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# Scary movies: The essential 15 you need to watch before Halloween

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1 of 10



Bill Skarsgård stars as Pennywise the clown in the new adaptation of 'It.'

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Do you remember the first time a movie scared you? For me it was *Jaws* (1975), and like many people, I never thought of playing in the ocean the same way after.

This is what good horror movies do: scare you, but inhabit some part of your consciousness, forever.

I rounded up 15 (or so) of what I think are the scariest movies you can watch before that most beloved of horror holidays, Halloween. (And hope I do it in a way that makes them enticing to watch, but still a spoiler-free zone.)

What you won't find on this list: slasher/gore movies ("Halloween," "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>," and "Nightmare on Elm Street" — though they did set the genre's standards); anything related to zombies; Vincent Price, Christopher Lee or Peter Cushing movies (while are classics, just may be a little too campy). And having just read "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley, I am still waiting to see a good version.

Please note: I have not seen "Hereditary" (2018) or "The Witch" (2015) which my friends tell me are truly frightening and should probably be on this list. (Maybe next year?)

The movies, in no particular order:

### **It (1990) and Part 1/remake (2017)**

A pissed-off, hungry clown, brave children, bullies — and did I say a pissed-off, hungry clown?

I was cynical when I first read they were remaking Stephen King's "It" (also a novel before being turned into a movie). The original, a TV miniseries, was seared in my memory: Tim Curry's portrayal of Pennywise the clown is truly something nightmares are made of and made me steer clear of storm drains. But I am here to say "Part 1" created just the right ominous mood, and as for Bill Skarsgard's Pennywise — well, you just have to see it and have nightmares later. If you weren't scared of clowns before seeing any version of "It," you will definitely give them the side-eye after. ("Part 2" is scheduled to premiere Sept. 6, 2019.)

### **The Omen (1976)**

A demonic nanny, freaked-out zoo animals and a child on a tricycle named Damien, aka the Antichrist, all make life rough for an American ambassador and his wife, who find out too late about the art of the deal. With elements of horror, suspense and fear of the supernatural, "The Omen" also has probably the most perfectly cast character in movie history — who can forget Damien's smile?

### **Get Out (2017)**

Body snatchers, identity and the sunken place, "Get Out" upped the fear factor of meeting your significant other's parents and friends.

### **Jaws (1975)**

A hungry shark, drunk teenagers and young children all hanging out in the same part of the ocean. What could go wrong? A lot, with a bigger boat and dry land sounding a whole lot safer.

### **The Thing (1982)**

"The Thing" keeps its audience in a constant state of dread as a ticked-off alien menaces a remote location in the Antarctic with no immediate escape.

Even though it's a remake of an earlier movie, "The Thing from Another World" (1951) and there is a prequel, "The Thing" (2011), this one delivers the scares.

### **Salem's Lot (1979)**

"Salem's Lot," adapted from a Stephen King novel, is a movie that consistently comes up — particularly with men, which I haven't figured

out — when talk arises about scary movies. The vampire flick is set in Maine.

### **The Shining (1980)**

A psychic child whose favorite phrase is “Redrum” (and who likes to ride tricycles), a remote location with no escape and an alcoholic father who has a way with an ax, "The Shining" (also from a Stephen King novel) created haunting imagery (the twins!), courtesy of director Stanley Kubrick.

### **The Dead Zone (1983)**

"The Dead Zone," another based on a Stephen King novel, is not an obvious choice for a scary movie list. But it masterfully mixes the scares — serial killers present and potentially the future, thin ice — with melancholy, which makes it frightening, showing how a person’s life can change horribly in a matter of seconds.

### **Poltergeist (1982)**

"Poltergeist" brought a modern twist to the haunted home story. Who knew a TV could be so malevolent? Yes, Carol Anne, they are most definitely here.

## **Alien (1979)**

Hungry aliens, another remote location (this time a spaceship) with no escape and a scheming android: "Alien" made a rumbling in your stomach a cause for concern and introduced to the movies a relentless monster who had two missions: eat and reproduce using whatever living being it could. (Not Jonesy the cat, right?)

## **Hellraiser (1987)**

"Hellraiser," directed by Clive Barker from his novella "The Hellbound Heart," is unsettling not only with its images (remember Pinhead?), but also with the way it shows how a ferocious dedication to selfish desires can lead to ruin. It's all done with alternative dimensions, painful-looking creatures and an unusual artifact that gets the story going.

## **The Ring (2002)**

Like "Poltergeist," "The Ring" combines modern technology with the supernatural, with frightening results. It varies some from its cinematic predecessor, "Ringu" (1998), but like

its source the scares remain genuine: a deadly videotape, a well and a ghost with a deadline. "The Ring" keeps you guessing up until the end.

### **Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)**

"Invasion of the Body Snatchers" scares come from the constant guessing game of who is an alien and who isn't. There is a sly humor in the movie as well, making fun of the era's self-help movements that in many ways reflect what the aliens were doing to the humans.

### **Phantasm (1979)**

Alternate dimensions, the tall man and a sphere with a point, "Phantasm" constantly creeps me out — let's just say, I still get nervous in mausoleums.

And last, but certainly not least:

### **The Exorcist (1973)**

"The Exorcist" always seems to be on the top of everyone's "scary movie" list. While many have seen the movie on TV, I recommend the director's cut — there is a scene that outdoes

the “pea soup” scene involving Regan, the possessed individual, and her imitation of a spider.

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