

SCARIEST Movie EVER!

TOP TEN SCARIEST BRITISH HORROR FILMS

Number 10 ***The Dead of Night***
Various Directors
1945

A portmanteau film that remains frightening purely because the sources of its terror are timeless: ghost and spectres, frightening promotions and portents of doom, possession and insanity. While the stories themselves are short, they are effective in their terror. Each frightening element within the film functions upon the psychological collapse of the characters - the protagonist questions not just their surroundings and the uncanny events that take place within them but also their sanity. In this apparent inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal, the sane and the insane, the film's overwhelming sense of unease is generated.

Number 9 ***The Asphyx***
Peter Newbrook
1972

The film begins in 1970's London with a horrific car crash before flashing back to Victorian London to chronicle the explorations of scientist Sir Hugo Cunningham (Robert Stephens) who is photographing the moment of death. He soon discovers the appearance of a spirit which, he realises, is a mythological being, the Asphyx. Devising a way to capture this creature, he can, he believes, become immortal. The horror of this film lies not in special effects or dramatic occurrence but more in the Cunningham's slow-burning but driven pursuit of conquering death – his experiments lead to horrific implications and then disaster before finally giving way to ultimate, dreadful success.

Number 8 ***The Devil Rides Out***
Terence Fisher
1968

One of the better Hammer films, which casts Christopher Lee against type as the heroic Duc de Richeleau. Essentially a narrative of the battle between Good and Evil over a single soul, the film plays Lee's urbane and knowledgeable Richeleau off against Charles Gray's equally charming but malevolent Devil worshipper Mocata. While containing numerous frightening set-pieces (including the appearance of the Devil at a woodland ceremony) the film's most tense and frightening sequence occurs when Richeleau and his friends fight off an onslaught of demonic beasts from within a protective pentagram.

Number 7 ***Hellraiser***
Clive Barker
1987

A superb combination of 'realist' family drama and the intense imagination of director Clive Barker: here the family unit is steadily breaking down under the weight of a past affair and a current loveless relationship, a collapse which in some way evokes the spirit of a deceased lover. Upon this man's supernatural return, Hell soon follows in the form of Barker's most impressive and rounded fictional creations, the Cenobites. For all its horrific imagery, *Hellraiser* is also perversely aesthetic as the Cenobites appear in dusky blue light and shimmering black leather, their pale skin pierced and cut in order to be folded back into bizarre symmetrical patterns while the object of their pursuit, Frank Cotton (Sean Chapman), spends the majority of the film without any skin and so appears as a precise and detailed anatomical drawing. It is a disturbing film but not without its moments of drama and beauty.

6 ***The Wicker Man***
Robin Hardy
1973

A film that begins as a police enquiry into a missing child soon develops into an increasingly unsettling battle between the good Christian copper Sergeant Howie (Edward Woodward) and the Pagan Lord Summerisle (Christopher Lee). As the two engage in religious debate, Howie is unknowingly drawn into the dark and violent plans of Summerisle and his followers. There is nothing scary about this film until the viewer realises the fate that awaits Howie. Once understood, all the viewer can do is watch Summerisle's plan steadily unfold and reach its bleak and shocking climax.

5 ***The Quatermass Xperiment***
Val Guest
1955

Upon a disastrous return to earth, astronaut Victor Carroon (Richard Wordsworth) is left mute. Kept under observation by Professor Bernard Quatermass (Brian Donlevy), it becomes apparent that Carroon has been infected by alien spores which are steadily transforming him into an extra-terrestrial life form. While it remains a powerful film that chronicles the grotesque and debilitating effects of a terminal illness, at the time of its release *The Quatermass Xperiment* would have been even more disturbing: The emergence of the space race, the awareness of the nation's post-war populace to the development of the V2 bomb, and the launch of the first guided missiles, meant that the threats that lingered after the Second World War now re-emerged, with Carroon's doomed space flight and subsequent infection suggesting there were potentially new enemies intent on invading the UK, be they an unknown alien race or microscopic biological weapons housed inside guided missiles.

Number 4 ***The Descent***
Neil Marshall
2005

A deeply claustrophobic film in which, it transpires, the cannibalistic underground dwellers are the least of the protagonist Sarah's (Shauna Macdonald) concerns. The film chronicles her *descent* into a mute and violent primitivism as she struggles with the loss of her only child and learns of her deceased husband's affair with her best friend. The horror lies not in the graphic scenes of the creature's assaults but in watching Sarah steadily realise her husband's betrayal while her inability to cope with her grief is compounded by the deaths of her friends, all leading to the terrible realisation that Sarah is slowly, but surely, going violently insane.

Number 3 ***Mum & Dad***
Steven Sheil
2008

Recalling the horrors of 25 Cromwell Street, Steven Sheil's *Mum & Dad* presents a horrific parody of the British family where love, care and affection are all perversely transformed into sustained verbal, physical and mental abuse. Here the breakdown of the family unit steadily increases as abduction, torture and murder escalates and escalates to the point at which the audience finally realises – as does the protagonist, Polish immigrant Lena (Olga Fedori) – that in order to escape the horrors of the family alive one must, at first, play along with their *rules*. So begins Lena's slow endurance test in which she must play her 'siblings' against her 'parents' and mother against father, all concluding in a series of brutal and bloody acts that ensure her escape.

2

Eden Lake

James Watkins

2008

A tense and unnerving film in which a group of working class teenagers terrorise (and finally murder) a middle class couple. While the scenes of humiliation, pack mentally and torture all clearly relate to the fears of a growing Hoodie culture, it is the climax which frightens the most: upon realising what has happened, the mother of one of the teenagers doesn't show remorse at her child's violent and murderous behaviour but simply states between sobs that "They are only children". Here the full horror of the film becomes apparent – it was indeed "only children" who terrorised the adults, who captured them and bound them to a tree with barbed wire, and then repeatedly stabbed and cut open those adults with Stanley knives. The fears of a feral and uncontrollable youth, of a violent and vengeful underclass, all resonate horrifically with the fears of Broken Britain.

1

28 Days Later

Danny Boyle

2002

Released in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Danny Boyle's film addresses two of the nation's (then) central anxieties: the threat of bio-terrorism and viral pandemics in the form of Avian and Swine Flu. As protagonist Jimmy (Cillian Murphy) and his fellow survivors struggle through the RAGE infected UK, Boyle eloquently depicts a post-pandemic nation, generating stark horror in the viewer as they, like Jimmy, stumble through the wreckage of the towns and cities and realise that should such a bio attack take place or such a viral strain become rampant then the country would become a place in which parents would rather commit suicide than succumb to the threat; where survivors would become as violent and as feral as those who attack them; where the familiar streets would not just be empty but desolate; where society, law and order would have devolved into a complete state of mindless violence and murder. It is the horror of the everyday, the mundane transformed into a purely frightening and possible future.

TOP FIVE SCARIEST HORROR MOMENTS

- 5** ***An American Werewolf in London***
John Landis
1981

When a pair of likeable Yankee travellers fail to heed warnings from the stereotypical broad and mysterious Yorkshire men in an inevitable Creepy Pub and go wandering off the road, there's something out there, in the mist. And suddenly, we're in a different movie entirely from the initial predictable opening sequence, as Landis beautifully handles the buildup to a ferocious attack: the claws, the teeth, the unbearable, agonized screaming would be a phenomenal scene even in a straight horror movie; stuck in the middle of a supposed comedy, it's like a punch in the throat.

- 4** ***Hidden***
Michael Haneke
2005

The terror in Haneke's films is more often suggested than explicit, most of the violence being merely threatened or happening off-camera. In this film, in which a well-to-do Parisian couple start receiving anonymous video taped and drawings, the climax of the implied threats is the horrifyingly unexpected scene in which the sender slits his own throat. The stillness of the camera, the splash of red on the wall and the sound of gurgling blood all leave the viewer plenty of space to consider the horror they've witnessed.

