

Eerie Horror Fest Presents . . .

SCREAM QUEENS

August 2, 2022

Room 33 Speakeasy, Erie, Pennsylvania



Week 1

Suggested Viewing: *Halloween* (1978)

Although earlier films like *Black Christmas* (1974) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) laid the groundwork, John Carpenter's 1978 horror film *Halloween* is considered by most to be the first true slasher film as well as the film that invented the modern notion of the Scream Queen. Independently produced and made for a budget of just \$325,000, it tells the story of an escaped psychiatric hospital patient who returns to his hometown where he brutally stabbed his sister to death fifteen years earlier. By chance he comes across three high school girls and begins to stalk them one horrifying Halloween night. The story is incredibly simplistic but it is elevated by Carpenter's slick direction which owes much to the films of Alfred Hitchcock (particularly *Psycho*) and its central performance by a then just 19-year old Jamie Lee Curtis. Curtis helped create the Scream Queen template with her portrayal of Laurie Strode as the quiet, timid "odd-one-out" in contrast to her more boisterous friends. While they spend their screen time discussing boys and parties, Laurie is outed as being a "whacko" who excels at school and spends her free time reading. This has made her something of a wallflower that, in her words, "guys think I'm too smart", but this difference proves to be to her benefit as she is the only character clever and resourceful enough to fight back against the killer. This formula would be replicated dozens of times in the Scream Queens that followed, but Curtis's Laurie is still the most iconic.

Suggested Reading: [The Slasher Movie Book](#), by J. A. Kerswell (2010)

["The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family"](#) by Pat Gill from the *Journal of Film and Video* (2002)



["Once with a Knitting Needle, Once with a Hanger": Reckoning with and Reworking Carol J. Clover's Final Girl in Halloween \(1978\) and Halloween \(2018\), Peyton Brunet](#)

[Evolution of the Final Girl: Exploring Feminism and Femininity in Halloween \(1978-2018\), Maya Zhou](#)

Week 2



Suggested Viewing: *Scream*

Since its inception, slasher films have been heavily criticized for misogyny and the glorification of violence against women. Many critics have condemned slasher films as having an almost regressively moralistic theme where the carefree and promiscuous girls are punished by the killer and only the pure "virgin" is allowed to live. Although John Carpenter and other filmmakers have flatly denied such interpretations of the films, the stigma has long remained with the subgenre. However, Professor Carol J. Clover found something different in these films. In her article "Her Body, Himself" and later expanded on in her book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Clover observed multiple screenings of slasher films in which the audience (almost entirely male) would seem to cheer on the killer as he went about his grisly business. It seems to assert the critics' take until the climax of the film when the heroine (who Clover dubbed the "Final Girl") faces off against the killer and the audience sympathies completely changed, cheering on the girl as she fought back against the killer. Clover argues that more than moralizing, slasher films seem to be tapping into an old tradition in storytelling called the "Victim Hero" where the heroism is found in the protagonist overcoming and conquering their suffering. Even more interesting, she observed that the mostly male horror audience seemed to have no trouble identifying with the female protagonist. She found that horror fans, who tended to be on the nerdier side of traditional masculinity, could sympathize and empathize with the Final Girl and experienced a kind of vicarious thrill from watching her overcome the threat. Whether one agrees with her conclusions or not, she makes a convincing argument that there is more to the pleasures of horror than simple sadism.

Suggested Reading: "Her Body, Himself" by Carol J. Clover first published in *Representations* 20 (1987)

Suggested Reading: [Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film](#) by Carol J. Clover (1992)

Week 3

Suggested Viewing: *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982)

Slasher films have long been criticized for the objectification of women's bodies, both in the throes of passion and being mutilated by various instruments. But what happens when a slasher flick is presented from an entirely female point of view? This is the fascinating question asked to us by the 1982 Roger Corman production of *The Slumber Party Massacre*. Originally written as *Sleepless Nights* by author and feminist Rita Mae Brown, it was intended to be a parody of the tropes of the genre. However, when purchased by New World Pictures, the story was changed into a more conventional slasher film, much to the dismay of the screenwriter. It was the directorial debut of editor Amy Holden Jones, she was able to look past the sexism of the subgenre and instead found a very feminine undertone to the film. As she described in the documentary *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*, these films present a uniquely female type of fear, what she described as "the fear of getting laid for the first time". The film itself about Trish Deveraux (Michele Michaels) inviting her friends over to stay the night while her parents are away. Unbeknownst to them, an escaped killer armed with a large power drill (easily the most phallic murder weapon ever committed to film) is stalking them during their carefree night. Trashed by critics upon its release, the film has since garnered a cult following due to its unusually strong characterization. As Willow Catelyn Maclay noted, "Men are the ones who have to work to relate to the final girl, but for women we are the final girl. These films belong to us, and in *The Slumber Party Massacre* movies, when women were directing, more of us survived." Whether one agrees that the film provides a feminist twist or is just cashing in on cheap schlock, this statement leaves much food for thought.



