



Substream's 31 Days of Halloween: 'The Innkeepers' (2011)

By **Murjani Rawls** - Oct 22, 2019

Welcome, dear readers, to [Substream's 31 Days of Halloween](#). While every holiday captures the hearts and minds of the Substream staff, Halloween holds an especially important place in our hearts. Now that we've entered the month of October, it's time for us to share our love for this holiday with you.

Every single day in October, our collection of spooky staff writers and ghoulish guest contributors will walk you through a horror or Halloween-themed movie they adore. The goal is to both celebrate the titans and icons of the season while also introducing you to new films and scares to fill your autumn nights. Lock your doors, check under your bed, and settle in as you join Substream for our 31 Days of Halloween.



Day 22: *The Innkeepers* (2011)

I'm a sucker for a movie about a haunting and the heightened tension of anxiety that tends to come into play. You ever have those times when you were a kid and in the darkness of your room, the slightest thump would send you under the covers? It's movies like 1982's *Poltergeist* that became one of my horror favorites overall. With a certain revival of the "haunted house style" movie as of late with 2010's *Insidious* or 2011's *The Conjuring*, I wanted to dive into a lesser-known movie. 2011's *The Innkeepers* was one that I had seen on a bunch of lists and it's been quite a while since a horror movie has escaped my viewing grasp. (Those really bad Netflix ones? I've probably seen them.)

The story introduces us to our main characters, Claire (Sara Paxton) and Luke (Pat Healy), two clerks who are working the last operational weekend of the Yankee Pedlar Inn. They also moonlight as amateur paranormal investigators where the supposed otherworldly activity is taking place. Claire is a recent college dropout trying to find where she is going next. Luke proclaims to have had contact with ghosts and has a little more on his mind when it comes to being just friends with Claire. On the surface, this plays almost like a parody.

Director/writer Ti West doesn't strive to present the movie to stay beholden to any genre at first. He chooses not to show the audience the impending horror right away. It's only the music score of Jeff Grace that gives us hints. Leanne Rease-Jones (Kelly McGillis), an actress turned medium and source of Claire's zealousness of her works, serves as a whole foreshadowing character piece. We find out the substantial pieces of the hauntings from her as the movie chooses to be sparse on details other than the basics to add to the mystery.



The first and part of the second act lend itself to be more of a comedy, chronicling the shenanigans of Claire and Luke as they interact with some of the lone guests and each other before the hotel shuts down for good. When we start to learn about the story of Madeline O'Malley, a woman who hung herself in the Inn back in the 1800s, we start to see the paranormal aspects of the movie heat up.

The hauntings slowly reveal themselves to the audience. Some voices on E.V.P. feedback here, some playings on a piano there. The cinematography of Eliot Rockett often goes for overhead shots over the back of the heads of characters while what's in front of them are faded out. There are odes to Hitchcock's style when the camera suddenly comes up to a frazzled character's face high and tight. You see the graphic images of ghosts for a snap second, often asking the audience to fill in the blanks.

If there's a case for a somewhat compelling draw in terms of character thread, it's Claire. The movie morphs around her passion to find some semblance of the ghost of Madaline which grows through the latter stages. Her sadness and want to be apart of something bigger than herself leads her down a path that ultimately leads to her demise. Her experience is so personal and so well done that the audience is left wondering if these figures are the abundance of her imagination or really happening to her. While *The Innkeepers* chose to narrow down the number of people or locations, this works to the movie's advantage.



The movie breaks itself down into three chapters, but it can honestly be a narrative of distinctly different halves that eventually melts itself into a horror movie. West really embraces the slow-burn aspect of a ghost story, almost to a detriment. It makes you want to spend more time in the unearthly history of Yankee Pedlar Inn instead of dancing around it. There are good horror set pieces to be found within the movie, but they really start to kick in once the story starts to wrap up. A rather abrupt ending is one of the frayed ends that presents this movie from truly being something great.



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