- 3** ***Ringu***
Hideo Nakata
1998

Nakata creates a tone of doom and dread, keeping things spare, murky and ominous. He proves his genius by creating pure horror from nothing more than a flickering TV screen, a repetitive metallic sound and Rie Ino's phenomenally inhuman, lurching performance as the evil spirit Sadako. It's the very lo-fi nature of the scene which makes it such a nightmare.

- 2** ***127 Hours***
Danny Boyle
2010

When eventually Aron Ralston, his right arm trapped beneath a rock inside a ravine, realizes that he has no other option, he ponders briefly before snapping his bones with a makeshift torque. What follows is one of the most toe-curling, gruesome close-ups of self mutilation in cinema history as he picks up his blunt blade and slowly pierces the skin of his forearm. The camera doesn't budge for several nauseating minutes as we watch Ralston hack, twist and saw through layer upon layer of mangled muscular tissue, the horror intensified by the knowledge that this actually happened.

1

Audition

Takashi Miike

1999

By the time the final conflict comes around we're already far from the film's initial implications of romantic comedy. It's hard to say which part of the climax is the most disturbing: is it the spiraling carousel dream sequence, with its vomit-drinking, its neon flashes and its horrifying glimpses into Asami's secret past? Is it the brutal retribution which follows, a torture scene of overwhelming ferocity complete with severed limbs, agonised shrieks and Asami's unbearable whisper as she slips sharp needles into places sharp needles should never, ever go? Or is it the fact that, deep down, we want this to happen, we recognise the full, hateful exploitation to which Asami (and, by extension, the entire female gender) has been subjected, and we want to see vengeance carried out? The climax of 'Audition' is exactly what horror cinema should be: shocking and unforgettable, yes, but also deeply responsible and passionately angry. This isn't some pathetic parade of tawdry torture, this is real terror. And it never goes away.

DO THE US MAKE SCARIER FILMS THAN WE MAKE IN THE UK?

This, in itself, is a difficult question to answer as the idea of being scared is unique to each individual. It is also compounded by the *type* of horror films each of the countries seem to make: the US has, since around the mid to late Eighties, been preoccupied with the notion of franchises while the UK is intent on making singular and haunting films. This approach to film production has led to two very different types of films:

The franchise film contains a limited plot in which a group of people are, in some way, tapped and killed off, one by one. The fear is generated by the audience's knowledge that this will happen and then amplified by the manner in which these deaths will occur. Consequently, a franchise film often becomes a showcase for increasingly violent and bizarre death sequences (see the later entries in *The Friday 13th* series for examples), which intend to frighten the audience because these horrific events are shown on-screen in a clear and graphic manner.

The British horror film often opts for a much more subtle approach. The narratives are often unpredictable and are much slower in their build up. They also opt for a less graphic depiction of violence and gore, preferring instead a much more oblique way of showing its fearful elements. It is also worth noting that in recent UK horror the monstrous element is not supernatural or monstrous as it usually is in US horror films (Freddy Kruger and Leatherface being prime examples) but *normal* people committing extremely violent acts: in *Eden Lake*, *Mum and Dad*, *Tony* and *The Last Horror Movie* the threat is simply human – people inflicting horrific violence upon other people.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SCARING AN AUDIENCE?

This is a problematic question because, ultimately, what scares some audience members will not necessarily scare others while the debate about whether on-screen gore is frightening is perhaps now redundant as it has become, after many years of Splatter Films, an expectation: the majority of the audience *want* to actively see such extreme images as part of the pleasure of the horror film – they may be disgusted by what they *actually* see but it is debatable that they are frightened by it.

One of the essential elements of frightening the audience is the aforementioned element that occurred in the upsurge of powerful US horror films in the Seventies – the narrative's blatant connection with the nation's concerns and anxieties: by placing the narrative in an easily recognisable and contemporary real-world location and then making the narrative threat one that is possible in the audience's world, then fear is bound to be generated because what they are watching in the fiction could *feasibly* happen in reality – a viral pandemic spreading from foreign shores, serial killers living (and murdering) in the quite suburbs of England, the rise of a violent youth/gang culture, all hang over the populace in post Blair Britain and have therefore begun to manifest themselves in its horror film productions.

Compounding this element is the need for realistic and three-dimensional protagonists. Most US products are populated by young and attractive actors and actresses who are not characters but vehicles (or, perhaps more precisely, bodies) ready for graphic dismemberment and slaughter. As an audience we cannot sympathise with them because their dialogue is as vapid as their actions. We are simply waiting for them to be killed, one by one by one. In contrast, when a script makes efforts to create believable characters with believable dialogue, then the audience not only sympathises with them but *feels* for them – they do not want to see them injured or killed, they want them to survive the narrative threat and overcome it. By placing such rounded characters in danger then fear is bound to be generated.

Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* is an ideal example of the successfully synthesis of both elements: the audience are clearly on Jim's side – he is weak and flawed but not without morals or a conscience. His journey through the post-pandemic world is terrifying because, as an audience, we too would feel the same as him. Our sympathy with Jim is compounded by the narrative threat – the RAGE virus, in an era of BSE, Swine Flu and Avian Flu, is all too believable and therefore becomes a realistic possibility.

TIME OUT: 50 TERRIFYING MOVIE MOMENTS

50 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (Animated feature)
David Hand
1937

If you can't get even – get old

The Evil Queen in this Disney animation is none too pleased when the mirror on the wall breaks the bad news: Snow White is alive and still the fairest of them all. That does it: the Queen sets to work on a magic spell – ‘The Peddler’s Disguise’ – that will allow her to get into Snow White’s home and give her a deadly apple that will get rid of her for good. The Queen knocks back a horrific potion and the room starts to spin round and round. Is she dying? Is the spell going wrong? But then her hands shrivel up and become boney. There’s lightning! There’s music! There’s a shadow of a hooded old shrew on the wall! Slowly, she reveals her face from beneath her cloak and it’s all so frightening that even a poor old crow leaps into an empty skull to hide from this terrible vision. **DC**

49 *Fight Club* (Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, Helena Bonham Carter)
David Fincher
1999

The unkindest cut of all

SPOILER ALERT He’s already lost his job, apartment, moral compass and most of his marbles. His larky little ‘Project Mayhem’ has mushroomed into a full-blown terrorist cell, his hipster doofus alter-ego has revolted and gone rogue and his girlfriend has just walked out on him. But now Edward Norton is about to lose the one thing that a man can never, ever hope to replace. Held down by three burly policemen who have been instructed – by none other than his own other-self – to cut off his crown jewels as a symbol of martyrdom to the gods of fight club, he is locked into a Kafkaesque nightmare of his own making. Like 007 and the laser in ‘Goldfinger’, it seems there’s no way out, and Fincher strings the scene out until every male viewer has tied themselves into knots of alarm, passed out or left the room. **ALD**

48 *Labyrinth* (David Bowie, Jennifer Connelly, Danny John-Jules)
Jim Henson
1986

Cool as a cucumber

The Excitement of David Bowie!’ ran the trailer to Jim Henson’s genial puppet fantasy-musical. Given the eye-wateringly snug collection of jodhpurs, leggings and codpieces he’d shoehorned himself into, there must have been plenty of ’80s parents hoping the Thin White Duke didn’t get too excited whilst cavorting through Muppetland. But even though he kept his genie fully jeaned, many were nevertheless scarred for life by the ‘Dance Magic Dance’ sequence in which Ziggy – sporting kinky boots, leather waistcoat, jodhpurs and a riding crop – gets hideously jiggy with a gaggle of belching Viking sock-puppets and a clearly terrified toddler. All this and Tin Machine round the corner! **ALD**