Suggested Reading: "[Lined Lips and Spiked Bats: Amy Holden Jones and the Women of 'The Slumber Party Massacre'](#)" by Willow Catelyn Maclay first published in Mubi (2019)

Suggested Viewing: *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film* (2006)
[Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)



Suggested Viewing: *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985)

Throughout their history, horror films have been both praised and criticized for their connecting of sex with death. However, in the 1980s, it was an unfortunate fact that sex and death were horrifyingly linked. This connection led either intentionally or not to one of the strangest horror films ever produced as well as the creation of an anomaly within slasher films: the male scream queen. Set five years after the original, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* follows teenager Jesse (Mark Patton) who is having vivid nightmares about the murderous Freddy Krueger and believes that he is trying to come into the real world with Jesse as a vessel. He tells this to both his best friend Grady and Lisa, his possible romantic interest. He fears that Freddy's influence is overpowering him and that he may become a danger to them and others. Ridiculed upon its release for its (possibly unintentional) homoeroticism, the film was long viewed as the black sheep of the franchise. It has since garnered a cult following and has received some interesting interpretations about the fear of one's own sexuality. Although the filmmakers have denied any intentional homoerotic subtext, some scenes (including one set inexplicably in a gay S&M bar) seem far too overt to be accidental. As a result, it is an interesting look at the fear of homosexuality in its time and place. Released when the AIDS crisis was shaking the gay community to its very core, the linking of sex with death feels more immediate than other horror films and Jesse's fear that his buried desires could pose a danger to his friends is a grim metaphor for a time when homosexual acts could become a death sentence. Mark Patton, who is a gay man though he was closeted during filming, originally blamed the film for tarnishing his acting career but has since come to embrace it for its subtext. His character, despite being male, has all the tropes of a classic "final girl" and Patton has even come to refer to the character as the first male scream queen.

Suggested Reading: "[Welcome to Our Nightmares: Behind the Scene with Today's Horror Actors](#)" by Jason Norman (2014)

Suggested Viewing: *Scream, Queen!: My Nightmare on Elm Street* (2019)

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BONUS

Suggested Viewing: *Jennifer's Body* (2009)

