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Scary Movies for Anarchists to Watch in the Dark

Nicky Reid

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The horror film is hands down the most woefully underrated genre in cinema. Art at its very finest provokes and there is no subject more provocative than death. Death is the only existential constant in the human experience. Like it or not, we are all born to die. So it only follows that human beings should be both fascinated and terrified by death in equal measure. This fascination is precisely what powers the commercial drive behind the horror industry. There has never been a time since cinema's infancy when audiences haven't flocked to the theater to be frightened. People are drawn to fear but when that fear is followed through with analysis they become too uncomfortable to enjoy the cheap thrill of being terrified without consequences. But there are always consequences.

This is why mainstream horror movies have largely been reduced to the cheap thrills alone. The last thing Hollywood wants is for terrified people to think about what terrifies them most. This isn't just a grave disservice to an entire genre of art. It is a grave disservice to society as a whole. Only when confronted

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by that which makes us most uncomfortable can we collectively overcome it. Since, as an anarchist as well as a lifelong horror movie buff, nothing makes me more uncomfortable than the state and the established order that thrives in its haunted architecture, I've decided to compile a list of movies that should both terrify and provoke anyone's god-given anti-authoritarian impulses. Not every movie on this list is a horror film in the traditional sense, but they all foster skepticism of authority through the strategic use of terror. These are scary movies for anarchists to watch in the dark and maybe, if we're lucky, a few of them will be scary enough to create a few new anarchists in the dark this Halloween.

They Live (1988)– The first film on this list isn't exactly scary, what with its cheesy one-liners and comically over the top street brawl ("Put on the fucking glasses!") But beneath the B-movie grime, few films have done a finer job of illustrating the cryptic authoritarianism that lies just beneath the shiny visage of liberal democracy. Once Roddy Piper puts on those shades, he sees right through the trappings of glossy magazines, fiat cash and Reaganomics and becomes literate enough to read the true message of the extraterrestrial oligarchy, loud and clear. When it comes to capitalism, they live and you sleep. This is a movie about getting woke. Now put on the fucking glasses cause we're just getting started.

The Hills Have Eyes (1977)– Wes Craven's sophomore shocker has long been dismally overlooked by snooty cinephiles, but in my book it's one of the craftiest horror movies of the Exploitation era. After finding themselves stranded in the desert, your average American family is preyed upon by a feral tribe of inbred cannibals who have themselves been subjected to generations of nuclear testing to benefit their prey's precious society. What could have been a simple Z-grade revenge flick (like the remake) becomes a harsh study in the hollow fallacy of civilization, as the Brady Bunch rapidly devolves into the Manson Family once their natural thirst for vengeance renders them every bit as depraved as the savages

sans only to find his childhood innocence engulfed in the surreal madness of total war. A Soviet picture from the Glasnost era, *Come and See* doesn't restrain itself by pulling any punches in revealing the savagery of the Nazi war machine at its most satanically virile on the Eastern Front, a chapter of the "Good War" that most Western sources choose to gloss over. But *Come and See* is bigger and blacker than any single tragedy. It is a movie about mankind's most horrific invention and it is as terrifyingly relevant today as it's ever been. For even in 2019, from the mountains of Yemen to the valleys of the West Bank, we have still yet to learn the lessons of 1943. In war, we all become the monsters we fight.

Joker (2019)– I've got a joke for you, dearest motherfuckers, but I don't think you'll get it. This body-slamming powerhouse of a social commentary is a last minute addition to the list. I only saw the movie last night, and I still can't believe that Hollywood sanctioned something so dangerously subversive. *Joker* isn't exactly a horror movie but it sure as shit ain't a superhero movie either, and it is scary as hell, largely because I, like too many low-income mentally ill Americans, have lived it. Joaquin Phoenix's Arthur Fleck isn't a criminal mastermind. He's a sad, broken, tired creature who simply couldn't afford to be ignored anymore. *Joker* is a movie about blowback. For what do you get when you leave your children to be raised by massive corporations and corrupt government bureaucracies while you get rich blowing up the Third World? You get exactly what you fucking deserve. See, I told you you wouldn't get it... But you will. You see, we are all *Joker*, the silent majority of the terminally fucked. And it is high time for the comfortable class in the straight world to get scared. They asked for it. Here it comes...