47 **God Told Me To** (Tony Lo Bianco, Deborah Raffin, Sandy Dennis)
Larry Cohen
1976

The way of the gun

'Loopy' Larry Cohen remains one of America's sultans of schlock, but – like John Carpenter – his grungy genre work-outs carry incisive political barbs. 'God Told Me to' is a mad, hardboiled satire about extra-terrestrial religious cults in which a strange lizard-like creature takes hold of people's minds and orders them to kill in the name of the Lord. The film opens on a young sniper taking potshots at a busy street, but it's a later scene where the startling reality of this act becomes clear. And it centres on an out-of-control policeman. Played by, um, Andy Kaufman. There's a police parade, and he just whacks out his pistol and opens fire. The scene is heady and amazingly choreographed. It encapsulates the gritty, street-level, in-the-moment style that characterised such '70s American classics as 'The French Connection' and 'Mean Streets'. It forces you to look twice to make sure it's not really happening. **DJ**

46 **Halloween H2O** (Jamie Lee Curtis, Josh Hartnett, Michelle Williams)
Steve Miner
1998

The knife man cometh

Is twentieth- anniversary cash-in 'Halloween: H2O' a patch on John Carpenter's original? Hell, no. In comparison to that groundbreaking, genre-defining classic, 'H2O' is a dithering minnow next to a ravenous pike. And yet... smack in the middle of the movie, after a fairly dull set-up establishing the new, witness-protected life of erstwhile Haddonfield resident Laurie Strode (Curtis) and before the film descends into screeching histrionics, there's a five- or six-minute chase sequence through the halls and grounds of an abandoned school which is close to perfect in construction. It helps that Miner's cast includes superior teen stars like Williams and Adam Hann-Byrd, not to mention that he has Carpenter's original score to riff on. The result is a textbook nail-gnawer, all the more so for arriving in the midst of such an average stalk 'n' slasher. **TH**

45 **Zodiac** (Jake Gyllenhal, Robert Downey Jr, Mark Ruffalo)
David Fincher
2007

Down the wooden hill he goes...

Come on, Jake! A freaky old projectionist invites you down into the fusty basement of a house so big and creepy and oppressively old-timey that even Norman Bates would find it a bit dank and unnerving, and down you go!?! The fear, malevolence and inky-eyed madness that course through Fincher's dissection of a city under siege comes to a head in a scene that has its roots in the haunted-house horror tradition but ultimately has more in common with the fevered detective fiction of James Ellroy, wherein the fear in the dark is not of being hacked to pieces but of finding out something so terrible that you can never hope to un-know it. **ALD**

44 *Trouble Every Day* (Vincent Gallo, Tricia Vessey, Béatrice Dalle)
Claire Denis
2001

Fangs for the memories

SPOILER ALERTYears before ‘Let the Right One in’ had critics slathering about the fact a vampire movie had been set in the Real World, France’s Claire Denis had already scoped out that territory with this underrated, globe-trotting follow-up to her masterful ‘Beau Travail’. Gallo plays a scientist on his honeymoon in Paris, but he’s suffering from a strange condition which paralyses him with sexual desire. He happens across a woman (Dalle) with an advanced form of the ‘disease’, only she’s at a level where she can only be satisfied by gnawing her sexual partners to death. The climax of the film yields numerous look-away-from-the-screen incidences of flesh chomping, but the one in which Dalle turns the inexperienced Nicolas Duvauchelle into a bloody mash – photographed in Denis’s customary super-fine and sensual detail – is certainly not one for the kiddies. **DJ**

43 *Jurassic Park* (Sam Neil, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum)
Steven Spielberg
1993

If you can’t stand the teeth, get out of the kitchen

Putting aside the unrealistic anthropomorphism of a prehistoric reptile with a tiny brain intelligently tapping its claw on a hard kitchen floor in an I-know-you’re in-here manner, Spielberg’s raptors-in-the-kitchen scene is terrifically tense. Part of the success of this sequence is down to the size of the dinosaurs, which are small enough to pursue little Lex (Ariana Richards) and Tim (Joseph Mazzello) between the stoves and shelves, yet strong and toothy enough to rip them both to shreds. The long shots also work well, giving us a wider perspective on the peril the youngsters are facing. **DA**

42 *The Hitcher* (Rutger Hauer, C Thomas Howell, Jennifer Jason Leigh)
Robert Hanson
1986

Chop-chop in the cop shop

SPOILER ALERT We’ve all been there. A night out, a few misunderstandings and next thing you know you’re waking up in a jail cell. After being forced into a series of cat-and-mouse road-games with deranged Dutch hitchhiker Hauer, it comes as a blessed relief to little C Thomas Howell to find himself safely behind bars. But this race isn’t run just yet. A few hours’ kip and he wakes to find the cell door ajar. The film, once again, has turned on a sixpence. Heart in his mouth, he slowly creeps out of the cell and through the police station in a scene of building suspense that recalls the heart-racking tension of John Carpenter’s finest hours. And what’s that police dog licking up from that sticky red pool? Looks like Uncle Rutger wasn’t too happy when he was told visiting hours were over... **ALD**

41 ***Manhunter*** (William Petersen, Brian Cox, Tom Noonan)
Michael Mann
1986

Feel the wrath of the Red Dragon

SPOILER ALERTMichael Mann was the first to commit Thomas Harris's crime thrillers to celluloid. His intelligent adaptation of 'Red Dragon' still stands as the best Hannibal Lecter film to date, not least for Noonan's cleft-lipped serial killer, Francis Dollarhyde, who is still among the most terrifying of all screen butchers. The most memorable segment illustrating Dollarhyde's calm, calculated methods is when he rips the blindfold off a smart-ass tabloid reporter he has tied to a wheelchair and lets him see his shocking, half stocking-covered visage. Then he calmly sets him alight. Do you see? **DA**

40 ***Went the Day Well?*** (Leslie Banks, CV France)
Alberto Cavalcanti
1942

England expects that every man shall do his duty

The second half of Cavalcanti's deeply upsetting WWII propaganda piece is a masterclass in mounting dread and unexpected horror, but there's one scene in particular which makes the movie memorable. Based on a story by Graham Greene, the film imagines a Nazi invasion plot beginning in the sleepy village of Bramley End and ending with the entire populace, young and old, taking up arms against the steely, murderous intruders. One of those forced to extreme action is post office mistress Mrs Collins (Muriel George), a loveable, matronly type who has an axe in the woodshed and a disarmed Jerry in the pantry. The resulting scene is shocking now; God only knows how it must have felt in 1942. **TH**

39 ***Twilight Zone: The Movie*** (Dan Aykroyd, Albert Brooks, John Lithgow)
Various incl Joe Dante, George Miller
1983

A demon behind the wheel

Joe Dante's opening segment for this compendium of remakes of episodes from Rod Serling's classic 'Twilight Zone' TV series sees two guys (Aykroyd and Brooks) driving a straight road in the dead of night. But then, after some playful banter, passenger Aykroyd turns to driver Brooks and says, 'Do you want to see something really scary?'. The result is a jolt from the blue as Aykroyd's face instantly morphs into a hideous witch-like creature. But that's just a precursor to George Miller's excellent reworking of the classic aerophobia scene in 'Nightmare at 20,000 Feet', in which Lithgow's nervous airline passenger is convinced he sees a revolting gremlin tearing the cowling off the aircraft's port engine while flying through a storm. What makes this scene especially terrifying is the way Miller ensures we only see a fleeting glimpse of the creature – just enough to freak us out. **DA**

