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THE BEDLAM FILES

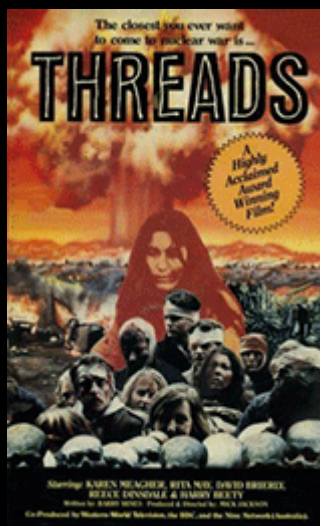
HAPPY ALL HALLOWS

"If human beings had genuine courage, they'd wear their costumes every day of the year, not just on Halloween."

—Douglas Coupland

Halloween Movies: My Top 20

Streaming Now



1. [THREADS](#)

Given all the talk about nuclear war that's been floated in recent weeks, I say this 1984 BBC telefilm is required viewing. Its sober and unflinching depiction of the effects of a nuclear strike on a British suburb outdoes those of any of the many anti-nuke movies that appeared in the 1980s, imparting horror of an entirely different, and far more horrifying,

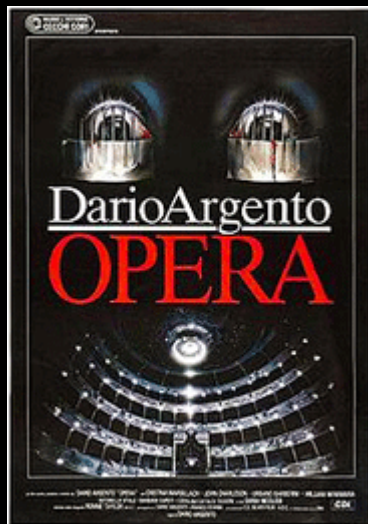
Adam's Picks



1. [THE OVERLOOK FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA: HORROR](#)

In the category of horror movie reference guides this hefty Phil Hardy edited compendium remains my #1 pick. In contrast to most of the others, which tend to concentrate on a single subgenre, this one touches on everything from obscure foreign productions like the Japanese JIGOKU and the Polish [LOKIS](#) to Hollywood

hue than that of [FRIDAY THE 13th](#) or SAW. Plus, THREADS can be [viewed for free](#). YOUTUBE



2. [OPERA](#)

One of my favorite [Dario Argento](#) films, a delirious inversion on the *giallo* formula mixed with elements from [A CLOCKWORK ORANGE](#). It's about an opera diva (Cristina Marsillach) stalked by a psychopathic fan who makes it a point to kill everyone close to his idol, forcing her to watch his evil deeds by taping pins under her eyelids so she can't look away. Yes, it's *that* kind of movie. SHUDDER



3. [GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES](#)

I'm not as high on this eight episode series as many others ([such as Stephen King](#)) are, but it is without question a worthwhile watch. A bit like TWILIGHT ZONE with Guillermo Del Toro in place of Rod Serling, it

spectaculars like [THE EXORCIST](#), [FATAL ATTRACTION](#) and BASIC INSTINCT. This book also helped familiarize me with essentials like [BLIND BEAST](#) (1968), [ALUCARDA](#) (1975), DAUGHTERS OF FIRE (1978) and [NO MERCY, NO FUTURE](#) (1981). Plus the over 2,000 capsule reviews, penned by Tom Milne, Kim Newman and others, are uniformly erudite and informative, bringing seriousness and intelligence to this most maligned of genres.

BOOK



2. [FROM BEYOND](#)

For what it's worth, this nutty H.P. Lovecraft pastiche from the RE-ANIMATOR gang (director [Stuart Gordon](#), producer Brian Yuzna, screenwriter Denis Paoli, lead actors Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton) just turned 36. I can remember going to see FROM BEYOND in a movie theater back in 1986 and finding it completely ridiculous. It hasn't gotten any less so in the ensuing years, but I have learned to appreciate the goofiness, which includes the addition of S&M, pineal glands popping out of people's foreheads and dialogue like "It bit off his head like a gingerbread man" to Lovecraft's rather modest and subdued source text.

FILM

features many interesting directors (such as CUBE'S Vincenzo Natali and BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW'S Panos Cosmatos) and, more importantly, some great source material, such as the stories "The Graveyard Rats" by Henry Kuttner and "Autopsy" by Michael Shea, whose elemental power shines through even when the filmmaking (in an all-too frequent occurrence) falters. NETFLIX



4. POINT BREAK

No, this 1991 adrenaline fest isn't a particularly good movie, but amid the glut of uninspired early nineties actioners (HARLEY DAVIDSON AND THE MALBORO MAN, STRIKING DISTANCE, DEMOLITION MAN, etc.) POINT BREAK definitely stands out. It was directed by Kathryn Bigelow, working from a script co-written by her then-husband James Cameron. The story, about a rookie FBI agent (Keanu Reeves) going undercover as a surfer to bust a zen-minded bank robber (Patrick Swayze), throws plausibility to the wind, and "borrows" rather heavily from Kem Nunn's surf noir classic TAPPING THE SOURCE. But Bigelow keeps the energy level high (some would say *too* high) and cheerfully takes the material over the top. *Fun fact*: this film's co-star James LeGros appeared as an egomaniacal heartthrob in the 1995 indie LIVING IN OBLIVION, and reportedly based the character's

3. HOUSE OF LEAVES

Possibly the most iconic horror novel of the 21st century, a widely imitated mind-roaster from author Mark Z. Danielewski (who has yet to approach, much less replicate, its impact) that functions as both a sly postmodern tweaking of the haunted house trope and an unusually absorbing horror narrative.

