

= Within the Woods =

Within the Woods is a 1978 horror short film written , directed and produced by Sam Raimi . Raimi drew inspiration from his earlier short film Clockwork , deciding to produce a " prototype " horror film to help build the interest of potential investors . Raimi cast his friends Bruce Campbell and Ellen Sandweiss as the two protagonists and produced the film for \$ 1600 . Shot on location in a remote cabin in the woods , production was a difficult process because of the low budget . Several of the special effects presented in the film were done in a severely low budget manner , some of which were improvised on set . The film centers around demonic possession and mysterious forces originating from the woods .

Raimi convinced a local theater manager to screen the film alongside The Rocky Horror Picture Show which sparked minor interest . Initially a meager success , the film screened well to test audiences and inspired a larger budget remake directed by Raimi , called The Evil Dead (1981) . The film was the first in the Evil Dead franchise , and launched the careers of both Campbell and Raimi . Several of the aesthetic qualities found in Within the Woods later defined Raimi 's films .

= = Plot = =

Two romantic couples , consisting of four teenagers , decide to spend a weekend together located in a remote cabin found in the woods . An unseen force stalks and watches the group without their knowledge . Ellen (Ellen Sandweiss) and her boyfriend Bruce (Bruce Campbell) enter the woods to have a picnic lunch . The other couple , Scotty (Scott Spiegel) and Shelly (Mary Valenti) , remain at the cabin playing Monopoly to pass time . During their lunch , Bruce announces to Ellen that they 're camping on an Indian burial ground . Ellen is concerned , but Bruce assures her that they will be fine as long as they don 't disturb the graves of the dead . Bruce then explores the area and discovers an ancient dagger belonging to the Indians . Ignoring his own advice , he takes the dagger with him .

After lunch , Ellen takes a nap . When she awakes , she finds Bruce missing and wanders into the woods looking for him . To her horror , she finds Bruce 's dead body , horribly mutilated with apparent knife wounds . She is then startled by the presence of a demonic entity hiding within the woods , and quickly runs back to the cabin . While fleeing , she is attacked by unseen forces . She runs back to the cabin and screams to be let in immediately , being let in just as the entity is approaching her . Ellen tells her friends that Bruce has been murdered , but Scotty dismisses the whole thing as a joke and goes to find Bruce . Shelly - Scotty 's girlfriend - , and Ellen are concerned when Scotty doesn 't return right away . Shelly walks outside to begin a search for the missing men , but a possessed Bruce assaults and strangles her , eventually stabbing her in the neck and killing her with the dagger that he found , moaning " join us . "

Ellen encounters her possessed friend and flees into another room , grabbing knives to protect her . Something attempts to enter the room where Ellen is hiding , and she blindly lashes out with a knife - mistakenly stabbing Scotty who had just returned to the cabin . While horrified , Ellen is then attacked by the possessed Bruce . Ellen manages to trap Bruce outside , stabbing Bruce 's hand several times in the process . The bleeding Scotty tells Ellen to look into the cellar for the gun they brought along . While walking down the stairs to the cellar , she trips on a broken step and injures herself . After finding the gun , she goes back up stairs and discovers that Scotty had been stabbed to death while she was downstairs . The demonic Bruce then attacks her , but she manages to cut off his hand .

Ellen attempts to flee but is severely beaten by the possessed Bruce , who throws her around the cabin . While being strangled , Ellen picks up Bruce 's mutilated hand which is still holding the dagger found from before , and she uses it to stab Bruce . A large amount of blood is expended by Bruce , who lies motionless for a moment , only to then continue his assault on Ellen . Ellen mutilates Bruce 's body even further with an axe , chopping off nearly every limb from the writhing body . Severely disturbed by the things she has witnessed , Ellen rocks back and forth muttering to herself . The corpse of Scotty suddenly springs up , before turning towards the oblivious Ellen ,

ready to attack . The screen then cuts to black , leaving the fate of Ellen ambiguous .

