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**Remembering “The Scariest Movie of All Time”:
A Grounded Audience Study of *The Exorcist***

Appendix IV: Project Data

Martin Ian Smith

September 20th, 2019

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Interview transcripts](#)

[Gill](#)

[Marco](#)

[Paul](#)

[Carol](#)

[Laura](#)

[Steve](#)

[Mark](#)

[Kristen](#)

[Jan](#)

[Courtney](#)

[Chris](#)

[Owl](#)

[Dan](#)

[Kirsty J](#)

[Johnnie](#)

[Natalie](#)

[Hope](#)

[Kirsty C](#)

[Holly C](#)

[Jeff](#)

[Jim](#)

[Caitlyn](#)

[Brogan](#)

[Focus group indexes](#)

[Focus group 1](#)

[Focus group 2](#)

[Focus group 3](#)

[Focus group 4](#)

[Codebook](#)

Introduction

This appendix contains all data generated for this project. They are presented in a digital format and feature hyperlinks for ease of use.

Survey responses are included on this disc as a separate .xlsx file with participants' contact details removed. There has otherwise been no editing of survey responses and they are presented as written by respondents. It was my policy to correct typos and clean up formatting of all survey responses before their inclusion as quotes in the final thesis, as a courtesy to respondents. They are presented here unaltered.

Interview transcripts are presented as originally written by me in order of when they were conducted. In the main body of the thesis, excerpts are edited, as discussed in the methodology chapter, to remove many false starts and my own occasional meaningless interjections. The full interview transcripts are included here in their pre-edited state. Bolded sentences represent my own speech or writing.

Focus group recordings were not transcribed in their entirety. Instead, indexes were created of talking points and only relevant sections were transcribed. These indexes are included here in full.

The final portion of this appendix represents the coding work undertaken in the NVivo 12 software suite. It presents a list of all codes used to categorise participants' accounts in the survey and interviews.

These documents are included for reference only and apologies are made in advance for the rough appearance of these collated responses and transcripts. While these materials were not intended to be included as part of the thesis in their un-edited forms, they are included in this appendix for the sake of transparency regarding editing, to better illustrate the work upon which this thesis is based, and in the interest of presenting individual participants' full accounts which were generously given.

Interview transcripts

Gill

Particulars: Female; 56-65; UK. **Format:** Telephone

Oh, hi. Is that Gillian?

Yes, it is. Um... Gill is better.

Oh, OK, sorry.

I (laughs) always... Gillian was whenever I was in trouble with my mother.

(Laughs.) OK.

How do you do, Martin?

I'm good, thank you. Thanks again for talking to me.

That's no problem.

You're the first person I've interviewed, so this is really exciting.

(Laughs.) Oh, gosh. I hope it doesn't disappoint now.

No, it's fine.

I will warn you. At the side of me I have large lurcher, who's prone to snore, so if you hear some strange noises.

(Laughs.) That's OK. I'll be sure to edit him out of the transcript.

(Laughs.) My daughter used to do podcasts and they would have strange, strange noises on quite a lot of them.

(Laughs.) Fair enough. You don't mind that I'm recording this do you?

No. I wanted to mention one thing to you. First, is the sound OK for you?

Yeah, sounds great. Can you hear me ok?

Yes, that's fine. I just wanted to say, I've got no problem with my name being used in anything, but of course I don't have the permission of the people who were with me. So, I'd rather their names weren't put in. You can use whatever names you want.

That's fine.

It's just a question of you don't really want to put names in of people who haven't given their permission.

Yeah. You don't want to sort of give permission on their behalf. That's fair enough. I'll change them to something generic.

Ah, lovely. It's a shame because one of the people I went with, we were friends for years, but I've lost touch with, and I phoned his sister yesterday, 'cause I thought perhaps he'd be interested but unfortunately she's lost touch with him as well.

Ah, that's a shame.

It would've been nice, I suppose, to get two people's perspectives of the same.

Yeah, that would've been good. Thank you for trying though. But that's OK.

That's OK.

If there's anything you don't remember or anything like that, that's totally fine, that's to be expected.

Yes.

And part of what I'm looking at as well is how people remember certain things.

Yes.

In different ways and that kind of thing, so it's fine, you know, if you don't remember anything.

This is it. I mean, it's so long ago my daughter actually said to me yesterday, we were talking about the leaflets, and she said "oh, have you still got it?" And I said, "God, no, that's years ago."

(Laughs.) Yeah.

I wish I did but, you know, it was the sort of thing you got and threw away. Anyway, we'll start if you're ready.

Yeah, that's brilliant. If there's anything that you want to talk about while I'm sort of asking questions or anything, don't feel like you have to stick to my questions. That's fine.

Right.

And if there's anything you'd rather not talk about as well that's OK as well.

Yeah. That's fine.

So, could you please just sort of roughly tell me what it was like watching The Exorcist in the cinema?

Well, um, I recall it was extremely noisy in parts. I mean, um, the thing is, it was unlike anything I'd ever seen before. It, I mean... The cinema was full. And I think that was because, yes, we'd heard that it was shocking and I'd actually read the book years earlier. So I had an idea. But, you know, it wasn't really what I expected to see on screen. The, you know, the sort of vomiting scenes, you had sort of very loud expressions of disgust. The crucifix scene, you know, people were really kind of shocked by. I remember all that. I remember it wasn't... (Sigh.) And people were

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

very animated coming out of there. It wasn't a sort of... But, animated but still quite shocked.

So, the audience was loud?

Oh, very loud, yes.

Oh, right.

Um, again. I think it tended to be in those days. I mean, there were four of us and we would try to go to the cinema once a week. I live in a village. The cinema is the town. We haven't got a very good bus service, so one of us drove. And we made it a regular thing. And we'd been to see other films there. Um, I remember Bullitt was out.

Ah, right.

(Laughs.) And that got very noisy as well. It wasn't, when you go into a cinema these days it's generally fairly quiet.

Yeah, yeah.

But it wasn't like that in those days, you know?

Just for every film, people were...?

Every film, but I think, you know, particularly for The Exorcist, there was a certain (sigh), um... because of all the publicity behind it and, you know, because of what happened, you know, outside the cinema and immediately when we sat down, um, I think people were very wound up then. I think that's the only way I can describe it.

You mentioned that people were handing out leaflets... Were they priests or were they...?

No. As I recall it, they were members of a local chapel.

Oh, OK.

And the leaflets were handed out to us. There was quite a... Where the cinema's situated, there is... People were queuing... Let me see. There was about ten yards outside the cinema and round a corner as well.

Oh, right.

So there was quite a queue. And people were coming and saying – asking us actually – not to go and see the film. And giving out leaflets, and, you know, a few people were kind of... I mean. I remember I took a leaflet. I glanced at it. But it didn't sort of affect me, and there was a general sort of air of, well, “You're just being stupid.” You know? “This is nonsense.” I wondered afterwards, because I've heard of this sort of thing, if it was actually a publicity stunt by the people publicising the film.

Oh, right.

You know (laugh). But, I really don't think so. It was too genuine for that.

Yeah.

And why would they bother in a little town like Merthyr? I can understand if it was somewhere bigger like Cardiff where they'd get the publicity but there were no cameras or anything like that, so they'd get nothing out of it. But, yes, they'd hand out the leaflets. Most people wouldn't take one, or they'd just, you know, squash it up and throw it on the ground.

In front of them?

Yes.

Oh, right.

And there was a lot of laughing and joking about it. I think the general idea was they were sort of saying, "Oh, well, you're letting yourself open to evil. You could be possessed."

Right.

And the helpline numbers.

Oh, OK.

If you're disturbed after the film, that kind of thing.

Yeah. I think I've found examples of that online, with claims the film's going to make you mentally ill and things on the front.

Yes. As I say, there was so much publicity about it and it was supposed to be so shocking. It was incredible how worked up people were about it.

Did you say in your survey response that somebody fainted?

Oh, gosh, yes. We got into the cinema. We were sort of settling down there. There was kind of a buzz, you know. There was general sort of talking. It wasn't as loud as during the film. But there was this sort of air of expectation really. And the opening scenes come on, you know, the scene in the fog, the figure in the fog.

Yeah.

And all of a sudden there was a disruption, and a woman had fainted, in one of the seats closer to the screen. So, I'm trying to remember if the film was stopped while they took her out. I- I can't quite recall that.

Ah, right.

But, yeah. I think there'd been just so much hype and everything. But, I mean, there was nothing then. It was simply the titles.

Yeah.

I suppose I can understand if someone had fainted later, further into the film, but-

Where it was more graphic and...?

Yes. But, I think it was just this, you know, expectation then.

Ah. That's really interesting.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Was the film more popular, do you think, than... Was queuing around the corner... Was that a thing you saw quite often or was that-

It wasn't something that happened quite often. I mean, generally, what would happen is you'd get to the cinema, there'd usually be a queue a couple of yards outside and people add to it closer to the time. And, then, you go into the cinema. It was quite an old cinema. Actually, I should tell you something about the cinema because I think that probably (laughs) added to the experience.

Oh, that would be great.

You'd go up the steps - it was the old Scala cinema in Merthyr - and you'd go up some steps into the cinema - it's a very old building - and on the right-hand side there was the ticket office. Next to that there was the thing that sold snacks. And there were stairs then in the right-hand corner. They were quite dark stairs. You'd go up them into a very narrow corridor, and you'd go along there and it was... As I remember it, it was kind of... I know the carpet was red. I think the walls... It was kind of very claustrophobic to go up there.

Yeah?

And really you could only go up one at a time. And you'd go into the cinema itself. And it did sort of strangely add to the atmosphere. If you had to, you know, go to the bathroom when you were watching the film, it was quite creepy.

Oh, really?

Because they'd have this long narrow corridor and you'd go through the door and the door would be really heavy and creaky.

(Laughs.)

Oddly, it added to the experience

Oh, right. That does sound like it would, definitely.

But, it... One thing I kind of thought was unusual, was the, as I say, the sound. I mean, you'd kind of get these - you know - during the vomiting scenes, it would be kind of overdone, then.

You mean the sound level on the film or...?

No. The sound of the audience

Oh, right.

You wouldn't get this sort of "Ooh." You'd get this "OOOOH!" You know?

(Laughs.)

It's as if everyone wanted to be heard, then.

Ah, right. Like they were kind of performing along?

Yes. That's exactly how it felt.

Oh, right. That's brilliant. So, how did you feel while you were watching the film yourself? Were you sort of taking part in that or was that kind of... did that make it scarier or...?

It didn't make it scary. I mean, I was about 18 years old at the time so it was sort of, you know, some of the scenes... I mean, I was with a boyfriend and his friend and the friend's girlfriend. And it was a little bit sort of embarrassing.

Oh, right (laughs).

I was really kind of glad at the time that it was a very dark cinema. And (sigh) yeah, I mean (sigh) I can't remember exactly what but I know during some of the scenes it's just "OK, I'm not gonna look at this." But they were the gorier scenes, not, you know... But, um, I think as an 18-year-old it was just a bit unexpected. Even though I'd read the book, I didn't really expect the scenes that were on there then.

Did you sort of expect him to cut them out or tone them down a little bit?

Yes. And it was quite surprising to me that they weren't... the amount that they showed then.

Yeah. Alright. Did you get a sense of your friends with you felt about the film as well?

Yes. The boys, when we came out – I say boys, they were about 20 years old – they were quite stunned, you know. I remember, the friend, he came out and he said, "Well!" And it was, sort of, yeah.

Just kind of didn't know what to make of it?

No. And I don't think anyone, you know, people sort of wanted to say something but they didn't quite know what to say. It was quite a shock. I think it was the first time I'd ever seen anything quite that explicit. Again, you know, I suppose you see worse things now on TV, but not in those days.

Yeah. So was this kind of, did you normally watch this kind of film or was this kind of a one off because of the...

Um, I've always, where I live, as I say, it's a village, and it's difficult to get back and forth into town. So, generally, I would read. I love horror books. I still do.

Ah, right.

You know, my father always had books around and I think I started off on Dennis Wheatley, you know, that kind of thing. And, yes. As I say, I'd actually read the book before I went to the cinema so I knew what was involved. But, going to the cinema was, as I say, once a week thing with these particular people.

Yeah.

And, um, no. I mean, our choice was mostly guided by the boys.

(Laughs.) Ah, right.

(Laughs.) As I say, Bullitt was a choice. We just, "OK." Went along. It wasn't generally (sigh)... It was something that they would choose the film and we would go along with them.

Ah, right. That's fair enough.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So, did the – just curious – did the book have kind of a similar effect on you or was it very different, because, obviously, it’s reading?

I think the thing with the book is that it can go into, obviously, more detail, and I think you get this sort of inner dialogue then of the priest in it. And I kind of felt that, I mean, reading the book I think I was one of the few people to cry at the end of the film. And when I got outside, the boy I was with said, “Well, why are you crying?” And I said, “But, he got his faith back at the end. You know, he had enough faith to take on the demon and, yes, he died, but he died saving the little girl.”

Yeah.

And I think, honestly, that’s the message I took from the book. And I think I carried that into the film with me. And I don’t know how many people – I mean, I might be wrong that being what the film was about. But I think the (sigh)... I think a lot of people went to see it because of the publicity and they wanted to see something shocking. They wanted to see something that they shouldn’t see, you know, the sort of forbidden fruit thing about it.

For the sort of gorier scenes and the effects and that kind of thing?

Yes. That’s it. I mean, I think my experience might’ve been different because I’d read the book and because, I mean, I think when you read a book – you might disagree – but, for me, it’s a very personal, it’s more personal experience.

Yeah, yeah.

But I think that’s due to my age. I mean, my daughter disagrees with me complete, but she’s... I’ve been brought up in an age where you didn’t have access to TV, to films, to visual entertainment. It was books. Her experience is very different. I mean, at 28, she has an extensive library of DVDs, almost all horror, and, you know, it’s... and able to go to the cinema more often, things are available on TV and demand and streaming and everything. So, it’s a very different world, I think.

Do you think that’s because maybe with films in the 70s you had to go and see them with lots of other people whereas now you can watch films by yourself much more.

Yes. And it’s sort of the accessibility now. You know, in my day, you’d have to wait until so-and-so film was on at the cinema. I mean, I’m trying to think when we got a video recorder. Gosh. I think that was years down the line.

Yeah.

So it was kind, if something was on TV and you were in and you could watch it. But, of course, you didn’t have that kind of film on TV. I do remember – oh, gosh – Hammer House of Horror that was on.

Ah, right.

And I would love to watch that. But this was something different. But, definitely the accessibility. I don’t know whether you’d like to know this, but, um, when my daughter was 12 years old, my husband and I had to go somewhere. And we had difficulty getting a babysitter. And my friend volunteered her daughter. She seemed

like a sensible girl. We got home to find that she'd actually watched *The Exorcist* in my house with my 12-year-old daughter.

(Laughs.) Oh, dear.

(Laughs.) I don't know if that has anything to do with why she likes horror films now. I was absolutely, well... I was annoyed. And, I mean, my daughter was, I think she was somewhat traumatised, as you would be at 12. But it's one of her favourite films now, so I dunno.

So would you have maybe waited a few years before...

Yes. Yes. Again, I mean, some of the... Honestly, the things that children see now... I remember her being quite traumatised by Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*. And when I watched it, I was quite surprised by the intensity. So, I think, again, it's a different experience. Because I didn't have access to things that were visual, my world was books. I think that people deal with films, horror films and that, they deal with them better perhaps than I would.

Just because they have more access to them.

Yes. I mean, she has to actually watch something and tell me if it's suitable for me. She'll say, "This one's not too gory, you'll be OK with that. Maybe give that one a miss."

(Laughs.) Oh, right. That's quite handy!

But, as far as *The Exorcist* was concerned, I did kind of feel that people went to see it for the shock value.

Yeah.

More than, you know, "Oh, this is going to be a good story." Which, I felt, was a shame.

Did you feel that, because it's hard to judge now really, the press were treating it in that kind of way?

Yes. I saw, I think there was a similar kind of thing with, do you remember the Mel Gibson film? *The Passion of the Christ*? It felt very much like that. There was all this sensationalism. I don't know how much the publicity was put about by the people who released it. That, oh, "This is..." I don't know. But, yes. Judging by the queues and everything, people really wanted to see it, and I think particularly in the little town where I live that was due to the publicity that it got.

Yeah. That's really interesting that the film made you cry at the end in that way, because you only really hear about the film being taken as this big sort of ghost house kind of film.

Yes. But, again, I don't know whether that was because how it came over in the book.

Yeah.

I tend to think of... I've seen lots of films that have been adapted from books and I feel you have to take them as two different entities really, because they can't possibly put everything into the film that's in the book. But I do wonder if some of

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

the message of the film – well, what was the message of the film for me – got lost in the sensationalism of it.

Yeah. Ah, that’s really interesting. So, how did you feel after the film was over? You mentioned that you had to run home past the graveyard.

(Laughs.) Yes. I think it was kind of a joke on behalf of my friends because they... I said, well, I wasn’t scared by it.

Because of the sort of emotion...?

I’m not the sort of person... I mean, I live in an extremely old house next to a cemetery and I don’t believe in ghosts.

(Laughs.) Right.

So it’s kind of... I believe in evil, but not the kind of evil... not the supernatural kind of evil. I believe in everyday evil, if that makes sense.

Yeah.

So I didn’t think zombies were gonna come out of the cemetery and get me, but it’s a very creepy place. On one side you have... To get to my house you went down this little lane and on one side of the lane there was a- a really quite Gothic looking... it’s an old Victorian chapel with a graveyard.

Ah, right.

And on the other side directly opposite there was an old people’s home, but that was always in darkness. There was a driveway going down to it. And it was really quite creepy.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

There was a light there, but it was always broken. So, I’m trying to think how far it would be. It was about 25 yards, I think. And you would have light at one end of it, light at the other end of it, not very much in the middle.

Just a dark patch?

Yeah. Unless a car came along. So they dropped me off on the high street and I’d walk sort of a little way in, and basically I’d wait for a car so the headlights would see me through... so I’d run then like mad from one end to the other.

(Laughs)

Even though I say now I wasn’t scared, things like that do still prey on your imagination.

Yeah. Of course.

I didn’t... I slept OK that night. It didn’t, sort of, prey on me.

So it wasn’t giving you nightmares and things like that?

No, actually. I’ve had books that have given me nightmares. There was one particular one that gave me nightmares for a week and that was a horror book.

Which one was that?

That was James Herbert The Fog.

Ah, right. I think I've read that one.

There's a film The Fog made of the John Carpenter film. They haven't made a film of the James Herbert one. Basically, it's a strange fog that turns people insane. And it's a really unpleasant book. People do horrible things to each other. And it gave me sleepless nights for a week.

I can imagine. I read The Rats by him when I was a kid and that gave me nightmares too.

Ah, yes. I've given that one a miss. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Probably for the best.

But, again, you know, I enjoy horror. I like Stephen King, James Herbert, you know. But... (sigh). And I do like horror films. But I find a lot of the films – and I don't know whether perhaps this started with The Exorcist – I find a lot of the films very very graphic.

Ah, right.

You know, I'm thinking of things like Saw and, is it Hostel?

Yeah.

For me, one of the creepiest things about The Exorcist, one of the things that really made me shudder... Regan comes out of the room and she's on the stairs and she does that weird sort of spider walk.

Oh, where she's upside down?

And that's really, really unsettling.

(Laughs.) Yeah, definitely.

I find things like that will sort of unsettle me more than... I don't... I think The Exorcist there was genuine imagination in the making of it.

Yeah.

I feel a lot of the Saw things, you've got the same formula and everything like that, and it's just... (sigh) It's all blood and gore.

With all the torturing and things?

Yes. I'm not interested in that. I want something with a story. And I felt The Exorcist had that. I've actually watched the series, the first series that they showed.

Oh, yeah.

And was quite disappointed.

With how graphic it is?

No. Not that. The overacting from a lot of people (laughs).

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I probably shouldn't say this, but a lot of the performances in *The Exorcist* I felt were understated.

Yeah.

And that gave it that much more horror. It was a very – I'm struggling trying to find the word – but, it wasn't (sigh)... The acting wasn't over the top. I mean, I did say to my daughter that in the series Geena Davis just gurned her way through it.

(Laughs.)

It was just too over the top.

Yeah. I see what you mean, definitely.

Mm. But, it was interesting to see the (sigh) I don't know what... I know it was a follow-on from *The Exorcist*, but it was interesting to see what filmmakers would make of the subject these days.

Like which parts they would emphasise and that kinda thing.

Yes. Yeah. Oddly enough I could watch that. I don't know what my limit. I think if there's a story I can put aside a little bit of that sort of squeamishness. And I think that was the thing with the film, with *The Exorcist*. There was a story there, there were people, there were personalities, and each person had their own little story.

Yeah. So with the scenes in the original film that were kind of a bit graphic and gruesome, did you find those scary or were you just kind of disappointed...?

In the original film? Again, I wasn't scared by it. I couldn't look at it. Not because of being scared, but, yeah, squeamish.

Yeah.

But, um, you know, there was some I sort of dipped my head for. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

And, yes, obviously, with the more graphic scenes there was... you did get that sort of (sigh) sense of embarrassment, because, you know, you're 18 years old and you haven't seen anything like this before and you're sitting in a cinema with a lot of people and your boyfriend and it's just, "Oh!"

(Laughs.) That makes sense.

I suppose 18-year-olds today wouldn't bat an eyelid, but, again, those days it was different.

So did you have any scenes in the film that particularly kind of stood out to you as being – well, not better I guess – but any scenes in the film that particularly impressed you?

I think the spider walk thing was...

Yeah.

At that stage in my memory. I think the beginning of the film was very well done. It was very well set up. When you had the fog and the figure outside, it really... you had that sense of expectation. You know, from the start, it was sort of,

“Something’s happening here.” You know, I’ve heard it said, a good book grabs you with the opening sentence and I think that was true with *The Exorcist*. It sort of grabbed your attention straight away. I’m trying to think... The scenes with the priests during the exorcism, you know, this struggle. That, um, and particularly the end part, you know, where the young priest sort of, you know, takes on the demon, sort of, takes it out of her. And I believe he throws himself out of the window?

Yeah, yeah.

That stays with you. Um. But, yes. I was looking at it as well... I probably... It’s a different thing. Watching the *Exorcist* series, I’m watching it as a mother.

Right.

And I’m kind of watching it as a... (sigh) how... with a view of how that would be as a mother of that child.

Ah, right.

With the original film, I’m watching it as a young girl. And I think I’m probably... I dunno... Um... I think you- You can’t identify with Regan in that, because there’s not enough of Regan in there.

Right. Oh, OK. Yeah.

You know. It’s the demon that’s there.

Yeah. You don’t get to see much of her before she’s possessed.

No. No. But, certainly, the struggle of the priests, that really did come out, and it was sort of... Even though I’ve read the book, you do get the feeling it’s going to defeat them. Which I don’t think you get so much in films these days.

This sort of idea that they might fail?

They might fail, yes, because they are so close to failure. I know that at times tends to be something that happens in films. You get this sort of, the hero fails but then he makes a comeback.

Yeah.

And I suppose there was that sort of thing about it, but, um... (sigh). It’s an incredibly downbeat ending. You know. They win, but at a hell of a cost.

Yeah. It’s like a happy ending, but it’s still...

Yeah. It’s very, very (sigh) very, very down at the end, where you kind of think, he won, but he’s dead. (Laughs.) I think it was the first film I’d seen that had that kind of ending.

Yeah.

Because, you know, usually there’s a (sigh) there’s a pull back at the end and you can think, yeah, the hero’s going to die or something of that sort and something happens and he’s saved. But there was never that with this film.

Yeah. Just kind of doesn’t give you that kind of, “oh everything’s ok in the end” kind of...

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yes. But, you know. You feel everything’s OK but look at what it cost them.

Yeah.

You know, you kinda feel good grief must be running out of exorcists at a hell of a go. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah, of course.

But, it wasn’t, um... I didn’t find it as shocking as I think a lot of people did, but, you know, again, I knew some of what was gonna happen. I found the actual visual of it... surprising more than shocking.

Yeah.

I don’t think I was prepared for what I was going to see.

Did you think-

Sorry.

Sorry. It’s OK.

But I think that is because, as I say, the time in which I saw it.

Yeah. Did you think it was, um, a well-made film? Did you think they did a good job of adapting the book or there was the things you’d rather they’d done differently?

No, I think they did a very good job of adapting it. I did feel, um, as well... I mean, my experience of horror films had been Hammer House of Horrors where people would ham it up. And I think the acting was very well done in it. You did feel for those people. You were there with them. I think there was a danger that they would overdo things, but I really felt that they (sigh)... I felt that they almost, I can’t say toned it down because I don’t think they toned down the scenes, but certainly the acting. You didn’t feel... You felt that... Well I felt that it was focused on Regan, you know, more than anything else.

Yeah. So you thought people were kind of underplaying a bit more and kind of...

I think it brought out the story better, because, I mean, obviously the character Regan, she is the main part and I think everyone acted around her. It must have been... I’m full of admiration for Linda Blair because it must have been a very hard thing to do, to act in.

Yeah. Definitely. So, can I ask, how do you feel about the... You mentioned that you thought the ending was moving because the priest regains his faith. How do you feel about the religious aspects of the film? Were they important to you at the time?

Ah, not particularly. I mean, I’m not a particularly religious person. I don’t go to church or anything like that. Um, I think (sigh)... I think for me it was the idea of faith, that someone could, despite the odds then, that someone with faith could actually make a difference. And that’s not in a religious aspect exactly. It’s just that, you know, that he had the courage and the faith enough to take it on. And, um, when you mention religion, I mean, to me (sigh) when you have those people

outside sort of trying to persuade you not to see the film, I would've it would be the opposite, because surely the message was in the end that she was saved?

Yeah, yeah. That's what, um, the author, William Blatty, says isn't it, I think.

Because that was it. She was saved. Um, again, because I'm not a particularly religious person I didn't come out of there thinking, "Oh, great. God saved her." I think I came out of there feeling that the priest saved her, his absolute faith managed, you know, somehow he got that faith together to save her. It's kind of an interesting idea that it's a demon that gives him back his faith, though.

Yeah. So it was more kind of because of the character rather than his religious...

Yes. Yeah. You know, he had the faith to do. Interestingly, the boy I went with... he was Catholic, but a lapsed Catholic, and, um... It would've been interesting, I think, to talk to him about it, and figure out how he took it. Because, you know, I think it's something to look at from a religious aspect.

Yeah.

Yeah, that would be quite an interesting point of view.

You do hear people saying they found it scary because they believe in the devil and things like that.

(Sigh.) Now, again. My belief syst- I believe in good and evil. I don't believe... I don't really believe in God and the Devil. I believe the Bible is a book.

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) You know. Written by people. So, again, I didn't go into it from a religious point of view. Um. It was just the fact that this man had this faith and saved her with the strength of his faith then.

Yeah. That makes sense, definitely. I can see that. You mentioned that you haven't watched the film again since.

No.

Is that because of the film itself or do you just generally not rewatch films again?

Now, again. I would've seen this in 73, I think.

Yeah.

And we didn't have access to – obviously it wasn't shown on TV for years. And we didn't... I don't think... Was it out on video?

I think it was for a couple of years and then it was taken off in the 80s.

Yes. And, I don't know. It just- It wasn't that I avoided the film. It's just that, again, it wasn't on TV. I didn't go to the cinema. And obviously it wasn't on in the cinema. So, because I'd seen it, I don't tend to be one of these people who will go back to a film after I've watched it/

Yeah.

It's sort of, alright, I've watched that, enjoyed it, wouldn't probably watch it again. So I haven't avoided it it's just the opportunity hasn't come around then.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Ah, right.

Um. I’m wondering if I would’ve watched it if I’d been home that night. Certainly not with a 12-year-old daughter. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

But, it’s just that the opportunity didn’t present itself to watch it. My daughter’s fascinated because one of her- well- her favourite all-time film is also one I saw in the cinema, which was the original Wicker Man.

Ah, right, yeah.

And she’s fascinated by the fact that I’ve seen all these films and haven’t gone back to watch them again. Whereas I think the Wicker Man is a constant favourite.

For you?

For her. I don’t know how many times she’s watched it.

Ah, it’s like the opposite of me with my dad who was around in the 70s and didn’t watch any of my favourite films. It infuriates me. (Laughs.)

