

EIGHT FILMS FOR FRIGHT (OR LEAST MULLING OVER)

* Debate and occasional devil's advocacy provided by James Morrison

By Jon Smith
Reporter

The following are eight films that stand out in this horror buff's mind as films that are great for Halloween parties or events. They may not all be the best, they may not all be the scariest, but they're a lot of fun. After much debate with a fellow horror film guru, the final list looks something like this. . .

Session 9

A team of asbestos-removers are given the task of clearing out the very-real historical Danvers mental asylum in Danvers, Massachusetts. Over the course of the week, the building itself, coupled with its history, becomes. . . disturbing. Not only does this film depict what could one of the most anxiety-inducing jobs out there - it plays on fears that are definitely more mental than physical, and therefore tends to get under your skin before you've even real-



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ized it.

Night of the Living Dead (1969)

It's corny, and at times unintentionally funny (well, most of the time). However, there's no denying that George Romero's original zombie classic is still great on so many levels. The sheer amount of allusions to xenophobia and invasion that hung over the cold war make it reason enough to watch. What is also effective is the paranoia and claustrophobia-inducing sets. Also notable is the fact that, given the time it was made, it featured a black man as the

lead, taking charge and holding the film on his own.

Dawn of the Dead (2004)

Although it does tend at times to suffer from the same computer-generated monotony of a lot of modern horror films, the remake of "Dawn of the Dead" is a very different film from the original in regards to suspense and identifying with the characters. The zombies and effects are very well done (with real horror make-up), and thus it's brutally violent but funny at times as well. Sarah Polley makes a good lead that doesn't feel like a "look, we have a female lead in a horror film!" attempt by the creators (and she's got a helluva lot more brains than the characters in most slasher films).

The Ring

By now, most people who have wanted to see this film have probably seen it. I must admit, I didn't like it the first time, but found myself watching bits of it again in the weeks and months later. It's worth a second look if you've seen it, and worth a first if you haven't. Though as a whole it may not come together completely, there are some wonderfully horrific scenes that are worth noting and a true "what the hell?" ending. Basic plot - a videotape seems to be causing the death of people seven days after they watch it. Sounds like a lot of movies these days.

The Exorcist

Though it's probably a cliché to call it a classic, it is. The now-famous story of a girl possessed by a demon and the priests who are forced to question their faith in an attempt to exorcise it from her has disturbed many in the past, and it still does today. For the theist, it definitely throws the darker side of the faith in audiences' face, and for the atheist it sheds light on the rituals of religion, particularly those of Catholicism, and asks what happens when scientific explanations fail. Twisted and demented fun.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)

The very name of this one turns many people off. However, let's get some things straight. If you saw the 2003 remake, disregard it in relation to the original. While the underlying premise remains the same, the two films are very different in style and execution. While the new one seemed to rely on the usual gore and slime, the superior original used its extremely low budget to its best effect, and produced a film in which your imagination must fill in the gaps. The acting is pretty much non-existent, but that isn't the point - it's the completely irrational yet unsettling concept. The fact that some of the most frightening scenes occur in the daytime makes the film worth a look.

Signs

A strange choice perhaps, but I found this film to be incredibly suspenseful. Again, there are some excellent scenes that make up for the fact that the film is not always the sum of its parts. The real fear here is not the threat itself, but more the way the media is used in the film and the all-too eerie feeling of what it would be like to witness the end of the world on your TV and radio. It also manages



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to pull off a good amount of humour as well, all too brief but welcome breaks from the dread that hangs throughout the film.

28 Days Later

Not a sequel to the Sandra Bullock film 28 Days. Another zombie film, but thoroughly British with an excellent dose of social and ethical philosophy thrown in (and for those who just rolled their eyes, you won't even notice it while watching if you don't want to). Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes up in a hospital to discover that the world has gone to hell and is filled with uber-angry zombies that are surprisingly sneaky for creatures that don't seem to have any rational minds. The reasons for the zombie carnage is a little sketchy, but the film will stay with you and is definitely more gutsy in its character development and its lengths to wring emotion from the viewer than most American horror films.