

# QLH-S2E9M: Candyman (1992)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

candyman, film, movie, character, story, clive barker, cabrini green, legacies, projects, horror, feel, white, plays, chicago, talk, mesmerizing, gothic horror, pull, people, bit

## SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

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Jessi Chartier 00:04

Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.



Jen Myers 00:17

Before we get started, as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie. So there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back.



Jessi Chartier 00:32

Let's talk about Candyman from 1992 Oh, what a good classic film this is I've really really liked this one and glad we're tackling it. Candyman. Candyman. Be careful to so good. So good. So I first saw this film, in the basement of a friend during high school. I just remember thinking about this is a really good scary film. But you know, I also grew up in a pretty affluent area. I'm a white woman. So like, I don't think I was really able to actually see it for what it was I was pretty, pretty sheltered. But now I go back and watch it. And I'm like, Dang, this movie is so good.



Jen Myers 01:10

Yeah, I can, I can totally see that. And I didn't see it until, I mean, it's only been in the past few years. I saw it. And I saw it after I had been living in Chicago for several years. But the thing about that is that I like my first job that brought me into the city is actually pretty close to where Cabrini Green used to be. And if you don't look into the history of it, you have no idea because the area is I mean, it's beyond gentrified. It's just like a completely different thing that the Not only does this not the project there don't exist anymore. Like you just don't have any

idea that something like that did exist. They're not that long ago. So it was really interesting to be able to kind of learn a little bit more about the history and then see it in the film and kind of you know, just have a sense of like, wow, this has already been eradicated this place. And there's there's kind of a whole nother story on that which we'll get to when we talk about the new one. But it is yeah, there's a lot of things that kind of really tied me to the world of this film, at least in that sense of like, under you know, thinking about being there and understanding the history and how it's changed now and everything. So yeah, it was interesting to kind of get into all of that.

J

Jessi Chartier 02:23

One of the things I want to talk about because I don't think many people know this is that the original story of Candyman is kind of an amalgamation of a bunch of different things. Clive Barker wrote a short story called The Forbidden I think it is it's The Forbidden. And basically tells the original love story that we see between Helen and her painter, but it was written by Clive Barker, as you mentioned, who is British, and focuses a little bit more on classism. And the director for the 1992 version of Candyman is also a Brit. He's also from London, England, and is also a white man. And so his desire to shift it from a classist story to a story of racism is just a really top notch move. Do I think he did it perfectly? Absolutely not, of course, that no one ever can. But I think that he opened up a door to some really important conversations that I don't even know if we, as an American culture, were ready to even discuss in 1992. I think that a lot of it might have gotten lost on especially on the white community. Probably not lost on the African American community, but definitely lost on the white community. And it was just so good. It was just so good.

J

Jen Myers 03:42

Yeah, and something else I want to throw into discussion before we really get into the movie is that there is also a real life murder that kind of, you know, has some threads leading into the film and I'll put a link to this article in the show notes because I think it's really important to read but back in 1987, a writer for the Chicago Reader wrote a really long but really, really good piece about a woman named Ruthie Mae McCoy, and she was murdered in a Chicago Housing Project. Not Cabrini Green but one that was similar to that and she she was killed by somebody who shot her after combing through her bathroom mirror like opening up the cabinet and coming through the hole in the wall and entering her apartment. And so I think that that is where some of the the ideas that we see in the original Candyman movie come in, but it is I recommend this article because it will get talked about this a little bit too but it really gets into some you know, a lot of the horror in this movie, there's supernatural stuff and we've got you know, the the horror of Yeah, like literal supernatural villains and all of this other stuff going on. But there's this structural racism, there's this lack of resources, there's this, you know, poverty and the way that people are not being taken care of. That is kind of underpinning the whole story and That is reality. And that's part of where this film is coming from to.

J

Jessi Chartier 05:04

Yeah, it's a great, great story. But I know we have a short amount of time because this is our minis. But I'd love to talk a little bit about, well, just a handful of things. One, what are what are the things you loved about it? And what are the things that you did not love about it?