38 ***Naked*** (David Thewlis, Lesley Sharp, Greg Cruttwell)
Mike Leigh
1993

'I hope I haven't given you Aids'

He's not the subtlest character in the history of cinema, but the character of the sleazy, upper-crust landlord Jeremy (or Sebastian, as he also calls himself, played by Greg Cruttwell) in Mike Leigh's 'Naked' inspires some deeply uncomfortable viewing. Put simply, he's a rapist and the scene in which he forces himself on his tenant, Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge), in her bedroom is horrifying because of the sheer exploitation of power evident on so many levels: he's a man, he's a landlord, he feels entitled by his wealth and, to top it off, Sophie is a nervous, damaged character, unable to assert herself and turn him down. After the event, his comments chill even further. 'We've had a very interesting afternoon, haven't we, Sophie,' he sneers when her flatmate returns. To top it off, he throws a load of banknotes on top of Sophie as she lies on the floor, visibly shaken. 'For services rendered.' DC

37 ***Body Double*** (Craig Wasson, Melanie Griffith, Gregg Henry)
Brian de Palma
1984

You know the drill

OK, whoever has actor Craig Wasson hiding in their basement, can you please let him out? Despite what reviews at the time said, he's the perfect lead for De Palma's ribald riff on 'Rear Window' as the sappy out-of-work actor who allows himself to get lured into the grimy depths of the voyeuristic LA porno snuff circuit. Temporarily based in a futuro house on stilts, he's advised by the mysteriously affable, slick-haired huckster, Sam (Henry), to glance through a telescope pointed at the building opposite and fill his boots as a woman does a striptease with the curtain opens. But wait? Who's that hiding upstairs? With the leather waistcoat and aviator shades? And what exactly does he intend to do with that masonry drill? No, he's not going to... Oh, he is. Oh. Oh dear. DJ

36 ***The Haunting*** (Julie Harris, Claire Bloom, Russ Tamblyn)
Robert Wise
1963

Things that go bump in the night

'The Haunting' is a perfect example of how, with horror, context is everything. Watched with a crowd, or in sunlight, the film would have little or no effect. But viewed alone, after dark, it is uniquely terrifying, a screw-turning exercise in pure tension. One scene in particular proves that the deepest dread can be evoked by the simple use of petrified faces, off-kilter cameras and extraordinary sound effects. On their first night in the reputedly haunted Hill House, shrewish medium Nell (Harris) and predatory paranormal expert Theodora (Bloom) huddle together as a mysterious force thunders inside the walls, marches in the corridors and rattles the door handle. Nothing is seen, nothing is explained, but the effect is unshakeable. However, one word of warning – stay well clear of the 2006 remake. TH

35 ***Sabotage*** (Sylvia Sidney, Oskar Homolka)
Alfred Hitchcock
1936

When it comes to terror, Hitchcock's the bomb

SPOILER ALERT Hitchcock's version of Joseph Conrad's novel 'The Secret Agent' has Karl Verloc (Oscar Homolka) as an undercover terrorist and the east European owner of a London cinema. While under the suspicion of the police, Verloc sends his wife's little brother, Stevie, out into the streets with a package – a bomb – to be left in the luggage store at Piccadilly Circus. Only the boy gets distracted along the way by various sights, stall-holders and hawkers. Even we start to forget about the ticking bomb when the Lord Mayor's Show passes right in front of the Royal Courts of Justice. Only Hitchcock keeps racking up the tension by cutting away to clocks and noting the time approaching the fateful hour. When Stevie boards a bus next to a small dog and an old woman, things really begin to turn sweaty and the mounting score adds to the tension. When the inevitable happens, we're already quaking with anticipation. **DC**

34 ***Guest House*** (Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson, Vincent Cassel)
Ade Edmondson
1998

Blowing chunks

The definition of the term 'terrifying' is nothing if not elastic, and we use it here in the sense that any sane viewer must question their life's trajectory when it leads to sitting in front of a screen watching Vincent Cassell vomit up a boulder-sized ball of hardened sick that rolls down a corridor in a cheap homage to 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'. Mayall and Edmondson slightly retool their characters from BBC sitcom 'Bottom' (and pretty much everything they've starred in together) for this silver screen atrocity where they play a pair of crooked hoteliers whose country stack is situated next to a (sigh) nuclear power plant. By the time you arrive at this point, you'll have endured the bogeys, farts, rabbit punches to the groin and a windfall of bad puns that even John Inman would've been loathe to mutter, but the fountains of puke really mark the moment where you'll want to have your eyes removed and replaced by acid-treated conkers. **DJ**

33 ***What Lies Beneath*** (Michelle Pfeiffer, Harrison Ford)
Robert Zemeckis
2000

Harrison Ford's mendacious husband wishes he'd packed his scuba gear

SPOILER ALERT Zemeckis's underrated Hitchcockian chiller stars Michelle Pfeiffer as a mentally distraught wife trying to make sense of the strange people next door and a deepening mystery about a missing girl. The first part of the film is pure 'Rear Window', but then creepy supernatural shit starts happening and every follicle begins to tingle. Harrison Ford's deceitful husband gets his comeuppance in the closing underwater scene when the motionless corpse of a woman he'd killed earlier drifts over to the sinking car he's trapped in. For a split, fright-filled second, we see her head suddenly turn towards the camera before it cuts to the cause of his demise. A heebie-jeebies moment of epic proportions. **DA**

32 ***Kill List*** (Neil Maskell, Michael Smiley MyAnna Buring)
Ben Wheatley
2011

Skip this one

Though there have been many British triumphs at cinemas in 2011, Brighton-based genre connoisseur Ben Wheatley has to be one of the year's most fascinating finds. His salty assassin thriller 'Kill List' was swathed in an atmosphere of thick dread, as his two hapless protagonists went about their business amid all manner of occult goings on. After Neil Maskell's Jay discovers that one of men on the titular list has been engaging in some very unsavoury business indeed, he attempts to find others who are part of the ring with the help of his trusty claw hammer. But it's the next scene, in which he enters an extremely dingy workshop – this time tooled up with a shotgun – while his partner Gal (Smiley) waits in the car, that is an unbearably taut piece of filmmaking. Who knows what could be going on inside – and is Jay even still in one piece? Gal decides to check it out, creeping through a forest of night-shrouded skips in a scene of almost unwatchable tension. **DJ**

31 ***Night of the Hunter*** (Robert Mitchum, Shelley Winters, Lillian Gish)
Charles Laughton
1955

When the man comes around

Very few of the great Hollywood leading men came as close to portraying true evil as Robert Mitchum. When he wanted to, Mitchum could be as easy and breezy as Cary Grant or Jimmy Stewart – but when the part called for something darker, there was no man better equipped. His role in the original 'Cape Fear' came damn close to making this list – the slow-walking chase through the empty school halls is a true skin-crawler – but for sly, creeping evil, 'Night of the Hunter' is the one. Mitchum plays a psychotic, hooker-murdering preacher who shacks up with Shelley Winters and family to get his hands on their loot. But when he murders Winters, the kids make a run for it, out into a crooked American dreamscape of nightmarish beauty, epic disquiet and the ever-present threat of discovery by that stalking man in black. **TH**

30 ***Les Diaboliques*** (Simone Signoret, Vera Clouzot, Paul Meurisse)
Henri-Georges Clouzot
1955

