**[Outpost #31 exclusive interview with John Carpenter](http://www.theofficialjohncarpenter.com/" \t "_blank)**

John Carpenter has earned many times over the distinction of being  'The Master of Horror'.  And The Master of Horror's masterpiece is The Thing. The Thing was Carpenter's first big budget, major studio project.  Though paying homage to one of his favorite films from his childhood, the Christian Nyby/Howard Hawks classic The Thing from Another World, John Carpenter's The Thing is not a remake of the latter. Instead,  it focuses on the authentic cinematic depiction of the setting, character dynamics and in particular, of the pathological alien monster portrayed in John W. Campbell's novella Who Goes There? Though sadly under-appreciated at the time of its release, recognition of John Carpenter's The Thing has, over  subsequent years, steadily increased.  Today it can be said to be one of the most well-liked and influential science-fiction horror films of all time.

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Thank you Mr. Carpenter, not only for The Thing and for all of your movies, but also for this wonderful and very kind opportunity to ask you questions. We would also like to express our huge gratitude to Sandy King Carpenter, Stuart Cohen and Sean at Storm King Productions for all of their help in making this happen. I will open with the first question:

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**Q.**What are your thoughts on a sequel? Any ideas for a possible story?

**A. The best THE THING sequel story, I believe, was in the Dark Horse limited series comic book published in the 90's. It began with MacReady and Childs walking over the icy landscape....**   
  
  
**Q.**There are various deleted scenes that have not appeared on any DVD releases; like MacReady with the inflatable doll, Fuchs’ body in the greenhouse and the other Norwegian corpse. Why haven't they been released on DVD's/Blurays and can we expect them in the future?   
  
**A. The deleted scenes were cut because of running time and narrative flow. I don't know why they haven't been released on DVD/Blueray.**  
  
**Q.**In particular the ending in which MacReady survives and takes a blood test at McMurdo that was shot in case test audience didn't like the ending. Are they any plans to release it some day? This would be a gem for us fans of The Thing. If it won't be released, are there some good pics or stuff so we can at least see some thing of that scene?

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**A. Second, there was never an ending shot in which MacReady takes a blood test at McMurdo. I filmed one shot of Kurt sitting alone safe in a warm room. I just wanted to have it in my pocket.**

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**Q.**If you had to make a sequel to the Thing, what would the story be about? I have heard MacReady and Childs could return and explain their age due to frostbite. But what would the story be about?

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**A. Third, THING sequel story would be Dark Horse limited edition comic books of the 90's.**  
  
**Q.**What sort of experiences did you have while filming The Thing, was it fun, crazy, both? And did you have a good time up in B.C, Canada?  
  
**A. Filming THE THING was hard work, very little fun. And the British Columbia location was that hardest work of all.**

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**Q.**Since Palmer was a pot-smoker, when he was Palmer-Thing, was he high on pot?

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**A. Palmer-Thing was definitely high all the time.**  
  
**Q.**In John W. Campbell's short story and Alan Dean Foster's novelization, there is absolutely no doubt that when somebody has been taken over by The Thing, the original person is dead and only his personality and memories are retained by the Thing in order to create a perfect imitation. However, in the documentary "Terror takes shape" featured on the DVD and Blu-Ray of John Carpenter's The Thing, Charles Hallahan says that the actors wondered if you would know if you were a Thing. He concluded by saying that Norris didn't know that he was infected but on a subconscious level, he was. This completely contradicts the short story and the novelization and doesn't make sense.  
  
So, my question, taken directly from Outpost31's FAQ: there is no doubt about it in the short story and in the novelization, but in the movie, does a Thing know that they are a Thing?  
  