BOOK



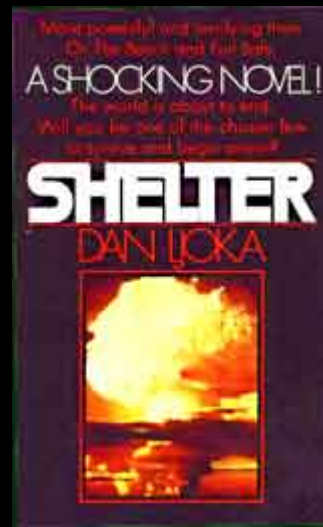
4. RAW MEAT

This subway tunnel-set shocker is one of the most respected British horror films of the seventies, and the acclaim is (for once) largely justified. Horror buffs will be pleased to see Christopher Lee and Donald Pleasance in the same film, and should also appreciate the highly atmospheric direction by Gary Sherman, whose skilled handling of the human monster at this film's core, and the tortured subterranean universe that monster inhabits, are without peer.



5. **LUCKIEST GIRL ALIVE**

An acting showcase for Mila Kunis as a fashion journalist with a dark past. Her secrets would appear to be safely tucked away, at least until an overzealous documentary filmmaker turns up to interview Kunis about her involvement in a 1999 school shooting, causing a most unwelcome resurfacing. The fact that Chiara Aurelia, who plays Kunis in the flashback scenes, looks nothing like her allegedly grown-up self isn't the colossal annoyance you might expect, as the character's self-willed night-and-day transformation is crucial to the drama. A strong film overall, but the material would have benefitted from a more imaginative director than TV veteran Mike Barker, and a better ending than the smug kiss-off we're given. NETFLIX



5. **SHELTER**

More nuclear war themed chills. This paperback original is a trashy and hastily written book to be sure, but I've found myself thinking about it a lot. Its story, centering on nuclear fallout shelters in Washington, DC and New Zealand, is quite pertinent, and makes two highly uncomfortable (but necessary) points: 1). That existence inside a fallout shelter will probably be worse than that on the outside, and 2). The radiation-suffused atmosphere into which you'd ultimately emerge is no place anyone would want to be.

Also NEW on the Site!

- **HALLOWEEN MOVIES: MY TOP 20**
- **PIGGY** *Film*
- **HELL HOUSE** *Documentary*
- **GRIMM MEMORIALS** *Book*
- **LIVING IN FEAR: A History of Horror in Mass Media** *Nonfiction*

- **BAD BIOLOGY** *Film*
- **EYES WITHOUT A FACE vs. THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS** *Commentary*
- **And Much More!**



INSIDER NOTES

Halloween is upon us once again! With that in mind, here's a short chronology of some important modern Halloween-related events:

1915: The [first recorded haunted house](#) (or as they were known back then, "Ghost Houses"), located in a Liphook, England fairground, opened to the public.

1938: The [Halloween broadcast](#) of Orson Welles' MERCURY THEATER ON THE AIR occurred, in which Welles performed an updated reading of H.G. Wells' WAR OF THE WORLDS and caused a mass panic (although precisely how massive that panic truly was remains an open question, as not too many people actually listened to the program).

1972: (I) [The first](#) known "Hell House," referring to an evangelical Christian run haunted house designed to literally scare the Hell out of its patrons (as detailed in the 2001 documentary [HELL HOUSE](#)), was put on by students of the Virginia-based Liberty University. The attraction, known as "Scaremare," was personally shepherded by Jerry Falwell, and is still in operation today.

(II) [THE HALLOWEEN TREE](#) by [Ray Bradbury](#) was published. It's far from Bradbury's best work but can lay claim to being the quintessential Halloween novel, or rather the quintessential *American* Halloween novel, being whimsical (rather than scary) in tone and aimed squarely at children.



1973: The year of the [inception of Knotts' Halloween Haunt](#), in which the Southern California based Knotts' Berry Farm amusement park underwent the first of its Halloween-happy makeovers. The concept was reportedly breached by two enterprising members of the park's marketing department, and their employer Walter Knott, against the wishes of his family and employees (who all thought it was a bad idea), ordered the Haunt put into action. The initial three-night affair (which ran from October 26-28) was an instant success and copied by all the major theme parks. Ultimately, though, Knotts remains the only real game in town when it comes to seasonal amusement park scares. (I of course have a special interest in this event, as detailed [here](#).)

1978: October 25 marked the release of the ultimate Halloween movie, a low-budget, high-style slasher that was titled, appropriately enough, [HALLOWEEN](#). Of the pic's many sequels and prequels, little need be said.

2006: (I) The initial publication of [DARK HARVEST by Norman Partridge](#), in my view one of the great Halloween stories, happened in October of '96. This novella first appeared as a limited-edition hardcover from Cemetery Dance, in which form it won a Bram Stoker award, and the following year was released as a Tor Books trade paperback that's still in print today.

(II) The final year of the Castro Street Halloween parade in San Francisco, the largest organized Halloween event in the world. This event, a children's parade that morphed into a raucous gay pride celebration, was said to be quite a sight. No-one seems entirely sure when the parade began, but everyone knows when it ended: Halloween night, 1996, when a [mass shooting prompted city officials to call it off](#).

(III) The death of my cousin Stuart at age 23, which like the Castro Street shootings occurred on Halloween night of '96. Definitely a sad event in my household, and one that will forever taint this holiday (albeit leavened somewhat by my memories of [Stuart's nature when he was alive](#)).

I'm done reading. To the website!

The Bedlam Files, 10-2022

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