

Scary movie classics worth watching multiple times

By **Howie Nave**

Oh, how we love Halloween up here in Lake Tahoe – elevating it to holiday status. And just like Christmas, what would any traditional holiday be without those classic movies encapsulating the spirit of that holiday?

And not just classic mind you, but movies that are cheesy fun, which can only be acceptable during Halloween.

My love for all things scary dates back when I was just a kid staying up late on a Saturday night watching “Creature Features” on KTVU Channel 2 (before it became a Fox affiliate) growing up in the Bay Area. It was my first introduction seeing the likes of Lon Chaney Jr., Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Vincent Price in those classic black and white flicks. There are so many good ones (and a few great ones, too) and your taste obviously may differ from mine, but here are a few of my personal favs not just from back then, but some recent horror flicks that still generate a scream when I least expect it.

Many of these I have on DVD and when the world gets weird I’ll close the curtains, pop in a disc and crank it up to cover my screams just in case anybody might be nearby.

Halloween, R (1978)

What better way to kick off any Halloween Horror Fest than the namesake that would spawn more than 20 sequels? “Halloween” is director-writer John Carpenter’s horror masterpiece and introduced us to the new Queen of Scream, Jamie Lee Curtis long before she was regulated via Activia. “Halloween” set the sci-fi horror standard in which other movies would soon copy.

Starring the late, great Donald Pleasence as Dr. Sam Loomis, "Halloween" had it all didn't it? A psychotic murderer The Shape (later to be known as Michael Myers in subsequent sequels) who loved to slash his victims, a terrifying music that sticks to your soul and by far one of the most frightening experiences I have ever had in a theater. There were some equally scary sequels. but nothing that captured that first scream as the original.



The Cabin in the Woods, R (2012)

As a fan of horror movies and one who has pretty much "seen it all" when it comes to predicting the storyline (I can usually tell you what's going to happen within the first 15 minutes of the feature) it's refreshing when a movie comes along like "The Cabin in the Woods" that isn't as formulaic as one would expect. Let's just say that you're not going to see this one coming. Oh sure, the movie starts out with the requisite college students, each with its own stereotypical character centered on a cabin where horrific things are happening. But wait, these undead wanting to kill the living (by the way why do they always crave college-aged students?) don't just show up randomly. They appear to be controlled by scientists. Say what? Yes. Beneath the cabin is a basement, and beneath that basement are where Richard Jenkins and Bradley Whitford hash out their dastardly schemes, but what's in it for them? I ain't tellin', but there is a surprise ending that reminded me

a little of "The Hunger Games" meets John Carpenter's "The Thing". Survival of the fittest, but when those controlling the outcome are themselves upstaged. That's when things get really interesting. "The Cabin in the Woods" was produced and co-written by Joss Whedon (creator of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Angel") and directed by Drew Goddard (writer of "Cloverfield").

Alien, R (1979)

To this day when you witness that alien bursting out of John Hurt's stomach, you know that director Ridley Scott's terrifying flick has you captivated. "Alien" and its sequel "Aliens" (1986) are still two of the better sci-fi horror flicks out there even though their version of high-tech by today's standards looks antiquated. The aliens are still some of the creepiest and scariest I have seen in a movie, which by the way were based on the work of H.R. Giger (for which he received an Academy Award under Best Visual Effects category).

The Exorcist, R (1973)

It would forever typecast its little known actress Linda Blair. After this flick it was tough for Blair to get any real serious roles forever typecast as that possessed girl who spit up pea soup. Of course it was supposed to be barf but soon everyone found out it was pea soup and then people would always imitate her making a mess. One of the scariest and psychologically tinged movies ever, "The Exorcist" caused a sensation when it first premiered, including religious protestors that of course only made me want to see it more. And yes, there were countless sequels and prequels, but none of them holds up to the mother of all satanic movies.

Hellraiser, R (1987)

Clive Barker knows a thing or two when it comes to messing with people's minds and this to me is one of his best in that department and one of the most original, too. Originally

titled, "Sadomasochists from Beyond the Grave," Barker (who wrote, directed and produced) must have been on some sort of medication (or stopped taking it) when he came up with this classic horror gem. The character of Pinhead, the lead Cenobite, is truly one of the more original icons in horror. You'll never play with a Rubik's Cube again if you haven't seen this classic. Go ahead, I dare ya!