Inspect a Clouzot

SPOILER ALERTThe French master of the thriller, Henri-Georges Clouzot, introduces us to a fading, second-rate provincial boarding school in this horror-mystery which reveals a series of chilling surprises. The school is lorded over by its headmaster, Michel (Paul Meurisse), an utterly unsympathetic character whom his wife Christina (Véra Clouzot) and mistress Nicole (Simone Signoret) decide to get rid of once and for all. Or do they? Without giving too much away about a film which specifically requests that audiences don't reveal the ending, let's just say we end up being as spooked as Christina and Nicole when their plan doesn't work out as they'd hoped. There are two scenes that send a special chill up the spine. The first is when a swimming pool is emptied and fails to reveal a body. The second is when a body is discovered in a bath and then... well, we're keeping this bit secret. Just take our word for it that it's a shocker. **DC**

29 ***The Blair Witch Project*** (Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard)
Daniel Myrick & Eduardo Sánchez
1999

If you go down to the woods today, be sure of a sick surprise

Myrick and Sánchez's woodland chiller is the most commercially successful film of all time, on a cost-to-profit basis. It's also one of the scariest and most confusing. 'Blair Witch' is chock full of hidden terror – the rustling of leaves and that spine-tingling chitter-chatter sound – but there's one scene in particular that really gets under the skin: the moment Heather (Heather Donahue) finds a shoddily wrapped, blood-soaked cloth containing the teeth and scalp of missing friend Josh. The fact that the items are wrapped and the cloth is bloodstained makes this scene far more disquieting than if the directors had simply showed the contents in a naked state. I still don't get that ending, mind. DA

28 ***The Thing*** (Kurt Russell, Wilford Brimley, Keith David)
John Carpenter
1982

I'd rather not spend the rest of the winter tied to this fucking couch!

Having just witnessed one of their bestest buddies detach his own head (which then falls to the floor, sprouts some legs, then canters off), MacReady (Russell) and his remaining ice station brethren decide that now's the time to nip this shape-shifting alien business in the bud. Realising that the monster exists in all the living molecules of its hosts, he draws blood from the remaining members of his crew and dips in a heated length of wire, the logic being that if the blood moves, there's killing to be done. Though the symphonic splat seen earlier in the film will have given your gag reflex ample workout, this piece of pure, old-school screw-turning will have your nerves jangling up a frenzy. Carpenter makes us wait as the wire is heated each time with MacReady's trusty flamethrower, and the way it's dipped into the blood is excruciatingly careful. DJ

27 ***Goodfellas*** (Ray Liotta, Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci)
Martin Scorsese
1990

'Don't worry. I got some money for you. It's down the block...'

SPOILER ALERT There are plenty of edgy and dismaying scenes in Scorsese's mob aria – mostly involving Joe Pesci, some initially playful banter and the sudden introduction of either a snub-nose pistol or a kitchen appliance. Subtler and far more unsettling than any of this jovial hair-trigger brutality is the scene in which Karen Hill (Lorraine Bracco) goes to Jimmy Conway (De Niro) for some financial aid while husband Henry (Liotta) is in jail. There's a little back-and-forth before De Niro suggests Karen go and pick out a nice fur from the darkened store at the end of the block. A store in which two entirely shady stevedores lurk around in the shadows. Glancing this way and that, De Niro – caught up in a seemingly opportunistic bout of Machiavellian scheming – directs her closer and closer to the entrance before Bracco finally heeds the audience's silent cries and bolts. Wise woman. **ALD**

26 ***The Others*** (Nicole Kidman, Christopher Eccleston, Fionnula Flanagan)
Alejandro Amenábar
2001

A case for children not being seen or heard

The creepiest scene in Alejandro Amenábar's nerve-racking ghost story is featured briefly during the final frames of the trailer. Nicole Kidman's distressed mother apprehensively peers into a cold, empty, unlit room to see the back of her photosensitive daughter kneeling on the wooden floor, dressed from head to toe in full antique lace while humming an eerie tune and playing with an old wooden mobile. The camera zooms in to reveal the grizzled hand of an old woman and the true meaning of the term 'hair-raising' becomes apparent. 'Where is my daughter?' she implores. 'You're mad, I am your daughter,' replies the wrinkled figure in the voice of a young child. Brrrrrrr – get me outta here. **DA**

25 ***Das Boot*** (Jurgen Prochnow, Herbert Grönemeyer)
Wolfgang Petersen
1981

Voyage to the bottom of the sea

'Tiefer... Tiefer...' These words, muttered in a deep, dolorous German accent, are pretty much guaranteed to send shivers down the spine of any self-respecting movie buff (as will the exact same words in Japanese, more of which later). Petersen's dank, claustrophobic U-boat masterpiece is packed with scenes of spectacular tension and disquiet, but one particular sequence plumbs the absolute depths of an audience's endurance. Fleeing from British mines, Prochnow and his already exhausted crew are forced to take their trusty sub well below the vehicle's manufacturer-prescribed limit. Screws screech, walls creak, the chief mechanic suffers a total mental collapse, but still captain Prochnow urges them to go ever deeper... 'Tiefer... Tiefer...' **TH**

24 ***L'Enfant*** (Jérémie Renier, Déborah François, Jérémie Segard)
Jean-luc and Pierre Dardenne
2005

Ice to see you

No, that's not a typo. We are including Cannes darlings, the Dardenne brothers, in a run-down of most terrifying scenes. Though they are prided on their terse, humanist dramas of everyday woe, one scene in their 2005 Palme d'Or winner, 'L'Enfant', struck many as being heavily redolent of the high-octane thrills mostly associated with Hollywood action cinema. Dardenne regular Renier is in a bit of a financial scrape when he casually decides to sell off his newborn son, much to the dismay of girlfriend François. A routine motorbike bag nabbing goes south when a nearby police car takes chase and Renier and his young accomplice are forced to dive in an icy river for cover. The chase itself is thrillingly choreographed, but seeing the lanky lad losing his breath when he descends into the water is genuinely horrifying because you realise his suffering is probably not an act. **DJ**

23 ***The Conversation*** (Gene Hackman, John Cazale)
Francis Ford Coppola
1974

You missed a little bit, just there...

In Francis Ford Coppola's post-Watergate psychological thriller, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) is a professional snooper, a lonely surveillance expert hired by a corporate high-up in San Francisco to spy on a young couple. The trail leads Harry to a hotel and he overhears a violent struggle in a bedroom and maybe even a murder. But when Harry breaks into the room later on, it's spotless. He moves around the room quietly. He enters the bathroom and with a nod to 'Psycho' pulls back the shower curtain to reveal – nothing. Haskell Wexler's camera starts to hover over the toilet, which is spotlessly clean and with a paper wraparound on the seat to indicate it's been serviced. The music starts to rise. Harry flushes the toilet and bloody water and paper rises up and overflows onto the shiny white floor. The look on Hackman's face says it all as our imagination goes into overdrive about what lies beneath. **DC**

22 ***Who Framed Roger Rabbit*** (Christopher Lloyd, Bob Hoskins)
Robert Zemeckis
1988

Aceeeeeeeed!