Here is what Mr. Cohen answered:  
  
**"I listened to the DVD commentary again recently and I was surprised that Charles spoke of that. Our working presumption was that of the novella – and is really the only way to dramatically proceed. I think that Charles is referring to the sort of speculative discussion one has discussing motivation sitting around a table with other actors examining ways to play the role, but never intended to be put into effect… In any case, for our storytelling purposes I know John had all the actors play things absolutely straight, including Blair…"**  
  
**A. First of all, we stayed away from explaining how the Thing imitates a person. Secondly, I don't know if a person knows he's a Thing or not. I assume so, but it brings up complex, existential questions that perhaps would get in the way of a simple premise. Best not to ask.**

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**Q.**When I read the short story, I loved some of the scenes which were obviously too expansive for the movie, like the dog-chase scene. I also loved the "lights out" scene where the characters are in the dark because the generator has been sabotaged as I thought that was one of the most paranoid scene I've ever seen (well, read). How did you choose which scenes would be cut?

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**A. Instinct and budget.**

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**Q.**There are a lot of people who thinks that Norris clutches his chest in pain because he is being taken over from the inside by the Thing and not because he has a heart attack. As I had read the short story, it always made more sense for me that Norris had a weak heart. In retrospect, do you think adding some more tips that Norris had a bad heart earlier (like in the novel, where Norris has pains in the chest when the Norwegian had shot at him and Copper at some point tells him that they'll have to check on his condition) would have helped avoiding this confusion?

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**A. Maybe. I thought there was enough of a suggestion of Norris' heart condition.**

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**Q.**I could probably ask hundreds of questions but as an end note, I would like to tell you that you've made one hell of a film with the Thing and that I'll never be able to understand why it was so badly received when it was released, except for the fact that it was ahead of its time. From what I've read here and there, the awful reception of the movie hurt your feelings and that pains me as I think it's incredibly unfair.

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**A. My feelings were so much hurt as my career was.**  
  
**Q.**You've built a distinguished career out of scaring the pants off your audiences. But, what is it that really scares you?  
  
**A. First of all, we're all scared of the same things, with some variations. Personally, I'm afraid of everything.**  
  
**Q.**What are your favourite scary movies and why?

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**A. My favorite horror and sci-fi movies I saw when I was young.**

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**Q.**What makes a really good scary movie scary in your opinion?  
  
**A. A good story.**  
  
**Q.**What are your views on shooting on digital and have you any views on the recent re-emergence of 3D over the last few years?

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**A. I think 35mm Panavision anamorphic is the best movie system there is. I couldn't give a shit about 3D.**

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**Q.**Looking back on The Thing, is there anything you weren't happy with or would have liked to have shot in a different way?  
  
**A. No.**

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**Q.**Was Childs The Thing at the end or not?  
  
**A. I don't know. MacReady was the Thing. (joking)**  
  
**Q.**There are rumours going about that you a) gave the producers of The Thing Prequel your blessing and b) you were being lined up for a cameo role - is there any truth to these rumours or are they just lies?

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**A. The rumors are not true.**  
  
**Q.**Any new projects lined up for you or are you taking a much needed vacation?  
  
**A. I have several projects I'm developing at the present time, but I can't do anything until I fully recover from eye surgery I just had.**  
  
**Q.**In terms of stage direction how did you have the actors playing infected characters approach their characters? Was it a case of playing it totally straight until the scene called for it otherwise i.e. the Palmer or Norris things truly believed they were Palmer and Norris or did you have the actors try to drop a hint or two that all was not well.  
  
**A. The actors played their characters in THE THING absolutely straight. A THING-imitated human would express outrage at being accused perfectly convincingly...**

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**Q.**In recent years much has been made of CGI, my own opinion is that with hard work and plenty of time it is a great tool, but if you had had CGI in 1982 how much difference would it have made? Would any transformations have been significantly different and if so which ones?  
  
**A. It would have been great to have computer graphics in 1982. Many problems would have been made easier.**

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**Q.**Did you try to develop a backstory for the events of the Norwegian camp when filming those scenes or was it sufficient to know that The Thing had run wild?  
  
**A. No real backstory at the Norwegian camp.**

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**Q.**Given how badly the film was first received, how long did it take for you to realize that the Thing was well liked and respected?   
  