I think, I mean, certainly, Caitlyn has... Um. We have... um... I think a sort of similar outlook on religion, although she always used to go to Sunday school with my cousin when she was little because I wanted her to have a choice, then.

Yeah.

Um. And I think... possibly, with the books I’ve had around and my interest in horror, I think that’s probably influenced her. But her interest is greater than mine.

Yeah.

I mean, I’m looking around at the room now and thinking, yeah, there are little clues as to why she would be interested in that. I have my tarot cards on one side. I have my phrenology head, my palmist hand (laughs). It’s something you take an interest in.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Is it something that you kind of share? Do you watch horror films together and that kind of thing?

She will generally watch them first to make sure that they’re not too gory for me.

Ah, of course, yeah (laughs).

On occasion we will. She’ll say, “I’ve heard about this, this is gonna be OK for you,” and we’ll settle down to watch things together. It’s not just horror films. She has a fascination in (laughs)... This makes her sound terrible. She has a fascination with murders.

(Laughs.) Right

Last night we sat down to watch a murder documentary together. There was something, funnily enough, I can’t remember the film – but there was something we watched recently and someone said, there was sexual content in it, and someone said, “You watch that with your mother?”

(Laughs.)

But we don't- I don't know. I think we have a similar attitude. Neither one of us, um, is particularly easily shockable then.

Right. Ah, OK. Um. Are there any other, sort of, any other films that kind of you've watched or stories you've read that relate to The Exorcist? How do you think they kind of compare or maybe are different or, like, the sequels and the prequels and that kind of thing?

Um. Yes. I did see the... um... the prequel. I'm trying to remember because it's quite a while since I've seen them. I think it was... Was it the third one that I enjoyed and the second one I didn't get? I'm trying to think.

The second one is the one with Linda Blair in it again.

It's hard to remember, because I would've seen them on TV but it would've been some years ago.

Ah right. I think the third one is the one that has the young priest from the first one in it again, in like a mental hospital.

Was that-? I think that might've been the one. Um. But I can't really recall a great deal about them to be honest.

Yeah.

Um.

Are there any sort of films from the same kind of period? How would you say The Wicker Man compares in terms of...

The Wicker Man, actually, it's interesting, because I saw this on a double bill. There was The Wicker Man and The Omega Man.

Oh, the Charlton Heston movie?

The Charlton Heston one. They were on a double bill together. I have a feeling that we went to see The Omega Man and actually caught The Wicker Man. It's very... It's kind of interesting, The Wicker Man, because it starts off with this very sort of repressed and sort of severe policeman and you kind of think, as you're watching it, it's sort of, "Oh, for goodness sake, lighten up."

(Laughs.) Yeah.

And then the film turns and you have this sort of awful scene at the end.

Yeah, of course.

I haven't watched it because my daughter watched the Nicolas Cage one as well.

Ah, right.

And, yes, apparently, "Oh, God, not the bees" or something like that is enough to send her into hysterics. She finds it so funny.

(Laughs.) It's very over the top that one.

But this is it. I think, again, you know, you had this sort of, um, understatement of the acting in it and, um, even his, I think, his absolute terror at the end really gets to you. It certainly did with me. Because you're led to feel along that there's this... that

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

he’s just overly critical, and then when it gets to the end and he is sacrificed it’s really quite, really quite horrendous. Really just does get to you.

So do you think maybe it’s just kind of a product of how films were made at the time that they were more restrained or less kind of...

It’s odd because I can recall films that were really over the top in the acting. But I kind of felt that these films... I mean, OK. The Omega Man, for me, was way over the top. (Laughs.) You know, Charlton Heston as Jesus Christ did not appeal to me at all. But, um, I did feel, with the Wicker Man, that it’s (sigh) it’s this sort of restrained acting that gives it more power if you like.

Yeah.

And, as I say, particularly at the end – I haven’t seen the remake – but the sort of (sigh) first of all the sort of quiet (sigh) um... as he realises the situation he’s in. And then the screaming and then you just see it burn. It’s horrible. I think that scene has stayed with me for quite a long time. It didn’t give me nightmares but it’s one of those scenes that really stays with you. I mean, I can actually see it in my head now.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

As I’m talking about it.

So, with how you watched the film, do you think if you could watch the film again, completely fresh for the first time, would you want to watch it the same way, or would you want to watch it in a different way? With the place and the audience and that kind of thing, did they add to it, or would you rather watch it...?

Uh. I think I would prefer to watch it in my own home. I think... Although, I think audiences... I don’t know. It’s difficult to say because when you... The audience then, as I say, they were really quite noisy. And I think, was it distracting? I’m trying to think. N- It wasn’t- No. I didn’t find it distracting. You were aware of the sound that was going on and I think possibly if it was a cinema now you wouldn’t have that noise.

Yeah.

So... I think it would be the same really watching it at home or watching it in the cinema. I think you get the experience of watching it in the cinema. You don’t get any distractions then. Although I’m saying it was quite noisy, if you try and watch something at home obviously there are things that are going to distract you from it. You’ll pause it and going and get yourself something to drink or a snack or something.

Yeah.

Or someone will say something to you and you’re sort of pulled out of it. So, I think the experience isn’t as complete then. As if you go to a cinema and you’re there, you’re in that darkened room, and even though around you, you have that big screen in front of you, the room is dark, and I think even though there are sounds around you and you’re aware of them it’s far more immersive than watching something at home.

Yeah. So were you kind of used to the sort of noise from the audience?

Yes. Because it was- it wasn't- I mean. I did feel there was more noise with the audience on that occasion, but, I mean, you know, I mentioned Bullitt to you which we were taken to see, and, yes, there was a lot of noise there during the- you'd have people shouting out, which you don't get now.

Were they sort of- is it kind of like how you see now in films which show American audience, where they were sort of shouting at the character to do things and cheering when things happened?

Yes, very much like that. Actually an American friend said to me he went to see Rocky in the cinema and it was very, very loud. You know. The audience really participated. I don't know... The last thing I went to see in the cinema was Cabin in the Woods.

Oh, right.

Which my daughter told me I could watch safely. And then we walked in and there were certain scenes and I think she started to panic, but I was OK. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

I quite enjoyed that film actually. But, um. There wasn't the noise there.

Yeah.

That obviously with The Exorcist... and certain other films. I remember there being- the audience was more – I don't if the audience was more involved or whether the audience was- whether they're told to keep quiet these days, I don't know.

Yeah.

It's sort of, again, at those times, the televisions weren't up to much at home so when you went into the cinema and there was this huge screen you would get very involved in it.

Yeah. It does sound very different to how it is now.

Yes. I mean I hadn't actually thought about it until you were saying about it now. But, yes. I mean, certain films, obviously depending on the film.

Yeah.

I do remember going to see The Champ with some friends. And it was altogether a quieter experience, but you'd expect that from that kind of film.

Ah, right. Is that a – I've not seen that one – is that like a boxing movie?

It's- It's- Avoid it at all costs.

(Laughs.)

It's- I think, there are certain films that are designed to tug at your heart strings, and The Champ was a story, he was a boxer and he had a little boy and he's trying to make a comeback and there's one scene with the little boy... It's quite funny because we were three girls with three boys.

Yeah.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

And the boys were all in tears, or choking back tears. And the girls were all sort of, "Well, this is too much. This is just, you know, over the top."

(Laughs.)

I think with films you have to be careful because there is that point where an older audience will feel that you are trying to exploit their feelings and they will react against it.

Definitely. So, just, a couple of last questions.

Yes.

Is there anything else that you think might be relevant, um, just in terms of your background and anything like that or your experiences, to how you felt about the film.

Um, nothing that I can really think of. The only- The thing you brought up about the religious aspect, I- Yes, I didn't take it as a religious film. I think that was because I'm not particularly religious.

Yeah.

I mean, you do get, very much in the Dracula films, for example, yes. Good always wins over evil. And I think with this it was good won out over evil, but you kind of get the feeling in the end, did anyone really win?

Yeah.

I think that point really came across in the series. Because it's the fact that the demon is never really gone, he's always there waiting.

Yeah, because they bring back the same one. So, would you say this sort of, the Americanness of the film mattered much to you? Was it different to say British horror films or was it just the same because you see so many American films in the cinema anyway?

It's not something that really occurred to me, about it being an American film. I think that was very much again of its time, that you were used to seeing American films.

Yeah.

Um. I'm trying to think of any British films I actually watched there. Um. I- But, no. You were used to having American films, because American films were the ones that people wanted to watch.

Yeah. Okie dokie. Um. Finally can I just ask... Can I just ask what made you want to take part in the research, sorry?

Ah, well. My daughter's a media postgrad at Swansea Uni.

Ah, right.

And she heard of your project and obviously I'd told her some of the stories of what happened and she said, "Well, would you like to, you know, mention your experiences?" And I know (sigh) how difficult it is to get people to take part in things, and yeah, no problem.

(Laughs.) It is, yeah, thank you.

(Laughs.) That's alright. I know how she's doing her PhD at the moment. She's on her final few weeks, and I know getting questionnaires out there, having to ask people, I know how difficult it is. I also did a college course myself where I had to get questionnaires out and I didn't get any of them answered (laughs).

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

So, yeah. It's difficult. I mean, I think people think it's going to be some sort of trick and they're going to be revealing terrible things about themselves.

(Laughs.)

But, I know it's difficult to get information and I mean anything that helps, yeah, I'm fine.

Ah, that's brilliant, thank you.

If there's anything that you need to ask that's to do with my background or anything to do with the research that's no problem.

I was just gonna ask you actually, do you mind if I ask you what you do for a living?

At the moment, I'm disabled. I, um, I had quite a nasty accident, so I'm a lady of leisure at the moment (laughs).

Ah, right. I'm sorry to hear that.

I did work for some years at British Telecom and after that I took redundancy because my job was moving out of the area and I did a- uh- a- oh, gosh what do you call it? – a childhood development course. It was a BTEC and at that time I started helping out at the school, my daughter just started school then, but it was kind of, you're talking about times when the work was really drying up in this area.

Ah, right. Sorry, it's a strange question I know.

Oh, no, no. I appreciate you have to have background. Yeah. I came from, my father had been in India during the war.

Oh, right.

And he was very interested in- You know, he came back, he had yoga books. He was interested in different sort of religions and everything like that, and I think, um, he was the one who kind of started me off on, um, (sigh) looking at different things. I remember one particularly bad summer when we had thunderstorms, I couldn't sleep at night. And I was very interested in mythology and he bought me books about mythology. My interests sort of went then from mythology to different religions and... Yes. You know, horror and... It's odd for someone who (sigh)... As I say, I'm not... (sigh) Um. I'm coming up to 62 years of age. I've never seen a ghost. If they exist, they're either too lazy or they're not interested in me.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So, I’m not sort of... (sigh) I’m not someone who- It’s odd because I can enjoy horror, I can enjoy supernatural, I can enjoy the scares of it and, yes, there are times when I will be rattled, um. I live next door to cemetery.

Yeah.

And I watched Poltergeist on TV one night and it was really quite scary going to the back door to lock the back door before I went up to bed.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Because even though, alright, I don’t sort of believe in ghosts and things and zombies and that kind of thing, they do touch off a nerve in you.

Yeah, so if you’re imagination...

Yes. Yeah.

Ah, that totally makes sense. I’m the same way. (Laughs.)

My daughter tells me, I have a red dressing gown and there are times, and I can’t remember what film, um, she was talking about, but she said there was one film she saw and I walked upstairs in the red dressing gown and it really gave her a start because there’d been somebody dressed in red there and apparently I was very quiet when I was going up the stairs (laughs).

(Laughs.) Crikey. Oh, it might be Don’t Look Now with the little girl in the red...

Possibly. Another one I saw in the cinema.

Ah, right (laughs). That one messed me up afterwards.

Oh, gosh, yes. It’s very creepy. But, um, yeah. You know, I think my father definitely, you know, his interests sort of sparked off mine, because, yes, he would read Dennis Wheatley. He once told me a story of when he was going out with my mother. And they had, oh gosh, Quatermass! They had Quatermass on the radio and he listened to it and he was really nervous walking home that night. A

(Laughs.)

And my father was a sort of big strong man. Been through the war. You know? He wasn’t easily frightened. But it’s strange how things like that will touch off a nerve.

Yeah, definitely. Is there anything else you’d like to... something maybe I’ve not asked or anything.

I think I’ve absolutely jawed your leg off to be honest with the way I’ve talked (laughs).

(Laughs.) No, no. This has been brilliant, thank you.

No, no, that’s alright. If there’s anything you think of and you want to ask me, there’s no problem at all.

Brilliant. But this has been really good, thank you. It’s basically been like a checklist of all the things I’ve been interested in with my research.

Yes.

So this has been brilliant, thank you.

So, what um what exactly are you researching? You're looking into... um... I know you're looking into The Exorcist and is it to do with just The Exorcist or...?

Yeah. It's just The Exorcist. It's just kind of like... Cause when I was growing up – I was born in like the 80s – so The Exorcist was banned on video when I was old enough to be able to see it.

Yes.

So I just heard stories about the audiences of the film and all the stories of people passing out and that kind of thing so I was really fascinated by the film, so I was kind of, just liked the idea of doing like a history of the film from the audiences point of view to kind of hear about things like, you know, how cinemas were different, and how people remember the film and that kind of thing.

It's fascinating. I mean, when you say, again, until you'd brought it up, I wasn't thinking about the difference between the cinemas and the audiences and the noise.

Yeah.

Again, the cinemas. I remember the Scala cinema as being this really old, grotty building. You would- You wouldn't put your on the floor because you would get stuck to the carpet.

(Laughs.)

And these days the cinema that we have no is absolutely gorgeous. It's strange. The differences. But I dunno. I do wonder if the audiences of today let themselves go as much. You know. Participate as much?

Yeah. Yeah. Because most of the time it's just total silence, isn't it?

Yes. Um. And it's, um... Yeah. You know, thinking back to Cabin in the Woods, there were things in that were sort of "Ooh!" and I'd sort of want to say something but it was so quiet I'd just sort glance at my daughter and sort of nod or something.

(Laughs.)

It's sort of, it's almost like being in a library.

Yeah.

It's very strange, what the differences are.

Yeah, they sound completely different. Like I'd love to go to America one day to watch a film like in America because I'd love that kind of atmosphere of people cheering and... that sounds great fun.

Well, this is it. You were so much more involved. I mean, yeah, funnily enough I think I was more scared after watching Bullitt (laughs).

(Laughs.)

Because I had to be driven home by the friend and it was just "Oh, god, don't take too much away from that film now. I want to get home in one piece." You know?

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

(Laughs.)

But, yeah. You did... You were very absorbed in the film.

Yeah.

I wonder... I mean- At home- I think possibly the experience at home is more like it used to be in the cinema, because my daughter and I will watch something and we'll sort of stop and comment on it and say "Oh, god! Look at that!" And, you know, yes. I think the experience is very much- The difference is of course there's the temptation to stop it and go get a drink or stop it and do something and that takes away from the experience.

Yeah. Can I just ask one more thing sorry.

Yes.

I've been looking through old newspapers and things with cinema adverts from when The Exorcist was out in the 70s. And one thing I noticed, they said, on all the Exorcist ones, at least up here in Newcastle, um, they mention that it's separate performances? And I notice on some other films it says continuous performances. Did they do that in Merthyr? Was that a....

Ours was continuous. I mean...

Does that mean you can just walk in at any point and...?

Oh, no. I think what they meant... I know during some films you would get- you don't get them these days- I know you buy your stuff before you go in- but during the cinema performances those days you'd usually get them, if you had two films, like I mentioned The Wicker Man and The Omega Man, in between the two films you would have concessions. They would come out and try to sell you drinks and ice cream.

Oh, right.

I think that's possibly what they mean by that.

Ah, OK. That makes sense.

But, I'm trying to think. They had- I know they have the heavy doors now but I think it would be very much a case of- No. If the film had started you wouldn't really go into the cinema.

Ah, OK. Because I think I'd just heard stories about people going to the cinema in the 40s and 50s and stuff where films would just play on a loop and people would just walk in.

Ah, yes!

I think I just got it confused with that, I think.

Yeah. No. These were set performances. I mean, it didn't always start on time, but, you know, particularly with The Exorcist because there were so many to get in in seats.

Yeah.

And, of course, you had the cinema that we were in, you'd pay for your ticket at the little box office and there was only person there. And then you'd go and get your sort of sweets and pop and everything, and it was a tiny little foyer, so you'd kind of try and- they'd try and get you through as quickly as possible.

Ah, right. Was it quite... Do you know how many people they sort of sat in the cinema? I've seen some cinemas from the 70s and they had like a thousand people or something which seems insane now.

Oh, no. No. It wouldn't be that. I don't know. I'm trying to- trying to- kind of see it in my mind. It's- um- that's quite a question. I know it was packed. I'm trying to think. (Sigh.)

That's OK.

There would be- There would be- I would guess, 200 seats?

Oh, OK. So it was packed because it was...

Yes. Normally what they would do is they would have, you'd have Studio 1 and Studio 2, and there would be different ones playing in each. The 1 would be further down the corridor.

Oh, right.

And, um, you'd have these- I'm trying to see it in my mind now. I know we were towards the back, because we came, as I said, we joined the queue and it was quite a big queue at that time. So we were towards the back of the cinema.

Ah, right.

And I remember every seat in front of me was absolutely packed.

Ah. Was that sort of unusual for a film at that time as well or...?

Um. I know, Bullitt was pretty packed but not as packed.

Yeah.

You know, I'm thinking back to that one. It just seemed, as we arrived- Generally you'd arrive for a film and you'd get in the queue at the front of the cinema. Very rarely would it sort of be around the corner. So that was unusual.

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for talking to me today. I won't take up any more of your time because I'm aware we've talked for over an hour now, sorry.

(Laughs.) That's alright. As I say, if you think of anything, you know, feel free to email me and if there's anything that you've forgotten that you want to bring up it's not a problem at all.

Ah, brilliant. Thank you very much.

And the dog has been very...

(Laughs.) Yeah. I've not heard him once.

He's been very good. He hasn't snored.

(Laughs.) Bless him.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Anyway good luck with your project.

Thank you so much. If you have any questions about the project or anything feel free to pop me an email at any time.

Well, I think Caitlyn’s been very interested in it because- yes- she loves the film, anything to do with horror. But, particularly, that is one of her favourites. One of the others is Martyrs, which I’m never ever going to watch.

Oh, no. I haven’t watched that myself. The things I’ve heard about it sound terrible.

Yeah. Strangely enough. She says it makes her cry in the same way The Exorcist makes me cry.

(Laughs.)

I don’t know why, but there we go. Anyway, it’s been lovely talking to you.

You too. Thanks very much. It’s been brilliant.

Thank you and good luck.

Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day.

Thank you. Bye.

Bye.

Marco

Particulars: Male; 46-55; UK. **Format:** Telephone

Introductions until 3:33.

You mentioned in your survey response that were taken with the film before you saw it, because of what you’d heard.

Yeah.

Can you talk a bit about what you’d heard about the film and what made the film appeal to you?

OK. Feel free to shut me up if I go on too long, because I’m sure you’ve got other things to do.

Laughs. OK. That’s fine.

Basically, this is the set up. My brother and I were always little, kind of, tiny horror creeps. Just our brains and sort of inklings always went that way. So, we had some friends of the family. There were two daughters who were probably, let’s say, I don’t know, three and six years older than us. So, old enough to seem a lot older.

Right.

They were Canadian, which added a certain amount of glamour. And they had been able to see the exorcist, because it was an R in the states, as you know.

Course, yeah.

And their dad had been able to take them. So, the context, I guess, is me, geeky, little proto horror kid. My brother, similarly, aged – I don't know - we're talking probably ten and twelve, something like that, sitting at home listening to black sabbath. And we go and visit these people. And they start telling us about it. And of course the first thing that they say is, "It's the most frightening thing ever."

Right.

And I think that was definitely the vibe around it, for years. It was sort of perceived as the most frightening film. Probably - I don't know - I think in many ways it still is. But, you know, it had that mystique.

Yeah

I was very much aware of the book, seeing the book in every single shop, it seemed. And the absolutely stunning cover, which frankly scared the shit out of me. I remember as a kid going into shops, looking at the other books, and picking them up and putting them over the cover of the Exorcist book, so that I could read the others.

Laughs. Right.

So, I guess things that struck me and probably shocked me was the – the blasphemy within it.

Oh. OK.

I didn't come from an at all strict, sort of, you know... It's not like some wild Catholic sort of background that made me shriek in horror.

Yeah.

My mother was lapsed catholic, but she sort of projected this idea of a very nice Jesus, if you like, a gentle Jesus. So, the blasphemy that was in it felt extremely shocking. To be honest, I was such a little kid that even the language was shocking. And the concept was absolutely terrifying, because how do you stop this happening? The idea of being taken over by this kind of unseen but, sort of, dreadful creature was... Just struck me as utterly terrifying.

Yeah.

So this was all before I- Literally all I'd seen would be the cover of the book, and of course the iconic poster with the Merrin silhouette. And this all mixed up with, probably, if I'm honest, sort of a kind of vague crush on these girls, and then probably my childhood mind. There was some sort of connection between them. I was sort of, almost, sort of projecting onto them. I clearly remember one of them drawing a fantastic picture and this is one thing I still owned - I loved this - and it was a before and after drawing of a girl.

Oh, ok.

And it was a classic kind of 70s kids' scrawl, but it was just like sort of stylized, a 14-year-old girl in flares and a sort of t-shirt and before she was sweetness and light and the after, of course, she had the scarred face and the forked tongue

Right.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So, this is just brilliant stuff. This was top dollar.

Laughs.

Anyway, so, there was all of that. Um. I think both my parents weren't into horror films at all and were somewhat disturbed by my brother and mine's sort of ghoulish leanings, so, of course, this adds to the taboo, and to the attraction.

Yeah.

And I think that's probably as much as I can say about before I even saw the film.

Yeah.

No. One other thing. In one horror magazine my brother had - I'm still trying to hunt down to this day, it might have been house of hammer or something like that - there was some pictures from The Exorcist in, the first I'd seen actually of Regan's face, which just did me a terrible mischief. Just terrified me.

Laughs. Yeah.

I tell you, my brother took it to our primary school, prompting a rather prim girl to refer to him as the son of Satan.

Laughs.

Which of course was about as cool a thing as you could possibly be. So, basically, I was kind of drip fed bits of imagery from it. I think there was one other Hamlin sort of book of horror films.

Oh, ok.

And I think there was the picture, the shot when you get, the outline of pasuzu statue and Regan's kind of kneeling on the bed.

Oh, when she's like reaching up?

Yeah. So, of course that just thoroughly messed with my head. I mean-

Yeah.

What an image. And I think the other one, there might have been one of when Merrin looks, when he's sort of up on the hillside and he looks across and sees Pasuzu. And of course the classic, sort of, just the poster.

Yeah.

So these sorts of images were incredibly, extraordinarily potent for me. But, still, of course, I hadn't read the book. I certainly hadn't seen the film. So, I think that's all. That's probably most of the stuff before I saw it, I think.

Do you remember what the book cover looked like? Is it the one with just the girl's face? Or is it-

Oh, which one? The-

The book cover, sorry.

Oh, the Exorcist one? Yeah, it's the classic one. I think there's- Ah, see, I've owned several copies. But I think there might've been an American sort of purple one with

the flash down the side which said something like, “the most electrifying story ever told,” or something like that. I think that was pre- the movie. But, then there was just the classic post film tie-in, which is this strange orange-ish girl’s face. Do you know the one I mean?

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. And that, you know, to this day, I just... That’s an extraordinary, extraordinary image. And, that was, before I even got to see it, I was, shall we say, somewhat intrigued.

Yeah.

And, I’ll be frank, it did contribute to, probably when I was about eleven, I started sleeping with a rosary under my pillow.

Oh, right.

Just- Just in case. (Laughs.)

Laughs.

So, yeah. It really... I don’t know if anybody else you’re gonna talk to... It had a very profound, I think, effect. And it certainly did at that age.

Yeah. So would you be able to talk a little about the first time. You mentioned that you tried to watch it several times.

Yeah, well, of course. This was, what? How old would I have been? I struggled with the chronology of this because, of course, when the video recordings act came in it was taken off the shelves. So, it must’ve... I can’t quite work this out. Because I rented it, so it must’ve been pre-83. If that chronology’s right, because I think that’s when the VRA came in. I need to check that, but I mean that’s all googleable stuff because that’s when the video nasties furore happened and bla bla bla.

Yeah.

But basically, I can remember it was on Warner Home Video. Erm. Again, beautiful, big spongy VHS box. Classic.

I love those.

Yeah. Go home. My brother had rented it and we just started watching it. I can’t – After several times it took me to finally watch it all, I can’t quite remember the chronology of which points, where I stopped each time.

Oh, right (laughs).

But I know at one point was the bit when Chris McNeill, she hears Regan screaming and runs in and the bed’s shaking. That was one bit. That must’ve been quite an early attempt because it’s not that far into the film.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So there was that bit. And I’m pretty sure – that is still such a superb scene – but the scene when Regan’s quite heavily possessed. And do you know what, I can’t quite remember if- It’s not the bit with the doctor. It’s the bit when she falls back on the bed and her throat really swells. And I think it might be “Keep away, the sow

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

is mine” sequence, which is a pretty potent bit of the film.

Yeah.

And that bit. Yeah. Couldn't watch that (laughs). I remember one time I watched half of it and then fast-forwarded through the rest.

(Laughs.)

So there these ginger steps towards actually watching the whole thing. But, yeah, it's weird talking about it. It's quite unbalanced really. (Laughs.) But it did have such potency, I think is the word I can't stop using. It's just so powerful. And it's just so unlike other horror films. Particularly at the time. Because I've watched a million horror films.

Yeah.

And, what, 95% of the time there's a cheesiness to them. You know, it's like the script's a bit lazy or the, I dunno, the acting's off or the editing's sloppy. But *The Exorcist* is just one of the best made films, to this day, that I've ever seen. And one thing I did want to specifically mention is the sound design.

Yeah.

In one of my attempts I remember sort of shutting my eyes and I could still hear it and I can hear the growling voice. Mercedes McCambridge did the voice, I think?

Yeah.

So, this sort of rough, gruff voice. But even, sort of, the ambient sound is frightening. Which, you know, I can't really think of a film before that when I'd seen that and picked it up. And, I mean now, in modern horror films, there's lots of utilization of ambient sound to enhance atmosphere etc, but in '73 that was... It just had an atmosphere very, very different from, I think, any of the horrors that had come before, certainly that I'd seen.

So, you think it was the kind of newness of the film being well written and well acted and the sound and everything?

Yeah! It's a good movie. It's a proper, good movie. You've got proper, like Ellyn Burstyn, what's his name, Lee J. Cobb, Jack Magowan, they're proper actors. They're not teenagers, for a start. I suppose there's a pre-teen main protagonist, but it isn't the usual group of teenagers go out and X happens to them. There's not... 2 people die? I think?

Um. Yeah, I think so.

Yeah. So, what's his name, Burke and Karras.

Yeah.

But it's a low body count movie. The most frightening film and, yet, 2 people die. So it just seems to somehow manage to be immensely horrific without doing the things that horror films before and since have utilized to be horrific. And the other thing, of course, it just cannot be understated, is the Dick Smith make up effects. To this day I can still – there was a tweet; I think you retweeted it – it was a behind the scenes. It was just one of the dummy Regan heads sitting on a workbench.

Oh, yeah. I put that up.

Yeah. And I was like, still, that's a wonderfully horrible thing to see. It's still so unnerving. And the prosthetic effects were just so... I'm trying to think of films that used those effects before, and I can't. You know, it really was very technically... I suppose it's a strange thing, isn't it? It was very technically advanced, and it was able to portray things that I'd never seen portrayed before. And this was still, you know... So, yeah, it's just a.... People behave like people would. Whereas many, many horror films, bless them, their weakness is that people behave like they wouldn't.

Yeah. So is there kind of a sense that you usually watch horror films for fun?

Oh, yeah. Definitely. Horror films, predominantly for me, that's kind of my safe space. I think a lot of other people would sit down and watch *Marley and Me*, I dunno.

(Laughs.) Right.

Something sort of heartwarming. But, for me, absolutely, just chuck some, even very, very microbudget shite horror, it's just my comfortable place. But *The Exorcist* isn't part of that. And I guess almost by default it spawned the 70s horror blockbuster. The fact that you could get a big budget to make something like *The Omen*.

Yeah.