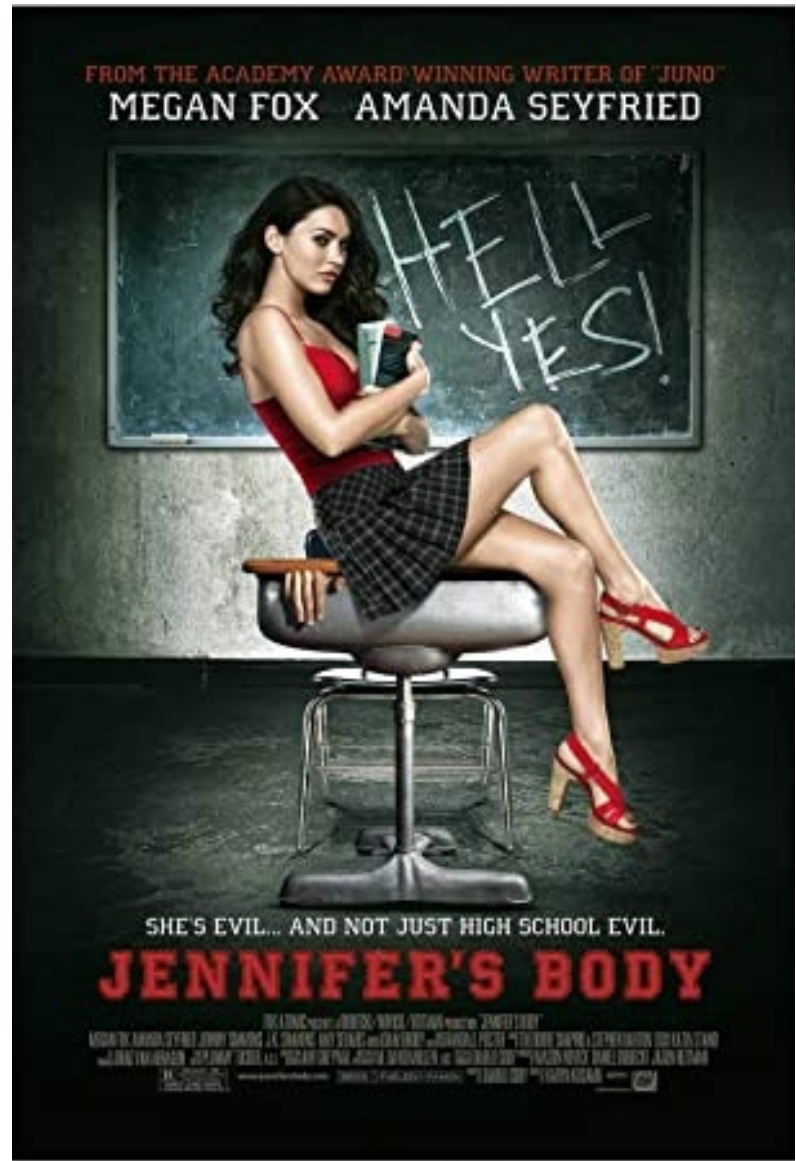
Written by Diablo Cody and directed by Karyn Kusama, this horror/comedy was intended to be a satire of the teen slasher subgenre as well as a deconstruction of the concept behind scream queens. Told from the point of view of Anita "Needy" Lesnicki (Amanda Seyfried) who is the nerdy friend of popular cheerleader Jennifer Check (Megan Fox). One night, after sneaking into a bar to see a rock band, a fire ignites in the bar killing multiple people and Needy spots Jennifer fleeing with the band. When she is seen again, Jennifer appears sickly and drained but she becomes more energetic and confident as several boys in the school begin to disappear. Needy suspects that Jennifer has been possessed by some kind of demon and is feeding on other people to sustain her life force. Upon its release, the film received middling reviews, with many critics complaining about the supposed "stupidity" of the script. Nearly a decade later, it was reevaluated for its stark feminist themes, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement. It is a story about, as Constance Grady notes: "a group of powerful men sacrificing a girl's body on the altar of their own professional advancement". Screenwriter Diablo Cody remarked that the film was marketed wrong, attempting to sell it to male horror fans as some kind of sexy horror spoof. In reality, it is not the sex that is the appeal of the film, but rather the idea of a wronged girl enacting revenge against the world that has wronged her. *Jennifer's Body* is a fascinating twist on the scream queen formula because it takes the helpless victim and turns her into the film's powerful antagonist.

Suggested Reading: [How Jennifer's Body Went from a Flop in 2009 to a Feminist Cult Classic Today](#) by Constance Grady first published in *Vox* (2018)

[What Jennifer's Body Foretold](#), Richard Brody

Suggested Viewing: [Jennifer's Body & the Horrifying Female Gaze](#)

[Jennifer's Body Reunion: Megan Fox & Cody Diablo Get Candid About Hollywood](#)



BONUS

Suggested Viewing: *Last Girl Standing* (2015)

The story of the Final Girl is a story about using one's fortitude and ingenuity to overcome a traumatic experience. But these horror films never address what could be a very important question: what happens after that incident is over and the girl must return to a normal life? This is the question raised in Benjamin R. Moody's underseen and underrated horror film *Last Girl Standing*. Beginning at the aftermath of a massacre, Camryn (Akasha Villalobos) has witnessed all of her friends suffer grisly deaths at the hands of a maniac known as "The Hunter". He would have killed her as well but she manages to evade him and kills him instead. Years later, Camryn is still haunted by this experience but is trying to put her life back together. She soon makes friends among a group of young people and everything seems to be getting back to normal, but she then begins to see visions of The Hunter in her new town. Has he returned from the dead or is it a symptom of her trauma. Less a slasher film and more of a psychological drama, the "horror" in this film is the stress that a traumatic event leaves behind for its survivors. The protagonist's triumph is not when she overpowers and dispatches her attacker, but when she finds the strength in herself to begin living again. The film covers this wonderfully until its confused ending, and as a result, it is unique in its very realistic, very heartbreaking depiction of the quiet life of a "scream queen".

Suggested Reading: "[What's the Deal with Women in Horror Movies?](#)" by Erich Schulte (as "Plexico Gingrich") first posted on [ruthlessreviews.com](#) (2014)

[Girlhood to Monstress: How Women in Horror Have Always Been the Hero & the Villain](#)



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CREDIT & A THOUSAND THANKS TO

Forrest Taylor

For this month's resource guide!