

**M**aniac see, manic do. In 1978 a young independent filmmaker named John Carpenter gathered together \$300,000 and created *Halloween* the archetype of what we now know as the "slasher film."

*Halloween* would cough up \$80 million worth of blood and money. And, in its wake, the screens would be filled with ersatz psychopaths slicing and dicing their way for a piece of the all-new horror film pie — the closest competitor being a guy with a hatchet and goalie mask who missed his calling with the Philadelphia Flyers hockey team. Carpenter used to be flattered by the imitation. "But then I realized it wasn't because I'd made a great movie, but because it had made a lot of money."

However, like the song says, there ain't nothin' like the real thing. John Carpenter had more than gore in his head.

And, in the ensuing years, his name has become synonymous with every angle of the dark and fantastic on film — from the horrible symphony of gore in *The Thing* to the gentle Frank Capraesque tear-jerking of *Starman* to the cartoon violence of last year's "kung-fu ghost-story monster-movie" *Big Trouble in Little China*.

So it's only natural that he'd eventually turn to the ultimate bogeyman for screen thrills — Satan himself, the infernal antagonist of Carpenter's latest film *Prince of Darkness*.

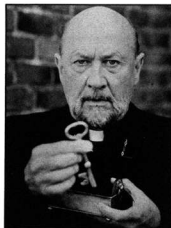
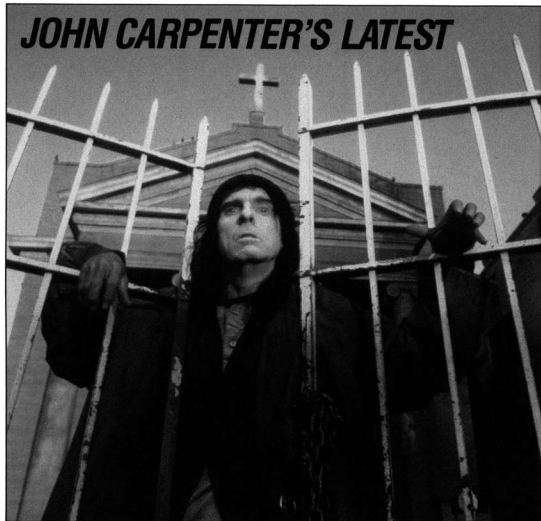
*Prince of Darkness* marks the return of Donald Pleasence (*Halloween*'s doomsaying psychiatrist) to the Carpenter fold. He plays a priest with the inside track on Armageddon who enlists the services of a group of scientists and graduate students to keep the Lord of the Flies in his place.

"It is human nature to be fascinated by the horrible, the forbidden. We seek it out and we challenge it," he says, by way of explaining the antagonistic dynamic in *Prince of Darkness*.

Carpenter, a native of Bowling Green, Kentucky has had a lifelong affinity for screen thrills, even in films not categorized as thrillers. "The first movie my parents ever took me to was *The African Queen*," he says. "And what I remember most is Humphrey Bogart coming out of the water covered in leeches."

"But my monumental experience in film was in 1953 when I was five. My parents took me to *It Came From Outer Space* in 3-D. You had to wear special glasses. The first shot was of the meteor. It came right off the

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screen and exploded in my face. I couldn't believe it! It was everything I'd ever wanted!"

Carpenter's course was well defined during his stint at the acclaimed University of Southern California film school. His actual first feature film — a cheapo sci-fi opus called *Dark Star* — was begun as a school project and finished four years after his graduation (it's now a staple at video stores).

Post-school he went on to revitalize the horror film genre he loved. "The horror film is unique because it is a shared investment; the audience feels common emotions."

"It's like going to a cheap psychiatrist," he adds.

It's not that he's solely devoted to that one particular genre. Carpenter thinks highly of musicals and would like to direct one. "But there are no scripts," he said to the *Toronto Sun*. "And there are no musical stars except Streisand."

Perhaps a horror/musical with Barbra Streisand? Not bloody likely, one supposes.

— Jim Slotek