

Wes Craven's New Nightmare

US : 1994 : dir. Wes Craven : : 112 min
 prod: : scr: Wes Craven : dir.ph.:
[Miko Hughes](#)
 Heather Langenkamp; Robert Englund; Mike Hughes; David Newsom; Sara Risher;
 Robert Shaye; Wes Craven; John Saxon; Jeffrey John Davis

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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Actress Heather Langenkamp, having nightmares about the fictional murderer Freddy Krueger, gradually learns that the NIGHTMARE movies were protecting the world from a monstrous demon, who has taken on the persona of Freddy and is acting out the events in Wes Craven's new NIGHTMARE script as he writes them. And the script doesn't look like it will have a happy ending... Langenkamp, Wes Craven, and others associated with the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series play themselves in this complex, sophisticated thriller. Scary, intelligent and witty, but it's also too long, and the last twenty minutes are a bit of a letdown. *** "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide" or
 "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995"]

Radio Times review:

"Before director Wes Craven came back big time with "SCREAM", he took a stab at the intellectual horror film, adding this semi-documentary-style sequel to the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series. Heather Langenkamp, the terrorised teenager from the original, plays herself - an actress troubled by (a real?) Freddy Krueger. In addition to the healthy dose of shocks, there's a look behind the scenes of the horror film, and, although the project occasionally reeks of self-indulgence, you have to admire Craven for trying something new rather than just cashing in on the franchise. Contains violence and swearing. *** "

"Horror starring Robert Englund. An actress, tormented by terrifying dreams and nuisance phone calls from a man claiming to be Freddy Krueger, is offered a role in the new Wes Craven production that will signal Freddy's return. *** "

Two elements redeemed the original "NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET" from being just another no-brain teen slasherfest. The first was an intriguing central premise about a quasi-omnipotent nemesis who attacks his victims in their dreams, and draws power from their fear of him to intrude into the waking world. This gave ample scope for some genuinely surreal visual touches, and generated its own paranoia about sleep: one half-expected the inevitable sequel to arrive with the tag-line "*Just when you thought it was safe to get back into bed..*"

"WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE" displays the same originality of conceit - a rarity in the genre - by making its heroine an actress called Heather Langenkamp who once starred in a Wes Craven horror movie called "NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET". Robert Englund appears in the film as an actor called Robert Englund (who played Freddy Krueger), as the actor making a TV chat-show appearance in the guise of Freddy Krueger, and, yes, as Freddy Krueger. This very knowing, post-modernist theme - actors playing themselves

playing their roles – is certainly witty, but also more than a tad self-indulgent, a vanity project for Craven, who of course appears as himself, writing the script of this film.

The second factor which made the original film stand out was an uncharacteristically strong female lead in Langenkamp. She was no borderline hysteric, reeling from screaming fit to screaming fit, worthless in crisis situations, a teaser for the adolescent male audience, who must content with waiting to see her symbolically ravished by some serial killer's blade. Langenkamp was a more proactive heroine, nobody's victim-in-waiting, and her survival was properly won by her own grit, not by some occult intervention or male rescuer.

A pity then to see her in this film, where she is most definitely a borderline hysteric, reeling from screaming fit to screaming fit. And, because the script is so knowing and self-referential, it exposes the very topical neuroses on which it plays. "**WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHT-MARE**" is, at heart, not a teen slasher movie at all, but yet another "avenging mother" melodrama, yet another stalker movie, yet another tale with the subtext male = predator.

Because Ms Langenkamp here plays the mother of Dylan (Miko Hughes), a little playdoll of 7 or 8 who serves as the conduit for Freddy's attacks on his mother. But this is not a real child at all. Dylan is a kind of toy with a concealed chord, making him bleat "Mommeeee!" so affectingly (and repetitively) on cue. He is a thing to be dandled, hugged, smothered and pawed at in some grotesque parody of parental protectiveness. If this is how Americans regard "motherly love" in 1994, then it verges perilously on the pornographic, but it is a pornography of the emotions, which of course is crafted not for male, but female appetites.

There is nothing new in this, you may feel – JoBeth Williams spent half the "**POLTERGEIST**" series shrieking and pawing at her children like a demented thing – but it's rather lazy of Wes Craven to fall back on this cliché of the frantic mother battling evil to wescue her wittle child. And since it is a cliché, we know with absolute certainty that no harm will befall the child/doll, however strenuously the film tries to persuade us otherwise. We know that Dylan will be cornered by Krueger in the last reel, and that he will escape without so much as a scratch, which of course is what happens. Where then is the suspense? Where is it graven in stone that children must not come to harm – in a horror film?

Every film of this sort merely offers another subliminal endorsement to the message that women and children (which includes boys, by the way) need to be insulated from males as far as feasible. It's surely no coincidence that the only real authority figure in the film is a black woman doctor. All the men in the film bar Krueger – among them Englund and Craven – are peripheral, ineffectual characters. And let's not forget that Krueger himself, as originally conceived, was a child-killer burned alive by a vigilante mob of protective Elm Street parents.

If we can lay all that aside, and most audiences will not want to deconstruct it anyway, it's a tricky little film with, as usual for the **ELM STREET** franchise, some baroque visuals and lots of *you-thought-she-was-awake-but-she's-still-dreaming* sequences. It steals openly from "**THE EXORCIST**" and "**POLTERGEIST**" in its repertoire of trick effects – the vomiting kid bit, the dolly back/zoom in shock bit, the victim dragged up the wall and along the ceiling bit – and it all ends in some half-assed message about the importance of keeping storytelling at bedtime alive. A disappointment then, but to my mind worse than that, one with a whole fistful of repellent subtexts about the place of men, women *and* children in the new order of things.

Nothing else is known of Miko Hughes. I only hope he's not related to... No no, surely not.

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