support the weaker lines.

Ultimately, *Krampus* is a highly enjoyable Christmas horror film and, while its message of Christmas spirit is occasionally too earnest, there's plenty of finely crafted horror set-pieces and fantastically designed monsters to satisfy those looking for a Christmas film with a little more bite.

**THANK YOU FOR READING!
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**



I HOPE THIS GOT YOU THINKING
ABOUT WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE
SEASONAL HORROR FILM IS.



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SEASONAL HORROR CONVERSATION GOING!