And on a smaller scale, *Carrie*, and slightly wonkier ones like *The Sentinel* which I do still love. But, you know, and, of course, big names in old horror films, I think, for me, probably started there. You know, and you get things like the *Manatee* with Tony Curtis(?) which is brilliant fun but daft as a box of frogs. And, I think, big names in horror films hadn't happened since the *Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte* and *Baby Jane* stuff when you had kind of people at the end of their careers being revitalised, bigger names like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis. It just seemed in one go to legitimise horror but utterly, utterly sort of genuinely horrifying the world, the Christian world, which... quite a thing.

Were you aware at the time when you first started watching it... were you aware of things like the effects being prosthetics and that kind of thing?

Oh, yeah. I was a Fangoria kid.

Oh, OK, so you were well versed in that kind of stuff.

Yeah. No, I mean. I clearly remember seeing my first edition of Fangoria and there were pictures of *Dawn of the Dead* in there and other such... and straight away I just thought, "This is amazing." So, technically, I could definitely appreciate. Sorry, one other thing just to dip back right before I'd seen it, of course, is stories of people fainting, throwing up, and running out of the cinemas.

Like in the newspaper coverage...?

That wonderful cultural folklore that grew up around it pretty much as soon as it was released in the states and equally as soon as it landed over here.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Did that make the film more appealing to you, do you think?

It’s a weird thing. I think, before I’d even seen it, it made it more awesome. Not in the modern American teen way, but in the true, “This must be something extraordinary.” Because I was, what, 9 years old. The thought of adults passing out watching a movie, throwing up. Yeah. So, yes. It was... I was very conscious of that. It attracted me. It’s the classic... When I was a kid, it was the inevitable attraction of equally knowing, “I’m not really up for this yet. I’m too young. I know if I see this it’s gonna really do a number on me.”

(laughs.)

But yet of course, it’s forbidden, it’s awash with taboo. You know, the language, the sexual content, the blasphemy. But, yeah, there you go. Kind of all things that are very intriguing but also terrifying.

How did your, if you don’t mind me asking, how did you parents feel about you watching this kind of thing?

By then, they’d begun to just tut and roll their eyes at it (laughs). I had a bookshelf – from a really young age, I’d go in second hand book shops so I had a couple yards of the Pan books of horror, a couple of the crappy James Herbert, all the better Stephen King stuff. Just, they kind of despaired.

(Laughs.)

They couldn’t work it out, because by nature I’m a pacific, mellow sort of a creature in many, many ways, and yet, they’d just say, “Why do you want to watch something so ugly?”

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Which is actually a very good question (laughs). And I don’t think I’ll get to the bottom of that this evening, but it’s a reasonable question. I think my mum read the book. My dad didn’t. Again, in many ways, I’m an atheist, but it’s a very Christian book. It’s very much about redemption and, what’s the word, sort of innocence regained, isn’t it? It’s about being saved. I think, basically... Sorry, do you know what, there’s a third death in the film isn’t there, because Merrin dies!

Oh, of course, yeah!

How could we forget. But, even the deaths, apart from Burke’s they’re classic sort of Christian sacrifice, so in a way it’s... That’s what William Peter Blatty’s often said. It’s a theological sort of book. Yeah. So.

When you watched it for the first time at home and that kind of thing, did you just... did you do any preparations and that kind of thing? Did you have to watch it in the day time or...?

Oh, yeah, yeah. Daytime. Definitely.

(Laughs.)

First attempts were daytime.

Is that how you would normally watch horror films?

Certainly not, no. That's not the ideal. Of course, the ideal for watching a horror film is with the lights low, if possible. So, yeah. And that's the thing, isn't it? It's interesting. Because I'd watched other horror films with my little mates. I'm trying think, like films that scared us but that were fun scary, like *The Howling*. The first time we saw that, lights down low, group of 14 years old. Brilliant. Really excellent, fun, popcorn, drive-in, all of that. But none of that really sort of fits with *The Exorcist*. And to be honest, I've since seen at the cinema... twice? Maybe more, but definitely twice. And both times... One time I was at college and it was on... Oh, where was it? Somewhere around highbury and Islington. Nice, big old Deco cinema. Midnight showing. We were pissed up. Everyone's pissed, everyone's stoned. Really rambunctious sort of crowd. Film starts. This was... 89.

Yeah.

So everyone's like, "This film's old, bla bla bla." And then of course by about 40 minutes in it's silent. And then by about 60 minutes in one of the girls I was with starts freaking out. It was just a gift, isn't it?

(Laughs.) Right.

For me, I was just like, "Oh my god, this is perfect." I remember she was a bit wasted and just like, "I can't watch this, I can't deal with this." And it's amazing. That was about 17 years after its release. Give or take.

Yeah.

I think that power still, then, hadn't diffused. It was definitely still, yeah, again, very potent. I saw it at the Scala as well on an all-nighter. Two other movies.

Oh, right.

I can only remember 2 other movies that were on. One was *The Hitcher*. I think the last- I think 3 that ran back-to-back were *The Hitcher*, Ken Russell's *The Devils*

Brilliant.

And *The Exorcist*.

That sounds amazing (laughs).

I don't smoke any more, but back then I did. I remember, me and my brother, I just got through like 60 fags that night. It was just brilliant. But, yeah. Really, really good. And, you know, coupled with *The Devils*. That's the other 70s sort of blasphemy film that, again, I had quite a strange relationship with through seeing pictures in books and bla bla bla.

Ah, right.

So, yeah. I think it's only twice I've seen it at the flicks. And since I've watched it probably... two weeks ago? It remains... I can never say I've got a favourite film, but there's a few that perpetually percolate through the top ten. There's like that... *Freaks*... Um... *Grease*, bizarrely. *Life's strange*.

(Laughs.)

Carrie.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

You know, but it’s just a film I can watch over and over. I know bits of it verbatim. But it’s still... of course it’s not as personally distressing as it used to be, but there are still moments that are just so extraordinary, you know, powerful. Proper powerful. Which I don’t get from a lot of films, despite having watched millions of horror films.

Yeah. So what would you say are the moments that still kind of get to you in that way in the film?

The whole “Keep away the sow is mine” sequence.

Yeah.

That’s just... terrifying. The opening sequence.

The Iraq sequence?

Yeah. The sound design on that. There’s a weird sort of moaning wind sound and then the dogs fighting and then the... that. Of course, Karras’s nightmare with the sort of Captain Howdy face, the black and white face that flashes up.

Yep.

God, I’m gonna end up saying the whole film!

(Laughs.)

Bits... The whole sequence... All the sequence with Karras with his mother are amazing. The one where he goes to see her in the hospital, it’s just extremely... And that’s nothing to do with a horror film. That’s just about how fucking awful life can be, you know? Um... And, yes. So many bits. And, you know, the editing in the sequence when he’s in the subway station?

When he’s waving across the street to her?

Yeah. But there’s a bit when there’s a homeless guy and he says, “Will you help an old alter boy, Father? I’m a Catholic.”

Oh, yeah.

And, just, you know... Again... To have that sort of time. To have a film structured so that it has a sequence like that is so unlike shlock horror.

Yeah.

But, yeah. I’m trying to think which other bits... Of course, the kind of the... Oh, no! Brilliant. Real favourite bit. Merrin arrives at the door and then you get the sort of cry of “Merrin!” really loud. You know that bit? Just as he arrives.

Oh, when you can hear her voice?

Chris McNeill opens the door and just from upstairs she goes “Merrin!” really loud. And I must admit, when me and my partner ever see a man in a fedora, you have to shout Merrin.

(Laughs.)

Not necessarily in his face. Sorry, one other thing to mention of course is the Max

Von Sydow make up. An old age make-up. Which of course... He was about 40-something when he was in it, wasn't he? An old age make-up so perfect in 1973 and you see old age make ups now and they don't quite stack up.

Yeah.

It's something I got more in retrospect, because I always thought he was an old man.

Yeah. Absolutely. I was the same. It took me like 20 years to catch on (laughs).

But yeah. Dick Smith. An absolutely extraordinary artist. And I've got... I'm wondering if I'm making this up, but did Rick Baker... was he an assistant on it? Someone like that. One of the guys who was one of the 80s effects wunderkinds.

Oh, I dunno.

Again, for me in my Fango days, that was all pretty perfect. Yeah, um. So I rambled a bit. I'm just trying to pick up the bits that terrified me most. I think one of the best scares of all time – and it's probably the only, apart from the Merrin bit, the only jump scare – is up in the loft looking for, query, rats.

Right.

And there's just the bit where she's got the candle and it whooshes up?

Yeah.

It's just a very beautifully choreographed jump scare, in a classic... It's not the cleverest bit. It's the one bit that feels a bit schlocky, and yet, even that, is so extraordinarily well executed.

So, um...

And! Of course, just the whole sequence – and it's something that really, really struck me the last time I saw this – was the sequence where Regan goes to the tests in the hospital. And the cruelty of that sequence... It just really struck me this time. Just this poor little girl. It's really horrible. And it's very real. And that's, I think, pretty terrifying. Hospitals are terrifying. Illness is terrifying. It seems, basically, and I'd put this in inverted commas, the "tortures" that people sometimes have to put up with sometimes to be treated, that sequence really struck me last time I saw it.

Yeah. You mentioned that you were struck by the relationships between Karras and his mother and... Were those scenes sort of... What am I getting at? Has the kind of the emphasis of what you look at in the film shifted over the years do you think? I mean, like, were those kind of...

Can I say the question back to you in a way? Because I understand this to be a difficult question. As I got older, which I am now – I'm 48 now – have I recognised kind of the responsibilities of a son to his mother that I didn't see as a 14-year-old?

Yeah.

Yes. I would have to say that has developed a deeper resonance. But I think even at the age of 14, we've all been aware at times when we've felt we might've let our parents down. And of course that's exactly what Karras is feeling. So, in a strange way, it had that resonance as a child, but as one grows older it kind of matures into

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

something which is still meaningful... But, yeah. It's matured. So, yes, to answer your question.

I think I'm kind of getting at, when you were watching the film as a child, did it make you feel anything besides scared?

Um. Not much. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Right.

I think there was a little... Even though by... I'm trying to think, was I a full-blown atheist by the first time I watched it? No, but I was certainly, certainly getting there. But, still, the blasphemy bit carried a whiff of guilt.

OK.

And that's, again, not because I had some terribly strict Christian upbringing, but, I think, it's, you know... To this day, you know, pre-teen girl masturbating with a crucifix... I don't think I've seen much in a movie in the last 40 years that could be a more shocking image, pretty much. And there was a little bit of guilt, clearly as I've got older that's kind of evaporated. It is, for me, like one of those films that's like an old friend. It's kind of comfortable, but it's still got moments of real edginess. Now, there's a sort of gleefulness in me. I'm waiting for the next sequence that I know and love to arise, but it's not got that kind of gut-punch, genuine nausea feeling I had the first time I had the pleasure.

Do you re-watch films quite often then or just certain kinds of films?

Yes. But there are definitely kind of canonical movies that both me and my partner will... Like, *The Shining* gets aired every so often. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* gets aired every so often. *The Exorcist*. *Omen*. *Omen 2*. So, you know. We're dating ourselves terribly.

(Laughs.)

American Werewolf, of course. To be honest, they were films that we would've been much too young to see at the cinema but we were children of the golden age of video, so that's when these films found a whole new audience, of course. Little Herberts like me could go down to the video shop and rent all sorts of gruesome stuff.

(Laughs.)

There are other films that we've watched. A lot of the Italian stuff. The classic Argento. I still love Fulci, you know. As much as I like good movies, I like dire films as well. So I like *Basket Case* and so on. Actually there's unfair on *Basket Case* because it's pretty fabulous. Yeah, definitely. I'm not one of people who say, "I've seen that film. I'm never gonna watch it again." There are certain films that definitely benefit from return viewings. I mean, I watched *Videodrome* again for the first time in a while, and that's just wonderful. So, yeah. Early Cronenberg stuff, all of that.

Yeah.

So, yeah. It's very interesting I think. Probably *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* are 2 movies which in a strange way, there's quite a shared sense around that. Kind of, very early

to mid 70s US, big budget, it looks great but it's meant to frighten you.

Right. Yeah.

And I think another thing about The Exorcist is – I can't remember who wrote the article – it might be... Have you read Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*?

I haven't, no.

Which is his kind of critique of horror. I think that's what it's called. And he talks about – I've read a lot about the Exorcist and it might not be – how there's something very traditional about The Exorcist as well. And he compares it a bit to the Hammer films and the Dracula stuff in that you've got a damsel in distress – well, you've got two because Chris and Regan – you've got a savant, someone who knows who understands. So basically Merrin is Van Helsing.

Oh, OK.

And you've got the ego male protagonist who has got the calm demeanour of the savant and of course that's Jason Miller. And you realise in some ways it's utilizing some very familiar tropes.

Yeah.

But this penny didn't drop for me for years and years and years. It always felt totally separate. But when you look at it, it does have a lineage behind it.

I'll have to read that. It sounds good.

Yeah. I think it's *Danse Macabre*. Don't hold me to it, but I think it is.

So, would you be able to talk about your experiences with... Obviously very well versed in horror and that kind of thing... Do you have any experience with the sequels and any sort of-

Oh, yeah! (Laughs.) Of course! So the sequels, you've got the official sequels: *Exorcist 2*, the *Heretic*, I think most people are in the place of saying let's move on. It's a fabulous misfire. It's John Boorman, isn't it?

Yeah.

It's John Boorman, it's a sequel to *The Exorcist*, it stars Richard Burton – "Come on, come on" – and you watch it and you think, "What the fuck is this?" It's very uneven. The basic conceit, as I recall – and I've seen it a few times... Every time I watch it again, I think, "Oh, yeah. This is why I didn't like it. It doesn't have a lot." Is James Earl Jones in it somewhere?

Yes. Yes, he is. He's like a...

I seem to remember his turn is pretty good, but I don't think anyone else acquits themselves very well. If I wanted to watch a Richard Burton horror film, I'd watch *The Medusa Touch*. There you go. That would be my late 70s, early 80s, but it's a delightful film. And it suits his at times rather hammy delivery. But, yeah. Not great. Then *Exorcist 3* came along. Great. I mean, not as wonderful as the first, but just some wonderfully chilling moments in that. The old woman scuttling across the ceiling.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah, yeah.

Absolutely wonderful. The kind of cloaked figure with the kind of big beheading thing?

Oh, the shears?

Yeah, that’s it. Really powerful stuff. Jason Miller again, who’s brilliant. You got George C. Scott. Proper actor. And Brad Dourif’s in it as well, isn’t he?

Yeah, yeah.

So that was a great recovery, I thought. And then, what was the 4th one? I’ve seen it.

There was 2 wasn’t there? The Beginning and Dominion.

And I’ll be totally frank, I seem to have a strange memory of someone being pulled apart by dogs in one of them and that’s kind of it. They didn’t stick. They felt... They were like other films that I’ve seen.

Yeah.

But, one of the things – people say guilty pleasures – I love Italian Exorcist rip-offs.

(Laughs.) Oh, OK.

So, like, Beyond the Door. Fabulous fun. There’s one hilarious one called Exorcist 3: Cries and Shadows, which is just barking mad and you’ve got demon witch child and I love all those. So, in a strange way, I’ve had more fun with the unofficial sequels. And I’m ashamed to admit I had a bit to drink and I fell asleep, but we watched the Turkish Exorcist, Seytan.

(Laughs.) Oh, I haven’t seen that.

I think the full film is on youtube.

Brilliant. I’ll have to search that out.

So, for me, something that’s gone from the real thing still being a quite terrifying thing, I’ve had so much fun with these. There’s a fabulous one called The Tempter, which is quite an arresting film in itself. Shall we say it wears its heart on its sleeve, as well as its influences, but, again, it’s actually, visually, there’s some great moments in it. So, there you go. It’s the gift that just keeps giving. Sadly, well... I was gonna say people have stopped, but we’ve actually seen a spate of exorcism type movies, like Exorcism of Emily Rose and things like that. And of course the TV series, which, of course, I watched. And was fun.

Yeah.

There are a couple of moments where I thought, “Wow, this is smart.” And then I was a little... The Exorcist in itself is actually an extraordinarily intimate film. There actually aren’t that many characters. Most of it happens in the house, etc. So I think turning it into a series, it’s become a bit of a conspiracy. It’s kind of fun and kind of of the moment, but, you know, it’s The Exorcist. I’m interested in some flawed priest trying to save the soul of a in this case girl who’s in total peril, and the peril is not only physical but, of course, it’s this sort of perceived spiritual thing. And I

hasten to add I have no beliefs whatsoever about that. I'm utterly a rationalist atheist, but it's a story so I'm allowed to be excited about that in a story (laughs). So, yeah.

So do you find the religious aspects of the film interesting?

Oh, yeah! Religion, yeah. I remain fascinated by religion though I am staunchly atheist. I think it's a very religious film. It's about faith, isn't it? As much as it's about anything. It's about Karras regaining his faith. It's about Merrin's endless steadfast faith. Yeah. So it's a lot of faith and redemption and martyrdom. Very classic Christian concepts. So the religious side of it adds, as with *The Omen*. If *The Omen* had just been about a spooky kid, it wouldn't have been a good movie, but tying it in with *Revelations* was marvellous. I think the religious context adds a great deal of resonance. And of course at the time it was utterly pretty much unprecedented as far as films. I seem to remember... I'm trying to think... Because again I've read billions of horror books as well. And I think the only book from around that time that might've pre-dated it that had some pretty wonky religio-sexual occulty stuff in it was *The Legend of Hell House* by Richard Matheson, I think.

Oh, OK.

I'll have to re-read it but I seem to remember at least one very odd sequence involving a crucifix and a hard-on. By the way, if that isn't real (laughs) and I've somehow constructed that, I apologise.

(Laughs.)

But I seem to recall reading that. Again, it was quite unprecedented, the whole thing. Though, of course, to the extent that it wasn't, that it was based on an apparently true possession of a boy, Donald...

Yeah.

Which is where he claims the inspiration came from.

Were you aware of that the first time you watched it, that it was apparently based on a true story?

Now that's a really, really good question, but I don't know. But I was, from my feverish... Well, basically... Great. Being a little horror kid growing up in the 70s you'd get genuine kids' books in big, A4 format with pretty pictures but they're about ghosts and hauntings and possessions. So I was conscious of the Enfield Poltergeist and the concept of demonic possession. I clearly remember when I was in middle school, I was able to not have to do – this is such a brilliant horror geek not-fitting-in thing, but anyway...

(Laughs.)

I was able to not have to go out and play rugby in the cold because I had to do my clarinet lesson in the middle of it. So I'd go to the school library and, Christ knows how or why, they had a brilliant old encyclopedia of the occult.

Brilliant.

Literally with a picture of the Goat of Mendes on the cover. So I'd just sit and read

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

that. So I had this cogniscence of the idea of a personified, evil devil.

Yeah.

And that this personified evil devil absolutely could interact with us, with human. I’m thinking I’m 10. Did I believe that? I didn’t disbelieve it enough not for it to terrify me when the lights went out.

(Laughs.) Right

That’s how I think I’d put it (laughs).

Fair enough. Just in terms of the various versions and that kind of thing, how do – do you watch the alternate versions? How do you feel about the Version You’ve Never Seen?

Yeah. The Version You’ve Never Seen, etc. It’s a curious egg, isn’t it? Because of course the edited out spider-walk that we all, after news that the footage existed, and, then, that’s a pretty extraordinary sequence, I gotta say. I don’t think it improves on the film. I really don’t like, there’s some sort of crap superimpositions that I’ve seen of Pazuzu’s face, or the Captain Howdy face. You know, the theatrical version, I’m absolutely good with that. You know, it’s a bit like, ET came out didn’t it?

Oh, yeah.

And they’d fixed some of the scenes with CG. And similarly with Star Wars.

They replaced them.

And possibly if you see it for the first time, it’s a less jarring experience for people who’ve grown up with CG.

Yeah.

But, for me, you know, I don’t know. It’s not better, it’s more.

Yeah.

And there’s plenty of good stuff in there without dredging for outtakes and adding bits. So, no, I’ve seen the (laughs) Version I’ve Never Seen – slightly oxymoronic nature of that – but, yeah, if it’s up to me we will watch theatrical version.

Okie doke. Bit of a hypothetical question, just about how you like to watch films and that kind of thing. If you could watch the film again, completely fresh, for the first time, what would be the ideal setting for you to watch it?

That’s a good question, because a part of me has fallen out of love with going to the cinema.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

Now I only go to the cinema to see dumb, big blockbusters, because they’ve got a wall of speakers and it’s an IMAXy thing. Back in the day I used to go to the Scala a lot. That was probably the ultimate place to see movies, because it would always be full of fellow freaks.

Right.

Now, probably, I'm lucky enough in my cellar I've got- I must admit I'm coming across as a geek in this (laughs).

(Laughs.)

I've got a little projector in the cellar with surround sound. So down there, couple of beers, lights off, surround sound loud, subwoofer pumped. To be honest, I did that tomorrow night it wouldn't be a huge surprise. It is a consistent delight.

(Laughs.) Right.

I suppose one other thing we haven't touched...

Yeah?

Which is the cache that The Exorcist got because it got taken off the shelves and the BBFC wouldn't give it an 18 certificate. Do you remember for years it was completely illegal to rent or buy a copy of The Exorcist in this country? Which nowadays seems utterly farcical, particularly as it had been passed with an X at the cinema.

Yeah.

But I think it was James Ferman at the time. I don't know whether he had a particular problem with it. But it was completely hysterical. I think I recall Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles had to be called Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles and they took out a scene with sausage nunchucks. The world had gone mad as far as I was concerned. But of course it gave it that further cache because the only way to see it was on the wonderful bootleg VHS creep circuit. So I think that probably added to its mystique. That it was a film made in 1973. I can't remember when it finally got passed. Still VHS time, I think, but it was amazing to be able to release a film from 1973 and say "the film that was banned for" you know, whatever it was.

Yeah, I think it was 98, 99, wasn't it?

Yeah. I think it was later than 89. In fact, I know it later than 89, because, long story short, but I wrote a little article for a tiny little magazine about this, about The Exorcist in 1993. And I was re-reading it and it ended on a rather whiny note of me saying, "And I still can't get a legal copy of the Exorcist." I think if we check the BBFC site, I don't think it got passed until after 93.

Yeah, sorry. I think it was 98 or 99. Because I was born 83, so I was growing up not being able to see it, which sucked. (Laughs.)

Ah, mate! (laughs.) You missed a good time. That mad golden age of video. It was... Bizarrely, probably now you can get nastier films on Netflix and what-have-you.

Yeah.

But to go from a place where you could only see films on the TV and at the cinema, to you could go down the road and see some dodgy fleabag of a man-

(Laughs.) Right.

And rent Cannibal Holocaust, The Exorcist, you know, the inevitable teen comedies, it was a good time. And of course it was all cut short by the evil... I think the MP was called Graham Bright.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

It was a sad day. But the only good thing was lots of video clubs sold lots of their films. My brother and I amassed... I've got a few rather nice old pre-cert sitting around, like an old Deep Red and Texas Chainsaw Massacre and...

Brilliant.

But, anyway, I'm rambling off a bit, off The Exorcist. But I think it's an important point that it was deemed by our masters to be too terrible for us to watch, for almost the whole of the video age up until we were almost on the verge of DVD. Extraordinary, in retrospect.

Were you very interested in the history and all the background material for the film? Did you watch the Mark Kermode documentary and things like that?

Yeah. The one called Fear of God?

Yeah, yeah.

The other thing I had, which I'm hoping is in one of the crates of books. I've recently gathered some old crates of books that I had in my parents' loft. And there was the – I can't remember what it was called – and it's got a white cover and it's either called The Making of The Exorcist or Behind The Exorcist. It's got the entire script and pictures in the middle.

Ah, brilliant.

So that was great. And I've read loads of interviews with William Peter Blatty, of course, and a few with old Friedkin. And of course some of the other movies William Peter Blatty had a hand in. Have you seen The 9th Configuration?

I haven't, no.

Ah, it's brilliant. It's about unbalanced ex-Vietnam vets. It's a very odd movie. It was taken from, I think the book was called Twinkle Twinkle Killer Kane. But, anyway, it's a William Peter Blatty thing. Worth a look if you like oddball 70s stuff. Yeah. That was on TV. I knew the connection, so that's why I watched it.

Ah, right.

Yeah, so the connections through, definitely... Yeah. More William Peter Blatty than Friedkin, though. I've seen a bunch of his films. I remember a very disappointing one about a killer tree called The Guardian.

(Laughs.) I don't think I've seen that one. That sounds... brilliant. (Laughs.)

Actually, maybe you should suffer it for the sake of context. But it's not great.

I'm sure I'll have to, yeah. Did you eventually get around to reading the novel, The Exorcist?

Oh, yeah. I read it before I watched it.

Oh, right.

Yeah, and, of course, loved it. It's a great novel. And I liked the whole backstory about... Is it Kicky? No, it's... The... Kind of butler. He's got a daughter in the book

who's involved in drugs, I seem to recall.

I think so, yeah.

I'm sure there's some sort of sub/backstory that doesn't feature in the film at all, but I remember, again, this whole sort of romanticised view of America as this exciting but dangerous place. I think the references to drugs were thrilling to a young chap such as I was. In fact, maybe check that. You know, again, it's a long time since I've read the book and I've read a lot of books since, so there's always the chance I've simplified something else in there. What's the butler's name? Swiss guy?

Oh, it's escaping me.

Yeah, me too. And I'm thinking Hans, and I'm thinking come on, Marco, you can do better than that.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

But I'm sure there's a backstory around there that I remember finding interesting that wasn't in the film. Yeah, you know, it's a good read, and it's a classic sit up after my parents were asleep, sitting in bed with the bedside lamp on, frankly terrified. So, yeah.

Just a last couple questions now if that's alright.

Sure.

Where were you living at the time the first time you saw it?

When I first saw it, I was at home. So basically first time I saw it on VHS it would've probably just been an afternoon with my dad at work, my mum at work, so I'm presuming it was a school holiday. It probably would've been a school holiday and my brother must've been wherever. Actually, the first attempt was with him. But the first time I saw it on my own, yeah. That was older. But it would've been school holiday time when I watched loads and loads and loads of wonderful VHS.

Yeah. Can I ask what your involvement with films usually, you mention that you wrote for a magazine about *The Exorcist* and that kind of thing?

That was like a tiny little local thing. Just now, just sort of fervent fan. One of my joys is watching generally dreadful Z-grade horrors and I'll tweet about them.

(Laughs.) Right.

Now, I'm an avid consumer, I guess. I don't have an output. I don't have a blog or anything.

Would you say you're more of a horror fan above and beyond any other genre?

Oh, I'd have to. I'd love to play the sophistication line and say-

(Laughs.)

I'm all about the nouvelle vague, but, no. I got a problem. I love 60s horror. I love 70s horror. I really like kind of wonky 80s horror, preferably shot on video, preferably a budget somewhere below a hundred thousand dollars. Ideally if the director did the catering as well and his mum is obviously the scriptwriter.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

(Laughs.)

I love that shit. But equally within that there are some good eerie gems to be had. So, yeah. I'm a pretty broad consumer of horror, though. I've got Netflix so I'll inevitably chew my way through some fairly tedious, run of the mill teen horrors. But, you know, it's a genre with which I'm extremely comfortable. And, to be honest, with my partner it's where our interests crossover. Not so much with sci-fi or fantasy stuff which, again, I enjoy. But, no. I've been a horror creep since my brother came home with Black Sabbath's greatest hits which has a Peter Brueghel cover with lots of skeletons on it, and I genuinely think the die was cast on that fateful day.

(Laughs.)

And since then, yeah, I liked horror stuff. I read loads and loads and loads of horror literature as well.

Oh, right.

Interestingly, I can't handle horror trash reading any more. I need it to be of a sort of degree of literary quality. People like Laird Barron. Don't know if you know him?

No.

Amazing. Jaw dropping. Truly. Occultation, collection of his. There's been a real resurgence in smart, properly weird horror at the moment.

Oh, OK.

So that's been a great joy for me. Though I am filling my house rapidly with books.

I'll have to look for that.

So as a consumer, don't go to the cinema so much to see flicks. I'm just as likely to be trawling through Youtube looking for old uploads of VHS rips.

Oh, OK.

I consume a lot of horror that way. Netflix and... Amazon are just beginning... I don't know who's their buyer or curator but some really low grade but delightful late 80s early 90s trash horror's appearing.

