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Carpenter classic 'The Fog' relies on mood for chills

The simplistic 1980 horror film is one of the last real American ghost movies

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

Ghost stories, at least cinematic ones, seem to have fallen out of mass popularity in this country. There are a number of possible psychological and cultural reasons for this, as well as the reality that bloodless ghosts don't offer the same visceral thrills that audiences want out of their horror films these days.

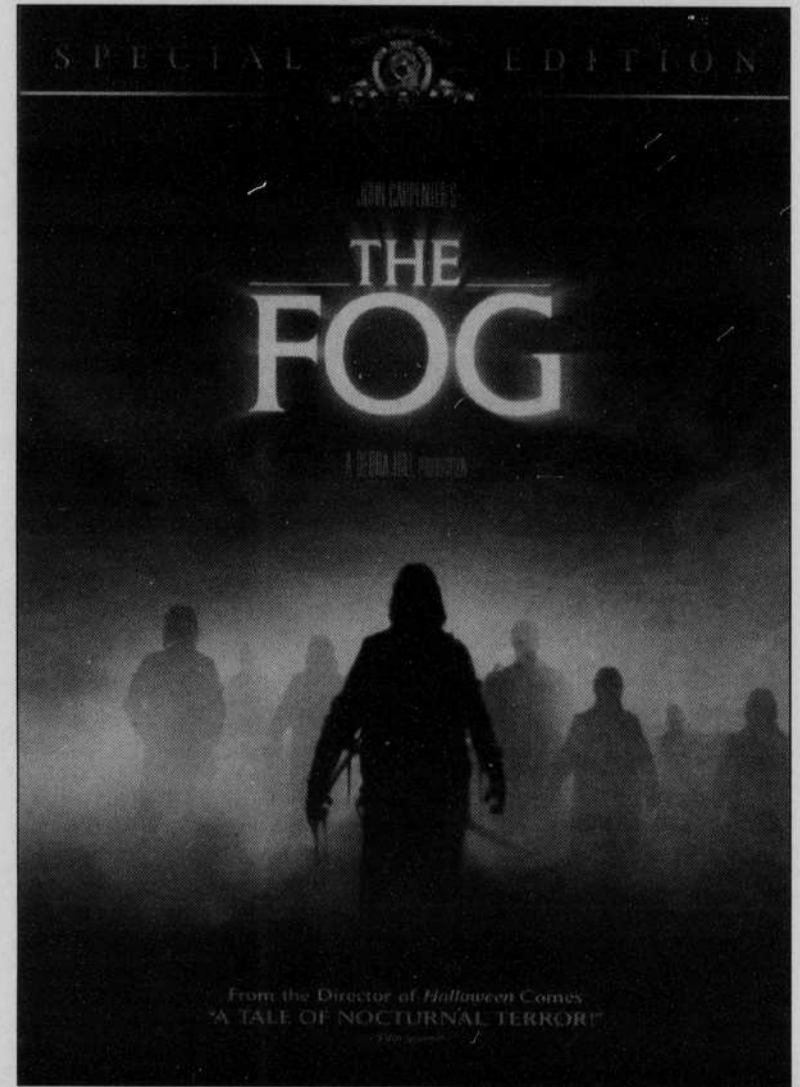
A good ghost film, like a good ghost story, depends heavily on atmosphere for the intended effect. Recent ghost films suffer because the filmmakers never seem to understand this. They stuff their films with cheap thrills and dazzling effects, bowing down to a convention that states shocks must come quickly or the audience will become bored. Good eye

FORGOTTEN FILM

candy with bad cinema is the norm. In this sense, John Carpenter's 1980 film "The Fog" might be called one of the last real American ghost films. Recent examples, such as 2001's "The Others" or 1999's "The Sixth Sense," bear the torch proudly, but aside from these exceptions, the genre has been fed only lackluster blockbuster exercises for far too long.

"The Fog" sticks to simpler joys of atmosphere and mood. Though its special effects are ample, they serve the film and increase the murky atmosphere rather than detract from it. The mood is set from the very beginning, with an opening scene depicting a group of children sitting around a campfire listening to ghost stories told by an old man, for whom the term "salty old sea captain" was probably coined.

This scene works in two ways: First, to introduce the film's back story, concerning a ship that ran aground near a



Courtesy

John Carpenter's "The Fog" uses atmosphere and mood to create a true ghost story.

California coastal town 100 years ago; and second, to let the audience know this is a contemporary ghost story.

The film takes place in the fictional town of Antonio Bay, which is celebrating its centennial. On the night before the big event, a number of strange occurrences take place throughout the village. Objects move on their own, car alarms go off, glass shatters and a thick fog envelopes a small fishing boat and

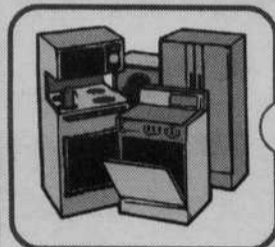
its three drunken crewmen. This whole sequence is done smoothly and with grace, introducing most of the major characters with little fanfare, setting up the chilling mood without laying it on too thick.

When morning comes, the story gets rolling. We learn the ship that sunk in the bay 100 years ago was actually a boatload of lepers hoping to

Turn to **FOG**, page 14

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