Carpenter's thrilling Halloween

(Continued from page 6)

serves a purpose: to keep you awake. Pleasure, instead of acting, simply reads the script; newcomer Jamie Lee Curtis (Tony's daughter) plays a wimp and does it wimpishly; and everyone else simply mumbles through impossibly weak dialogue.

John Carpenter's direction is what saves the film from obscurity — or infamy. When he tells you to jump, you do; when he wants you to panic, you panic. This is surprising, when you realize how contrived the circumstances are. For example, the killer is stalking a house; inside, the baby-sitter spills something on her clothes, and the laundry is in a shed in the backyard. You know full well that the next few minutes is designed to make you hold your breath; strangely enough, that's what you do.

So, Carpenter is the real star of Halloween. Between screams, you get the feeling that his reasons for making the film are similar to Ralph Bakshi's reasons for making Wizards — he's sharpening his talents for a full scale masterpiece (like Bakshi's Lord of the Rings) rather than simply turning out a second-rate one. I recommend staying tuned for Carpenter's next effort.

Jamie Lee Curtis (center) is about to notice the local knife-murderer as he wanders by the window in a scene from Halloween.

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Monday, March 19, 1979

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