**A. It took five to ten years for me to realize that THE THING was appreciated more than it was in 1982. Finally, maybe.**  
  
  
**Q.**Many modern stories are completely undermined, or seriously impaired by the availability of technology, such as mobile phones with internet access allowing the protagonist in peril to "call the cavalry" or Google the correct way to disarm an atomic bomb in a pinch. With the exception of Assault on Precinct 13, none of your films would be hampered by this problem if made today.  
  
Was there a conscious decision on your part to always put your characters in the sort of peril that is beyond outside help (The Thing and Prince of Darkness are set up in such a way that if outside help could be brought in, the situation would actually deteriorate apocalyptically) - and going in the opposite direction, are there current technologies that enhance our lives in ways unimagined back in the 70's and 80's that could make for interesting catalysts for stories, rather than undermining them?  
  
**A. When the phones go out, the characters are further isolated and trapped without help. Then the lights go out. Alone in the dark. Evil outside all around you. Simple idea, complicated now by cell phones. Short answer, however... yes, cell phones could be utilized dramatically to enhance isolation. I'll work on it.**  
  
**Q.**You're famous for your use of the Panaglide system, not least because you do so in such a subliminal way. So I'm curious to know whether you intended to use that vari-speed technique to achieve something equally subliminal, perhaps to achieve a result that was not physically possible to do in real-time on set, or if you were going for a stylised "Showy" shot, which might have seemed out of place within the context of the film, let alone within your style - you are not know for gimmicky camera moves. Can you throw some light on that one?

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**A. The vari-speed camera was to be used as a monster effect. It was a suggestion of Rob Bottin.  Tentacles moving at radically different speeds.**

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**Q.**I've spoken to Alan Howarth a few times, and he is generally quite happy, for practical reasons, moving from analogue synths to virtual instruments. What is your home studio set-up comprised of these days, are you still hardware based, or have you moved over to computers, and have you kept your original synths?  
  
**A. I use Logic Pro.**  
  
**Q.**Speaking of synths what made you decide to use a synthesizer to score Dark Star?

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**A. Budget.**  
  
**Q.**When did you first read John W. Campbell's 'Who Goes There?' was it before or after you first saw Hawks’s movie? What were your feelings about how the novella and the movie compared with each other after having experienced them both?  
  
**A. I read WHO GOES THERE after I had seen THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD. It was essentially a pulp novel with a great premise. The Hawks movie changed many important elements, including the imitative ability of the creature. We went back to that.**  
  
**Q.**I'd like to ask you about the original plan for the main Palmer-Thing. What was it? Was it a head coming out of another head or something like that, as has been rumoured?

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**A. I don't recall any extra Palmer-thing gags except for a tumbling on ceiling/wall/floor bit involving a spinning set. We cut that out.**

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**Q.**You mentioned to us that you believed MacReady was a Thing at the end. Do you have any specific ideas about how and when he was attacked? Some have speculated that he might have cheated the blood test as we didn't see him draw any of his own blood - do you agree?  
  
**A. I'm just bullshitting about MacReady being a thing at the end. I have no idea. Nobody does.**

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**Q.**Was Jim Morrison at all an inspiration for MacReady, in terms of his appearance, personality etc.?  
  
**A. Jim Morrison as inspiration for MacReady? I don't think so.**

**Q.** If one administered LSD to The Thing in disguise, would it forget to maintain its cover and begin mutating?

My reasoning for asking this question is the presumption that the Thing is mind over matter. What it thinks, it becomes. When in disguise, it thinks only "disguise" thoughts. Imbibing LSD would change its reality, change its perceptions, so it would be reacting differently, thinking differently. Given the intense nature of LSD it seems possible that the Thing would have a "bad trip" and begin thinking "monster" thoughts instead of "disguise" thoughts.

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**A. What a question. Who knows? I've always thought the thing imitated other life forms in a purely physical way. But maybe with LSD it would be a thing with a higher consciousness. Maybe it would hear the Doors' greatest hits in its mind.**

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