The Grudge, R (2004)

Based on Takashi Shimizu's Japanese movie, "Ju-On: The Grudge", the American version is just as good. Why? Because someone out there in Hollywood was smart enough to let Takashi Shimizu do a remake from his own movie. How about that? The original creator gets to do his own work and wow-the results are impressive. Starring Sarah Michelle Gellar as an American nurse living and working in Tokyo, she discovers (and is exposed) to a mysterious curse that causes a person to experience an uncontrollable rage before taking their life. The part that still creeps me out is that of images of zombied looking kids in this waterlogged black and white image with freaky noises that stay with you long after the movie has ended. You'll never want to enter an uninhabited house again unless accompanied by an army of eyewitnesses.

Shaun of the Dead, R (2004)

Got a have a funny horror flick and nothing says, funny better than a Simon Pegg movie, especially when it involves zombies. The British horror comedy, "Shaun of the Dead" makes scary sexy. By treating the genre as a joke Pegg gets plenty of mileage with his dry wit making this satire one of the best comedy/horror one of the funniest I've ever seen outside of "An American Werewolf in London". When zombies start descending on London the media declare it "Z-Day" in the U.K. Pegg, who wrote the screenplay with director Edgar Wright, plays the title character, a hapless 29-year-old clerk who, with his best friend Ed (Nick Frost) plot a plan to make a

safe exit along with Shaun's on-again, off-again sweetheart, Liz (Kate Ashfield). The movie also stars Bill Nighy. Trust me, this is one of the funniest movies I've ever seen with regard to brain-eating zombies.

The Thing, R (1982)

Hands down one of the best remakes ever. How good? Well, there was a prequel that came out earlier this year that takes you up to the 1982 remake – that's how good. I first saw this as a double feature in the theater (yes kids, they used to let you see two movies sometimes for the price of one) not knowing what to expect, but was literally blown out of my seat when I did see it. It was that good. Starring a bearded Kurt Russell as the head of an American Antarctic expedition, "The Thing" still boasts some of the best special effects ever and has an all-star stellar cast that includes Wilford Brimley, T.K. Carter, David Clennon, Keith David, Richard A. Dysart and Charles Hallahan. Directed by the master himself, John Carpenter, you'll be grabbing anything when you see what happens when an alien being replicates itself into anything starting with huskies and moving on up from there. Every movie mentioned so far has had a sequel or two and yet this one is the one that I wanted to see a sequel but alas, Carpenter felt otherwise.

Paranormal Activity, R (2007)

The original was good, but and I could see having a sequel was inevitable – but three sequels? Someone went to the horror well a little too often and that's why global warming is not a myth. The original was good because of its low-budget quality that made it appear so real with its single-camera, rapid-movement-shot in the first-person style. With each subsequent sequel the budget got bigger as the quality depreciated. "Paranormal Activity" works in much the same way another very low-budget flick, "The Blair Witch Project." The tension is just as shaky as those hand-held cameras are. You know the

story is good when you don't require any big names to carry your picture. Of course that makes it easier for the filmmakers to control their young actors lest they want to be killed off and not be in another sequel.

Poltergeist, PG-13 (1982)

Would you believe that back then executive producer (and writer) Steven Spielberg had to lobby to give this movie a PG rating? The film was originally given an R rating so he (along with the filmmakers) protested successfully and got a PG rating (the PG-13 rating did not exist at the time). This was the movie that gave us the immortal line, "They're baaaaaack" that was uttered by Heather O'Rourke, the cute little blonde who played Carol Anne, daughter of Craig T. Nelson and JoBeth Williams in the movie. The movie is a stark reminder of what happens when developers in their zeal to construct urban sprawl forget to move bodies from a cemetery they are building on. The movie took on a life of its own with real life actors dying in each production. The eldest daughter in the movie (played by Dominique Dunne) was killed in real life by her boyfriend upon completion of the first film. Actor Julian Beck died of stomach cancer after shooting the second film and actress Heather O'Rourke died of a mystery case of intestinal stenosis shortly before completion of the third film. Also, many cast members' careers have suffered after appearing in the films. The ghosts at first appear friendly by moving objects around the house to the amusement of everyone, but then they turn nasty and start to terrorize the family before they "kidnap" Carol Anne. Still a great scare factor to this day, "Poltergeist" has a great story and great effects that rival only that of "The Thing".