**J** Jen Myers 05:19

Yes, that's I think that's a really great way to structure this because like you said, Yeah, I agree that this is, it is an imperfect film, I there's a lot of really good ideas on it. And I don't think that they were really able to pull it off for for a few different reasons. So I would say that the things that I like most about it are, I really love the just the whole concept of thinking about urban legends and folklore, and how that, you know, weaves its way into communities in people's minds. Just that as a concept is really fascinating to me. And I think that this film does it differently than other horror films who just use it as a scare factor. I feel like this film really digs into the fact that people like need to believe certain things, and especially if they're not getting what they need in other ways. And I think that's something that other horror movies, they just use it as kind of like a device and not this kind of real need that humans have. And I think Candyman at least tries to get into that, which I think is cool. And I also think that this has a really great villain, which I don't even know if we want to jump into that immediately. But that's definitely something I like about it. I also, on the other side, though, I think that overall, I just feel like the filmmakers didn't quite have what they need to pull off the nuance ideas in this film, like there's a lot of really good stuff, but it's so complex, and so much. And it's all centered around a white character, which I don't think is necessarily the best for the story. So I feel like that drags it down a bit.

**J** Jessi Chartier 06:48

I was just about to say the same thing. The things that I don't like are, how white centric it really is, when it's not a white centric story. And I don't know why that choice was made, you know, was back in the in 92. Maybe it was because the filmmaker felt the need to have a white character because they felt that that was the only way a white audience could connect, which is a bunch of baloney. But maybe that's just the mindset at the time. I don't know, I haven't done enough research on that. But I did. I didn't like the fact that everything was just so focused around her. And then she plays the white savior. At the end. It's like, Oh, come on. Yeah, that was a little disappointing. But overall, what I did like about it is how it was willing to tackle some things kind of head on. Well, maybe a little more head on than it had been had in other movies. Like it was just very stated. Like, the projects were built poorly. Like, hey, we had these horrible plans, where it's like, yeah, of course, you just had to remove your medicine cabinet that slid in to a space and you could just get into anybody else's department like what No, like that would never lie. Like just the disregard for the disregard for those who are were in poverty and in these situations, was not subtle. It was very direct. It was very, almost factually based. Like it wasn't trying to be sensational. It was just like, Yeah, here it is, and it sucks. Like I really kind of appreciated that that particular piece about it. I also, I don't know, I kind of go back and forth about the relationship with her and her colleague, who are not her husband, but her colleague of writing the story. I felt like that character I can't remember her name was Trish.

**J** Jen Myers 08:36

I can't remember her name.

J Jessi Chartier 08:37

I don't remember either on this, but her colleague who is also African American just wasn't developed enough for me. She felt just like not even a good foil character. Like, if that's what her role was in the script. Like she just was underdeveloped. And I almost would prefer to have followed her more than Helen. But that wouldn't play well with the story of the history of Candyman. Right, right. But anyway, I could sit here and pontificate about how I'd revise it all day.

J Jen Myers 09:06

Yeah, so what what did you like of it? Did you get into what else you liked about it?

J Jessi Chartier 09:11

So what I liked about it, I kind of liked everything I liked about it I still have issue with but I still liked it. So I liked how in your face it was about the houses or the systemic racism, like it was just very clear. And I don't think that many other films could have just directly tackled it. And I think that's one of the things I love about horror movies is that you can sometimes do that, like you can just like state it directly and have it work. And the the the flip side of that is that it still was a little too. It was still a little too squeaky clean. When it came to like, oh, there's a there's a white woman wandering through the apartments or in the projects, and someone's going to invite her into there. House like really? Like, really? Little things like that. But I do think that the disparity, like the beautiful juxtaposition of her affluence. Like, she's clearly athlete she's eating dinner at with these other academics pontificating about certain things. And then, oh, what's his name? The British actor who plays with the long hair creepy guy.

J Jen Myers 10:28

Ah, I can't remember, I got to look it up,


J Jessi Chartier 10:31

I look up his take on everything, where he's like, Don't you know that this is like, I've written a paper on it. Right? Like, I know what I'm supposed to be doing. Right? Like, but are ya? Like, really?