This may just be a generational thing, but I certainly received an early childhood scar when being taken to the Enfield Cannon Cinema (RIP) at the tender and impressionable age of seven to see the much-buzzed, grammatically lopsided cartoon/live action hybrid, 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit'. Little did I know, this seemingly innocent comic book caper would be the film to introduce me to the highly corrosive and potentially deadly properties of acid. The scene in question arrives early in the film, planting a seed of threat which grows as the story moves on. Christopher Lloyd's bizarre, Southern preacher-like Judge Doom is introduced as despising all the toons of Toontown, and he wants nothing more than to rid the entire world of them by submerging them in a noxious brew of turpentine, acetone and benzine (AKA 'The Dip'). This example, where he frazzles a lovable, squeaking shoe (a shoe ferchrissakes!), is heartbreaking and petrifying. **DJ**

21 ***Alien*** (Sigourney Weaver, John Hurt, Tom Skerritt)
Ridley Scott
1979

An astronaut gives birth in a most unconventional manner

The story goes that the production team on Ridley Scott's intergalactic shocker kept the cast in the dark about this particular scene in order to capture the most accurate reaction possible. Having been given an earlier facial of sorts by a skittish crab-like creature, John Hurt's character begins to feel in high spirits again. His appetite, too, is fully restored. In fact he's ravenous. Then comes the first seizure, followed by another. And then it happens... A volcanic eruption of flesh, blood and viscera explodes from his stomach and out pops the slimy, foetus-like head of Hans Rudolf Giger's cute lil alien. A ten on the jump scale. **DA**

20 ***The Profound Desire of the Gods: Tales from a Southern Island***
(Mikuni Rentarô, Kawarazaki Chôichirô and Kitamura Kazuo)
Shohei Imamura
1968

Going for a quick paddle

SPOILER ALERTOne of the fixations of the late Japanese director Shohei Imamura was using film to emphasise how human culture and interaction is essentially founded on a catalogue of primitive and bestial urges. His sprawling, sun-blissed 1968 soap opera involves the fictional inhabitants of a tropical island situated on an archipelago of Okinawa, detailing the effect that rapid modernisation has on this uncorrupted way of life. The jaw-dropping climax of the film anticipates 'The Wicker Man', as one of the island's denizens attempts to escape a crime of passion via boat, but is eventually chased down by masked captors and battered senseless with their paddles. Imamura expertly draws out the scene, and the tension comes from the grinding inevitability of a gory death. **DJ**

19 ***A Room for Romeo Brass*** (Paddy Considine, Andrew Shim, Ben Marshall)
Shane Meadows
1999

You want to see things get really dark?

Following 'Dead Man's Shoes' and 'My Summer of Love', we all know what Paddy Considine is capable of: that stomach-turning shift from friendly to ferocious, from casual to carnivorous, has become familiar. But back in 1999, Considine was an unknown quantity: 'Romeo Brass' was his first film, and remains his finest performance. As knockabout doofus Morell, who befriends a pair of happy-go-lucky ten year olds, he seems at first like just another jolly outsider, a figure of fun for both audience and characters. But then the boys push him too far and, at the end of a fun-packed day on the beach, Morell simply flips. The result is shocking, indescribable, as bold an actor's entrance as any in cinema. **TH**

18 ***Zardoz*** (Sean Connery, Charlotte Rampling, John Alderton)
John Boorman
1974

James Bond in a red nappy! Mummy, make it stop!

Director Boorman has plenty of previous when it comes to big-screen diaperings. Not only did he parade his own teenage son in a junglist loincloth through 'The Emerald Forest', he also persuaded man's man's macho man Burt Reynolds into a watertight black rubber singlet for soggy-bottomed thriller 'Deliverance'. And we're pretty sure we remember a few Medieval undercrackers amid the Arthurian lunacy of 'Excalibur' too. None of them – nor even Sting's strong showing in a pair of winged metal jockeys in 'Dune' – make quite as deep and upsetting an impression as seeing 6' 2" of hirsute Edinburghian beefcake block-quoting Nietzsche whilst prancing through a sci-fi 'Wizard of Oz' retread in a tomato-red jockstrap. Most petrifying scene? The rickshaw sequence, perhaps. Or the transvestite wedding. The hall of mirrors? The psychosexual library freakout? You decide. **ALD**

17 *Jaws* (Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss)
Steven Spielberg
1975

Three-and-a-bit men in a boat

The horror genre is the perfect medium in which to explore our primal fears in completely safe surroundings. We pay to scare ourselves shitless, and then go home and tuck into bed, safe in the knowledge that the frightful bogeyman we'd just encountered was nothing more than a figment of someone else's imagination. But what of those films that dwell not on the impossible but the tangible? There are a number of buttock-clenching scenes in 'Jaws' but for sheer unexpected frights, Richard Dreyfuss's sub-aquatic encounter with the bleached, festering head of a chomped boatman is a cracker. Worse, we all know that if he doesn't squirrel his way to the surface very quickly, he'll be adding his own visage to old sharkey's trophy cabinet. **DA**

16 *Rosemary's Baby* (Mia Farrow, John Cassavetes)
Roman Polanski
1968

'This is no dream, this is really happening!'

It's a little creepy from the start when young couple Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and Guy (John Cassavetes) move into an upscale New York apartment block and their elderly neighbours Minnie and Roman start to take too keen an interest in their lives. It only gets worse when Guy changes his tune and expresses a liking for the pair and starts to spend time with them, no matter how much it bothers delicate, nervy Rosemary. Then things turn strange. Rosemary eats a dessert prepared by the neighbours, has a funny spell and passes out. She dreams there are naked old folk around her bed, including her neighbours, and someone is saying, brandishing a rope, 'Better have your legs tied down in case of convulsions.' Rosemary screams what we might be thinking – 'This is no dream, this is really happening!' But is it a dream? Is it happening? The questions continue right through the film and although this scene is terrifying, the real terror is the slow build of doubt and counter-doubt. **DC**

15 *Ban Lieutenant* (Harvey Keitel, Zoë Lund, Darryl Strawberry)
Abel Ferrara
1992

Objects in the rear-view mirror may appear hornier than they are

We're still waiting for the third installment of Keitel's 'Wang Trilogy'. If he hadn't been booted out of the lead role in 'Apocalypse Now', we could add the sight of him rolling around starkers in a Saigon hotel room to the twin poles (fnarr!) of his full-frontal assaults in 'The Piano' and 'Bad Lieutenant', but it was not to be. And it says a lot for the raw, naked battering that Ferrara's magnificent cop drama delivers that Harvey's Howitzer isn't his most disturbing showing in the film. That must surely belong to the bleak, harrowing and forbiddingly humorous scene in which Harvey's rapidly degenerating copper pulls over two teen girls and forces to make 'love me' faces whilst he spansks his monkey against the door of their Volvo. Even within the context of the mired squalor and moral dilapidation that floods the film, this scene still manages to break the needle on the Yikes!-o-Meter. **ALD**

- 14** *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (Sheryl Lee, Ray Wise, Grace Zabriskie)
David Lynch
1992

'The man in the mask is looking for the book with the pages torn out...'

There was some discussion over which of the many mind-shatteringly unsettling Lynch moments would make it on to this list. The baby in 'Eraserhead'? Michael Elphick's sickening waltz in 'The Elephant Man'? The midnight drive in 'Blue Velvet', or the phone call from the Mystery Man in 'Lost Highway'? The closest contender, which almost won the day, was the hobo behind the diner in 'Mulholland Dr', a scene of indescribable, inexplicable terror – but also an almost shot-for-shot recreation of this even more shocking moment, the sight of the murderous demon Bob crouching behind doomed Laura Palmer's dresser in 'Fire Walk with Me'. The big-screen spin-off from 'Twin Peaks' is a film stuffed with horror, loss, grief and fear, and in the most disturbing of contexts, familial abuse. This scene is the turning point from grim melodrama to outright nightmare – a realisation so shocking, it can only end in bloody murder. **TH**

- 13** *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Marilyn Burns, Edward Neal)
Tobe Hooper
1974

'It's a house'

'I thought I heard something.' You thought right – and it wasn't the Forest Commission doing some standard pruning. Youngsters Sally (Marilyn Burns) and Franklin (Paul A Partain), while on a trip through rural Texas, set off into the woods to find two missing friends. Sally is pushing Franklin in a wheelchair – uh-oh – when old Leatherface lunges out of the darkness and rips the disabled one to death with his chainsaw. The next few minutes are pure hell as Leatherface chases Sally through the dark forest. She then darts into an isolated house – uh-oh, number two – where she finds several shrivelled bodies upstairs and throws herself from a window when the man with the bloody machine follows her in. Soon they're tearing through the forest and it seems like any second the sheer, hulking horror of this crazy monster will catch her up and rip her to shreds. Just don't forget to breathe. **DC**