Psycho, PG (1960)

The one movie that would forever make showers a scary experience (if you're a woman) and would brand those of the male species who were too close to their mom a horror just

waiting to unfold. Think of it as a momma's boy becoming momma. Leave it to Alfred Hitchcock to deliver one of the truly frightening masterpieces of all time. Phoenix office worker Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) is fed up with the way life has treated her. She has to meet her lover Sam (John Gavin) at lunch breaks and they cannot get married because Sam has to give most of his money away in alimony payments. One Friday afternoon Marion is entrusted to bank \$40,000 by her employer. Seeing the opportunity to take the money and run, Marion leaves town and heads toward Sam's California store. Tired after the long drive and caught in a storm, she gets off the main highway and pulls into The Bates Motel. The motel is managed by a quiet young man called Norman (Anthony Perkins) who seems to be dominated by his mother. An interesting piece of trivia: After the film's release, Hitchcock received an angry letter from the father of a girl who refused to have a bath after seeing "Les Diaboliques" (also on this list), and now refused to shower after seeing "Psycho." Hitchcock sent a note back to the father simply saying, "Send her to the dry cleaners."

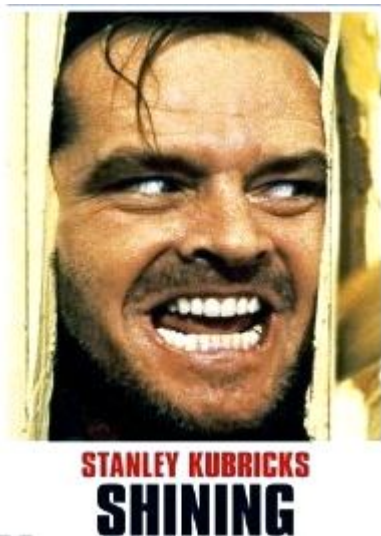
A Nightmare on Elm Street, R (1984)

Outside of John Carpenter, Clive Barker and George Romero, I kind of know I'm going to pretty much enjoy my scare factor when I see horror master Wes Craven's name attached to it. And with "A Nightmare on Elm Street" I wasn't disappointed. One could argue that many a subsequent horror flick borrowed their chops (no pun intended) from Craven's original "Elm Street". High school kids are being killed off in a small town and nobody knows why. Enter Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) playing detective who traces the cause to Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), a disfigured bum in a slouch hat who sporting knives for fingernails long before Wolverine made it sexy. Still holds up as classic slasher that I think horror fans continue to hold in high esteem in part because it comes across as low-budget and with an intelligent (and original)

script featuring some pretty impressive newcomers such as Johnny Depp, Ronee Blakley and Amanda Wyss with Craven himself directing.

28 Days Later, R (2003)

Who would have guessed that the same guy who directed that incredible montage at this year's 2012 Summer Olympics in London would also be the same chap who brought us one of the more original movies centered on a deadly virus. There's just something about movies revolving around a deadly virus that creep me out the most. Is it airborne? Can I get it from shaking somebody's hand? Will it kill me slowly and is there a host to help find us a cure? Whichever it might be director Danny Boyle plays on that scenario (and more) combining the terror of its after effects and the tried and true zombie story. The movie also takes a look at what might happen if we experiment on things that go unchecked. It's that unknown element that can be the scariest psychologically. Londoner Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes up in a hospital room all alone. No one else is in the entire hospital. He puts his clothes on, walks out into the empty streets. He does meet other survivors, but how long will they survive? Not just that, but it's the manner in which they die that will make you writhe.