Stay scared, dearest motherfuckers. It's the best way to stay awake. Happy Halloween.

tormented one of them for unknown gains. When the girls grow up to seek revenge, they get more than any two human beings could ever bargain for when this aforementioned organization turns out to be a powerful international cabal who tortures innocent victims in hopes of creating martyrs, who bear witness to the beyond once they are brought to the brink of death. At its heart, I see Martyrs as a parable analogous to the dangers of organized religions who turn this life into hell for the weak in hopes of creating some kind of paradise in a plain of existence no mortal could possibly comprehend. It is a cruel lesson because it needs to be. Take it from a lapsed Catholic martyr. Keep Doubting.

The Shining (1980)– Stanley Kubrick’s cerebral masterpiece has inspired a wide variety of fascinating theories about its true meaning (see Room 237). My take on my favorite is that it’s a ghost story about American history and its unexorcised demons. The film is loaded with references to genocide, both Jewish and Native American, from the Indian burial ground that serves as the Overlook’s foundation to the racially charged “Tomahawk” ambush on Doc Hallorann. But the gravest reference is the Torrance’s themselves. Rather than dealing with Jack’s clearly violent temper and history of abuse, they choose instead to ignore the demons of their patriarch and leave it in the past until history comes back to haunt them. America shares this karmic amnesia with the Torrance’s. We bury the slaves and dead Indians and war crimes, and fool ourselves into believing that this history of violence will never revisit us. Until our schools ring with the death rattle of gunfire and the blood comes pouring from the elevator doors. In a sense, all of us have always been at the Overlook Hotel. Will we ever leave?

Come and See (1985)– The most disturbing movie that I’ve ever seen isn’t a horror movie in the strictest sense of the genre. It’s a war movie, but a war movie daring enough to acknowledge that any movie about war should, by nature, be a horror story. Taking place in Belarus during the height of the Nazi invasion of Operation Barbarossa, a young boy leaves his idyllic village to join the Parti-

they seek to get even with, a class created by the pollution that superficially divides predator and prey until that line blurs in the bloodshed. The abyss stares back.

Under Our Skin (2008)– This one may be more frightening to some than others, but if you are one of the millions of Americans suffering in the dark from the ravages of lifelong chronic Lyme disease like myself, it’s about as scary as it gets. Decades after an ancient ailment exploded into new and monstrously crippling variants in Lyme, Connecticut, the American medical establishment still refuses to so much as even acknowledge our very existence. This controversial but little seen documentary traces both the history of the cover-up and the disintegrating lives of the plagued. If you have any brains in your skull, you’ll likely never feel safe in the woods or the doctor’s office ever again. I know haven’t. Those fucking ticks make Jason look like Jesus. Fuck the AMA.

Jacob’s Ladder (1990)– “Based on a true story…” is a classic horror movie trope going back to the Texas Chain Saw Massacre, but in the case of Adrian Lynne’s mind-bending psychological thriller, it’s terrifyingly true. A Vietnam veteran traumatized by haunting visions of hellish demons discovers that he and his platoon were the subjects of a government experiment gone horribly wrong. This was the real life horror story for untold scores of veterans and active duty soldiers who were subjected to lethal doses of high-powered hallucinogens during the 50’s and 60’s as part of the CIA’s Project MK-Ultra in blatant violation of the Nuremberg Code. These men lead broken lives with one foot permanently planted in a waking nightmare that most of us couldn’t even begin to comprehend. Jacob’s Ladder brought that nightmare to the screen and its disquietly surreal imagery is made all the more hideous by the fact that it was indeed based on a true story and one that our tax dollars financed and our elected officials covered up.