J Jen Myers 10:45

Yeah. Also, something else really a little bit interesting. Again, like, I like thinking about these places in real life. And since I have somewhat of a connection just by living in the city. Another thing is interesting about Cabrini Green is that it was very close to affluent neighborhoods. So I think I actually looked up the the location that they used for her home, and it still exists today, and it is less than a mile away, much less than a mile directly east. And if you know Chicago at

all, you'll know that you still see a little bit of kind of the legacies of this where, you know, once you start going west, in the near north, you you know, you get to a point where, you know, you're out of like Streeterville, and all their like really expensive stuff, and things change. And those are kind of legacies of what it used to be. So something else to keep in mind is like her those yeah, there's dinners and her hanging out or her home and all of that. She's like, me, you know, I don't know, not that far at all, like within walking distance of Cabrini Green. That's how big of a disparity there was so close together.

 Jessi Chartier 11:49

Yeah, yeah, exactly. It was so good. Such a good composition. Oh, the other thing I love about this movie, can we talk about Tony Todd?

 Jen Myers 11:58

Absolutely. I could do that all day. I can. I think the Tony Todd is like maybe the great success of this film.

 Jessi Chartier 12:07

Did you know A random fact that he actually had bees in his mouth?

 Jen Myers 12:11

I think I did read that somewhere. Because I think it's another thing that gets talked about a lot is that he had a special thing in his contract that he got \$1,000 for every time he was stung, which is brilliant, like good for him until like the least you should get it.

 Jessi Chartier 12:25

Yeah, that's the least Yeah, you negotiate.

 Jen Myers 12:27

It's right here. The Wikipedia page talks about it where he negotiated a bonus of \$1,000. And he ended up with 23 bee stings. So that's a nice little bonus, which yeah, great for him.

 Jessi Chartier 12:38

Yeah, he was just delightful.



**J** Jen Myers 12:41

He is just so mesmerizing in this role. And it's a tricky it's a tricky rule because he is this kind of larger than life supernatural being that is the living embodiment of this urban legend, but it's an urban legend that is yet grounded in this legacy of racism and kind of like it's keeping the the people living in this area now almost hostage. And so it's kind of a tricky balancing act to make that reality relevant in the supernatural being but I think and then also just be like, genuinely, really scary, which I think he is. So I think he does a really great job with all of that.

**J** Jessi Chartier 13:22

I agree. I think that the way he performs Candyman could have been very creepy, but he plays it almost Shakespearean like, like he plays it very not opulently. But there is this beautiful sense of sensuality to it.

**J** Jen Myers 13:39

Yeah, that's a great word. Yeah.

**J** Jessi Chartier 13:41

It's just you're just like, drawn into how he portrays this character. And this legend, right like he's soft spoken. He just pulls you in and is uh, he's just charismatic is not the right word. Because charismatic makes it sound like you're a hotshot just kind of be like, Yeah, I'm gonna like,

**J** Jen Myers 14:03

oh, yeah, no, this was a really profound. Yeah, I don't know. Like, I think I use a mesmerizing that's the one only one I keep coming back to. But even that, yeah, it comes from like, a deep place. And yeah, and I think that it also when he learned, you know, kind of the original story of this, and there is a, I don't know, I feel like there's a little bit of a sneaking like sympathy for him too. He's not just this. He's not like a Leatherface. He's not like a Jason in the hockey mask, or it's this faceless killer. There's a lot of humanity in him. And that really it kind of the same thing you're talking about. It's like his humanity makes you face that kind of where you know, what, what gave birth to him and the area we're in it's that reality that you're saying that horror can you know make you face and I feel like you know if he were this faceless killer or just this, you know, other worldly being that is distant and doesn't have any of that kind. Pull to him, it wouldn't have the same effect. And I think that part of grounding himself in this story is that humanity that he makes a part of the character.

**J** Jessi Chartier 15:10

I had a thought while you were talking about all this, that's okay. Hit me over the head. Would you consider this a gothic horror?