Oh, right.

It's really interesting. That's been a rare treat for me. Just kind unheard of lost late 80s horror films have materialised. That's a joy. I don't really buy films so much any more. I was obsessed with it. I've got so many DVDs I don't even want to talk about it.

(Laughs.) Right.

I've got dozens of blu rays. I'm desperately trying not to turn into a hoarder. I think my levels of acquisition have gone down, but interestingly my levels of consumption have gone up. So I won't rest until I've seen ever crap 80s shot on video horror film on youtube etc.

(Laughs.) Right. Just finally then is there anything in your background or anything in your life which you think might relate how you feel about the film, which we

haven't covered or...?

Um. I don't think so.

No? That's OK.

I think the fact probably as a child that I had some sort of a Christian faith without doubt adds something that I don't think there would be there without that. I think that's part of... It was like a sin to watch it.

Yeah.

You know, just to see these things. Just to see these dreadful things, to hear these awful things being uttered, it was a bad thing to do. Which, of course, like so many bad things to do, was an incredibly attractive thing to (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah.

And in some ways it's a fun thing to do. Yeah. I think that's probably the crux of it. And it probably is having some sort of, at the time, when I first encountered it, an unformed sort of view of whether the supernatural existed.

Yeah.

In the daylight. But when the lights went out, being pretty sure it did.

(Laughs.) Right.

So, yeah. I think that's probably somewhere at the crux of it. To be totally honest if I have any revelations or whatever further I'll be more than happy to drop you an email if that would be helpful.

Yeah, that would be grand, thank you. But, yeah, I think that's all of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

No. Not really. To be honest, that's good. That's some very bizarre form of therapy. I feel a bit rude, because now I feel I have to ask all the same questions of you, but I'd be interested to know.

(Laughs.) That's OK.

But why The Exorcist for you?

For me it's just because it's one of my favourite films of all time, and growing up in the 90s and not being able to see it and just hearing from my mum every time I told her a scary movie she'd tell me, "You having seen The Exorcist, so go away." So fascinated me from then.

Yeah. Brilliant. That folkloric thing. You were growing up in the 90s, I was growing up in the 70s.

Yeah.

We're saying the same story.

Yeah.

That's pretty impressive, for a film, I think.

Absolutely, yeah.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

And I sent you the links to those from the University of East Anglia archive?

Oh, yeah. With the priests outside the cinema? That's brilliant. Thank you.

I guess that was all floating around on the edge of my consciousness, too. Mate, I gotta admit this has been an absolute pleasure.

Yeah, thank you very much. It's been really good.

I wish you the best of luck with it. I'd be really delighted to see what- Dare I ask if you've got a timescale?

It's gotta be done within 3 years, so it'll be 2 and a bit more years? Hopefully I'm gonna be putting an article or something before then. I have to do a bit of archive digging so if I find that Hammer House of Horror magazine that you talked about I'll send you a link.

Yeah. And I'll see if I can find the Hamlyn horror book, because I'm pretty sure it was the front piece. So literally you opened it and it's a double A4 spread and she's reaching upwards while Pazuzu glowers down, so, yeah, if I can find any more... Have you seen the making or Behind the Exorcist book?

I don't believe I have, no.

I'll see if I can find my copy and if I can I'll take a photo or whatever for you.

Ah, brilliant. Thank you. That's awesome. Well, thanks again for talking to us, that's amazing.

My absolute pleasure. Well, no doubt I shall be seeing your tweets etc.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Brilliant. Thanks very much.

OK. Take care. See ya.

Thanks. Bye bye.

Paul

Particulars: Male; 26-35; UK. **Format:** In person.

I'll just turn this on. Because, I'm gonna transcribe it myself anyway, so if you're racist or anything I can always just snip it.

I'm not gonna be racist, am I?

(Laughs.)

Although I do really hate white people.

(Laughs.) Uh, yeah. So with like pre-liminary things, with my little script. Basically, if there's anything you don't remember-

Is it recording now?

Yeah, yeah.

Oh, OK sorry. You gotta write that up now.

(Laughs.)

And that.

(Laughs.) Shut up. It's so hard to transcribe stuff. It takes forever.

Yeah, I can imagine.

Um. But, yeah. If there's anything you don't remember. That's fine. If there's anything you don't wanna talk about. Like if I ask something and you're not sure you want to talk about it, that's fine.

Um. Like that night we had in the beach hut?

(Laughs.) Shut up. Um. And, you don't have to stick to any of my questions or anything. If stuff comes up and you want to ramble off, that's fine. Um. Or if I'm not asking you something and you're like, "I really wanna talk about this." Just jump in.

OK.

Cool. So, you said in your survey response that you first watched it on tape. Can you talk about that first time you saw the film?

Yeah. Um. One second. You're gonna compare this with the survey?

No. This is its own thing.

Because I was gonna say... I don't know if... I definitely watched it on tape, but I don't know if the first time I watched it was the time I was referring to in thing. It was more of an overview of any time I've watched.

But this sort stands on its own, kind of thing.

Yeah. First time I watched it was on a battered old VHS that someone had dubbed off an original one, so it wasn't even like a proper Exorcist tape. It was, um... A kid I was in school with, his dad was big into the Exorcist films and you'd heard like, ah, these have got things that are banned and-

Right.

You know, "It's dead scary." He got the dubbed tapes because he used to keep them in the shed so he robbed them out the shed.

Right. (Laughs.)

And he used to make his own covers for them.

Brilliant.

But he just put a banned thing (laughs) on The Exorcist. So, it was just like The Exorcist and then he'd done like a, you know, like a red stamp thing?

Yeah.

He'd just drawn as if it'd been red-stamped. Banned!

He just drew his own covers?

Yeah, yeah. He used to do it so he'd know what it was about. So it was- Half the time it wasn't even related to the film.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

But, yeah, he used to just draw his own little things. So, we got it. It's just like a white cover where he'd done *The Exorcist*. He wasn't an artist. And he wasn't- (Laughs.) He wasn't even a very good speller-

(Laugh.)

Because half the videos I had from him were all wrong. But, yeah, he had them. He had all of... (sigh) Did he have? He definitely had two of them that I remember. But, I dunno. And I don't even know what version it was, because I seem to think that the, um, down-the-stairs bit was in it.

Oh, ok.

Which would've been a thingy. But, I dunno. Because you've seen so many versions over the years that... I could've thing. But, it was definitely said that it was the full version. Everything in it. No cuts. But, I dunno. I was 13 and it was a banned movie and we were just excited to be able to see it.

So that would've been, like, early-to-mid 90s?

Uh, mid-to-late 90s. Would've been, like, 97, 98 maybe.

Ah, OK.

Yeah. I was about 13, 14, something like that. So, yeah, around 97, 98. That's when I was friends with that lad whose dad had all the tapes.

Ah. And you watched it in your house?

Yeah. Watched in my house. We had a little sleep over. Cause we used to. So, like, you know, just duvets in the lounge, bit of computer, talking nonsense, and then put a film on. And being teenage boys, it's like "Yeah, let's watch this scary movie, cause we're all hard as nails." Yeah, it was about... One of the lads, Gaz, he- it was his dad got the video, so he'd already seen it, he said. And there was probably about three or four others of us, all just crammed in watching it, yeah.

Cool. Um, and you watched films like that a lot?

Um. Yeah, not that many banned films. The occasional thing, because obviously I was a bit young, and most of my film watching was either stuff that was one TV or... We had, like- We used to have a video van that come 'round. 'Cause I live in, or at the time I lived in, quite a rural area. We had two little shops - a post office and a shop - in the village, but they closed at, like, six o' clock everyday, ten o'clock in the morning on a weekend, I think. But, they didn't even have videos back then. So we used to have this guy that came round in a van with all the latest releases strapped to his boot.

Right.

So he lives it up and you just choose. And he came round twice a week so you'd have it for like three or four days at a time until he's there next time. So we used to get horrors from him, but my mum used to have to- Because she'd let us choose what we wanted, but she'd watch the film beforehand, so we could generally watch it if it was violent or if there was drug use or anything like that (laughs) or swearing

she'd kind of let us get away with that.

(Laughs.) Right.

But she wouldn't let us see any proper sex scenes or anything. So she was a bit funny about that. So normally she'd kind of screen it the night before and we'd get to watch it the day after. So we could usually pick. But, by that point, she wasn't too bad. But you're talking, like, um, Terminator and things like that that we used to get or...

Right. Yeah.

Um... The Exterminator, the old, uh.... So it used to be stuff like that, just with cool covers of dudes with flamethrowers. Just anything that appealed really. Watched a lot of trash. But, it was all readily available videos. Probably a little bit behind their release dates and stuff, but, yeah, there was nothing like- The Exorcist was a bit like a holy grail thing 'cause it's the kind of thing everyone reckons they've seen because such and such brother's sister has got them a copy and all that-

Right (laughs).

But it was banned, we were told, so it's like, it kinda become something more, so we'd never seen anything like that before.

Did your mum have to screen that for you?

No, no. My mum didn't know we had that. I mean I don't think she would've minded too much, but obviously there's a couple of scenes in it that might not have got past her.

Yeah. (Laughs.)

But, yeah. By that point, my mum was always- She used to work like fourteen-hours days, so there was, like, if I borrowed a film off someone she generally couldn't tell what we were watching because she's out at work and stuff. So, sometimes, when she was on lates, we'd have dinner fixed for us for when we got- and I had an older sister who'd look after us and everything. But from, like, six until you go to bed, you're pretty much left to your own devices. You know, I'm in my room watching videos or whatever. My sister's just leaving us to it. So, mum didn't really have as much of a say. But, at the same time, there's only so many places you could get videos from.

Right.

So, it was only if, you know, someone had slung me a copy and said, you know, "Check this out." So, yeah, she- I'm not sure she would've been happy with us seeing it had she seen it first, but she didn't really have a say.

(Laughs.) Right. So how much did you know about what was in the film before you saw it?

Not a great deal, to be honest. Like I say, it's one of those things that- When we were- I was quite, um, quite naïve about films, because we didn't really have the internet at that time, so I didn't, you know, it was only when I went on in school or something. So I didn't really know the ins and outs of what I was into. I was into any

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

type of film, just as long as it was a film. So I was just consuming everything I could from the video man, and, you know, people borrowing me stuff. But with The Exorcist it was kind of like one of those things someone would mention in school, or someone will try to appear cool because they saw it at the weekend and it's this... thing. Same with, Texas Chainsaw Massacre used to be the same.

Yeah.

There was, like... I always remember this kid Gary Sinnett, telling everyone he'd watched it and stuff. And in biology just being like, “Yeah, I've seen Texas Chainsaw and bla bla bla.” And, um, yeah, like. Everyone was like, “Whoa, you've seen that? Was it amazing? Was it good? Because it's well banned. There's all this really serious stuff, and it's crazy.” Then, in hindsight, I'm sure I remember him telling us stuff about these massive chainsaw fights and stuff that are in it.

(Laughs.)

Which, like there's not two dudes going at each other with chainsaws, so he definitely hadn't seen it. But, it's one of those things, like, because you're kids, and you're trying to be cool, it's like “Whoa, this is the scariest film ever!” And then it's like, “Well, I've seen it.” So it didn't really know anything other than people used to say it was, like, proper scary. That it was, like, banned because it was that horrific. So it became, like, a, “Ooh, I'm seeing this banned film.” So, yeah, that's all I really knew from what my mate said, and when the little shite video cover comes up and it's like, “Banned.” I thought, “Yes! This is the one!”

(Laughs.) Brilliant. So, how did you feel about watching the film? Were you excited? Were you nervous at all?

I was excited, but, yeah... Um... You're kind of like excited because you feel like you're getting in – as I say – people talking about it and being like, “Ah, yeah, this film.” So, knowing I was about to see it, you're like “Aw, like I'm gonna be like, everyone's gonna be like, what's the film like?” So, as a 13/14 year old who cares way too much about what other people, you're a little excited that you're kinda getting in on the ground floor on something. Well, not the ground floor because it's years after it was released, but you feel like you're kind of getting ahead of all your peers and that, checking it out. At the same time, I was a little bit worried because if it was as horrendous as everyone was saying I was like, “Oh, God. I'm watching it with my mates. I don't wanna make a tit of myself.”

(Laughs.)

“And be too scared, jumping out my skin and, you know, not being able to actually look at the screen.” So, yeah. Excitement, because I really wanted to see it. As I say, and at that kind of age I was just really getting into films, so it was just an opportunity to see something, the kind of film I hadn't seen before.

Yeah.

I watched horrors. I liked horrors. But the idea that one of the ones I'm watching is like so horrific that it's been banned was just like, because I'd seen some – what I thought at the time – was some pretty horrific films, like Critters... whichever one where they murder the Easter bunny and throw him through a church window...

(Laughs) Right. Was that 2 or 3?

I mean, that... maybe 3? But that destroyed me when I was younger, like. Terrifying. That's the only film to ever give me nightmares. It was crazy.

Because they killed the Easter bunny?

Yeah, it was just the gruesome way they threw him through the church window and that, to be honest. But that like, proper – couldn't believe that. And it's like, that got through.

(Laughs.)

So what could be banned?

Ah, right, yeah.

So I'd seen like Hellraiser. Had I seen Hellraiser at that point?

That's pretty hard.

Yeah I must have. Where they're pulling the skin off. And that's like, pff. And, again you're thinking, well, "That got through." So, yeah, it's, um – I had seen... One of my favourites at the time was a film called Hello Mary Lou: Prom Night 2, or Prom Night 2: Hello Mary Lou. And that had this really cool bit where the main girl- It's like a fake Carrie thing – and the main girl's like walking down looking for one of her victims who's hiding in a locker. And she's walking down and she's singing that, uh, "ah wom bom balo bom," or whatever the- you know the song I mean.

Yeah.

And she's scraping her nails along the lockers as she goes and it's proper terrifying and you're cutting in to the girl in the locker and as she gets to the final bit of that song with the little... um, out thing. Where she says, "bam, boo" or whatever it is. The moment she says that she kind of moves her hand and the lockers kind of crush in either side to the one the girl's hiding. And all this proper, like- It wasn't so much that it was a horrific thing – I mean, it is a horrific thing but – there was this proper like awful shade of red, lumpy- proper lumpy blood that spurts out of the locker vents and down the locker.

(Laughs.) Right.

And, again, that's was like, for that film – it wasn't a very good film, there's a lot of things that bother me about it – but it was a horror movie that I had round the house and it's like, "Whoa, check this, I'm watching this," because my mum had picked it up at Woolworths or something in a deal at some point on video.

Yeah.

And, yeah, so, like, again, there was just this blood thing, and there was something about this image that was just like, "Whoa, what the hell? That's like proper dark that." Just because of how lumpy the blood was. Because lumpy blood is just a weird thing. Like, you just thing, "Whoa, she must have just absolutely smushed the body to bits." That ain't blood trickling out like you're watching a samurai movie or something. No spurting. That's just lumps.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

So you've proper just turned her (laughs)... So, again, I was just like, that got through. So, again, you're just kind of thinking to yourself, "This is banned, right. How bad's it gonna be? Well, this got through, and that got through... Oh my god..."

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) So you start to think "Oh, no. This might be a bit much. I'll give it a bash."

(Laughs.)

So, yeah...

So how did you feel when you actually saw what was in it? Did it match up to how bad you expected it to be?

No. The first time I watched it, no, to be perfectly honest. Subsequent viewings, definitely, but that first time was a bit of a different one, because, as I say, I'm watching it with a group of mates.

Yeah.

So, you've got this kind of bravado in place. You're kind of trying to show, "Ah, this ain't no thing." It's a group of, probably, age range, 16 to 13, 12. I feel like my little brother was there as well, so, yeah, about 12. I'm watching it, and, it's like, you're enjoying it, but the thing with that film is there's large parts where it, actually, it's really nicely paced because it doesn't rush anything, you know. It slow builds and, on subsequent viewings, you're seeing just the deterioration of the relationship between the mother and daughter because, early doors, where they're playing - I think I'm remembering it correctly - where she comes home from one of the shoots, and she's chasing her round the house to catch her and stuff, and it's dead playful and she's very young. There's a warmth between them. You notice that. You can see that bond. And then as the possession progresses, you can see that they're becoming more distant.

Yeah.

Even before where she's confined to the bed, you can just see that there's a little, kind of, chasm being opened up between them. Um. Babbling now, sorry. Going off on one.

It's alright, don't worry.

So, um, when you're watching it in a group of mates...

Yeah.

Those slower moments that are showing things like that, the subtleties of it, the nuances of the actual film to kind of take you on that journey, you're not paying as much attention. Because, you know...

Right. You're looking for-

You're talking to each other.

Oh, ok. Yeah.

You know, it's not the same as if I watched it on my own, where I'm focused on every detail and you're kind of being drawn into the world. You're very conscious of

the fact that you're watching that film and you're watching it with your mates.

Yeah.

So, you're putting on a front with it, to make sure that you don't embarrass yourself. But you're watching it with your mates, so, you know, like, when she comes down stairs and says to the dude... What's his name? Can't think of his name.

Which one?

You know the one her mum's seeing?

The astronaut?

Yeah, and she's like, "You're gonna die up there," and then she pisses herself on the rug.

Yeah.

That's, like, "Whoa, what the hell?" She just told him he's gonna die up there and then she's doing that. Like, she's clearly got no control. "What?"

Yeah.

That's crazy. You look at that scene now and you're like, "Wha-? That's crazy, man. What would you do there, like?" But back then, it's like, "Aaaaah! She's pissing herself!" Like, it's hilarious.

(Laughs.) Right.

It's hilarious. Because you're 13 and there's a little girl peeing herself on a rug.

Right.

That's... You know. We're teenage boys. That's hilarious. And, then, some of the even more horrific scenes, like the cross, the scene with the crucifix...

The masturbation?

Yeah. That's, like, 13-year-old boys watching that, it's hilarious. Like, it's not. It's obviously not. But, to a 13, 14-year-old boy, it's, like, you gotta laugh, because you don't fully understand everything that's going on.

Yeah.

You don't realise the severity of what you're seeing. Um. But you can see that there's a woman jabbing herself with a crucifix. And you're like, "Ha." It's funny. It is funny.

Yeah.

You know. Because, yeah. That's the kind of idiot I was as a teenage lad, and we're all, as well, there's that level of discomfort, because it is unsettling. So, that plays into it as well. So, you ramp up the things like getting the giggles at it, because, you know, you're trying to show you're not actually scared by it, you're not feeling a little uneasy with it so. Little bit of giggling, and once one starts laughing, that's the thing. And the head turning looked, even then, it looks a little bit funny.

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Just the way it goes round, like. So, little things like that, I mean, they're quite serious scenes obviously. And in hindsight they're brilliant. But, at the time, you're just kinda like, “That's ridiculous.”

You were looking for something else?

Yeah. Yeah. You're expecting a horror but you're not treating it in the same way. You're viewing it like you should be watching American Pie or...

Right.

Some other light film where where you can just dip in and out and have a conversation. The Exorcist works as an entire film and you should pay attention to it - like you should most films to be honest - but, you know, when you're young and with your mates you don't really think like that. Maybe if we were in the cinema we'd be a bit more drawn in, but we were just at my house, eating munchies, talking crap to each other and watching a girl jab herself with a crucifix. (Laughs.) It's... Yeah. It is just funny. So, yeah. I mean, I think there's a load of other factors that make you deal with the film in that way but, in all honesty, that's how we felt about it when we were that young.

So is that kind of how you talked about the film after, like, “It was funny when this thing happened...” and...?

Yeah, to an extent, because, you know, it's - that was the experience and there were so many of us in the room that, yeah, like, that's what happened, so that's what's gonna be thing. But at the same time you do build it up a little bit as well. Like, “Aww yeah, with the crucifix. Pff! That was dark that. There was so much blood. There was this. There was that. Aww, yeah. I'm not sure anyone could watch that, like.”

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Because, as I said before, you've kind of been let into the club.

Right.

So it's like, once you're in the club, you're trying to tell people, “Aww, it's great in this club you know? Aw, what! You don't even understand.”

Like you're bigging yourself up as a survivor, kind of thing?

Exactly. You're part of the myth-building. In the same way, if you see an amazing film... If you see a great film, a film that you really enjoyed. You say to someone, “Aw, I watched this film last night. Aw, absolutely amazing. Ah, it's one of the best things I've ever seen. Incredible! Incredible! Literally, one of the best films I have ever seen.” “Ah, what's it called?” “Ah, it's Mighty Ducks 3.”

(Laughs.) Right.

Like, it just happens to be the film you watched last night that was quite good, but the people you're telling it to haven't seen it, so you're like “Yeah, amazing!” like you've had this amazing experience that they haven't. It's just- it's what we do. You big it up like that when you're young especially, because you don't really know any better and you don't really realise that that it doesn't actually matter either way.

Yeah.

But, um, yeah. There's a bit of like "we were just laughing at it because we're well 'ard and we're not- (laughs) we're not scared by no horror film. But, by the way, this horror film was dead scary, and you probably would've struggled with it. Not us! Not us. We found it hilarious. But you. It was banned, you know?"

(Laughs.) Yeah.

"You couldn't deal with that. I heard a woman fainted when she saw it at such-and-such's house." "Did she?" You know, all that kind of nonsense. But, yeah...

So the stuff- the scenes that sort of stood out for you the first time you were watching it were more of the effects scenes and that kind of thing?

Yeah, yeah. When you're that age, again, you're not really looking at the performances.

Yeah.

When I've watched it as I've got older – you know, I've seen it a number of times – yeah, performances are great, score, like there's so much, the atmosphere, the slow build, the way that the things go, it's superb. But, I was just a person- like, I'd watch any film.

Yeah.

I just told you about Prom Night 2: Hello Mary Lou or whatever. Like, watch that back now. There's no way anyone says that's a good film.

(Laughs.) Right. Yeah.

Not even the person whose only credit was that. They're still looking back on that with some "Ugh, god, what was I doing?" But, like, you only can appreciate those things once you get more kind of knowledgeable about what works in films and once you've seen so many and at that point in my life I hadn't really. So, you're looking for the stuff that you don't see in all films. I'm seeing people talking, standing round, talking-

Right.

I'm seeing a priest look a bit "pff, what's going on here?" As far as I'm concerned at that age, it was boring. That's the boring bit isn't it?

Yeah.

So I wanna see the bit where the head spins around. I wanna see the bit where the... crucifix scene. I wanna see – what else – the peeing on the rug obviously stood out because that was funny to us.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Um. You know. When everything's flying around the room and she starts moving the chest of drawers thing towards her mum when she's knocked her over and stuff.

Right. Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

And the door closes. Those are the things. And when she’s projectile vomiting. The stuff you haven’t seen in every other film. Or in any other film really. Because at that point I’d never seen any of that stuff. So those are things that stood out, because that’s like... You know. They’re some of the film’s most powerful images regardless of what age I’ve watched it, how much of the film I’ve actually understood, it’s still- you know- I mean the crucifix, that’s such a powerful image anyway, and when you understand it more it becomes a far more powerful image, but, back then, it’s a lasting one, but for really superficial reasons. For just the pure, like, “She’s got a crucifix, she’s doing that and then she’s said this.” Like what.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

It’s just crazy. But once you understand it a bit more and you’re actually thinking past that you’re like, the fact that it is a crucifix that she’s... using. The fact that she grabs her mum and asks her to do that, like, that’s a mother and daughter. That’s messed up with anyone, but that’s a mother and daughter. And you don’t even think about that when you’re watching it the first time, but, yeah. So, yeah. A lot of the big scenes, that if you ask most people and say, “What are the scenes?” They’re gonna say crucifix. They’re gonna say the head spinning. Maybe the down the stairs bit, but I don’t know if... I feel like that was in the version we watched, but I don’t know if it is.

Yeah.

Because we were told it was an uncut thing and I’ve definitely seen that in a version at some point.

They’ve all kind of mused?

Yeah. Exactly. Cause you kind of... You remember the situation of the first time you watched it, maybe the second time, maybe the most recent time. But I’ve probably seen that film upwards of twenty times total, I reckon.

Right.

But, yeah. Somewhere round there. So, you pick up different parts of the film as you’re going. And I couldn’t tell you about the seventeen times I’ve watched it in between.

Yeah, of course.

Because, you know, the vast majority of them are gonna be the same. It’s gonna be me, sat in my bedroom, on my own watching it. Because it was one of the first DVDs I had as well. Because, like, I was one of the first people to have a DVD player, that I knew. And I literally had- I think I bought it with 2 or 3 DVDs like... Blue Streak.

Any Given Sunday.

(Laughs.) Any Given Sunday.

Man United the Movie.

Man United the Movie. Erm. Chopper. Lock Stock. And The Exorcist was one of the first cause I got it from one of these ridiculous brittania things that they used to do, like “Have 6 DVDs for a pound.” Whaat?

Yeah. And then they're \$16.99 afterwards.

Yeah. And they you have to buy another, like, six for the next two years but they're like sixty quid each. Or seventy quid in the case of Harry Potter for me.

(Laughs.)

But, yeah. So The Exorcist was one of the first DVDs I had. So I probably had about eight DVDs and no-one to swap them with to get new stuff.

Oh, OK.

So, what you'd get is, I had quite a number of different groups that I was running with. So, um, this is a couple years after when I first watched it, but you'd get, like... My brother and his mates might be round the house and say, "Ah, Paul, can we watch one of these DVDS?" Because, as I say, I'm one of the only people anyone knew with a DVD player back then. So it's like "Yeah, yeah" and we'll watch one. And because I wouldn't just let them be in my room watching my DVD player, I'll watch it with them.

Yeah.

So, they'd be like, "Oh, we're gonna watch The Exorcist," so, alright, I've seen The Exorcist. And then, you know, another mate comes, "Ah, do you wanna watch something?" "Yeah, yeah," because most people when they did come to my house at that time were like "Let's watch one of these DVDs." Because, you know, most people didn't have DVDs. And quite often, if people would stay - well, you know yourself - if people stay over we'd only have like 3 DVDs but they'd be so impressed with picture quality and stuff that we'd watch, like, American Beauty, Fight Club

Yeah!

And then, those were the only two I had at the time, so then we'd watch American Beauty and Fight Club, so we'd literally watch a film two, three times over the course of twenty four hours.

Yeah.

Because it was just there and it was like a really good film, so "Let's watch it again!"

Yeah

So we would do that, and that happened with The Exorcist. And if I was just bored, I'd never watch television or anything when I was younger, because I just had my DVDS, so I just put one of them on. So, all of those times just become the same, so you don't know, "Oh, this is when I realised that" or when "Oh, yeah, that's from that time," because it's just something you've done loads of times so it just kind of all merges into one.

Yeah. So how do you feel about the film now?

Oh...

Taking into account all your viewings of it and everything.

I love the film. It's one of the best horror films ever made. Definitely. Certainly don't laugh at it (laughs) in the same way now as I did the first time.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah. (Laughs.)

Yeah. Just a great film. Uh, everything about it. Really well acted. Really well paced. The shots... Especially when it's starting to get super cold in the room and you're starting to see the breath and everything...

Yeah, yeah.

It just looks incredible. Yeah, some of the effects are a little bit ropery in hindsight, just because, they were then.

Yeah.

But, I mean, for practical effects they're very very good. Considering there was no computer wizardry used or anything. Like, the vomit's incredible. Still. The head turns a bit (Pff). But a lot of the scenes still work, still as powerful when you see it. I harp on about it, but the crucifix scene is always going to be really uncomfortable to watch because, it's a little girl and stuff, innit, so you're like, “Ugh”.

Yeah.

And I think, weirdly as you get a bit older, you become - I dunno... I've found myself - I don't know about other people - but some of my friends that I talk to, become weirdly a bit more sensitive to things.

As they get older?

Yeah. So things that I wouldn't about when I was younger. I didn't really cry at films when I was younger. Things didn't get to me and stick with you properly. You just kinda shrug it off. But, as you get older, I've found that I'm much more likely to cry at really sad things in films, like, you know, and just feel more uncomfortable with things. Because it's almost like you start - maybe you've had enough life experience to know these things actually happen. Well, not so much the possession.

Yeah.