- 12** *The Wages of Fear* (Yves Montand, Charles Vanel, Peter van Eyck)
Henri-Georges Clouzot
1953

Sweat, Sementex and South American roads – a killer combination

Take two clapped-out trucks, four displaced, combustible, conniving Europeans sweating out last night's whiskey and dripping with Old World ennui, endless miles of bumpy roads and a whole mess of nitroglycerine and you've got the makings of what might be the most sustained piece of edge-of-the-seat cinema ever produced. Fully the entire second half of Clouzot's masterful study of men under pressure is a gut-wrenching, teeth-grinding, knuckle-whitening death ride on which our four anti-heroes inch their way around boulders, through tar pits and across rotten, rickety bridges as they struggle to get their cargo to a refinery in order to extinguish a fire threatening a Yanqui oil concern. A film that will leave you truly exhausted. **ALD**

11 ***The Vanishing*** (Gene Bervoets, Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu)
George Sluizer
1988

Searching high and low

SPOILER ALERT Freaking out an audience by burying your main character alive should be like shooting fish in a barrel – but just try watching mediocre grave-based Ryan Reynolds vehicle ‘Buried’, and you’ll see how wrong that assumption can be. Without doubt, the high water mark of the surprisingly limited living-internment subgenre is Sluizer’s unforgettable 1988 thriller, in which a loving husband spends years tracking his wife’s abductor, only to be presented with a simple choice when he finally catches up with the psycho responsible: drink the flask, and know her fate, or put it down, hand me to the cops, and live in ignorance. The result is somehow inevitable, but still utterly devastating, an ending so bleak and fearless even its director couldn’t bear to live with it, as shown in Sluizer’s own pathetic Hollywood remake. **TH**

10 ***The Grizzly Man*** (Documentary)
Werner Herzog
2005

Some sound advice

SPOILER ALERT Awkward confrontations are the bread and butter of investigative documentary cinema. Think of Michael Moore stitching up a General Motors spokesman on camera in ‘Roger and Me’, the tragic lives of the downtrodden Beales in the Maysles brothers’ ‘Grey Gardens’, or even the chilling reveal at the end of Facebook thriller, ‘Catfish’. But terrifying? The only scene that comes to mind arrives at the mid point of Werner Herzog’s ‘Grizzly Man’, his profile of bear-loving monomaniac, Timothy Treadwell, whose eagerness to get close-up-and-personal with his furry friends eventually led him and his girlfriend to become a hearty supper for one of them. Treadwell, who made sure to film his exploits in the hope they’d be made into a TV series, had his camera rolling at just the point when the hungry critter laid siege to his tent, and though the lens was covered, a document of the audio remains. Ever the intrepid voyager, Herzog dons headphones and listens to Treadwell’s violent death throes. Considering his back catalogue (and the fact he was best buds with Klaus Kinski), Herzog must have seen and done some crazy stuff in his time, but here he softly requests the audio be turned off, there’s a long pause, then he says to the owner of the tape: ‘Julie... you must never listen to this’. **DJ**

9 ***Don’t Look Now*** (Donald Sutherland, Julie Christie)
Nicolas Roeg
1973

Hi-Ho, hi-ho, it’s off to death we go

SPOILER ALERT Much of Roeg’s premonitory chiller is imbued with an air of impending doom. But there are two scenes that particularly jangle the nerves. The first is a moment any parent will find unbearable: the sight of a young girl in a red mac frolicking by the family lake (to the plaintive sound of a few single piano notes, no less) as her father (Sutherland) coincidentally inspects one of his picture slides bearing the strange image of a similarly dressed small person sitting in a church pew. The scene then cuts back to his daughter negotiating a slippery log over the water. Then back again to a glass of water spilling across the slide to reveal what looks like a rivulet of blood. It’s a chilling portent of bad things to come... and they don’t come more terrifying than the film’s beautifully shot Venice-set closing scene where Sutherland confronts what his eyes believe is the figure of his late daughter wearing a similar red, hooded coat. The coat turns to expose a hideous gargoyle-like face, a

long kitchen knife is briefly seen, and it's all over. **DA**

8 ***The Exorcist*** (Linda Blair, Ellen Burstyn, Jason Miller)
William Friedkin
1972

Rage against the machine

Obviously the threat of a swearsy hell fiend taking over the body of your pre-teen daughter is nothing to scoff at. But then having to witness her involuntarily painting the wallpaper a nice shade of camo green with her vomit? Nasty stuff indeed. But the scariest moment in this scariest of movies actually derives from something more mundane, more close to home: something which many of us may have experienced ourselves. After the initial signs of behavioural abnormalities in her daughter Regan (Blair), cinema's greatest concerned single mother, Chris MacNeil (Burstyn), duly takes her to see a doctor. One of the tests she receives is a brutal, horrifyingly convincing spinal tap, and the way in which Friedkin employs fast, jutting cuts and ear-splitting industrial noise really makes you feel for the little blighter. **DJ**

7 ***Barton Fink*** (John Turturro, John Goodman, Judy Davis)
Joel and Ethan Coen
1991

You're just a tourist with a typewriter, Barton. I live here!

SPOILER ALERT The Coen brothers have unleashed all manner of cinematic furies over the years, from the comic (the bounty hunter in 'Raising Arizona') to the oblique (the tornado in 'A Serious Man') to the seriously scary ('No Country's Anton Chigurh). None of them, however, runs quite the gamut of surreal nightmare anxiety as the moment Charlie Meadows – played by Goodman, then best known as the affable blue-collar dad in TV's 'Roseanne' – finally lets the mask slip and goes utterly tonto through the corridors of the Hotel Earle. The audience – and even the fatally blinkered Barton – has already started to wonder if there isn't more to Charlie than the plain, folksy travelling façade he's almost pathologically keen to encourage. And when dead bodies, decapitated heads and LA's finest start showing up, Charlie's inner demons come out to play in spectacular fashion. Exploding into an infernal rage that ignites the very air around him, Charlie (aka Karl 'Madman' Mundt; aka King Ralph) barrels through the flaming hotel with a shotgun, repeatedly bellowing 'I'll show you the life of the mind!' before blowing away a couple of policemen. Chilling? It's like watching your grandmother dancing naked. Or Santa Claus butchering a reindeer. **ALD**

6 ***Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*** (Dick Van Dyke, Sally AnnHowes, Lionel Jeffries)
Ken Hughes
1968

Remember kiddies: never trust a ballet dancer

'Here we are children, come and get your lollipops!' No government-funded, public-service short film about the threat of kidnapping could rival the appearance of the Child Catcher in 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' (1968) as a way of warning kids about the danger of strangers. Robert Helpmann – a world-renowned ballet dancer – played the hook-nosed creep and comes skipping into a deserted German square wearing clownish, colourful clothes and offering all sorts of goodies to any little cherubs who will come and get them. 'Cherry pie! Cream tarts! Treacle tarts! Come along, kiddie winkies!' Poor little Jemima (Heather Ripley) and Jeremy (Adrian Hall) Potts rise to the bait, rush to collect their sweets and jump into the Child Catcher's jolly-looking cart, which – bang! – reveals itself as a prison and they start shrieking horribly. It only increases the fear factor that the music keeps switching tones from jolly to perilous. 'Children! Where are you?' **DC**

5 **An American Werewolf in London** (David Naughton, Jenny Agutter, Griffin Dunne)
John Landis
1981

Don't go off on the moors...