**J** Jen Myers 15:21

Oh, interesting. You know, that's a really great way to describe him and how he plays that. I think he does play like a gothic horror. I think it kind of it kind of is. Yeah, it's kind of like a modern gothic horror.

**J** Jessi Chartier 15:34

Yeah. With I mean, with a lot of other stuff dripping off of it. But obviously, yeah, I agree. I think that he plays this. He plays that character as a gothic core. And I think that it, it, it fits, because it balances out the starkness of everything else. You know, when you look at the utilitarian nature of the projects, for example, the Cabrini Green, I shouldn't use that term projects, when you look at the starkness of Cabrini Green, and just the utilitarian nature of how everything was built, and how it just lacked so much life so much just, just even like respect there, that not life, it just left so much respect for the people there and all these other things, that when you meet this character of Candyman, and he brings such beauty and such fullness and such elegance to the character, it's just as beautiful he you can't help but but notice it, you can't help but be like stunned by it, you know, at least, that's what I felt. And I, I think that's one of the reasons that I really liked him as a character is that he's not a leather face. He's not a Michael Myers, he is not even someone who is vengeful, at least in this movie, we can talk about that in the next one. But I think that he is just, he, he's a gothic, he's a gothic horror to me, like he's a ghost, who finds joy and, and pleasure and pain.

**J** Jen Myers 17:14

Well, and I, for me, there's also I feel like that's where the Clive Barker really comes in right there, the original there. And I hadn't thought about it in that way too. But I do feel like maybe that is where the original Barker is coming in. But for me, it also is a little bit of like, for me, it gives me a little bit more of a sense also that he he has been created by his story. And I don't mean that in the sense that like he doesn't transcend it at all. But again, it like re emphasizes the horror of the story that inspired this, which again, goes back to everything we've been talking about, because the original story is also based in racism and violence. And so I think that that is also a part of this character where he has been made by the forces around him. And so the I feel like the, you know, the humanity in him, or even just the elegance and him are all kind of a part of the stuff that's coming through. But the villainous is what is I feel like I at least I get the sense of like, this is what he was made into. This was what people pushed him into. And I think that he now that character is kind of like this is now what it is. And this is now how the balance needs to be. But there's I don't know that. Yeah, there's something in the way he does that, that it just very complex. And for me, I think it really does bring a lot of depth to that. So it's not really one thing or the other, but it is he comes closest, I think, to kind of pulling together all the disparate threads of this movie. And and making that work, because like I've said before, like we both said, I think that there's too much going on this movie, that they don't really get it all across. But I feel like he within himself maybe does that.

**J** Jessi Chartier 19:01

I agree. I think that he carries this movie, I don't think that the movie would have been would

have been as successful without him. A great, I think it's just he carries it. Yeah. I am excited to however, to talk about the 2021 version of Candyman in our next episode.

**J** Jen Myers 19:23

Yes, because we have plenty like we just barely scratched the surface with this. And then in the next one, we can really dig into some of this other stuff also, because I think we have slightly different takes on the new one in terms of how successful we think it is. So

**J** Jessi Chartier 19:36

I am excited to get onto it. So we should end it there so we can lead into that. So thank you, everybody for joining us. We hope that you join us next time for our discussion of the 2021 where we'll dive into more detail with how we feel about Candyman and what we think about it. So Jen, any final thoughts?

**J** Jen Myers 19:58

I don't think so. Just watch how many times you say Candyman in a row? Oh my god probably, like doomed ourselves with this episode. So

**J** Jessi Chartier 20:06

they better not be consecutive because otherwise Yeah, I don't know what the rules you don't hear from Yeah, we

**J** Jen Myers 20:12

should look that up because if it's not consecutive then we're done. Yeah.

**J** Jessi Chartier 20:16

Maybe we should have looked that up before we started this podcast.

**J** Jen Myers 20:19

It's too late now. It's too late now.

**J** Jessi Chartier 20:22

Well, we'll see you on the flip side Jen. Bye