But, you know, seeing people you love getting harmed and things, that's a thing. So you almost understand the emotion behind the performance and stuff. So when you see someone seeing their daughter go through something horrific, you're not thinking, “Oh, yeah, I remember that time Jane was possessed.” (Laughs.) You're not like harking back to it like that, but you are thinking like, “That's not happened but oof”. There's something in there that links it to you like, “Bloody hell. Imagine having a daughter doing something like that. It's mental.” And it just sort of sits with you a little more uncomfortably because you understand more of what's going on and you understand more of the fact that there's some messed up stuff that happens in the world. So, I think on a subconscious level, you're more affected by it because... it's almost like your brain is knowing what emotion they're trying to elicit and going, “Oh yeah it's this thing,” because it's like that. It's linking it in your file. It's able to send it to the right department because it knows what you should be feeling. So you're a little more susceptible to what they do.

Like linking it to the suffering a bit more.

Yeah, exactly. Rather than the shock. Because when you're first watching it, when I'm young, it's like, “Whoa, what is that! Ugh! That's uncomfortable.” But as you get

older you're assigning the right emotion to it, so you're feeling it a bit more. It's the same way, you watch extremely cliché stuff that's just tugging at your heart strings and it gets you when you're old. Didn't get me when I was younger because "Pff, yeah, and?" It just wasn't a thing. I dunno. I think you're brain now takes it in and it's like, "Oh, it's this thing. You know that thing. You've experienced it with this, this and this." But purely on a subconscious level, so you're more susceptible to go down that route and go "Yeah, it's getting me." (Laughs.)

Yeah (laughs). So you find it upsetting now in places?

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. I mean, the stuff with the crucifix, and just the fact that a mother is essentially watching her daughter go to ruin. That is horrendous.

Yeah.

And you see that. You don't see via possession. But you see relationships damaged like that. You see a parent losing control of their child, going down a path they really don't want them to go down, but unable to prevent them. Trying what they can to stop it, but it almost has this inevitability about it. I think you kind of look at things on another level, than just this is what it is, it's possession. You kind of take the specifics out of the story and look at it in a broader way, I think. You know like - what's a good example? - when they say - I've probably got the wrong one... From back in the college days... Was it like, six types of films that there is, six types of story?

Oh, yeah.

With the Orpheus and all that stuff.

From like old myths and things. And everything's from the same six or seven stories

So it's the exact same stories, but with different specifics to differentiate it. Even if you look at like a remade version, then that's straightforward remake, of like Yojimbo to, the Bruce Willis one Last Man Standing.

Yeah, yeah.

That's the same movie, isn't it? If you just look at them, you think, "That's not the same film." But the story's exactly the same. It's actually a remake. It's just a different looking remake. What else is there?

You mean like King Lear and Ran and things like that, where it's like the elements are all the same but the dressings are different?

Yeah. Exactly that. And I think you're able to see the elements more.

Yeah.

So, on some level in your brain, you're like, "Oh, yeah. That's like this thing." So it's affecting your emotions more because...

You can generalise out from the...

Exactly. Rather than seeing the specifics and being like, "Oh, yeah. Possession. Possessions don't happen."

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

So you're not really looking at it in the same way when you're younger, because you're like, "Oh, yeah, it's a possession movie." But you start to look into it and it's like, no, no, it's about a mother-daughter relationship, it's a movie about religion. You start to see all the different strands that are attached to it. So you can see them all but you're actually seeing the core of what it is, and that's what's pushing the way they see it. So, yeah, it definitely affects you more, because I think you just have a better understanding of it. You can relate to it more just by virtue of being older and having experienced more because the base emotions behind everything are there, because you've experienced them. And when I was 13/14, I might've thought I'd experienced sadness, but not really, because everything's done for you (laughs). You're looked after.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

You don't really know what it's like to be out in the world. I think it just comes to mean a bit more.

Right. So would you say when you watch the film again, do you get different things from it each time or is it like the whole thing and you're re-experiencing it?

Yeah. To an extent. I think there comes a time where, for a period - for instance from the first viewing to when I first watched it on my own. Certainly when I watched it on my own there would've been loads I woulda been realising, because it's like, I wasn't really paying attention during that bit, I didn't hear what he was saying, what was he saying about his mum there. Things like that, I wasn't paying as much attention as I should. And even then when I paid attention I might've been reeling from one bit. Because first time I watched on my own I was like, "Whoa, this is actually kinda scary" when I'm not laughing and giggling with my mates, when I'm being drawn in to the film. So, again, you might be reeling from a bit so you maybe miss this next bit or don't really understand that bit or don't quite know what the idea behind that is, and, again, as you become more knowledgeable about things or, once you see it a couple of times you start to work it out in your head and be like "oh, yeah, so that's like this kind of thing"

Yeah.

So certainly for the first few times you're watching it you're discovering new stuff every time you watch it. But then, that might be it for the next 3 or 4 times you watch it. And then, all of a sudden, "Oh, I never really noticed that thing before. Oh, OK, that's kinda cool." So, there's still little bits you find, but not as frequently as you might have the first couple of times you watched it, because it's that thing. But then again - I can't think of the last time I watched it, it's definitely a few years ago - but probably if I watched it today I'd probably get something else from it because the me watching it now is not the me that watched it last time.

Yeah.

It's not the me that watched it the first time. I'm coming at it from a completely different perspective with even more experiences and feelings and whatever my mood might be watching it. So all that's gonna play a part and I might see

something I've never seen before because I've never had this unique set of circumstances around me to enable me to notice something.

Yeah.

So I think you can always get something more from it, it just becomes less and less as you become more familiar with it. But there's large... I've seen it plenty of times, but there's still large parts where I'd say, like, I've forgotten that bit and this bit and this person's name. Well, most of the names, because I'm terrible with names and stuff. So, all of that would come back to me, but once you start watching it it would be familiar and like, "Oh, yeah, that's the dude and that's what happens and then this..." So it would all come back because you do have that familiarity with it from watching it so many times, but I don't think you gain as much from it every time now, because you hit a level where, you know, I haven't... Say, for arguments sake, I watched it 3 years ago. 3 years ago me isn't as different to this version of me as this version is to when I was 14.

Right. Yeah. I know what you mean.

So, I'm not gonna notice as many different things from then. But probably if I compared notes from 14 year old me to 30 year old me, yeah, there would've been a big difference in what we took from the film.

(Laughs.) Yeah. And it's the same for all films when you're rewatching them?

Yeah. It's the same for everything. Well, maybe not all films. Because some, well, a lot of films don't have the depth of something like *The Exorcist*. Don't have the performances of something like *The Exorcist* where you can appreciate certain subtleties or nuances that you've never seen before.

Yeah.

Like, I'm not watching *American Pie* for the 10th time and being like, "Whoa, I really like the way Stifler did that thing there. I've never really noticed that. That really gets to the core of his character, yeah. And the interaction between Jim and his dad, there. It really highlights the relationship." Like, you're not noticing that stuff because you're not there to notice that stuff. They haven't built that into the story to have you notice it. Whereas *The Exorcist* is built to do that to you. It's to draw you in and take you on the journey the characters do. It doesn't happen for all films. Actually, it's easier to qualify it. It happens for films. It doesn't happen for movies.

Right. Can you explain the difference?

For me, a film is a bit more of a work of art that's kind of trying to maybe show something to you, about yourself, about life, about our understanding of the world. It's more of a character thing, maybe to engage your brain to make you think. Where for a movie is to leave your brain at the door and just to enjoy yourself without thinking. To just immerse yourself in something, some loud noises, some shiny things, some pretty people.

Right. Like escapism?

Yeah. Exactly. Just - there's no issue with either. I'll happily go watch a movie. It's fun.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

You’re just looking for different things from it.

Yeah. Because, if you think, on a Saturday night, I’m like, “Whoa, let’s go and have a good time.” I’m not thinking, come on everyone, let’s go and watch *The Exorcist*. Let’s go watch a film. Let’s go and watch this Iranian movie about a lesbian women who’s gonna get stoned to death. That ain’t fun, but that’s a film. And that’s gonna show me something about life and show me things I don’t understand and maybe teach me a perspective I’ve never even thought of.

Yeah.

But you don’t always wanna be in that place. It’s great. Because you can learn different things. But a movie is just gonna be like, “Come in, come in. Have fun. Let’s have a good time.” Don’t get me wrong. there’s things that look like movies that are films.

Like what?

Um. What’s a good example.

Like it’s deeper than it appears?

Yeah. Example off the top of my head.

Sorry. Putting you on the spot (laughs).

Yeah. Four Lions.

Right. OK. Yeah.

Seems just like, “Yeah, OK. We’re gonna follow the bombers and there and bloody hell these jihadis, they’re rubbish aren’t they? Look how stupid they are.” And it looks silly, but it’s actually saying a lot more about society and how we view these things and how we don’t help the situation with our own actions. It’s shining a light on a part of society you don’t generally see as a white man from North Wales. Things you don’t understand. But at it’s core it’s a silly little comedy if you just glance at it, but it’s actually not. It’s so much more than that.

So you’d say the *Exorcist* is a film?

Yeah. Definitely, it’s a film. Because, in terms of “Let’s go and have a good time,” do you really, like, “Let’s go and have a good time, let’s get scared” because being scared is not a pleasant emotion. I mean, some people get a kick out of it. And, obviously, films like *Saw* and that, they made all their money because of exactly that reason. But that’s almost... This is why usually it’s like horror films, I always think if horror is done well it’s always a film, because they’re making you feel feelings which aren’t actually pleasant, but it’s nice to experience them. It’s out of your comfort zone. It’s taking you on a journey to a feeling you don’t have in your day to day life, or hopefully don’t have in your day to day life, and that’s the thing it’s giving you. And people enjoy that and people get a kick out of it because they’re experiencing something they don’t normally. Because they’re able to experience it and come out of it. Like, no-one wants to be in *Saw*, but they go and see it and it’s like “Whoa!” And it’s like crazy and “I wouldn’t like that,” and they walk home and it’s all fine. Done.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

But, if it's done right, horror... There's some that just don't work because they don't get that response, because the vast majority of horrors being made don't elicit that response or make you feel those things. They're trying for cheap scares and they're not even getting those. Those are movies. They're not doing it. You're meant to just leave your brain at the door and just have fun. "Look, that was gruesome."

Yeah.

Hostel tried to have a bit to say, but that's just nonsense. Or something like... What's the one where, the Eli Roth one, Cabin Fever.

Oh, right. Yeah.

That. It's gross. It's "What, aw, no!" It's cheap.

Right.

It's just like, "Aw, here's a flesh-eating thing on someone's legs." "Ah, that's gross!" Anyone can just show you something like that, it's thing. The Exorcist is trying to take you on that journey and provoke those reactions. It does use shock tactics but it builds to them. It actually takes you on a journey so it's like a rollercoaster going up and then it drops you on the things. Whereas something like Cabin Fever, it's just a road with some turns in it. It's just, you're flat and you're turning and "Oh, it's this thing. Oh, that's close to the wall!"

Laughs. Right.

But The Exorcist is you get the slow pull up before it drops you. You get another climb before it does a loop the loop. You go on a bit more of a journey that's more varied, so you appreciate the drops more.

That makes sense. Definitely.

What am I even saying?

(Laughs.) Nah. I get what you're saying. Definitely. How do you feel about the religious aspects of the film? Are they important to you? Do they interest you? Do they have any bearing on how you feel about the film, about how the film makes you feel?

Um. Not really. The use... I mean, obviously, it's... There's an exorcism, there's possession, there's demons. Religion goes hand in hand with that because you kind of have to believe in the world, heaven, hell, to have things as terrible as these demons possessing people, and then, obviously, you need the priest to come in and try to fight it and all that stuff.

Yeah.

Um. It doesn't affect it... Obviously, I can imagine some religious people would be like, "Whoa. No." Like Christian people. Using a crucifix for that scene. Like, "No, no, no. That's our crucifix." But then again they all wear them around their necks which is weird.

Laughs. Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Like the Bill Hicks. “He died on one of them. Don’t show it to him. Don’t walk around with that. That’s a weird thing to walk around with.”

Laughs.

But yeah. That’s an extremely important religious symbol in that faith, and it’s being jammed in and out of a little girl’s vagina against her will (laughs). Um. So, yeah. I can see why people would get offended. But, it’s just a story that’s using parts of your story. So, personally I’m not religious at all, so it doesn’t bother me that they use religion. It makes for an interesting setting. Because, again, it’s something I don’t fully know about. I’ve learnt bits about religion, obviously, but it’s something I’m not involved in, so it’s nice to see how other people live, what other people believe in. It does make it interesting. It would for any religion, really. If it was, I dunno, if it was based around Judaism or if there was bits I didn’t really understand, “Well, why are they doing that?” it would still be interesting because I don’t quite understand it and you kind of trying to understand the culture at the same time, or why someone would act a certain way. Because when you watch a film you always put yourself in it, like, “Ooh, what you doing?” You wouldn’t do that. But if they’ve got faith guiding them to do that, it gives them a reason to do half the stuff you just wouldn’t do as well.

Yeah.

So, I think it’s important to the film. Obviously, it’s an exorcism film, so it’s super important. But, yeah, personally, it doesn’t impact my thoughts on it at all. It makes it interesting. But I can see why some people would be like, “Whoa. Hang on.”

Yeah.

But, it’s just a story.

Yeah. If you could watch the film again, completely fresh for the first time, what would be your ideal way to watch it? Or would you say the way you watched it the first time...

No. I don’t think the way I watched it the first time was the best way. Definitely not. To be honest, now, I’ve got a little man cave at the back of the house, surround sound, nice telly that I sit a couple of feet away from. Sprawled out on there, feet up with a bit of munch, surround sound on, turned right up, caning it for the first time, completely fresh. That’d do. Because when you watch it on your own there’s nothing to distract you, apart from your mobile phone if it keeps going. But there’s nothing to distract you in the same way. Even if you’re watching it with a friend, just one, even if neither of you is speaking, you see each other in your peripheral vision and you’re not paying attention to them, but movement and stuff you are slightly drawn away, so just to watch it on my own, surround sound so the sound’s consuming the room, so those stabs and stuff when the scares come in hit you a bit harder.

Yeah.

Yeah, just to enjoy it on my own so I know I’m fully focused. So, yeah, similar to how I would’ve watched it the vast majority of the times I’ve seen it, but, yeah. Definitely on my own. And definitely... with snacks.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Just to give me something to distract myself if I need it.

Right. Can you talk about your experiences with any films or stories, maybe the book if you've read it, any sequels or that kind of thing that relate to The Exorcist, and maybe talk about how they compare, or how the experience of them compares?

OK. I started watching the TV show.

Yeah.

But I've only watched a couple. What I've seen so far is really good. It's different, just because it's being made in a completely different period and the way we tell stories has completely changed from then. We're a lot faster to reveal things, to go through the paces. We don't let things build as much. So, you know, there's changes that have happened just because of cultural differences between now and when The Exorcist was originally made. But, yeah, what I've seen so far, it's decent. I've not read the book. I've seen the sequels. I mean, I watched one not long after seeing the first.

Right.

And you gave me one, didn't you?

Which one? Exorcist 3, did I give you?

Yeah. I think so. I watched that. I didn't think too much of that to be honest.

Oh, OK. (Laughs.)

It just, I dunno. It didn't have the same impact as the first. Maybe because there wasn't as much built up around it. It didn't feel like an event.

Oh, OK. Right.

Whereas the first Exorcist was an event. So it's gonna be hard to compare to that, just on that level. To be honest, I probably didn't know what an exorcist was, I didn't know what an exorcism was the first time I watched it.

Oh, OK. So it was all new to you?

Yeah. I don't think I really understood any of that world. I'd heard of demons and possession and that when you're reading your little Ripley's books, "Believe it or not these people believe demons..." You know? But I don't think I really knew anything about that kind of stuff. So once you're seeing it in sequels and other versions of the story it's like, "Oh, yeah, I've kind of seen this like in The Exorcist." Whereas before it was like, "Whoa, what is this?"

The novelty's gone.

Yeah, definitely. But I do quite like exorcism stories and stuff. They're quite interesting because it's a bit of a sketchy area really, because there's definitely stuff that goes on when people are performing exorcisms. But the reason behind performing them and stuff is a little bit like, "Hold on a second."

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So it's quite an interesting thing. And there's been some interesting films since then about exorcisms that are really good. That Exorcism of Emily Rose?

The court case one?

Yeah. That's really cool and it's got some more of the stuff that you see in these exorcist films. You know, like speaking in tongues, things like that. That's kinda cool. So I like other films that have kind of gone down a similar path in terms of subject matter. But, yeah. I've only really... I've watched sequels, messed with the TV show a little bit, not bothered with the book. I've read Billy Friedkin's autobiography quite a bit in there, and that's interesting just because of some of the stories he tells, like the way he was getting actresses to appear scared on film by letting shotguns off. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Right next to their head. That explains why everyone looks so terrified. Little things like that are cool, and they're kind of... When you talk about films with your mates, it's like little tidbits like that that come up because that adds to the myth again. These kind of unbelievable stories that are like, “That's just crazy” and, again, it almost builds it up into that event a little bit again.

The sort of production history of it.

Yeah. You know like Sam Peckinpah, there was all those ludicrous stories stories about him.

Oh, the thing where he shot his chin off?

Yeah. Or ran out of film so shot it on a toilet roll (laughs). It's all clearly nonsense, yet, it kind of makes it like, “Peckinpah, man. He was a lad, wasn't he?” (laughs).

(Laughs.)

And it kind of built him up a little bit. “He shot off his chin.” “But I can see his chin.” “No you can't.” And he'd just cover his chin? Obviously that's just nonsense, but for some reason you're like, “Peckinpah, man. What a guy!” Those ludicrous stories where someone has a little anecdote in their back pocket. You like when someone talks about Primal Fear and they tell you the Ed Norton story about his audition. It's like “Yeah, I watched this film Primal Fear last night. Really good, yeah.” “Well, did you know, you know Ed Norton in it...?” And someone tells you that story. And you almost feel like you're in that club again. So it's like, “Oh, yeah, I watched Exorcist last night.” “Ah, scary wasn't it. Didn't the actors look terrified?” “Yeah, they did, yeah.” “Hey, do you know why? When they were shooting it...” You got little stories. It's like, “Oh, I know that. A lot of people don't know that. I've now got an inside line.”

Yeah.

It's that thing of making you feel important and involved in it in some way, that you spread the history of it. So, yeah. Whatever my original point was. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah. So, what kind of films would you say, if you had to pick a few examples, what kind of films would you say The Exorcist is most like, in your opinion?

The Exorcist is most like? Well, in terms of...

It doesn't have to be like anything, but if you had to sort of, like if somebody came to you and said, "I watched the exorcist and it was amazing, what should I watch next?"

It would depend on the person, but generally I'd go down a horror route, because if they've watched The Exorcist like I watched it, maybe not the first time I watched it, one of the things is "Oh, god, that's pretty horrific. Uh, man. That's dark. What would you do there? That's horrible." And they've maybe got involved in the scares as well. If they've gone down the scares route, I'd just pick examples of brilliant horror movies, films, both really, that hit you up with actual scares. You know, like, "Oh, you think that makes you jump you should check The Thing." Do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

You're not going for, it's not really that it's the same film. It's nowhere near the same film, but it's eliciting a similar response. Like, "Oh, yeah, that really got under my skin that." "Well if that got under your skin, have you seen The Orphanage?" You're looking for other things that get... In terms of content, you'd put them onto other exorcism movies, like The Exorcism of Emily Rose for example. Um. there isn't that many great exorcism movies. Erm. Is it The Rite?

Hopkins?

Anthony Hopkins where he's actually playing a Welsh dude. Yeah, stuff like that.

So, if you were like, if you sat down and you were like, "I fancy watching The Exorcist tonight", for whatever reason, and somebody pinched your DVD of The Exorcist-

Somebody has pinched my DVD of The Exorcist, because in preparation for this I was gonna watch it again.

So what would you watch instead, to give you that kind of experience? Or it might not be the same experience...

So, for me, I find certain scenes in that film just make me feel uncomfortable now. They are scary, but they make me feel uncomfortable. What's a good example of film that makes me feel uncomfortable? So I might go for an Audition.

OK.

Because, tonally, I think it... Actually I think it covers that in that at the start of The Exorcist there's that lightness to it. It's actually quite nice, you're seeing this relationship and stuff and then, "Whoops. Uh-oh! It's all gone wrong!" (Laughs.) Now I'm gonna feel uncomfortable. So, yeah. Maybe Audition. What else? The Orphanage, because I think that's more like a film that was made in the 70s and 80s, it kind of finds its voice and lets itself come into it. It's a slow builder. It's creepy. It gets under your skin at times. So maybe that. Erm. I'm trying to think what other horror movies, other films I'm into that have a similar... Not Critters.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Definitely not Critters. I dunno. That’s probably it. I’ve definitely got Audition on my shelf. No-one can steal that, so I’d watch that, yeah.

Cool. Last couple of bits then. Well, I know where you live and I know where you were living when you watched it. Dyrny, yeah?

Yeah. I was living in Llandyrnog when I watched it the first time.

How would you generally describe what you do for a living?

Erm. G shit?

(Laughs.) G shit.

I’m a civil servant, and a dog’s body in the second job. I’m a professional, I guess. I count as a professional, don’t I?

Yeah.

A HR professional. I’m an associate member.

That sounds good.

I am an associate member. I get to put letters after my name. I don’t because I’m not a twat.

(Laughs.)

But, I could. You know like you can put your little letters. Yours mean more, but I do have some.

(Laughs.)

If I do level 5 I get to be chartered member.

You’re nothing unless you get the A.C.E. though.

Yeah, level 5 is the degree version.

Oh, right.

Yeah. But I’m not paying 3 grand for that.

Is there anything else you think might be relevant in your background or your life experience or anything that you think shapes the way you look at the film or the experiences you have with the film?

I think the fact that I’m not in any way religious, and actually quite the opposite, I hate religion, I just think it’s pointless but it makes for good stories, so I’ll allow it. I’ll allow it? (Laughs.) Like I’ve got a say?

(Laughs.)

But, yeah, go on. Carry on with your religion. It’s fine. (Laughs.) But the fact that I’m not into it means that I’m not susceptible to any outrage or anything about it, because it doesn’t bother me. Erm. Don’t think there’s anything in my... Spent a couple of years as an exorcist, would that count? I dunno.

(Laughs.) Nah, that’s ok. Just covering bases.

Nah. I don’t think so. I’m pretty regular people.

BANG

Wen?

That's spooky. (Laughs.) That's everything now. Awesome. Thank you very much.

Diolch. What was that...?

Carol

Particulars: Female; 66-75; UK. **Format:** Telephone.

Introductions until 1:44.

The basic idea of this is that's it's an audience history of the film from the point of view of people who saw it when it first came out and over the years.

Yes.

And if there's anything you don't remember or anything like that, it's totally fine.

Yes. Because it was a long time ago (laughs).

Yeah, of course. (Laughs.) I can't remember what I saw last week. If there's anything that you want to talk about that I don't ask about, feel free to jump in. The questions are just a guideline really. And if there's anything that comes up and you don't want to talk about it, that's totally fine as well.

Right.

Would you mind describing the first time you watched The Exorcist. Did you say it was in Cannock?

It was in Cannock, in quite a small cinema. Yep. It was our local cinema.

Ah, right.

I lived there, but I... I'm trying to remember when about it came out. I'd finished college and I was living that area. So, yes, I went to see it, because I was interested.

Yeah? And this was in 1974?

Yeah. Because I finished college in 73.

Ah, right. So this was your local, your usual cinema?

Yeah.

Ah, right. Was it a small one?

It was quite a small one, yes.

Ah, right. Did you have any of the hubbub around the outside? Some people have mentioned protests and that kind of thing.

No. Cannock wasn't the sort of place where you'd have protests, to be honest.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

I'd seen protests in Birmingham, but no, there was none around Cannock.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Oh, right. What was it that drew you to the film originally?

(Laughs.) I just said that I’d finished college. I’d studied evil.

Oh, OK!

(Laughs.) Sounds good doesn’t it?

(Laughs.) Yeah.

My main subject was drama, and I had the hypothesis that evil, true evil for evil’s sake, only existed in literature.

Oh, OK.

And I’d cited different characters. So I’d done a lot of reading round the subject, on exorcism, witchcraft, Alistair Crowley’s books and things like that.

Yeah.

So it was a natural interest to go and see it.

So it was just in your wheelhouse, academically.

Yes.

Ah, right. Was it kind of supernatural evil, the kind of evil you were interested in?

Um, no. I was really interested in evil for evil’s sake. So I was looking at Mephistophles in Faust and Iago in Othello and Arletty in Sartre’s Huis Clos (?), so it was people who created evil.

Oh, OK.

But at that time as well, having been brought up, I looked at Manson. And, also, I was brought up on Dennis Wheatley books, which was all to do with the supernatural.

Oh, OK. Yeah. Had you read The Exorcist before you saw the film?

Uh, yes.

And what was your take on the book? Was it something you liked?

I found it more interesting than the film.

Oh, OK. In what kind of respect?

I suppose I was super critical of the film.

Yeah?

Because I literally was looking at it thinking, “Well, that’s not quite correct.” You know? That wouldn’t have happened just like that. Don’t ask me what. But I remember sitting there with people kind of round me making noises and a couple leaving, and I was very dispassionate about it.

Yeah.

I was looking at it quite scientifically, saying, “I don’t think that’s quite correct.”

In terms of the exorcism rather than-

Yes.

So not in terms of how faithful it was to the book?

Yes.

Ah, OK.

So is this the kind of thing you want to hear?

Oh, yeah. Definitely. It's all great. It's all just sort of seeing what everyone's different experiences are, so this is definitely an interesting one. I've not had somebody look at it in that way before, so that's brilliant.

Well, this is it. You know, I was still very wrapped up, having only just left college, and having, as I said, done a lot of reading on the subject. And, also, it was quite interesting seeing how horrified some people were, and then talking afterwards and people saying to me, "Oh, how could you watch that?"

(Laughs.) Right.

Well, it was no problem. (Laughs.)

Yeah. I guess you had a very different point of reference to most people?

Yes.

So was that kind of the vibe in the cinema, that people were reacting to it just as a kind of-

Horror film.

A schlocky horror film?

Yes.

Ah, OK.

And, at that time, I mean (laughs), I work at the arts centre, so I know Nia so, the horror films nowadays are in a way a lot worse than they were in 1974.

Yeah, yeah. Definitely more graphic and quite cruel a lot of them (laughs).

It was. But in some ways they were a lot more effective.

Yeah.

You could sit and watch a horror movie now, you know, and you know it's computer graphics, so (sigh), you know, so, to me, it takes it away.

Yeah.

Some of the horror movies I saw in those kinds of times, I found more horrific. I found *The Exorcist* interesting, from an analytical point of view.

Yeah. So were there films around that time... Which ones did you find more effective in getting under your skin in that way?

Repulsion.

The Polanski movie?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yes.

(Laughs.) Yeah, that’s...

I was talking to Nia about this. Sorry, but you know Nia and they’re doing Abertoir and I know some of the films they’re showing. And I said, “To me, Repulsion is still with me. I can still close my eyes and recreate that.” And for a film to do that, um, it’s gotta be very effective.

Yeah. What was it about that? I saw it once about ten years ago and I can still remember how unsettling it was when she was wandering around the apartment and people were just sort of appearing.

Yes. And potatoes, and the walls, and it being black and white.

Yeah.

I suppose it was psychological, wasn’t it? While The Exorcist, to me, was almost like watching – don’t get this wrong – kind of cookery programme (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right.

Like, this is an exorcism and this is what would happen.

Oh, OK. Kind of like, almost instructional but kind of documentaryish.

Yeah.

Oh, OK. Yeah.

And I hadn’t really thought about The Exorcist until you sent me that questionnaire. (Laughs.)

Oh, right (laughs). So was the film what you were expecting having read the book or was there anything in there which didn’t quite meet your expectations or was just very different?

I think I find a lot of books... I was working out everything in my head, when I was reading the book.

Like visualizing everything?

I was visualizing it. I was visualizing the exorcism.

Yeah.

A) From the book. And B) from what I’d read.

Oh, OK. About real life exorcisms?

About real life ones. So when I saw it on the screen, no, it didn’t match my expectations.

Was that because of the tone or because it was too-

It was theatrical.

Oh, OK. It was too overdone?

Yes.

So is that the kind of horror you usually enjoy? The kind which is more psychological, quieter horror?

Yes. And I like ones that make me think and I will come out feeling uncomfortable and it will stay with me. You know, like *Repulsion*.

Yeah.

And we were talking about other ones. Seven.

Oh, right, yeah! Are these kind of ones that- is it because they kind of make you think about certain aspects of your own life and that kind of thing or...?