= = Production = =

= = = Background = = =

Before the development stages of *Within the Woods* , Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell were long time friends who had grown up with each other . The duo had produced several low @-@ budget films with super 8 mm film during their youth . During the early parts of Raimi 's career , he directed films that were mostly classified as comedies , such as *Booby Bartenders* , *Shemp Eats the Moon* and *The Great Bogus Monkey Pignut Swindle* . While those films were described as " goofy " and primitive by members of the cast and crew , Raimi eventually produced the short film *It 's Murder !* , which featured mostly comedic moments . One of the sequences of the film involved a suspenseful moment where a criminal jumped on an unsuspecting individual . Raimi later dismissed the short film , but complimented that scene , stating that it was " the only part of *It 's Murder !* that really worked well .

While working on the film , it inspired Raimi to approach the horror genre with more enthusiasm , leading to the conception of his next short film *Clockwork* . The film featured a woman being stalked by a demented man , and launched an interest in Raimi to pursue working on more horror films . While both Raimi and Campbell expressed a positive opinion on the genre , they admitted they had little experience with the genre and went to drive @-@ in theaters to research various science fiction and horror films . Raimi developed the motto " the gore the merrier " during these sessions at the drive @-@ in , and quickly developed an interest in films featuring high levels of blood . Raimi gained an appeal in B movie cinema , which led him to want to pursue the production of a more ambitious film for his next project . In order to gain the interest of producers , Raimi and Campbell set out to produce a " prototype " film that would serve as a showcase of their talents . The film would work as a trailer to help promote further cinematic productions .

The prototype film was called *Within the Woods* . In addition to Raimi 's interest in various horror films , one of the main inspirations came in the writing of H. P. Lovecraft , who introduced the concept of the " book of the dead " to Raimi . Raimi studied the concept of magical books , in particular the *Necronomicon* , which formed the basis of the film . Campbell described the film as a combination of " creative writing and ancient history " . In order to flesh out of the idea , Raimi came up with a concept where a group of teenagers went into the woods and were attacked by demonic spirits , summoned by the disturbance of an Indian burial ground . The book of the dead concept was not present in the finished film , but appeared extensively in later films by Raimi .

= = = Filming = = =

Raimi was able to secure \$ 1600 to produce the film . Raimi and Campbell collected a group of their friends and family who were interested in participating in the production of the film . The film was primarily shot at a farm house belonging to one of Raimi 's friends located in Marshall , Michigan . One of the regular actors involved with Raimi 's early short films , Ellen Sandweiss , was cast as the film 's protagonist . This decision stemmed from the notion that most horror films at the time involved female leads , who were more enjoyable to watch terrorized . The current boyfriend of Sandweiss was cast as the film 's antagonist , a demon who threatens the cast . Campbell was cast as one of the protagonists , though he initially was not familiar with horror cinema and instead identified as a fan of comedies . One of the films that inspired Campbell 's interest in the genre was John Carpenter 's film *Halloween* . Another Raimi regular , Scott Spiegel , was also cast as a protagonist based on his prior collaborations with the group .

The effects of the film were entirely low @-@ budget . Nearly every effect in the film was done via things picked up at a make @-@ up and Halloween store located close to where the film was shot . The effects in the film were notably more intricate than the simple ones featured in Raimi 's prior

projects , and contained mutilated bodies , stabbed body parts and demonic possession skin @-@ attachments . Tom Sullivan was one of the primary make @-@ up supervisors on set , and he found it difficult working presentable effects out of such low budgets . One notable example involved a chest stabbing rig that had to be attached to Spiegel 's chest by straps and duct tape .

Campbell had to sleep wearing his make @-@ up . Because of several scenes that required to be shot in both the day and the night , it was considered easiest to have Campbell sleep all night wearing his make @-@ up , since removing it was too complicated . When Campbell eventually had the effect removed , he was alarmed to notice that his face had actually " changed shape " because of how long the make @-@ up had been applied , though it returned to normal after an extended amount of time . This serves as one of several moments where the film @-@ makers had to be creative to make the film considering the low budget . Other examples include blacking out the windows to make scenes darker and shooting all night long to make the filming schedule . Raimi had to get increasingly inventive during production , often coming up with " bizarre " ideas while shooting scenes . This led to him experimenting with camera moves and camera speeds , " taking it a little further than we had gone before , recording synch @-@ sound at a third slower for a more monstrous effect .