For the average filmgoer back in the early '80s, horror-comedy meant the likes of 'Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein' or 'Carry on Screaming': wild overacting, bad puns, a spot of slapstick, the occasional ghoul, nothing that'd really upset Grandma. And one can imagine audiences sitting down to 'American Werewolf' anticipating more of the same: Landis was, of course, the guy responsible for 'Animal House' and 'The Blues Brothers', a wiseacre goofball from the SNL school. And for the first few minutes, we get what we expect: a pair of likeable Yankee travellers, a creepy old pub, a gang of broad Yorkshire stereotypes muttering obscure threats, chief among them 'stick to the road, lads... don't go off on the moors...'. You half expect Charles Hawtrey to wander in. But then our two lads start walking. And they don't stick to the road. They go off on the moors. And there's something out there, in the mist. And suddenly, we're in a completely different movie altogether. Landis handles the buildup beautifully – the laughter sticks in the throat even before the actual attack comes. But when it does, it's ferocious: the claws, the teeth, the unbearable, agonised screaming. Even in a straight horror movie, this would be a phenomenal scene; stuck at the beginning of a supposed comedy, it's like a punch in the throat. (Special mention should also go to that insane dream sequence with the murderous ghost Nazi shock troops – God only knows what Landis was smoking). **TH**

4 **Hidden** (Daniel Auteuil, Juliette Binoche, Maurice Bénichou)
Michael Haneke
2005

Ever kick sand in a kid's face? It'll come back to haunt you

SPOILER ALERT The terror in Michael Haneke's films is more often suggested than explicit – think of the unrevealed disaster of 'The Time of the Wolf', or even 'Funny Games', in which most of the violence is threatened or happens off-camera. That's the thrust of 'Hidden', too, which gives us a well-to-do Parisian couple, Georges and Anne, played by Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche, who start receiving anonymous video tapes and drawings at their well-to-do home. These unwanted gifts lead a harried Georges to an Algerian man, Majid, who used to share Georges's family home as a child and who is the source of some long-buried guilt around an incident they shared which involved the beheading of a chicken. The man, Majid, insists he has nothing to do with the packages, although during Georges's second meeting with him, at his flat, something dreadful happens. He didn't send the tapes, Majid says, but he has something he wants to show him. At which point he slits his own throat and dies. The stillness of the camera, Auteuil's frozen stance, the splash of red on the wall and the sound of gurgling blood all leave us plenty of space to consider the horror we've witnessed and recover from the inevitable involuntary jolt or scream. **DC**

3 **Ringu** (Nanako Matsushima, Miki Nakatani)
 Hideo Nakata
 1998

Video killed the... well, everyone

SPOILER ALERT The just-when-you-thought-it-was-safe ending is an established horror classic. Kill the monster, destroy the threat, get everyone back to normal and then – bam! – a hand from the grave, a dwarf in the dark, a flicker on the motel TV screen. But none of these can hold a guttering candle to the closing scene of Nakata’s electrifying 1998 masterpiece, the film which shook horror out of its self-regarding post-‘Scream’ stupor and reminded audiences what a real scary movie was all about: no screeching teens, no splattering gore, no CGI, just great high-concept thrills, terrific performances, a mounting sense of terror and one epic shock. In fact, it’s the very lo-fi nature of the scene which makes it such a nightmare. The high concept of the ‘Ring’ series – a video tape which, if watched, results in death within seven days – could easily have been ruined by a high-style approach. By keeping things spare, murky and ominous, Nakata creates a constant tone of doom and dread. But a build-up is nothing without a pay-off, and here Nakata proves his genius, creating pure horror from nothing more than a flickering TV screen, a repetitive metallic sound and Rie Ino’s phenomenally inhuman, lurching Noh-inspired performance as the evil spirit Sadako. **TH**

2 **127 Hours** (James Franco, Clémence Poésy)
 Danny Boyle

A lone adventurer rues the day he forgot to pack a pneumatic drill

SPOILER ALERT There’s one grisly scene in Danny Boyle’s film that typifies the solitude, agony and despair experienced by lonesome adventurer Aron Ralston on that fateful day in the Utah canyons. Quite literally stuck between a rock and a hard place (to pinch the title of Ralston’s book from which the film was adapted), Ralston (Franco) spends five and a half days trying to extricate his right arm from a trapped heavyweight boulder several metres inside a deep, slippery gully. Every thought of escape crosses his mind – from erecting a pulley system to chipping away hopelessly at the boulder with the blade of his cheap multi-tool. And then it happens. That unthinkable moment to which the desperate mind succumbs when every other avenue has been explored and found wanting. Ralston ponders briefly before arranging a makeshift torque system to snap his radius and ulna bones. Then he picks up his blunt blade and slowly pierces the skin of his forearm. What follows is one of the most toe-curling, gruesome close-ups of self-mutilation in cinema history, made worse by dint of the fact it actually happened. The camera doesn’t budge for several minutes of nauseating arterial mayhem as we watch Ralston hack, twist and saw his blade through layer upon layer of mangled muscular tissue. One suspects many a meal was put on hold after that scene. **DA**

Hell hath no fury...

SPOILER ALERT In the final analysis, it all depends on how you define 'terrifying'. Is it a short sharp shock, a scene of creeping tension, a moment of graphic horror, or a long, lingering look at something so utterly wrong, but so entirely believable, that it scars the soul? The climactic scene of Takashi's masterpiece, 'Audition', has all of this and more – hence its proud placing at the very top of this prestigious list of horrors. For its first hour, 'Audition' is almost a romantic comedy – albeit an oddly unsettling one. Almost on a whim, widowed businessman and loving dad Aoyama (Ishibashi) decides it's time he sought another wife. But at his age, he doesn't have time to mess around: he wants Miss Right, and right now. Luckily, his best pal is a moviemaker with a brilliant plan: invent a fake movie, put out a casting call and hold auditions for Aoyama's blushing bride-to-be. So far, so breezy – if this was Hollywood, we'd be well on our way to a happy ending. But this is Takashi's world, where nothing ever ends well. So instead of chuckling along with Aoyama, we're starting to question him. Isn't this all a bit, well, creepy? And once the auditions begin, things begin to get ugly: women sing, dance, talk and strip, and our 'hero' watches with utter disdain – at least until the arrival of beautiful, young, submissive Asami (Shiina). She's everything he's looking for – talented, lonely, eager to please – and Aoyama is immediately smitten. There's no need to go into the details of what transpires over the course of Aoyama and Asami's courtship – suffice it to say that nothing is as it seems, particularly the lady's apparently giving nature. By the time the final conflict comes around, we're already far from the film's initial good-natured style: Miike has goosed us with a few nasty shocks – a flapping, severed tongue, a man with missing feet, a bag stuffed with something horribly alive – but then Aoyama returns home to find the house dark, a needle flicks into his neck, and it all goes hideously, unforgettably wrong... It's hard to say exactly which part of the ensuing nightmare is the most disturbing: is it the spiralling carousel dream sequence, with its vomit-drinking, its neon flashes and its horrifying glimpses into Asami's secret past? Is it the brutal retribution which follows, a torture scene of overwhelming ferocity complete with severed limbs, agonised shrieks and Asami's unbearable whisper as she slips sharp needles into places sharp needles should never, ever go: 'kiri kiri kiri...' ('deeper, deeper...'). Or is it the fact that, deep down, we want this to happen, we recognise the full, hateful exploitation to which Asami (and, by extension, the entire female gender) has been subjected, and we want to see vengeance carried out? Miike has never been able to replicate the overwhelming power of this staggeringly wrongheaded sequence – but that's okay, neither has anyone else. But the climax of 'Audition' is exactly what horror cinema should be: shocking and unforgettable, yes, but also deeply responsible and passionately angry. This isn't some pathetic parade of tawdry torture, this is real terror. And it never goes away. **TH**