Yes. Well, I suppose they come slightly out of the norm. You know, *Repulsion* is psychological.

Yeah.

Seven, I found it interesting because drama was my subject I was trying to think of what the seven deadly sins were and how they were gonna do it.

(Laughs.) Right.

But it was still, especially how it was filmed, it was like *The Inferno*, wasn't it? It was kind of sepiatic. And when I saw it there were two people in the cinema.

So it was a more personal kind of experience?

It was. And it was frightening.

Yeah. When you saw *The Exorcist* in the cinema was it full?

Yes, it was fairly full.

Do you think that detracted from the film at all or the experience of it?

I think so, to a large degree, because you've got people's nervous laughter and gasping, and you've got me kind of sitting there almost in the middle of the middle, almost like making notes.

(Laughs.) Yeah. You're sort of analyzing the film and people around shrieking and...

Which is an unusual way of going in to see it, I must admit.

(Laughs.) Yeah, but a lot of people have said that, you know, it's very kind of slow for a lot of the film, so for some people when they've seen it with audiences, people get restless so when things do happen they get a bit over-excited, or they just get bored and sort of turned off by the film and then the effects happen and it becomes sort of a comedy to them.

Yeah. I've tried to remember a long time ago, but when her head started going around there was quite a lot of laughter.

(Laughs.) Oh, right. So had you heard the stories in the press before going about people fainting and this kind of thing?

Yes. Yes. And because I'd been in Birmingham where you were always having reactions outside cinemas and this, that and the other, there was quite a build up to going to see it, and especially since I went to see it on my own.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

Um. And because I'd read the book. I'd got expectations.

So, you were kind of used to films generating this kind of fuss?

Yes. I think *Midnight Express* was on around that time. It was in an Iraq prison or something, and there was a lot of controversy about that.

Oh, right. Yeah. So were you skeptical of the media coverage of the film or just not interested?

I was interested because, as I said, although I'd finished my degree and everything, as somebody said to me after my dissertation and everything about what I'd been writing, and said, “Has this affected you?” And I said, “Yes. I look at the evil in people.”

Yeah.

Because I'd read so much and I was looking at, trying to find somebody as evil as those characters.

In real life?

In real life. But not... Those to me were clever. They were almost like chess masters.

Oh, OK. The dramatic ones, you mean. And the ones in real life... You said you'd studied Charlie Manson?

Yeah. Manson. It was almost like an erotic pleasure.

Right, yeah.

Well, if you've read *Othello*, Iago is playing games. He's almost like a chess master.

So it's almost like an intellectual pleasure for them.

And so, yeah, I was going to see anything which would interest me and would follow up on that, and because everybody was talking about it. You always want to see if something is as bad as people think it's going to be.

Yeah. Of course. So what kind of... So was this the kind of film you were watching quite a lot of the first time you saw it?

I would go and see a lot of films. I've always liked the cinema, so I would go and see whatever's... And because I was used to living in the city and I'd moved to a small mining town, I would go and see anything that was on.

So you wouldn't say you were a horror fan or something like that? You were just a fan of the cinema?

No. I liked the cinema. And at that time, you didn't have a lot of choice. You hadn't got all the other choices of DVDs and things like that. I had a small child so I'd be going to see Walt Disney and things like that.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

And also you had the blockbusters at that time. You know, you had *Towering Inferno* and, what else can I remember seeing there? Emmanuelle.

(Laughs.) Oh, right, yeah.

Yeah. So, I'm interested in cinema. Also mainly because, being a drama student, part of my course was I had to go to a theatre every week to do a review, a criticism.

Oh, right.

So I would look at the cinema almost like a stage show. I'd work out... I'd look for mistakes. But I'd also look at how they were doing different things. So, quite often, if I wasn't interested in the film, I'd be watching how the film was made.

Oh, OK. Like mistakes in the production?

And continuity, yeah.

Did you end up doing that with *The Exorcist*?

I don't think... Oh, yes, I did. Because I knew some of the things would not have happened in the exorcisms that I've read about. And don't ask me... We're talking a long time ago.

(Laughs.) Yeah, of course.

But also, I think if you read a book first of all and you've got it imprinted on your mind, it's very difficult for a film to match that.

Yeah. Like you've built your own idea of who the people are and...

Yes. And literally how it's done, and this that and the other. That's why if I'm going to see a film I sometimes don't read the book until afterwards.

Oh, OK. Yeah.

Because I know if I read the book, 9 times out of 10, it's not going to be what I've imagined, what I've pictured in my own mind.

So you can kind of enjoy the film and then afterwards enjoy the book, rather than enjoying the book and have that kind of ruin the film?

Yes.

Oh, OK. You mention that you were interested in real life exorcisms and that kind of thing, was any of that due to a religious interest or a spiritual interest or was it based on your interest in evil and that kind of thing?

Makes it sound really dark, doesn't it? (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Um. I suppose part of it, I was interested in comparative religion, so I'd always read a lot around different religions. I tend to read a lot. I love reading. So, as I've said, as a child I've read all the Dennis Wheatley books and things like that. So, I was interested... I think that was the kind of basis of what I was interested in. In the evil side of things, also the power side. You know, even if you read things about Hitler, he was involved in Satanic practices.

Oh, right (laughs). I've not read that.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

He had Satanic beliefs. So, yes. Also, I’ve got friends who are New Age, so you were looking at black and white magic.

Right. So it was more kind of an interest that came out of your reading and that kind of thing.

Yes. Interest and the times, you know. You’ve got the 60s and the 70s, when people were looking at magic and black and white magic and them being both sides of the same question.

Yeah. And were you kind of... Was your reading into murderers and people like Charles Manson... Because wasn’t there a lot of talk about him in terms of devil-worshipping and that kind of thing?

Yes. Manson was the big one at that time, because of Sharon Tate.

Yeah.

But, also, at that time, Crowley was being talked about. There were books on black magic. And you can blame Dennis Wheatley for a lot of it.

(Laughs.) Right.

If you read any of the Dennis Wheatley books, they were very into Satanic...

I’ve not read him myself, but people have mentioned him a few times when I’ve spoken to them about The Exorcist.

Well, start really Dennis Wheatley books. I started reading them – makes me sound very strange (laughs) – when I was about 9.

(Laughs.) Right.

They’re historical and Satanical at times. And like a lot of fiction, there’s sometimes a bit of truth to it from a historical point of view or something like that, and that fires you up.

Yeah. Is it kind of like - because I’m not familiar with his work – is it a bit like The Devils? That film?

(Laughs.) I remember seeing The Devils as well. Um, no. It’s kind of like To The Devil A Daughter. It was a lot of black magic through power.

Right.

And almost like a third eye and in some of it went into mysticism and Tibet.

Oh, OK.

Reading Dennis Wheatley, it opened up a world... I read him and I read H. Rider Haggard. Both series of books that do go into mysticism and magic. You know, the Rider Haggard ones do, She and Ayesha, King Solomon’s Mines. So, I could read 2 books a day.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

I just loved books. And those were the kinds of ones I read. When you mention... Yeah, I saw lots of different films at that time and read a lot. And Oliver Reed was a very good example (laughs).

(Laughs.) So you'd say that's sort of where your... Well, where you'd say your interest in that kind of thing came from? Was it from anybody in your family or was it...?

No. I was an only child. I think I just had a vivid imagination and to a large degree they were adventure stories, but they were slightly different.

Yeah.

And because you started reading then, you then kind of read onto different things.

So they were similar to things you were already reading with a twist which took you down a different alleyway and...

And, then, it must've been in my background. Yeah, I was interested in it. You'd got The Beatles at that time and meditation.

Oh, of course, yeah.

Lots of different things going on. So, yeah. It was a time when people were experimenting and looking at things out of the norm.

Sounds like an interesting time to live through!

Well, they always say you can't have been there if you can remember it, but I think in the 60s and 70s we had time to read and discuss things into the... You know, I can remember my sixth form and at school spending hours discussing random ideas.

Yeah.

And going onto that afterwards. In some ways, you'd got people going to university for the first time that wouldn't have been there before. They'd have been out at work or something like that. And people were enjoying the mental stimulation.

Yeah. It was like a new experience. So, were the religious aspects of The Exorcist interesting to you in a kind of... Do you have a religious background yourself?

Um. No. Only that I did comparative religions. When I was reading as well I read a lot on the problems caused by religions.

Yeah.

I read... We've just had the Gunpowder Plot on television where they were talking about Catholicism.

Oh, the thing that just come the other day?

Yeah. And so I read a lot about that from a historical point of view. How different sects have been, you know, the problems that religion has caused.

Yeah.

So, yes. I was very into that as well. So by reading all about different religions and western religions and how that had affected... You know, more evil had been done through the name of religion than had been done through the name of black magic.

Yeah. Course. So there was no kind of spiritual interest for you in the film at all? You were aware of the corruption and that kind of thing in certain religions?

Mm.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So, you mentioned that you’ve seen the film twice?

No. I think I’ve only seen once.

Oh, right.

I might have seen it on television, but if I did – I might’ve said that I had, I really can’t remember...

(Laughs.) That’s OK.

I certainly haven’t been to the cinema twice to see it. I didn’t rate it enough to go and see it again.

Course. Yeah (laughs.)

Sorry. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) No, that’s fine. I’m interested in speaking to people who weren’t big fans of the film anyway, because there’s a danger with these kinds of things that you just end up speaking to lots of Exorcist fans anyway, so it’s good to speak to someone who’s not into it.

Well, Nia gets used to this, because I’m not into the horror movies to the degree that they are.

Yeah, because she’s running Abertoir and everything. So, do you rewatch films much? Or is it just kind, or are you a sort of one-and-done, I’ve seen that now I don’t need to see that again?

I’ll sometimes go and see a film again. I’ll watch some on television. Working at the arts centre I see quite a few films.

(Laughs.) Of course.

And that’s quite interesting because sometimes I see films that I wouldn’t have gone to see.

Yeah. They’re very good with... They have quite a varied programme, aren’t they?

Yes. So I might – because I’m working on the door – do two films straight after each other. One that I want to see and one that, “Oh, I’ll see what that one’s about.” So like on Friday I saw Goodbye Christopher Robin followed by Mother.

Oh, right. That’s a hell of a double bill (laughs).

So, no. I don’t watch as many films on television as I used to. I still have this love of the cinema.

Yeah.

I think, to me, a film in the cinema is totally different to a film on the television.

Yeah. Do you think that’s because of the atmosphere, or is it the size of the screen or the sound or...?

I don’t think it’s the size of the screen. It’s just that... you’re not being interrupted by anything. If you’re watching a film at home, you’ll get up and get a drink. You can be easily distracted. In the cinema, you are concentrating on that film. And I can get

totally lost in a film and I wouldn't even know that there's anybody else in the cinema.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

If I'm watching a film, I'm really into watching it. Every bit of it.

So it's that forced concentration of having to be in one place?

Yep. Which is what I love.

Yeah.

I don't want any distractions. If the film is good enough, that's all I want to be able to see.

Yeah.

And it's quite interesting working in the cinema, you can analyse how people are reacting to a film, by the movement. If there's a film on – (laughs) I don't know if this is relevant – but if they're getting up and going out to get a drink or go to the toilet, they are not involved in that film.

(Laughs.) Definitely. That makes sense.

If they're involved in the film. Nobody moves.

Yeah. Whereas if they're bored, it's any excuse to stretch their legs.

If they're bored, if it's not holding their attention, they'll be up and down like yo-yos.

(Laughs.) That must be a good indicator of whether you should see something then. Just watching the door and seeing how many people...

It is. And I also like looking at people's faces when they come out and analyzing what they thought of the film.

That must be really interesting if they're showing Mother with how divisive that one's being.

I think one of the best ones I've ever seen was people's reactions after Black Swan.

Oh, right.

And that was total confusion.

(Laughs.)

So, yeah. It is interesting watching people's reactions. I think if The Exorcist was on now I'd be going to see it, but I'd also be doing it so I could do the door and watch people's reactions when they came out.

Yeah. So, have you had experiences with films kind of similar to The Exorcist over the years? The sequels, the other exorcism films that have been done in the same kind of spirit?

I saw all the Omen films.

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I enjoyed The Omen (laughs).

(Laughs.) Oh, right. What was it about the Omen films that interested you?

I think there's more of a storyline. And it was almost going back to that game, the ligo and the [Fautus?], the story was being manipulated.

Right. Yeah. It was more of an intellectual...

Yeah.

And did you feel there was less of the kind of show-and-tell of The Exorcist?

Yeah. I just felt, and as I said, it's not a film that stayed with me. I hadn't thought of it until I got that survey in the email.

Yeah.

But some films have stayed with me. To actually remember what happened in The Exorcist, I would have to watch it again. It didn't stick with me apart from her head rotating.

Yeah. Was that just because it was a dramatic effect and...?

I thought it was a ridiculous effect.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Sorry (laughs).

(Laughs.) It's fine. I think it's a little dated now. A lot of people have said everybody just broke out into hysterics when that happened.

Yeah. There was a build up to it. People were expecting. And, that, you know... I would say that people watching it now would think it was very funny, that film.

Yeah. That seems to be the consensus with people re-watching in the cinema in the 90s when it came out again. So, did you see any of the sequels?

No.

Oh, right. It's probably for the best to be honest (laughs).

I'm not a lot of help to you, am I? (Laughs.)

No, this is great. This is brilliant. Because it's brilliant to speak to someone who's got a very different frame of reference for seeing the film, if you know what I mean? Because a lot of people I've spoken to so far have come at it as sort of horror fans going there to see disgusting things and that kind of thing. So, yeah. Do you have examples of films which have stuck with you over the years, like Repulsion?

Repulsion. The Omen. I'm trying to think. Seven. A lot of the kind of, what was it, Here Comes the Spider. Is it...?

Which one's that one, sorry?

Here Comes a Spider? It's a James Patterson book.

Oh, Along Came A Spider!

Along Came A Spider.

Yeah. I saw that last week for the first time.

Yeah? I read a lot of James Patterson and Jonathan Kellerman and those kinds of books.

Oh, right. I actually read Along Came A Spider for a week before the film and had the same experience you seem to have had with The Exorcist.

Yep.

With everything being kind of very condensed and edited down, sadly. What is it about those films? Is it because of the intellectual villain?

Yeah. Mainly, as I said, I read the books. I like trying to solve things. When I was reading all those other books, I was reading Agatha Christie and things like that as well.

Oh, right, yeah.

So, yeah. And I think nowadays as well, horror doesn't have the same effect any more, which sounds very sad, but it's... To me, I'd rather have something that unsettles me.

Yeah.

Than something that's, "Let's see how many heads we can cut off."

(Laughs.) Right.

And blood and this, that and the other. I mean, when I saw Mother, I thought, "Let's see how many..." To me, the director was just trying to throw everything into the fire. "I'll have a bit of this and I'll have a bit of that."

Yeah.

You know. I'd rather sit and have one that I've got to think about, that I'll come out afterwards and think, "Oh, my god, I've got walk out to the car." (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah. Because Mother very much went for the throwing random horrific violence at you towards the end, didn't it?

Yeah. Especially after you've just watched Goodbye Christopher Robin.

(Laughs.)

Not a good thing to do. Don't do that. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah. Bit of a mood killer, watching Mother after that. Brilliant. Is there anything else you think might be...

I don't think so.

No?

If you want to recontact me, you know where I am.

Brilliant. Thanks for talking to me. It's been really great. It's awesome to have a different point of view on the film, so I really appreciate it. Thanks for your time.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

If you haven't got the form, I'll send it again.

I think it's come through now. That's brilliant. Thanks very much.

OK. Great.

Thank you. Thanks very much.

Bye bye.

Bye.

Laura

Particulars: Female; 26-35; UK. **Format:** Telephone.

Hello?

Oh, hi. Is that Laura?

It is, yes.

Hello. It's Martin from Northumbria.

Hello!

How are you?

I'm fine, thanks. How are you?

Yeah. Good, thank you. Thanks for agreeing to speak to me.

You're most welcome.

Can you hear me OK? I've had to put you speakerphone so I can record this.

Yeah. Fine.

Ah, good stuff. Um. Was everything clear in my emails and everything?

Yeah. It was perfectly clear, yeah.

Ah, good stuff. Okie doke. Do you mind that I record this phone call by the way?

No, that's fine. [unintelligible.]

Brilliant. Thank you. Okie doke. Just to say, it should take about an hourish. It doesn't matter if it's longer or shorter.

OK.

I don't wanna keep you all day either.

No, that's fine. I got nothing – I'm off work today. It doesn't matter.

Ah, right. Fair enough.

(laughs.)

And if there's anything that I ask you and you don't remember anything, that's totally fine. That's to be expected.

OK.

And if there's anything you want to talk about as it comes up, don't feel like you have to stick to any of my questions or anything like that.

Right. Lovely.

Brilliant. Okie doke, then. So in your survey response you said you saw the film for the first time in the 90s.

Yes.

Could you talk a little bit about that please, about sort of the situation and the place and who you were with, that kind of thing.

Well, it was with my brother because obviously at the time it was banned. You couldn't buy it on video or anything like that so the only chance you could see the film was at the cinema.

Yeah.

So I think it was like a Halloween showing, something like that. And I- I- I- was underage, but I mean, these things happen.

(laughs) yeah.

And I went with my eldest brother, because he's obviously he's about seven years older than me so he'd seen it before.

Oh., right

I'd read the book, so I wanted he'd known that I wanted to see the film. So that's how it came about really. It was one of these midnight showings where you had Exorcist 1 and 2

Brilliant.

Shown together. So, because I hadn't been able to see it I wanted to know, you know, what was in this film that was so terrible that you couldn't watch it at home.

Yeah

And, yeah. So that was it really. We got a ticket for it and I think it started about ten, I think, and twelve was The Exorcist 2, so we were out most of the night.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's how it came about. That's how I saw it.

Ah, right. So was this not your usual cinema? Was it one that was just doing a special kind of...?

No, it was the usual cinema. It was my normal cinema, but they always had Halloween midnight showings of it could be Halloween or it could be jaws or whatever and this particular year it was the exorcist. I think it run for a week.

Ah right. Amazing.

Yeah. Yeah. So we decided to go – I think the Halloween was like a Saturday or something like that, so we decided to see it then.

Yeah. Were you sort of excited to see the film or were you worried or, how were

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

you feeling? Sort of...?

I was excited to – I wanted to know why this was banned. I wanted to know why, um, the censorship board and the church and the government were saying you can't watch this film and what's so awful about it. And I knew that it wasn't one of these horrible dead films you know, really nasty rubbish, so I couldn't wait to go. I was really excited to go.

Ah, right.

(Laughs.) And I wanted to see what this film was all about.

And you'd read the book so you knew what to expect?

Yes.

Ah, right.

I'd say that I knew the story I just didn't know what to expect from the film, because we weren't allowed to buy it over here, so, yeah, I was really excited.

So the fact that it was banned kind of made it more interesting or...?

Yeah, I think so because. I know that Child's Play was banned at the time as well, but I knew why that was, because of the Bulger thing.

Yeah.

But this film I couldn't quite get. I couldn't get what was so bad about this film. I couldn't quite see it. [Unintelligible.] He booked for the double showing and said, "Do you wanna come?" and I said yeah. I couldn't wait.

Right. So, had you watched similar films to this before?

Oh, yeah. All I've ever watched was horror films. I don't really watch many others. (Laughs.)

Oh, right (laughs).

As a teenager, obviously, yeah, obviously that was... Amityville and all of those attacker films, and The Omen and things like that. But [unintelligible]

So had you had to sneak into 18s before and that kind of thing, or was this...?

Not in the cinema, no, 'cause we had quite a few videos at home so I used to just go and... My cinema was actually pretty relaxed about censorship, what we watched. Nah, it was like, "18?" It was like "Ah, you can watch what you like." [Unintelligible.] This wasn't such a big deal. We just went and sat at the back [unintelligible] until the film started.

Sorry, I think the signal's going a bit weird, I'm not sure if it's my end or your end.

Can you hear that better.

I think a little bit yeah, sorry.

OK. It's fine.

I think I'm in a bad spot.

Ah, I see.

There we go. I think that's a little bit better. I've shifted a bit now. Sorry about that. So how did you feel while you were watching the film?

I think I was a bit nervous, really. As I say, I didn't know what to expect from it. It was like, "Oh, my God." Because what's so clever about this film is it's kind of at various stages in the film all you see is this bedroom door and you don't quite know what's going on behind it. You kind of realise during the film that every time you see that door it's getting gradually worse.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

It's kind of like a mixture of excitement and watching it through your fingers a little bit (laughs). That's how it was. You should see me, how I watch these films the first few times that I watch them. But I was just really excited and just wondered what it was all about.

Did it stack up to how you imagined it in the book?

Oh, it did, yeah. It's one of those things. I think the film is just as good as the book. [Intelligible.] I wasn't disappointed when I came out of that cinema. At all. At all. I thought it was brilliant.

Oh, right. You mentioned the film sort of made you feel scared and that kind of thing. Did it make you feel anything else besides scared?

Um. Do you know what, it sounds ridiculous saying it, but I actually think I came out a slightly person than the person I went in to see that film.

Yeah.

I am religious. I come from a family that isn't. And I think at quite a young age it shaped how I felt about those sorts of things and religion in itself.

Oh, yeah.

So, it was quite a big impact. Maybe because I was quite young when I saw. I wouldn't quite have the same reaction now. But, as a young girl, I thought "Oh, my God." It made me think about bigger things than what I was thinking at the time.

Oh, right.

It was really quite a massive impact on me where for the next person it could just be another horror film. I suppose it's how you take it.

Oh, right. Because when you read interviews with the writer and that kind of thing, he says that's kind of the effect that he's after really, isn't it?

Yeah. I think I came in the week after – I get frustrated, because when people talk about the film it's all about spinning heads.

Yeah.

And profanity and whatever. But, actually, even at 16 I could think, "That's not actually what this film's about. It goes a lot deeper than that."

Yeah.

It's very- Yeah, it really made me think. It was a film that made me think. It wasn't

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

like just coming out and seeing *Scream*, which was around about the same time, you just forget about it. It left a mark, and it still does, even now.

Ah, right. Did you get a sense of how other people felt at the time about the film? Like, your brother say? Did they not take it in the same...?

Nah. There was a lot of laughing about the head spinning and laughing at all of the swearing and all of that and I think people just thought it was funny. For most people it was just old-fashioned, out of date kind of film.

Yeah.

And I was just sitting there thinking, “No! It’s nothing at all about that!” (Laughs.) It goes much deeper than that. And I just come out thinking, “God.” You know, this was quite a different film from what I’d normally would’ve watched.

Yeah. What was it about the film that made you think about those kinds of things? Was it the ending, Karras’s kind of story, or...?

I will say, being 16, I came out slightly in love with Father Karras because he is very handsome and I don’t think that’s changed in the preceding years, so I think that’s partly, a little bit.

(Laughs.)

When it was... It was kind of... He’s here as he’s losing his faith, isn’t he? And that’s that whole part of that story. And then you have Merrin who loved God very, very much and he went into that house knowing he was going to die, and they were fighting over this girl. And both sacrifice their lives at the end, and you can’t get any more powerful than that. Two people die to save this child. So it was really... It’s in the vein of *The Omen*, just made a lot more impact than *The Omen* did, I think.

Yeah. And you said you weren’t brought up religious, it’s just kind of something you discovered by yourself.

Yes. It’s something, I’d sort of tend- I would not go to church but I would form my own opinions and beliefs. And at the very forefront of this film is this huge battle and in the end really you could say, unfortunately, it was a sad ending but a good fight. That’s how I came out of it. Good triumphs over evil. And that’s quite a powerful message to a girl of 16 (laughs) who’s really not quite sure what’s going on in the world. That’s why I think it’s always stuck with me since.

Yeah. Is that something that’s sort of stuck with you, because you mention you’ve seen the film over a thousand times, is that something that’s stuck with you through the years, the kind of religious...?

Yes. I can’t get over the fact that even though there’s nastiness at the end, it’s quite a positive film, if you look at it in that way, that it sort of ended very differently. Yeah, that has stuck with me, and it still creeps me out now, and it still sends chills even now. No matter how many times I watch it, I still feel chills just watching it, much like I do with *The Omen*. Again, they’re a similar sort of thing.

Oh, right, yeah. But you see the ending as a very happy victory ending?

I wouldn’t say happy (laughs) because two men have died.

(Laughs.)

But it was a more positive ending than I think that most people thought it was. Because actually if you sit and think about it, Karras has got his faith back, the girl survived, and it's not happy but it's more positive than most people think it is on initial viewing.

Yeah. Ah, right. So, after you came out the film, how were you feeling once it was over?

I think I was a bit stunned, actually. I couldn't quite believe it. I remember being quite quiet the next day. People were commenting, like "Ooh, she's seen this film and it's upset her," but it wasn't that. It gave me so much to think about.

Yeah.

Obviously, we watched *The Exorcist 2* straight after, which was horrendously bad, so that made no impact at all on me.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So the whole way through *Exorcist 2* I'm thinking about what I've just seen. I paid no attention to the second film, really, just thinking "This is just a really bad spin-off."

Yeah.

But, yeah. It left my mind wandering for days. My brother, he did religious education and did it at A level, so there was always someone there to talk about that with.

Yeah.

We chat happily – we still do chat happily about it when we go out and stuff. It just made an impact and has stuck.

So, did you go not being too bothered about *Exorcist 2* to begin with?

No. I didn't find it... I thought it was rubbish.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

(Laughs.) I just think it lacked any charm. It lacked any depth to it. Obviously a spin-off. So, yeah, I watched it, but I didn't really take it in. And I don't think I've watched it properly since in ten years. So...

Are there any moments in the film you remember as standing out to you the first time you saw it?

Um, I think the [unintelligible] sequence is always quite interesting for me.

Which sequence sorry?

The opening sequence, when they're in Iraq.

Oh, yeah.

And also when Father Merrin gets the note to say where he has to go and he doesn't even read it. And you're thinking, he knows... He doesn't need to read this note to know what's coming.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah. I never noticed that he doesn't read it before. I'll have to watch that again.

Yes, he doesn't read it. He takes it off the boy and just carries on walking. I don't think he even acknowledges it. I think he just knows what it is.

Oh, right. Yeah.

Yeah. It's just bits and pieces through the film, but they were the two stand-out moments, I think, for me.

Was Father Merrin one of the more interesting characters for you in that way then, or...?

Yes. Because he's sort of... He's just... calmer. You see some certain scenes that Karras, that he's reading his book and he thinks that is bad, and he's like, you know, you need to get a move on with what you're doing (laughs). Whereas he's got this calmness for the whole film. And when she spits in his eye, he just wipes it off and carries. And Karras is like “Ugh!” They're like day and night. They're two different sort of men that eventually come together to save this girl. But, yeah, I think I find one of the more interesting.

Ah, right. Are scenes which in re-watching the film become more interesting? Do you sort of find new things that you sort of attach yourself to the more you watch it or less or...

I don't know really. Kind of... I like anything with Burke Dennings in because I think he's kind of like [unintelligible] a little bit. I think the scene where she's hypnotised during the film I didn't pay much attention to, but since these new versions have come out, there's little differences in them. It's hard to pinpoint really.

How do you feel about the new versions with the new editions?

I think generally they're very good, you know. I just wish sometimes that more had been put in. I think they improve on the original. They don't detract from it.

Yeah.

I think it's done tastefully.

Yeah.

Yeah, I love them. But then again it's just extra footage. It's more time in the film (laughs). It's like anything is a bonus.

(Laughs.)

I'm not bothered about the spider-walk thing. I know a lot of fuss is made about that. It doesn't really appeal to me. I just ignore it.

Yeah. So is it just like the extra dialogue between the priests and the extra bit at the end and that kinda thing?

Yeah. And things like where he's listening in the language lab, and her voice as it was then and now, which is an important detail because it's evidence of how she's changing. The spider-walk, which everyone makes this hoo-hah about, it doesn't really add anything.

Yeah.

To the film. So it's more the dialogue bits, like when they're on the stairs, there's extra conversation there which makes the film more interesting rather than visually, effects visually, which I don't bother about.

Ah, right. So would you say re-watching the film so many times over the years, your opinion of the film has stayed the same, has it made you like the film more or...?

Oh, I like it more. But it still makes that impact that when I watch it hasn't changed hugely from the first time.

Yeah.