The Unknown Known (2013)– The greatest monster movie ever made in my book isn’t Dracula or Frankenstein but this ter-

rifingly Blair-Witch-simple documentary about former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Over a series of candid interviews in which director Errol Morris questions Rummy on his heinous decisions regarding Iraq and Abu Graib, it slowly becomes frighteningly clear that we're not simply listening to a remorseless failed politician here, but an outright sociopath, capable of compartmentalizing his malicious behavior into moral origami that creates a universe where he is never wrong and anything and everything is justifiable if it creates the results he seeks. It is an absolutely horrifying spectacle to behold, with no CGI, no gore, no topless coeds. Just a camera and a psychopath who was once one of the most powerful men on earth. Goosebumps.

Audition (1999)– One of the most shocking movies on the list is also one of the most woke. Takashi Miike's perverse fable of a lover scorned plays like *Fatal Attraction* on a bad acid trip. With the help of a TV producer friend of his, a lonely widower holds an audition to find his ideal woman. In Japan, this means quiet, subservient, dotting and eager to please. He finds that in sweet young Asami. He also finds out the hard way that all of these chauvinistic qualities he finds so endearing are symptoms of a lifetime of sexual abuse and abandonment. When the widower tries to pull the plug on this toxic relationship, sweet young Asami gets even in one of the most unnerving scenes in cinematic history. It's feminism with a wire saw and you better believe it fucking hurts.

Dawn of the Dead (1978)– Fuck the remake. George Romero's magnum opus is without a shadow of a doubt the greatest zombie picture ever made. It's also a gruesomely hilarious satire on the emptiness of American consumerism. What do you do when the world comes to an end and the dead walk the earth? Well, you go to the fucking mall, of course. As do the brain-dead zombies and the rapacious biker hordes, who rip each other's fucking guts out in a nihilistic fight over an air-conditioned square mile of useless shit. It was also filmed just hours away from my home town at the Appalachian Monroeville Mall. Romero was Central-Western

Pennsylvania's answer to John Waters, an auteur who used trash to cut high-society down to the Rust-Belt's level. I almost wish zombies were real, just to keep that brilliant old son of a bitch around while he decomposes. *Roam In Peace*.

Collapse (2009)– The third and final documentary on this list has to be the most relentlessly grim. What was essentially an autobiographical interview with ex-detective and arch doomer Michael Ruppert was depressing enough when it came out in 2009. But after the last decade, Ruppert's wild predictions of economic and energy driven collapse on a societal level look a lot less like theory and a lot more like prophecy. The movie takes on a truly haunted quality once you learn that since its commercially underwhelming debut, it's prophetic subject succumbed to his own doom and committed suicide after too many years of being ridiculed and ignored. *Collapse* stands as Michael Ruppert's final warning and it is a devastating piece of work to behold.

Nightcrawler (2014)– With the possible exception of *Natural Born Killers*, Louis Bloom's *Nightcrawler* might be cinema's most brutal take-down of the grotesque venality of America's so-called mainstream media. Armed with a single camera paid for with stolen swag, ambitious bug-eyed con-man Dan Gilroy (Jake Gyllenhaal on a manic bender) manages to hold the whole city of Los Angeles hostage with his brutally manufactured news stories. He lies, cheats and kills his way to the top of the headlines, and the most disturbing thing about the whole sordid tale isn't that he's a smashing success, but that this ending doesn't feel the least but unlikely in today's 24/7 news circus. Modern American "Journalism" is a world where the bad guys win and win big.

Martyrs (2008)– Hands down, the most soul-crushingly upsetting horror movie ever made. Pascal Laugier shocked the usually unshockable French film press with his brutally existentialist study on the very nature of human suffering. *Martyrs* has two stories to tell. The story of two abused little girls who grew up together in each other's arms. And the story of the shadowy institution that