



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

A Nightmare on Elm Street

When a group of teenagers discover they are all having nightmares about the same creepy guy, they realise they must stay awake if they want to stay alive. Often grouped in with the slasher sub-genre that dominated US horror cinema of the 1980s, Craven's most infamous creation was in fact rooted firmly in the supernatural, making Freddy Krueger a different kind of vengeful ghost, whose haunting ground was not a house, but the collective subconscious minds of a generation of vulnerable adolescents.

Michael Blyth, bfi.org.uk

A Contemporary review

Although *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is a screen original, it has all the symptoms of a Stephen King adaptation: a director whose reputation rests on harrowing, personal horror films relaxing with a bogey-man-will-get-you movie; an archetypal small-town setting, populated by fresh-faced teenagers whose milieu is observed with sociological exactitude; an invented monster myth, complete with folkloric trimmings like a skipping rhyme with significant lyrics whose meaning has been forgotten; and the impression that about two hundred pages worth of characterisation has been compressed into cliché details like boozy Ronee Blakley demonstrating her renewed self-respect by throwing away a half-full bottle. The epilogue even features a specific reference to King's world, as Krueger possesses the teenager's red classic custom car and drives them off to an uncertain, doubtless horrible, fate.

Not that Craven has entirely abandoned his own territory. Indeed, he proves that he is capable of a spot of self-plagiarism as he lifts the thing-in-the-bath scene from *Deadly Blessing* and the booby-trapped hallway from *Last House on the Left*. In those films, he used brief, surreally horrifying bad dreams to undercut the normality of the few nonviolent establishing scenes. Here, the nightmares have literally become the whole film, and not entirely to its benefit. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* falls somewhere between the two truly dreamlike modes achieved by *Videodrome* and *Halloween*, but the two strains of nightmare work against each other. While the kissing telephone and the bottomless bathtub are disorienting in the Cronenberg spirit, they get in the way of the relentless, pursuing-monster aspect that Carpenter manages so well. The only original idea in the film – that a dream monster ceases to exist if the dreamer doesn't look at it – turns up too late, and contradicts earlier scenes in which Krueger menaces dozing, unaware victims (it also calls attention to the fact that, since a dream reality can only be subjective, all film dream sequences should be shot with a first-person camera).

Nevertheless, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* does find Craven emerging from his recent career slump (*Swamp Thing*, *The Hills Have Eyes Part 2*, *Invitation to Hell*) with a fine, perhaps definitive, bogey man to back him up. The video censors will doubtless look askance at the do-it-yourself sequence in which Fred Krueger fashions a glove with razor-sharp talons, but the killer's

trademark claw provides the film's scariest images as Krueger slices himself open, slashes his way into the real world, and looms through a distended wall above a sleeping innocent.

Considered as a straightforward co-ed killer film, *Nightmare* is a superior example of an over-worked genre, thanks to Craven's skill at organising individual shock scenes and getting neat performances out of his mostly young cast. Robert Englund, of course, steals all his scenes with porkpie hat, disgustingly striped jersey, and maniacal laugh, but heroine Heather Langenkamp also makes a strong first impression, summing up in one line the fears of an imperilled generation of movie teenagers. 'God', she gasps after several sleepless days and a close call with Fred Krueger, 'I look twenty years old'.

Kim Newman, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1985

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

Director: Wes Craven

©: The Elm Street Venture

Presented by: New Line Cinema, Media Home Entertainment Inc., Smart Egg Pictures

Executive Producers: Stanley Dudelson, Joseph Wolf

Producer: Robert Shaye

Co-producer: Sara Risher

Associate Producer: John Burrows

Production Executive: Stephen Abramson

Production Manager: John Burrows

Production Supervisor: Amy Rabins

Production Co-ordinator: Lisa C. Cook

Location Manager: Craig Pointes

1st Assistant Director: Nick Batchelor

2nd Assistant Director: Peter Graupner

Casting by: Annette Benson

Screenplay: Wes Craven

Director of Photography: Jacques Haitkin

2nd Unit Photographer: Henning Schellerup

1st Assistant Camera: Anne Coffey

2nd Assistant Camera: Tom Vanghele

Mechanical Special Effects: Jim Doyle, Theatrical Engines

Editor: Rick Shaine

Co-editor: Pat McMahon

Production Designer: Gregg Fonseca

Art Department Assistant: Barbara Metzbaum, Don Diers

Set Decorator: Anne Huntley

Set Dresser: Dorree Cooper

Storyboard Artist: Bill Kroyer

Costume Designer: Dana Lyman

Costume Supervisor: Lisa Jensen

Make-up: Katy Logan

Special Make-up Effects: David B. Miller

Title Design: Dan Perri

Opticals: Cinema Research Corporation, Cinopticals, The Optical House

Colour by: DeLuxe

Music: Charles Bernstein

Sound Re-recording Mixer: Jack Cooley

Supervising Sound Editor: Jess Soraci

Supervising Sound Editing: Magnofex

Sound Editor: Al Nahmias

Looping/ADR: Gomillion Sound

Stunt Co-ordinator: Tony Cecere

Animal Wrangler: Jim Picciolo

Cast

John Saxon (*Lieutenant Thompson*)

Ronee Blakley (*Marge Thompson*)

Heather Langenkamp (*Nancy Thompson*)

Amanda Wyss (*Tina Gray*)

Nick Corri (*Rod Lane*)

Johnny Depp (*Glen Lantz*)

Charles Fleischer (*Dr King*)

Joseph Whipp (*Sergeant Parker*)

Lin Shaye (*teacher*)

Robert Englund (*Fred Krueger*)

Joe Unger (*Sergeant Garcia*)

Mimi Meyer-Craven (*nurse*)

Jack Shea (*minister*)

Ed Call (*Mr Lantz*)

Sandy Lipton (*Mrs Lantz*)

David Andrews (*foreman*)

Jeff Levine (*coroner*)

Donna Woodrum (*Tina's mother*)

Shashawnee Hall (*cop*)

Carol Pritkin (*cop*)

Brian Reise (*cop*)

Jason Adams (*surfer*)

Don Hannah (*surfer*)

Leslie Hoffman (*hall guard*)

Paul Grenier (*Tina's mother's boyfriend*)

USA 1984

91 mins

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