And that's where the thing with these new versions out it gives it added extra and gives a bit more depth and keeps it interesting. But I don't think my feeling on it has changed hugely. I just love it more each time I see it (giggles).

(Laughs.) Ah, right. What is it that makes you want to rewatch it? Is it if you're in a certain mood or want to feel a certain kind of way?

Yeah. I think being in a certain mood. I can go quite a long time without seeing it and then I can watch it a lot within a short period. Especially now you've got things like iPads you can download it and watch it wherever you like. It just goes in fits and starts normally. I can go a long time without watching it and then... It's like the other week I watched The Exorcist 3 and I hadn't seen that in about 8 years. So, obviously with The Exorcist I didn't wait that long. It just depends really.

Yeah.

When you fancy watching it, you fancy watching it.

How do you feel about the Exorcist series as a whole? Does the film stand by itself or does your interest spread to the Exorcist 3 and the prequels and the TV show?

I'm not very keen on the prequels, I have to say. They're not my kind of thing. They weren't done very well. I don't like Exorcist 2 very much as I've said. Exorcist 3, though, I do like. And I've read the book – Legion, to give it its proper name – and I think it really is a very good sequel. And if it needed to have a sequel, it really should be that. What I tend to do is miss 2 out completely and go straight to Exorcist 3. To me, Exorcist 3 is a proper sequel. I would say.

Ah, OK. Yeah. Why do you think it is that Exorcist 3 fits and Exorcist 2 doesn't?

It's written by the same author so it's got that general kind of feel about it, but it's continuing the story. I've heard the original script for Exorcist 2 was very good, but apparently they butchered it around and they changed it and they went to make it a bit scary and all of that which wasn't how it was originally intended. But I think Exorcist 3 just carried on in that vein because it was written by the same person. It flows very nicely and it sits really closely to the book as well. So I just find that, to me, that's its proper sequel.

How do you feel about films that are kind of other exorcism films and that are kind of derivative and inspired by The Exorcist?

Exorcism of Emily Rose, I thought that was very good.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Oh, yeah.

I liked that very much. Things like The Last Exorcism, I just won't bother with them, because they're all special effects. There's no real story. And I've watched quite a few of them, but I tend to not watch too many of these exorcism-based films, but I did find Exorcism of Emily Rose, again it's one of my favourite films. You don't often get a horror film set in a court. And I just thought the whole thing was really interesting. But mainly I don't- I'll watch them, like if they come on Sky and I'm not that impressed with them.

Yeah. How about – because you mention the religious aspects of The Exorcist were very important to you – do you watch other films which have this kind of religious aspect to them?

What like these horror things?

Just any films really.

I probably watch some biblical things. They show them at Easter, that kind of thing. Another thing, I don't think I mentioned before, but the 3 Omen films, I absolutely love them. Because I just, again, I think they're really, really good. And they're all as good as each other and they all work together. [Unintelligible.] They're another one that I watch quite often as well. I genuinely like horror films that have a religious feel. Rather than slashers and Saw. They don't appeal to me. I think they're just violence for violence's sake. It's unappealing. So, yeah. I would say I like religiously based films.

Yeah. What kind of stories and that kind of thing usually do you find scary in horror films? Is it usually religious-based things or is it other...?

I think it's got to be something that has some backbone of reality, or potential reality. Things like Scream, I mean I like Scream and I like Halloween.

Yeah.

And there really fun to watch, but they don't affect me like that because in some ways they're almost absurd. In Freddy Krueger there's a kind of silliness. If I watch a horror film it tends to have a backbone of some kind of reality. And I think that's what's unnerving about The Exorcist. It's not set in a mansion, some deserted mansion somewhere. It's on a normal street.

Yeah.

I mean, last week I went to see it.

Oh, right.

That was quite powerful because it's that horrible situation of children being hurt. It's a normal little street with normal kids like who play around here, so there has to be, to make a good film, a certain reality to it. And The Exorcist does that quite well. I think.

Yeah. I haven't been to see it yet. I'll have to go along.

It's so good. I've got the mini series with Tim Curry who plays Pennywise and that's really camp. This is much more sinister and dark. It's just horrible. And it's good at

the same time! (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

It was really good.

I'll have to go along! So, how do you usually- Do you go to the cinema quite a lot at the moment or do you watch a more films at home?

I'm going through a phase at the moment of going a few times, because I've seen a lot of things that have caught my interest. I went to see the Lighthouse Golem the week before and then It.

Oh, is that good?

Yeah. Really good. It's another one that makes you think. I've seen loads of people who saw it and didn't like it because it was a bit out there and a little bit strange. Generally, because I've got Sky and because films don't take that long to come on Sky now I don't tend to go as much as I used to because it's actually getting to be quite expensive to go to the cinema for me. I only work part time because I'm a carer for my mum so I don't earn a great deal. Unless it's something like It and I really need to go and see it, I don't tend to go as much as I used to.

Ah, right. When you were younger did you used to go with your brother a lot?

Oh, yeah. All the time. All the time. We'd always go to midnight showings when they did – what's those zombie ones they did a while back? – Night of the Living Dead and they remade all of those, so we went to see those. When I was younger I used to go a lot but not so much now (laughs).

You said your brother was 7 years older than you did you say?

Yes.

Was he an influence on getting you into horror?

Yeah. He was, because he would like – my parents were really laid back about stuff, you know. As long as it wasn't hugely rude, in a sexual way, they didn't seem to mind what we watched. (Laughs.) So my brother was like, "Come on, mate. I've got Robocop for us to watch next." And I'd watch them. So he was really influential because he showed us so much that you shouldn't really have watched, but that's what big brother's do.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So, yeah, he was very influential in that he definitely seeing a lot of things. I'd say he really was, yeah.

Okie doke. Sorry, just looking at my questions. Is there anything else you think might be sort of relevant in your background or your upbringing that you think-?

No. Not really. Horror films and that kind of thing have always appealed to me. I don't really do romance films. I don't find comedies particular funny most of the time. So that doesn't appeal. I don't think there's anything in my background. We've got different access to these things. Easy access. It'd be on the shelf so it'd be like, "I'll watch it." It's not like it is now. I always just liked scary stuff. I always used to read penguin when I was about 10. Like Penguin Frankenstein or, even

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

younger, I'd read the ladybird Hound of the Baskervilles. It's always just appealed to me since whenever. I don't know why, but it just does.

Would you say you sort of, because you're talking about the sort of deleted scenes and that kind of thing, have you been interested in the production side of the film? Is it something you read about?

Oh, yes! Hugely! I'm interested in that side as well. Sort of, how the special effects work. A huge amount of that actually. And all of the behind the scenes stuff. I find it very interesting.

Ah, right. Do you follow the director's work?

William Friedkin? Yeah, I've seen some of his stuff. But he's had sort of like French Connection and all of that. I can't say I've watched everything that he's done. But I think he's very good.

Is it more sort of the writer...?

William Blatty. I love William Blatty. I've got quite a few... I've got all about the Exorcist on the book and the sequels on the book.

Yeah.

And that he did another film, the 9th Configuration, which was about people mentally ill. I've got that on DVD, because it's just like this kind of dreamy of way. Even nasty subjects can appear quite nice by the way that he writes. So I love William Peter Blatty. Really upset when he died a few months back, because I think he's really good.

Yeah, of course. Very sad, bless him. Are there are any other films that you watch as regularly or as much-

Jaws. I've this strange compulsion with Jaws. Whenever I see it on like on ITV3 or whatever I have to watch Jaws. I have to watch them. They're stupid and daft, but I love it.

Yeah. Classic.

I quite like Halloween. I watch them quite a lot. I watched all of the Friday the 13th and that kind of thing. But there's a certain amount of films that I like that I watched quite recently. Silence of the Lambs, that's another one that I like. Hannibal, that kind of thing.

Yeah. So all very scary stuff? (Laughs.)

Yeah. They're all in the same vein, I think.

Ah, right. Do you mind if I just ask you a couple of random kind of questions about you?

Yeah. Yeah.

Can I ask where you live if that's OK?

I live in London.

Ah, right. Have you always lived in London?

I moved up to Blackpool with my ex partner and lived there for 8 years, so it's only London and Blackpool really.

And you were in London when you watched the film for the first time?

Yes.

Good stuff. And you said you're a carer for your mother?

Yes. And I work 3 days a week in a Sainsburys.

Yeah. Okie doke. And what's your sort of involvement with films usually? You sound like a horror fan to me (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah. I like documentaries. I like these sort of movie length documentaries. Recently watched Black Fish about killer whales in captivity, that's another thing that I like. I tend to sort of root around on Sky a little bit and find hidden things. Sometimes I might just watch something really stupid. Last night I watched Bad Santa (laughs). There's no reasoning to whatever mood I might be in on a particular day.

(Laughs.) Yeah, course.

Normally it's horror films but sometimes random things will pop up and I think, "Oh, I'll watch that," and I'll quite enjoy.

Okie doke. Just a random thing, so I can pop it down in my file. Can I ask where you heard about the research?

I can't remember. It might've been on Twitter. The only place it could think of was on Twitter.

Ah, it could've been. I've been spamming Twitter relentlessly.

Can't remember (laughs).

That's OK. Not to worry. It's taken me a while to get around to contacting you sorry. Just going through all the thingies. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about in relation to the film that maybe interests you that I've not asked about?

Well, no, I can't... I find it quite interesting that it was banned.

Yeah.

I still find that quite frustrating that between the church and the BBFC and the government were stopping adults watching it. And I think it was quite interesting. I think it was the last bastion of the church, having control. I think once the BBFC said, "Actually we're gonna overwrite the church on this one" I think that had quite a big impact and actually that's an interesting element, that it was banned and now it's not.

Yeah.

The only the other thing I suppose is I think it's quite influential in quite a lot of ways. It changed that the church is now, no longer, you don't do what they say. I think it's quite interesting that it's unbanned eventually. I think it had a big cultural impact as well. It is quite a radical film for me. But over here in the UK it is anyway I think.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So you’re quite anti-censorship in your views generally?

Um. I think censorship is quite important. But I’m uncomfortable with certain people saying to adults that you can’t watch this film in the comfort of your own home. When I saw this film in the cinema and you could go into HMV and buy a video from the adult section. I could never understand why you could go and do that in the local shopping centre but you couldn’t watch this film. I do think censorship is very important and it has a right place, but I think for *The Exorcist* it was unnecessary and, I think, quite insulting, because actually there’s quite a lot of films that are a lot worse that were on the market at the time. So, it’s quite an interesting thing to think about because it’s an interesting film.

Was it frustrating because, it seemed like, *The Exorcist* is such a positive religious message?

Yeah! I think I don’t understand actually what the problem the church had with it was. Because, as you say, I think... I suppose in the 90s it was an embarrassing subject for the church. And now I’ve read the amount of exorcisms has been going up at a radical rate. So now they’re not too bothered about the film. Because it shows what they can do. Yeah, it is frustrating, I think. I can understand there’s quite a lot of blasphemy in it.

Yeah.

But there’s a lot less [untelligible]. So a part of what I felt coming out the first time was frustration, that I couldn’t go to HMV and buy this film and watch it again, because of these three different governing bodies.

Oh, right.

My other brother goes on holiday quite a lot and he tried twice to bring it back for me and he was stopped at customs both times and it was taken off of him. The government was saying you can’t bring that in and the church was saying you can’t watch and who’s to say that we can’t, when there’s worse stuff out there. I couldn’t understand why you could buy *The Omen* and not *The Exorcist*. I couldn’t quite see where the difference was. So, I suppose partly when I first saw it there was this frustration that I couldn’t watch it again. And I didn’t watch it again for, what, 3 years?

Oh, until the rerelease?

Yeah. I think I had a very bad bootleg copy somewhere that I could barely watch, you know. So, yes. That was quite interesting. The fact that again, I think it’s an important film because of that as well.

Yeah. Ah, right. And I guess you could read the book but you couldn’t see the film as well. Which seems a little...

I think it was unfair. I didn’t see what the issue was.

Yeah.

And, you know, because it actually it is... I was actually thinking, “Is that it? Is this that the thing that’s banned?” And it was very frustrating. And then they unbanned it and you could buy it and then soon after it was on Channel 4 for the first time, I

was like, “Oh, well. Finally.”

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So it was quite a big thing. Anything that’s banned [unintelligible]. That’s what you want, isn’t it? It makes a noise.

Yeah, definitely. That was the same for me. I was a horror fan. I was born in like 83. So I was growing up in the 90s watching all these horror films and my mum kept telling me about The Exorcist and I couldn’t watch (laughs).

You couldn’t watch it! It’s very frustrating! You could watch Freddy Krueger, and visually that was, I would say, more upsetting for a child to see than that. But it had this myth built around it. [Unintelligible.] I was like, “Why are you laughing at this film? Can’t you see what’s happening?” I think people who like it like it forever. I think once you’ve seen it I just think it sticks with you.

Yeah.

[Unintelligible.] All of this, that and the other. Yeah, I just think it’s great now you’ve access to it and you can watch it whenever you like.

Yeah. How do you feel about the tag it’s been given of “The Scariest Movie of All Time”? Would you agree with that or...?

It’s a big thing to live up to when you say things like that because, unfortunately, when the audience go in and see the film that’s, what, I don’t know, over 40 years old it looks dated. And people just say, “Oh, there’s nothing scary about that.” My middle brother’s girlfriend was like, “Oh, it’s boring. It’s so dated. There’s nothing scary about.” But, “Yeah, you’re not watching it properly.” Not seeing what it’s really all about. I’m a bit, I can’t quite decide whether that’s a good thing, that it’s called the scariest movie of all time or not. Because if you’re looking at a visual level it isn’t.

So you think it makes people watch it in a certain way that makes them kind of miss the point?

Yes. I do. I think it builds people up. It’s not as scary as things that we have now. Effects stand up pretty good actually, but I think that people watch that for the first time think, “That’s rubbish. That’s not scary.” We’re more sophisticated now and expect a lot more. But, again, that’s why these exorcism films that we have now I have no interest in, because you’re seeing people with their limbs twisting and there’s no story behind it. It’s just the visuals. And I find them just a waste of time. But I think the scariest movie ever made tag is a bit of a double-edged sword. Don’t think it’s necessarily the positive thing for it. For audiences today who want more sophisticated stuff then it probably isn’t the scariest movie of all time. So I’m a bit dubious about it. I’m not too sure (laughs).

Okie doke. I think that’s about it. That’s brilliant. Thank you very much.

You’re most welcome.

Would you like me to use your name in the research? It would just be your first name.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah, that’s fine, yeah. I’m very happy with that.

Brilliant. If you decide later on that there’s anything else you’d like to talk about or anything you’ve forgotten or anything like that or if you’ve said anything that you don’t want going in, feel free to pop me an email and we can sort that out.

OK. I’ve got your email anyway, so if I think of anything I’ll let you know.

Brilliant. That’s great. Thanks very much. Thanks again for talking to me.

You’re most welcome. I hope it all goes well for you.

I’ll let you know hopefully when it’s all done and hopefully I can make a book out of it or something.

Ah, very good. Well let me know if you do, I’ll definitely buy it (laughs).

(Laughs.) Thank you. Well, thanks very much for your time. It’s been lovely talking to you.

Bye bye.

Bye bye.

Steve

Particulars: Male; 36-45; UK. **Format:** In person.

Oh, it’s fine.

I’ll put my radio voice on.

I’ve just found some new software which means I don’t have to listen to it in VLC media player at, like, a quarter speed so it’s sort of like HEEEEELLLOO

He-he-he-ll-ll-oo-oo. Brilliant. It’s a nice piece of kit.

Yeah, it’s alright. They’re quite cheap as well. I think they’re like thirty, forty quid, something like that.

All good?

Right. So, just as like a first bit. If there’s anything you don’t remember that’s awesome, that’s fine.

There’s bound to be things I don’t remember (laughs).

If there’s anything you want to talk about as it comes up, just jump in. Don’t worry about sticking to the questions too much or anything like that.

Free-styling.

If there’s something you don’t want to talk about, just say and that’s fine and we’ll skip over it, that’s fine.

I have few boundaries (laughs).

(Laughs.) Good stuff. Okie doke. You said you watching the film for the first time in Birmingham when you were a teenager?

Yes.

Can you just describe that for us?

It was whenever it was rereleased, which I'm guessing was around 98. It had a cinema re-release. I'm guessing it was around 98 because certainly I was 18 at the time and the people I was with were in the year below me at school so they must have been 18 as well. So that's when I'd guess it was.

Yeah.

Um. Can't remember what cinema it was in, but just one of the multiplexes around...

Oh, OK.

It was either around... No. It was around Birmingham. I can't remember where exactly. I think it was... No. I can't remember where. But, yeah. That was the first time I'd seen it, was in the cinema, because I'd never... Although I had access to different things on video before they'd been released – like Natural Born Killers I'd pirated before that had been released – that had never come my way for whatever reason. So I took the opportunity to see it (laughs).

You said the crowd was a bit chaotic, not a good experience generally.

Yeah. Generally, I would say my cinema experiences aren't great (laughs), which is why I don't tend to go to the cinema any more. But that was probably one of the earlier places where I noticed it.

Yeah.

It was really busy. It was sold out, as far as I remember. To the extent where there were, I guess 5 of us went? Because we went in a car and there were definitely at least 5 of us there and me and my then girlfriend were separated out from the other three. So we sat right at the back because that was the only 2 seats available, and there were 3 down at the front, so we had very different experiences of it, where they were craning their necks up and we were going like...

(Laughs.)

And that's the only time I've ever sat at the back row of the cinema, because it's not somewhere I'd choose to sit because I can see the crowd and the crowd annoy me (laughs).

(Laughs.) I'm exactly the same. Whenever I go to the cinema I get annoyed because everyone wants to sit at the back and you've gotta be a pain in the arse to go and sit at the front by yourself, kind of thing.

I'd rather sit somewhere in the middle, but I'd rather no-one else was there, so this was not ideal viewing circumstances for me.

So you could see the backs of everybody's heads and...

Yeah. Which was interesting for this, for this project you're doing, because I could see what the crowd were doing in a way that I wouldn't normally. But, because it was sold out – and I think it was sold out because it had just been re-released and there was hype around it – the crowd responded... Well, I surprised by the way the

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

crowd were responding. Well, I was surprised and I wasn't surprised by how the crowd were responding to it, because I didn't have any expectations because I didn't know what the film was going to be in a sense.

Oh, OK.

I knew roughly what the story was – as in, girl gets possessed – had seen *Repossessed* starring Leslie Nielsen and Linda Blair before it (laughs)...

(Laughs.) Classic.

So I had some sense of what the touchpoints were.

The key sequences and...?

Yeah. Head spinning around and pea soup and all that. Like, I'd absorbed that, but I hadn't really got a sense of what the tone was going to be or even what some of the content was going to be, in as much as, um, when I was a kid, the only person I knew who'd seen it was my uncle. And I remember him saying about it. Because he knew I liked horror films when I was fairly young, possibly when I was buying a Stephen King book when I was with him, he might have said something around that. And I said, “Well, what's in it? Why is it so bad that it got banned?” You know, in that sort of childish, why's it so bad way.

(Laughs.)

And he couldn't really describe it to me. And I think partially he didn't know how to articulate that a lot of it was blasphemous and that's why it'd been banned. Because I suppose that's quite a tricky thing to articulate to a child anyway.

I guess if you don't want to go into religious talk and that kind of thing.

I don't know that he had a firm grip on why it had been banned in honesty, as well.

Ah, OK.

But, obviously, now as an adult looking back on it, the thing he didn't want to say to me is, “Well she jabs a crucifix in her and starts talking about how her dead mom sucks cocks in hell,” or whatever.

(Laughs.)

He didn't wanna say that to a child, obviously. So he kind of didn't say anything. He was like, “It's not so much about what happens, but what's said.” Or something like that. And that's the way he phrased it to me, and so I was a bit like, “Well, I don't really know what the content of the film's going to be on that basis.” So, I didn't really have any set expectations other than I was going to see someone's head spinning around and a bit of green sick.

Right.

And those were the bits that the audience seemed to not get along with. And I can see why because the effects look quite hokey in some respects, but still, I was a bit annoyed that there was at least, like... I've got a lot of tolerance for those sort of effects anyway, because I've got sort of a splattery background. It was the 80s and all that.

Yeah.

So, um, I was quite tolerant of that. I quite like that kind of effects work anyway, and that's fine. Um. But, also, there's a kind of reverence, I suppose, that I have for what it is. You know, knowing what it was at the time.

Right. Yeah.

Like, that's the kind of background I had. That it was controversial at the time and it upset people at the time when it was first released.

Yeah.

And, so, I was kind of annoyed by the fact that people were laughing at it, not because they were laughing at the effects, because that's alright – I understand that it's not everyone's cup of tea (laughs) – but that it was quite disrespectful to what the film was culturally.

Like, they didn't treat it as important.

Yeah. Or that they came to see it because they thought it was important and was like, "Ugh, what's this shit?"

Right. Like the Citizen Kane thing? They've taken it as like, "Greatest Movie of All Time"...?

Yeah. And then it just isn't, from their perspective. And, but, the thing that coloured my take on it is that I didn't know what to expect because I hadn't seen it. I didn't really know what the content was, because I hadn't been told what the controversial elements were.

Yeah.

But also it was around the same time that I saw a number of films that had been previously banned and then re-released on video, like Driller Killer and Texas Chainsaw, and those weren't what I expected them to be either. Especially, I mean, Driller Killer is what it is, but is not the splatter film that it was made out to be by the BBFC or the press.

Yeah.

So, when we saw that, it was like, "Oh, it's just gonna be just someone drilling people's heads."

(Laughs.)

And then it's not. It's barely any of that. It's just a documentary about the punk era in New York.

That's why I hated it (laughs). Like, I expected, like...

I was really bored by it when I was first watching it.

Yeah. Same.

Same thing with Texas Chainsaw. It just wasn't what I was expecting it to be because it wasn't as violent as it's made out to be. Love all three of them, sincerely, in retrospect, now that I know what they are.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

But I was coming to *The Exorcist* with the same kind of, “This probably isn’t going to be what I expect it to be, so I’m just gonna let it happen and then probably have to rewatch it another time now that I know what it is.”

Yeah.

But I kind of felt that... Even when I was watching *Driller Killer* and I was quite bored by it, I was like, “There must be something in here and it’s just the weight of my expectations, whatever I had about it,” though I couldn’t really articulate the thought, “don’t match what’s on the screen, so I’m gonna have step back from that and come back another time” (laughs).

So, you went in with those experiences framing *The Exorcist*?

Yeah. And I couldn’t what order exactly those came in...

But it was the same kind of period when all that was happening?

Yeah. I’d had several experiences like that of those kinds of films and thought, “Hmm, I don’t know what I’m gonna make of this.” But I was expecting to not... I was expecting for it to not be what I was expecting it to be (laughs). Because I shouldn’t have had any expectations of what it was gonna be, because I didn’t know what the content was (laughs). If that makes any sense. Sorry. You’re gonna have to transcribe that now, aren’t you? (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) No, that makes sense.

So, yeah. That was the framing for me. But I felt the crowd weren’t giving it enough time, especially for such a quiet film. I mean, my girlfriend at the time found it particularly annoying that there was – I didn’t find this bit that annoying – but you know there’s a sequence in which the camera’s just sort of zooming very slowly towards the bedroom door or something and there’s noise behind it?

Oh, right. Yeah.

That people were talking during that bit, going, “Ugh, boring!” or whatever.

Right.

And she got really annoyed by that afterwards and was saying to me, “Well, that was the atmosphere-building bit, and if it weren’t for people talking in front of me I think I would’ve found that, like...” In subsequent watches when she’d seen it, she’d said that’s the bit that filled her full of dread, not knowing what’s behind the door.

Right.

But she felt cheated, I suppose, in retrospect, by not being allowed to experience that, because the crowd were going, “Ugh, it’s a door! Boo!” or whatever. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So it was an odd experience seeing it with that crowd.

Was it that they were treating it as some kind of cheesy novelty 60s, 70s thing? Like it’s a *Carry On* film or something?

That's how it felt, yeah. It was like it was just sort of... I've just seen my poster of The Evil Dead over there, but that's the kind of thing they were treating it as, like it was a low-budget film that was made for shock and giggles.

Right.

And that's how they were approaching it.

Right.

It was like, surely this film is too slow and quiet for that. Surely you're not seeing that there's a mismatch in the tone of the film and the tone you were expecting of the film? At the time, I thought maybe some of the laughter was about the tension. Like, how people laugh when their tense.

Right, yeah, as a relief.

But then there was much of it, I don't think that's what it was like. I think they were just thinking this was rubbish or "I'm better than this" or "Oh, god. This was banned. Weren't they pussies back in the 70s. This is nothing."

(Laughs.)

And that's kind of how it felt. That it was mocking what it was.

So they didn't go in in a kind of generous mood.

Yeah. No. That's exactly it. It was like people were seeing it as a challenge.

Because it's "the scariest film of all time".

Yeah. And then went, "Well, it's not scary and I'm awesome." And that's how... I mean, maybe I'm being grossly unfair to the audience...

(Laughs.)

That's certainly... There were some people very vocally being quite disparaging towards the film. And that's my assessment as to why, based on their reactions to it.

Yeah. Ah, OK. So how did you feel when you were watching the film? Were you just trying to manage the anger and the frustration of being around these people?

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) I mean, partially. I suppose part of it was me trying to work out what the film was, because, as I say, I didn't really have a firm grip on what it was going to be. But whatever it was, I knew my expectations would be different to what it was. Clearly, there was a mis-match between my expectations being... Because I didn't know what "the scariest film of all time" would look like.

Right.

Or this thing that was worthy of being banned in that way, what that would look like. It's just this empty space. In the same way when kids go, "Ugh, the monster's going to get me!" and they don't have any reference for what would happen- You ask a child "What would happen if the monster actually got you?" They go, "I don't know." Because the getting you is the worst bit and the rest is abstract.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

(Laughs.) Right, OK.

That’s kind of how I felt about the film. Well, I could understand I could go and see the film but I don’t know what that would be. But whatever it was going to be was going to be a mismatch between that vacant abstract space and what I was actually presented with, by proxy of the way I’d been imagining it.

Yeah.

But I’m like that with all films anyway. Partially, I was frustrated by the way the crowd were responding to it. And I suppose, because of the nature of the person I am and my interest in cinema, that then led me towards reflecting on audiences and how they behave and the way they value horror cinema, and that kind of thing.

Right.

Which is distracting from the film, especially when you’re trying to grip what the film is. I seem to remember there were bits of the film where I lost the audience as it were and it did absorb me enough.

Oh, OK.

But they probably were few and far between and not enough that... And I don’t whether that’s coloured by my retrospective viewings of it on VHS.

Like you’ve sort of combined them?

Yeah. I don’t know how much I’m just re-reading into how I experience it now. Probably I was more annoyed by the audience than I’m even remembering.

(Laughs.) Right.

Because I was 18 and intolerant (laughs) and an angry young man. I’m not so angry now.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Did you go to it with knowledge of the people involved and that kind of thing?

The personnel who made it?

The director, the actors and things?

No, I had absolutely nothing. Apart from Linda Blair who I’d seen in *Repossessed* (laughs). I was about to say, “Oh, yeah! Leslie Nielsen! I remember him.” (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Aside from that I definitely didn’t know anything about Friedkin. Um... I don’t think... I’d probably seen... I’m trying to think whether I would’ve seen any of the actors in anything else beforehand that I would’ve been, “Oh, yeah, that’s that guy.”

Yeah.

I think I might’ve seen Max on the screen and gone, “Oh, I’ve seen him somewhere before,” but not really. We’re talking pre-IMDb days.

Of course. It’s not as easy back in the 90s.

I don’t think I would’ve... I think it would’ve been, “Oh, there’s that guy. I’ve seen

him in some stuff.” But asides from that I don’t think I would’ve known anyone on screen. I certainly wouldn’t have known... I didn’t really know about the book. I knew it existed as a book.

Yeah.

But I didn’t know what the content of the book was. In fact, actually, they gave us, on the way in, thinking about it, a smaller version of the book. I think it was like the intro to the book or the first chapter or something.

Oh, OK.

In a separate book.

Just as like a sort of memento for coming to the screening?

Yeah. It was like one of those kind of – my then girlfriend had it. She said she read it. But I think whatever it was that was in there, you know the first half of the book or whatever is set wherever in the desert and all that, I think that’s all that was in there. And I think she was like, “Oh, that’s weird, because we didn’t see any of that in the film.”