The Shining, R (1980)

The pairing of director Stanley Kubrick with Jack Nicholson's cold and frightening character (also named Jack) defined this

movie and the career of both. "The Shining" introduces the viewer to Jack Torrance (Nicholson), a man who plans to spend the winter in solitude with his wife, Wendy (Shelley Duvall), and son, Danny (Danny Lloyd), as Jack becomes the caretaker of the Overlook Hotel just as workers are shutting it down for the winter. Chef Dick Hallorann (the classic Scatman Crothers) is one of the crew but the movie centers almost entirely around Jack and his slow, deterioration into madness writing the novel that is page after page of the same line. For me it's a psychological mind thriller at its best and a movie that would label Shelley Duvall as the Queen of Scream and one that every young actress would have to emulate in order to be considered as the leading lady for any horror flick.

Night Of The Living Dead, R (1968)

If this movie were made today, it would be considered tame compared to the current crop of gore flicks out there. "Night of the Living Dead" is a true classic (and always will be) that definitely deserves its place in the Smithsonian Institute of Horror. The movie is still quite effective shot in glorious black and white. I had the rare privilege of seeing this film in a theater at a midnight screening. The audience found themselves screaming and jumping as I did in certain parts of the film. It's raining weird rays from outer space that causes the dead to awaken from their graves to feed on human flesh for sustenance. After seeing this movie originally on television, I never slept near my sister again when camping with the family.

Diabolique, R (1955)

This movie (original French title "Les Diaboliques") centers around a nasty headmaster having an affair on his wife who, as it turns out treats his mistress just as badly as he treats his wife. In a twisted three-way the two women conspire to do

in he headmaster Robert Bloch, author of "Psycho," called this his favorite horror movie.

The Fly, R (1958)

You know a movie is good when a generation of fans who crept out on the original decide that when they become filmmakers in the next generation to try and top the original. They don't. Tough to make a better one when you have Vincent Price in the original. When a scientist experiments with matter transference and a fly accidentally becomes part of that matter well, let's just say if you've never seen this classic you'll never look at flies the same way again.

Seven, R (1995)

For one thing I liked seeing Brad Pitt in a role where even he looked scared. David Fincher's "Seven" stars Pitt as a rookie detective with veteran detective Lt. William Somerset (played by Morgan Freeman) tracking a serial killer who gruesomely kills for world's ignorance of the seven deadly sins. It gets really good when they get into the killer's mind and start thinking as he does.

Jaws, PG (1975)

This was the movie that literally put a young Steven Spielberg on the cinematic map. If you think the PG rating is too tame, you're correct. But back then they hadn't come up with the PG-13 rating, which is what this should be if seen today. This is one of the best psychological horror-adventure flicks I've seen in a while. The idea of a lone, killer shark bent on eating people in a vacation resort community just begs buffet specials. That coupled with the signature shark music of John Williams makes this an all time fav of mine and even to this day I ask myself, "Is it safe to go into the water?"

Zombieland, R (2009)

In much the same way that "Shaun of the Dead" poked fun in London "Zombieland" is a post-apocalyptic America where the undead have already pretty much taken over the entire country. The trick now is how one survives and stay (literally) one step ahead of them. With a cast that includes "The Social Network" lead, Jesse Eisenberg, sexy Emma Stone and zombie hunter Woody Harrelson, "Zombieland" is a laugh out riot using anything handy, even a banjo to rid the world of the walking dead. There's a cool cameo too of Bill Murray, playing himself, which was unexpected and just added even more laughs to an already soon-to-be-classic. Director Ruben Fleischer mixes just the right amount of gore, glee, fright and slapstick to create what is now a must-see every Halloween.

Honorable Mentions:

There are so many other flicks that make Halloween worth celebrating include the original "Saw" (2004), "Basket Case" (1982), "The Omen" (1976), "House of Wax" (not the Paris Hilton version but the original 1953 rendition with Vincent Price), "The Haunting" (1963), "The Blair Witch Project" (1999), "The Birds" (1963) "Scanners" For campy horror fun you must see "An American Werewolf in London" (1981) and "Scream" (1996), "Dracula" (1931).

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.