= = = Post @-@ production = = =

Though production was difficult for many of the actors involved , especially Campbell , the film was eventually completed within acceptable budget limits . Raimi had completed the filming of his " prototype " and sought out to develop and edit the film as cheaply as possible . Though at the time it was unknown how the film was going to be distributed . Raimi had shot the film in the same style as many of his earlier films , with 8mm film . He intended to blow the footage up after filming to the industry standard of 35mm in order to save money , though Campbell noted that the idea was without precedent . Though the request was " obscure " in nature , a company in San Francisco managed to accommodate the task with little difficulty . Upon testing how the footage looked at a local movie theater , it came out mostly acceptable , until further tests led to the footage appearing grainy and difficult to make out .

= = Distribution and reception = =

After production , Raimi virtually had no idea how the film was going to be distributed and what would come of it . The main idea behind shooting the film was to make a trailer to show to future investors , but even that was proving to be difficult . Eventually , Raimi got in contact with a manager at a movie theater in Detroit who was " open and flexible " . The same theater played The Rocky Horror Picture Show every single week and was open to more unusual cinema . To Raimi 's shock , the manager agreed to screen Within the Woods right before a midnight showing of The Rocky Horror Picture Show . The premiere of the film received a positive reception by the audience , and the cast and crew was paid just over \$ 10 , all of which was donated to the American Cancer Society . The film , however , was never commercially released .

While critics mostly ignored the locally distributed , low @-@ budget horror film , local The Detroit News critic Michael McWilliams watched the premiere of the film , writing that " it will probably never be advertised alongside the glossy , big @-@ budget horror movies of our time , but you won 't easily forget a locally produced little film called Within the Woods . He compared the low @-@ budget film to the blockbuster The Amityville Horror , writing that it provided more scares . Tom Sullivan , the make @-@ up supervisor of the film , stated that the film " really packs a punch " , and expressed a positive opinion of working on the project .

= = Aftermath = =

In order to produce a follow @-@ up picture , Raimi needed nearly \$ 150 @,@ 000 . Raimi approached Phil Gillis , a lawyer to one of his friends , asking if he wanted to invest money into the

production of a remake . Gillis was unimpressed with Within the Woods , but offered Raimi legal advice on how to approach further productions . Raimi approached several investors , " begging " for money , and eventually acquired nearly \$ 90 @, @ 000 of the funds needed and set out to make the movie anyway .

Within the Woods was later retooled by Raimi with a vastly higher production value and a full @-@ length running time as the 1981 film The Evil Dead . The Evil Dead would go on to be the first installment of a film franchise spawning two sequels , Evil Dead II (1987) , and Army of Darkness (1992) , both of which were directed by Raimi and featured Campbell as Ash Williams . A remake , known as Evil Dead , was released in 2013 with Raimi and Campbell as producers and creative consultants . In 2015 , the Starz television network began airing the ongoing comedy horror series Ash vs Evil Dead , which features Bruce Campbell returning as an older Ash Williams .

Several aspects of Within the Woods were later presented in future Raimi films , including the use of the " Raimi @-@ cam " , a camera rig that creates a fluent flow of camera movement . Other elements , such as graphic imagery , bleak endings , and mutilations , defined many of Raimi 's other films . Raimi has put Campbell in cameo roles in all three of Raimi 's Spider @-@ Man trilogy , as well as several other films .

Academy Award winning film @-@ making duo the Coen brothers were inspired by Raimi 's decision to produce a short film as a trailer , utilizing the concept to produce funding for their debut Blood Simple (1984) . The Coen brothers served as editors for The Evil Dead , and developed a friendship with Raimi . The duo have cast Campbell in some of their films such as The Hudsucker Proxy (1994) and Fargo (1996) , the former of which was co @-@ written by Raimi .