

Jake Gyllenhaal is Eerily Seductive as the ‘Nightcrawler’

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- [Bill Paxton](#) [2]
- [Dan Gilroy](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Jake Gyllenhaal](#) [5]
- [Kent Shocknek](#) [6]
- [Los Angeles](#) [7]
- [Movie Review](#) [8]
- [Nightcrawler](#) [9]
- [Open Road Films \(II\)](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Rene Russo](#) [12]
- [Riz Ahmed](#) [13]
- [Sharon Tay](#) [14]
- [TV News](#) [15]



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – This film can be defined as “Network” meets Norman Bates, but it also exposes virtually all our modern sins, in a chilling story about a loser who spouts business self help while taping bloody crimes that sell on the morning news. Jake Gyllenhaal is the “Nightcrawler.”

Gyllenhaal creates an amazing characterization, his Louis Bloom is a creep who is dangerous, because he convinces enough people that his way of practicing his profession is legitimate – which describes the methodology of most American fortunes and politicians. It is a riveting and hard-to-digest psychology, because in the end it is the obvious truth. Dan Gilroy makes his directorial debut from his own script, a clear-eyed vision of a modern society that favors fear over substance, and what is for sale over what is moral. This is the scariest film, guaranteed, to be released on Halloween.

Louis Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) is a con man and petty thief who stumbles upon a new business while coming upon a car accident – the selling of nighttime crime or accident footage to Los Angeles morning news programs, hungry for ratings. After getting a cheap camera rig, he lucks out on his first assignment, and sells his stock to Channel Six in L.A., encountering and developing a business relationships with news director Nina Romina (Rene Russo).



Louis (Jake Gyllenhaal) is the Title Character in ‘Nightcrawler’

Photo credit: Open Road Films (II)

Soon the "Nightcrawler" is building a business selling these videos, and takes on a hapless assistant named Rick (Riz Ahmed). To be successful, Louis has to fight his own demons, stave off a competitor named Joe (Bill Paxton), seduce Nina into seeing things his way, and gather crime footage by outpacing the other Nightcrawlers. It's a dirty business, in a dirty town.

Jake Gyllenhaal is so vividly oily in this portrayal, that he becomes the sole proprietor of the movie. Louis is deceptive at first, shown stealing manhole covers and bikes to make cash. But in his idle hours, he is taking courses online on how to start a business, and the self help platitudes from these courses show up throughout the story – to hilarious effect when he is spouting them off to his one and only employee Rick, then more and more menacing as he begins to feel a sense of power. Louis has the demeanor of someone that sits at the head of a boardroom table at that point.

Rene Russo, who famously took six years off from acting after 2005, has her best post-hiatus role. The lanky ex-model is portraying a career woman at the brink of her extinction, fighting to remain relevant with a tad too much makeup. Her repulsion, then capitulation to the Louis character is one of the more fascinating dynamics in the film. She is playing the Faye Dunaway role from "Network," but instead of the hard charging young up-and-comer, she is in a do-anything-to-keep-my-job mode. Russo is subtle yet desperate.

The script that Dan Gilroy wrote and directed is filled with a combination of tense action – the crime and mess of nighttime Los Angeles – and cynical creepiness through Louis. The way Gilroy was able to morph Louis was the most fascinating part of the character. What is disturbing about the Nightcrawler never changes throughout his evolution, it's just that he becomes more powerful – and realizes it. When that occurs, there is no turning back, and another sociopath is given the keys to the kingdom.



Nina Romina (Rene Russo) Controls the Message in 'Nightcrawler'

Photo credit: Open Road Films (II)

The tale of Louis works as a metaphor for overwrought ambition everywhere. Capitalists, politicians, propagandists and hard chargers everywhere create the same scenarios as Louis – whether it's his slicked backed hair as he gains confidence, the overused platitudes that pass for his truth or his cold calculation and lack of compassion for others – we have met persons like him everywhere, and often they become "leaders."

"Nightcrawler" ends with a whimper, not a bang. The whimper is not coming from the screen, but at it. Society and culture are the victims of what Louis perpetuates, and instead of fighting him, we give in. If it bleeds, it leads.

"Nightcrawler" opens everywhere on October 31st. Featuring Jake Gyllenhaal, Rene Russo, Bill Paxton, Riz Ahmed, and Kent Shocknek. Written and directed by Dan Gilroy. Rated "R"



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dan-gilroy>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jake-gyllenhaal>
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