(Laughs.) Right.

And then I don’t know whether she actually read the entire book, but I think that was the purpose of it, was to go, “There’s more to this and go and read the actual book.”

Oh, OK.

I mean, god knows what people did with those, but it was like a 40-page thing. Can’t remember how it was framed on the front now, but if you wanna know I can ask her and see whether she can remember because she had it (laughs).

Cool. I didn’t even know that was a thing. That’s crazy.

I’d forgotten about it until just then (laughs).

So you hadn’t seen the sequels or anything before you watched it?

No, no.

Just the parodies and spoofs?

Yeah. We saw the second film shortly after that, and thought really that is genuinely very boring. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

It was years since I saw the third one, like years and years. Which I’ve got more time for than the second film, obviously, for obvious reasons (laughs).

(Laughs.) So when you – even though you might’ve mused them together from different viewings – can you think of any moments that might’ve stood out the first time you watched it or the first time you watched it and could kind of get into it?

Yeah. As I said, there were bits that stood out that were icon, like the head spinning, that I’d kind of seen, so I came with the baggage of expecting to see those

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

so those stood out, because it was a confirmation bias thing.

Because you were waiting for them.

And because of the way the audience reacted to them. So those are my most visceral memories of it, I suppose, because I not only had the expectation the annoyance coupled with it. I remember being... Oh, another bit that I remember the audience laughed at and it annoyed me was the bit where she wets herself at the dinner party. Like when she comes down the stairs and pees on the carpet. That they laughed at. And I was like, “You’re now laughing at a child’s emotional trauma or something.” (Laughs.) I don’t know what it was that was funny about that. I thought there’s a mismatch between what the audience think this is and what the film is trying to communicate.

Yeah.

I’ve never encountered anyone finding that moment until that moment. Maybe it is supposed to be funny, maybe I’m devoid of humour (laughs). “Oh, it’s pee isn’t it? Ugh!”

(Laughs.)

I do remember seeing the sequence where the priest is having the nightmare.

With his mother?

Yes. And there’s subliminal flash-throughs. I remember seeing that and not catching it but thinking, “There’s something going on there.” But I remember that being maybe one of the sequences- perhaps the audience were quiet, just going, “What’s happening now? Which bit am I supposed to laugh at? The bit where his mum dies?” (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

I suppose I do remember the ending as well, as far as I think I remember the ending being, you know, after he’s thrown himself out of the window and he’s being read, what do you call it?

Last rites?

I was gonna say that but then I thought, “No, that’s the thing they...” I was thinking Miranda rights. “You have the right to remain silent... Ugh!”

(Laughs.)

Where he’s holding his hand and remember working out whether his hand was moving and whether he was still alive or whether he was dead. I wasn’t really expecting it to end in that way anyway. That sequence I remember standing out. And the sequence when they’re moving towards the door, standing out, only because my then-girlfriend would’ve had something to say about it. “What are these people doing laughing at this,” or whatever. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Those are the main sequences remember. Apart from the crucifix sequence just going, “Oh, right. OK. That’s what my uncle wasn’t gonna tell me about.” (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Of course.

Aside from that... Oh, no actually. Another thing that I do remember standing out for me is when the mother's wandering around with the candlestick in the attic and suddenly the flame jumps up and I was just like, "That's a bit weird." (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

It was like, "Why?"

I still think that (laughs).

(Laughs.) It was like, "Well, what's that...?" Those are the main sequences that stand out to me in my memory.

OK. You mentioned in the survey that the strength of the film was in its more subtle moments.

Mm.

Did they come through when you watched it again?

Oh, yeah. On VHS. That's when I'd say that that's when I noticed any of that. I'd missed all of that in the cinema. Not only because I wasn't prepared for it being subtle – that wasn't the part of the cultural landscape that I came from, it's like this is the most controversial film of all time or whatever, not a subtle one – but I was more primed for that when I watched it again.

Yeah.

Because I recalled it being a slow, quiet film.

Yeah.

And so I suppose I was looking out more for that on second viewing, or even on any subsequent viewing. That's the bit sticks with me, because it's the bit that was least like my expectations, I suppose.

Oh, OK. So you were expecting a big, garish, noisy thing.

Yeah. Yeah. In order for it to upset the censors so much, because normally they're not that upset by quiet films, I suppose (laughs). Yeah, they still aren't. I don't know why. "It's quiet, therefore it's art." (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah, course.

But, yeah. The subtleties of it are what gives it any kind of lasting power I think. I don't think the shock value of her head spinning around does much, like, now.

Yeah.

I don't think that's a memorable... Well, it's memorable because it's become iconic, but other than that I don't think that it's got much substance, whereas a lot of the tension as it builds over the first hour – I would guess, because it's about 2 hours, isn't it?

Yeah.

In case you said like, "No, it's 70 minutes." Like, "Jesus, it does feel slow." (Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

(Laughs.)

The way the tension builds really before the bed starts rocking around and that kind of thing is probably my favourite part of the film. Like where you can see the young priest’s dilemma, his crisis of faith... That’s the kind of thing that motors the film for me. That’s the bit that I was interested in. Probably precisely because it wasn’t that green-spewing, head-spinning stuff. Because I’d seen *Repossessed* so I’d seen that already (laughs). It’s like, “I don’t need any more of that.”

So you’d seen the effects done almost in the same. It’s been a while since I’ve seen *Repossessed*, but it’s probably quite close...

It’s probably done better in *Repossessed* because it’s so much later (laughs). We’d gone through the heyday of prosthetic effects by that point.

Yeah.

So what’s that? 91, 92, maybe 93?

Yeah. Something like that.

It might’ve been 93ish, because Leslie Nielsen was a thing after *Naked Gun*.

He was at the height of his powers in the early 90s.

Yeah (laughs). He was. Sorry, I keep talking about Leslie Nielsen. This is not what you’re asking about (laughs).

(Laughs.) It’s fine. I secretly wanted to write a PhD about Leslie Nielsen anyway, so... (laughs).

You can now have a Leslie Nielsen chapter. “Everyone kept talking about Leslie Nielsen and his role in *The Exorcist*.” (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) So, how many times would you say you’ve rewatched the film, if you had to guess?

(Sigh.) Um. I would say... I probably saw it... Do you want me to count the cinema in this, or since the cinema?

Um. Since the cinema. How many times you’ve watched it again.

I reckon I’ve seen it about... I owned a VHS copy of it, and I reckon I saw that about 5 times maybe, realistically. Not that many times because it’s quite slow and quiet. When they rereleased the *Version You’ve Never Seen*, I’ve seen that once.

Yeah.

And I’ve got a DVD box set that I’ve seen maybe three times. I’d say maybe 10 times in total. Enough that I should be able to remember more about it that I do. (Laughs.)

Is that standard for you that you’ll watch a film you like that many times?

Oh, yeah. I mean, I’ve seen *Nightmare on Elm Street* upwards of 40 times.

(Laughs.) Right.

Which it makes it by default the best film that’s ever been made in my mind.

(Laughs.)

Because I've seen it more than any other. More than once a year, I'll watch that. I'm a repeat watcher, without doubt, which is why I have the job I do (laughs).

So what did you make of the... Because you only watched it once, does that mean you weren't a fan of the Version You've Never Seen?

It was more like it was like a curio for me. I'd seen the sequences before, somewhere, maybe in a documentary, I can't remember.

Yeah.

But, um, I only really saw it to see them in context. I felt like they didn't really add anything for me.

Yeah.

So I was just like, "There you go, I won't buy a copy of it because I don't need to see that again in that form."

You just wanted to see what they added and there wasn't enough so you went back to the original?

Yeah. It just didn't make any real difference to me. I don't know whether it was partially because I'd already seen those sequences out of context, and like, "Oh, OK that's how that fits in." But it didn't really integrate in a way that I thought, "Oh, that changes the narrative." Unlike when I first saw *The Evil Dead* uncut, because I had that on VHS for years without the tree rape. And then when I saw it with the tree rape it radically changed the tone of the film. And I was like, "Oh, right. Now it's a completely different beast." Whereas I didn't get that with *The Exorcist*.

Because there's nothing dramatically different, because she just comes out of her room once, a little chat and a cheesy ending isn't there?

Yeah. I was just like, "Alright. Fine." It didn't ruin the film for me or anything, but it just didn't me enough difference that I thought I'd buy another copy of it.

(Laughs.) Yeah. So what makes you want to rewatch *The Exorcist*? Is it like a specific mood or...? Or does it have to be... Is it just, nothing on telly?

The thing that would make me most likely to watch it now, I think, is probably with someone who hasn't seen it.

Oh, OK.

Because, quite often I'll be sat around and someone'll go, "Oh, let's watch a film" or whatever, and because I've got literally thousands they don't know what to do with it.

(Laughs.)

So I'll start picking things off and they'll either go yes or no and that would be one of the things I'd say to them. Because it's one of those that's so iconic, sometimes people haven't seen it. I don't know whether I would often gravitate towards watching it now. I think I watched it quite a few times when I bought it on VHS because I was trying to grip what it was and I was intrigued by working out what it

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

was to me, or I was determined to enjoy it in a way I didn't get a chance to in the cinema, whereas now I've got that. I'd have to be in the same kind of mood I would if I was going to watch a piece of French cinema or French drama. It's that kind of thing to me.

Oh, OK.

It's more like a slow, quiet... It's what I would call an afternoon.

(Laughs.) Right.

Oddly. It's not like a midnight. Like where I've got a number of hours and I don't mind concentrating on something because I'm still fairly fresh in the afternoon. And it can be quite thematically heavy. It's the same kind of mood I'd be in if I wanted to watch Michael Haneke's *Amour* again. And you have to be in a specific mood to see something about old people dying (laughs).

Course.

It's that kind of mood I'd be in. Quite sombre.

So you rewatch the film more to kind of – just generalising – to pick more things out of it and make sense of it rather than re-experience it?

Yeah. I would say it's not an entertainment thing for me. Because having watched it a number of times, the entertainment value, just for pure entertainment, unless it's a kind of rollercoaster film, decreases.

Yeah.

So, like, you know, I'd watch *Jason Lives* again and again because it's a rollercoaster. It's fun. Whereas that isn't fun. As I say, it's more about his crisis of faith and that kind of thing, and the violation of innocence and this sort of thematic thing about the human condition. That's the kind of thing I would watch it for, if I was in a contemplative mood about that, that would be the circumstance I'd watch it in. *Exorcist 3* is a rollercoaster film. I'd put that on because like, “Oh, remember that bit with the nurse's station, that was fun.” That's the difference, I suppose. And *The Exorcist I* would never watch again (laughs).

(Laughs.)

Unless I wanna be bored for a while.

I don't blame ya.

Unless I was like, “I can't really remember what happens in that. I can't remember why I was so down on that.” And then put it on again. “Oh, I remember now.” (Laughs.) “How long's this been on?”

(Laughs.) I had the same experience when I rewatched it starting this thing. How do you feel about the prequels, have you seen those?

I've seen both of them but only once a piece. I haven't ever revisited them. I can't remember much about them.

Oh. Just didn't stick?

Yeah. I only saw them because I bought that box set they released with all of them

in.

Oh, OK.

That's when I saw them. So it can't have been that long after they were out. The thing that I was interested in most was how those two different iterations of the same story worked.

The troubled production history?

That's what interested me about it. I watched those back to back and went, "Oh, yeah. They are quite different, tonally." But that was kind of... I didn't find either of them very entertaining. Didn't really amplify my understanding of the story more than I'd already got a grip on it by then.

Didn't add anything to the original film?

Not really. Not such that I'd need to rewatch them a lot. Maybe I will now you've said it.

(Laughs.) Have you read the book since, the Exorcist book?

No. Never have. It was one of those things where I think I might even have owned a copy at some point, but, part of my problem is that I saw The Exorcist in 98, in 99 I went to uni and I did English Literature and I haven't really read fiction since, because it killed it for me.

Oh, right.

I was reading 3 works of fiction a week and it became work and I'm still not in the mindset where I can do it. I've had a flick through some things subsequently, but generally I don't read fiction for giggles any more (laughs).

(Laughs.)

Unless it's a graphic novel. That's what I do now. It's enough that it's not like a novel any more.

Just had it beaten out of you?

Yeah. Absolutely.

Fair enough. Where would you say your – you said you were a horror fan when you were younger, buying Stephen King books and that kind of thing – where would you say your interest in horror came from, do you think?

I can pin it down very precisely for you. It was from going to into video shops when I was a kid. I was still living in Bristol at the time, so I was... In fact, I can tell you what year it was. It was 1985. Because the thing that really got me was seeing – I didn't know anything about the video nasties, obviously, though I may have absorbed that there was important about horror films going on because people were talking about them, I don't know – but it was seeing the box cover for things like... American Werewolf in London I definitely saw and thought, "What's that?" And Spookies. It has that Graham Humphreys art on the front, a bit like that Evil Dead poster.

Oh, OK. Yeah.

So it was a bit child friendly in a way, but I was obviously thinking, "What's in there?"

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

What’s that like?” The thing that really triggered me and why I can tell you the year is that there was, on the counter for the video store which was maybe a bit taller than this desk – maybe about this tall tops – was a big poster for Freddy’s Revenge, the second Nightmare on Elm Street film, which was as tall as me, like, so I was just looking at it while my parents, whoever it was, was getting a video, probably a cartoon or whatever for me. And I remember just looking at it thinking, “Well, who is Freddy and why’s he so angry and why’s he burning a school bus? Because that was at the bottom. And why does he want to take revenge?”

(Laughs.) Yeah.

And I’ve always been really interested from then. It took me a while to get to horror, because my dad didn’t approve. I don’t know why. He never has approved of it as a form of entertainment.

Yeah.

It’s cause he’s a hippy I think and he doesn’t like violence as entertainment.

Right.

But my mum was never that bothered by it. I started watching horror films with her when I was a bit older. Say about 9 or 10 or something, she’d rent them out and we’d watch them. But that’s where my interest comes from. It was kind of “What is that?” And “Why can’t I watch that?” Because “What is it about the content that I wouldn’t get?” as a child. Would it scare me or something. I couldn’t quite grip how bad it could possibly be. And I suppose the same thing plays out with the Exorcist thing. It’s like that thing I was saying earlier about children going “What would happen when the boogeyman gets you?” What is that? The kind of unknown of that has always intrigued me, in way. That’s inspired my love for horror.

Ah, right.

It’s not like I pick a horror film and I’m wondering what’s in there in the same way, but it’s now more of a compulsion for me, or I’m devoted to the genre in a subcultural way, but that’s where it came from originally.

Was it like you were interested and you kind of pestered your mum into letting you watch them or was it an interest of hers that she was sharing or...?

I don’t know how she feels about them, to be honest, because I’ve never asked her. We started watching them because – and this is quite telling, I suppose – my sister had seen – I must’ve been 9 at the time – my sister had seen Nightmare on Elm Street at someone’s house, because their older brother had it, and then she brought it over and we were going to watch it and then my mum went, “Well, OK, you can watch that as long as I watch it with you.” Because she didn’t know how any of us would react.

(Laughs.) Right.

So she’s like, “If it gets too bad I can turn it off or whatever.”

Yeah.

I think she just wanted to see how I’d respond to it. And afterwards I was like, well

that wasn't, I didn't really know what the fuss was about. I liked it as a film but it wasn't outrageous in that way. So after that we watched the Elm Street sequels and then we started watching other things together and then I just sort of went off. It was back in the day when Channel 4 and BBC 2 used to show great films late at night, so that's when I started doing that as well, and going "Videodrome's on at 11 so I'll see what that's like," and so my world opened up. And now I'm living the dream (laughs).

(Laughs.) Now you can watch Nightmare on Elm Street as many times as you want.

And I do (laughs).

Brilliant. So what kind of... Is there a kind of thing you look for in horror movies?

Different things for different moods. So, there's still a part of me that, when it's done well, I like that rollercoaster type of horror. But it has to be done well. So many films try to do it and fail to entertain because they're just either recycling old tropes in a really naff way... But sometimes the magic just happens. Jason Lives, fucking brilliant. Final Destination 5, one of the best rollercoaster movies ever made.

Which one is that? Oh, of course with trucks and the pipes and the traffic accident and they all go through the...?

Oh, no. It's the one with the bridge and the bridge is collapsing.

I don't think I've seen this one.

There's a sequence with a gymnast. It's fucking brilliant. Part 3 was shit. Part 4 was pretty dire. And that one came out of nowhere. That's one of those things if someone's looking for a film and if they haven't seen it it's like, "We're fucking watching it."

(Laughs.)

Going off track now. But you know that bit in that second film where he's in the kitchen and he's got his hand in the waste disposal unit and there's about 6000 ways he could die and his kitchen's on fire and he finally escapes and the thing gets him through the eye and it's just unexpected.

Brilliant.

It's all like that. They've just stepped back and gone, "What made these films good?" and they've just done that for 90 minutes. It's so good and you can get it for about 70p at CEX.

Brilliant.

So sometimes I'm in the mood for that but as I say it has to be done well. Some of the times I'm into extreme horror. I suppose it's that thing again. "What is in there that's so bad?" sort of way. I'm intrigued by what people are upset by. Sometimes I like my boundaries pushed a bit as well.

Yeah.

Just, I like that challenge intellectually. But a lot of the time it's just about humans

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

doing human things against whatever odds they face.

Yeah.

It's not even like they have to overcome those odds so much as being pushed by them. That's why I think I have a lot of tolerance for torture porn. You get people in a box and you subject them to something and you see what happens to them and you get out of that something rich about the human condition. If you're looking for it. Otherwise you just see boobs and screaming and you don't like it. But that's what I mainly look for.

Ah, OK.

In cases like Final Destination 5 it's just like yeah, whatever, popcorn, rollercoaster, it's fun. I get a lot out of the genre that I don't get out of a lot of other types of genre. I don't get the same thing out of comedy at all. I like comedy but more in that rollercoaster way and that it's entertaining kind of way whereas when I'm watching horror it's not for the entertainment it's for the stimulation of it.

OK. How do you feel about the – because of the whole blasphemy aspect – the religious aspects of the film? Did you have a religious upbringing or anything?

Oh, no.

Was that anything that connected with you in any way?

Not really. Watching it, I could see why people were upset about it. I could see why if that was your religion you would find it upsetting. I suppose (laughs) I learned a lot about James Ferman watching the film, and Mary Whitehouse for example. I was like, “OK, now I get it.” Because if that was your belief system, it seemed to be like sticking fingers up at them for the sake of it in some ways. But no it didn't affect me in that way because I don't have that kind of religious background. Around that time is when I started reading Neitzche (laughs) and like, “Oh, yeah, whatever. God is dead and that's playing out here.”

(Laughs.)

So it didn't really bother me, but I could just see why it bothered other people. I mean you can imagine what it would be like now if we said, why ISIS would be upset if you had an equivalent.

Right, yeah. Of course.

It's like, I get it. I get why people are upset by that kind of thing, but it's not going to upset me in the same way.

That makes sense. So the interest in Karras's crisis of faith and that kind of thing is more because of his character rather than-

Yeah. It's more about his humanity. That it's... Yeah it doesn't bother me that he's having a crisis of faith so much as that's his belief system and it's crumbling away beneath him and he's tested. That could be true of anything.

So it's sort of watching him go through that and it's kind of broadening that and applying it to other things without it being a specifically Christian thing?

Yeah. Because when I'm watching extreme horror and I'm having my boundaries

pushed, it's the exact same kind of principle. It's like, there are things that would upset me and do upset me, but it's that kind of testing of those boundaries that I find interesting as an experience in that context. And I suppose the same kind of thing he's going through is he's having his beliefs tested and I find that interesting to see someone going through that, but it doesn't bother me that it's religion specifically.

Yeah.

It could be that... You could imagine- In fact there's a film, it's a police drama, it's Spanish or something and I can't remember what it's called, and there are these police officers looking at violent sex crime committed against children.

Right.

I can't for the life of me remember what it's called. But they're all having their boundaries tested on just by their day to day experiences. That I can relate to much more because I find that upsetting too, but it's still the same kind of premise for the drama, like "I've got a belief system, my values are being tested," and some people crumble and some people step away from it and whatever, and that's what interests me about him.

Oh, OK. Just coming to the end now. If you could watch the film again completely fresh for the first time, what would be your ideal scenario for it?

What the context would be like?

Yeah. If you could erase the first time you watched the film and put yourself back again.

(Laughs.) Right, yeah. Um. I would say, I would definitely like to not watch it in the cinema.

Yeah.

Especially now that we've got the technology we have. I didn't have such a big TV back in the day or whatever (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right.

Now if I could watch it for the first time... I'm just wondering whether I'd like to watch it alone or not, really, that's the bit that I'm... Not that I... I never really got scared by those films anyway. It's not like that's the consideration. It's more that, would I want someone to experience it with or to see how they're responding to it. But someone I trusted not to go, "What's that? Is her head spinning around? She's wet herself, haha!" Because that's the bit that I would definitely remove from the cinematic experience of it.

(Laughs.) Of course.

I certainly wouldn't to watch it... Cause you can imagine watching it at a film festival where there's an audience who are going to pay devoted attention to it even if they've not experienced it before. I wouldn't necessarily want to watch it in that situation because I don't feel it would add anything to my experience of the film, because it's quite personal and intimate. Or certainly in the way I respond to it,

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

that’s how I feel about it, that it’s about the individuals having quite, very intimate personal experience with each other. So it would have to be at least a small group that I watched it with. But actually I think I’d probably prefer to watch it by myself. In a darkened room with a big TV! (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Which is how I do most of my viewing anyway, sat about 3 inches away from the screen.

Just don’t get on with cinemas now?

I think it’s...

The audiences?

Yeah, it’s the audiences. There are some experiences I’ve had that’ve been good. I think I could watch Final Destination 5 with an audience because I think they’d respond in a way that would amplify my own response to it. Never saw Paranormal Activity in the cinema but wish I had because apparently that was brilliant.

I saw that, yeah. People were talking throughout the entire thing, but in a really kind of fun way. Do you know the sequences where they go to bed and the camera speeds up and as soon it stops fast-forwarding you know something’s gonna happen?

Yeah.

People would start pissing themselves laughing as soon as it stopped, like, “Ooh, shit! What’s gonna happen here?!” It was great.

(Laughs.)

It’s the only time I’ve been in the cinema as well everybody screamed all at once. Not me obviously (laughs). You know the bit at the end where she leaps at the camera?

Oh, yeah.

Everybody did a big cheesy advert trailer kind of scream at the end. It was great.

See, that’s the kind of atmosphere I wouldn’t mind seeing, as long as people were paying attention to it, not running around. My then girlfriend who I was watching The Exorcist with - who got pissed off – she went to see Paranormal Activity in the cinema and she said the best bit for her was, do you know the bit just before she gets pulled out the bed?

Yeah.

She said there’s this guy behind her who was built like a bouncer and looked about 8 foot tall and 8 foot wide and he went, “Fookin’ hell” just before it happened.

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) She said that’s the best thing that ever happened to her in a cinema. And I regret that I didn’t get that experience of that film.

Yeah.

Because when I watch that I think there's an emptiness to it that would've been filled by the audience. And there's a sort of atmosphere. Mind you, Blair Witch was totally opposite. It was awful watching that with an audience.

I didn't see that in the cinema. Was that...?

It was horrendous for similar reasons to *The Exorcist*. People were walking out going, "Well, this isn't real. This isn't scary." Or whatever. It didn't really work in the cinema anyway because found footage was its own thing at the time, but it worked much better on video on anyway like you would see the footage.

Course. Yeah.

Um. But I just don't think I'd ever have that experience with *The Exorcist* with an audience, that it's not that kind of film where I think that... Even if there was screaming at the bits where... I don't know that you would scream at much in *The Exorcist* anyway, really. It's more like an existential dread for me.

Not many jump scares, really. Apart from the...

Apart from the candlestick, yeah (laughs). Which I think everyone should go, "Hmm" rather than screaming at. But even then I don't think that would add much to my enjoyment of the film.

Yeah.

Not like some other films. So, yeah. By myself, in a dark room. By myself. All alone! (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

Like a loner. A grumpy bastard (laughs).

Yeah. (Laughs.) Audiences, man.

(Laughs.) Yeah, forget 'em.

So, yeah, just finally, is there anything else you think might be relevant in your background or your experiences that might influence how you take to the film?

Now or then? Or both?

Both really. Has it changed over time?

I think it has changed over time, because my relationship with horror has changed over time, without doubt. Like, I still like it, but I'm kind of just a devotee to it, because, you know, I've built my academic career around it, so I've got a very different relationship to it now than when I was just watching it as a hobby and had never read anything about it and didn't know anything about the production of it and I was just interested in it. So, even my relationship with *The Exorcist* would've changed in that respect, because now I've got an additional set of contexts that I didn't have previously. My relationship with audiences... You know. My personal experiences with audiences is still like, assholes, don't wanna be near them.

(Laughs.)

But, at least from my perspective now, I would say there were probably about 20 people and maybe there were 150 people there, 200 people there, and about 20 of

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

them were being assholes.

Right.

Some of them would've been having exactly the same experience as me. Some of them would've got a lot more out of the film than I did at the time.

Right.

But, you know, when you've paid for a ticket and there's just people being dicks around you, I just don't think about that. Whereas now I've got a different set of contexts, and I different understanding of why I don't engage with audiences (laughs), to draw on. And that changes my understanding of the event itself, but... they were still assholes.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Definitely.

But I suppose I take horror more seriously now, but don't know how much of that is a product of my intellectual relationship having developed in the way that it has now that I teach about it and write about it.

You've just got different ways to think about it now than you had back in the day.

Yeah. I've got a different tool kit. There's the same things I always found interesting about it, but, you know, I've got a slightly different relationship because of the frameworks.

Makes sense! That's about it I think!

Grand.

Brilliant.

(Laughs.) I promised you I wouldn't waffle and all I did was waffle.

(Laughs.) Nah. That was brilliant. I'll turn this off.

Grand.

Mark

Particulars: Male; 46-55; UK. **Format:** Telephone.

Hello, Mark speaking.

Oh hi. It's Martin it is. Martin Smith.

I'm expecting your call.

Ah, good stuff. How are you?

Of course. Oh. You're breaking up a bit.

Oop. Sorry. Is that any better?

That's better, yes.

Ah, good stuff. Stuff.

That's alright.

How are you? You OK?

Absolutely. Fine.

Thank you for speaking to me.

That's quite alright.

The reason I thought it'd be good to speak to you is just because I'm looking for people with different kind of experiences with the film.

Right, OK.

So it's great to talk to somebody who wasn't that sure the first time, and then come to like over time and that kind of thing.

Absolutely, yeah. I was too young to see it when it came out.

Ah, right.

Because I've been about 12 (laughs).

Yeah (laughs).

We knew it was happening at the school, but I think most of the reports I heard were just about what people had read.

Ah, right.

So, I- Everything was led by books then.

Yeah.

The book came out, so we'd- one of the kids would have got hold of the book and we'd just assume the film was the same as the book.

(Laughs.) Ah, right.

So there's where we all started out, we just didn't see it because we couldn't (laughs).

Yeah, that's fair enough.

And then of course it kickstarted all the other devil movies.

Yeah. You mentioned you'd seen The Omen beforehand.

Yes. The Omen. Legend of Hell House was a re-release.

Yeah.

I saw a Spanish film called The Antichrist. Was it Spanish or Italian? Could've been both actually.

Oh, I haven't seen that one.

That's one of the first X films I saw in the cinema, so I mean I saw all of the films that were sort of inspired by The Exorcist before seeing on re-release.

Oh, right. Yeah. So was-

Als- Sorry.

Sorry. It's OK. Carry on.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

I'd also picked up a book, again, cause we couldn't see it, which was William Peter Blatty's script.

Oh, right.

Um, which was a book called From Novel to Film.

Ah, OK. Yeah.

So, this would've been the whole script plus stuff that didn't make it to the screen. So, again, I was reading about it, trying to sort of learn about it, and there are tonnes of photographs in that sort of tell you the story.

Yeah.

So, by the time I got to see the film, I knew what to expect, sort of.

Yeah.

I'd seen the story, read the story, um, and seen photographs and special effects leaflets about it.

Ah, right.

Um, I think I even saw the sequel before the Exorcist.

Ah, right. So you'd seen the sort of later recreations of scenes from The Exorcist 1 and that kind of thing.

Well, I don't know whether there were any. I think Exorcist 2 just expected you to have seen. There- There might be flashbacks in it actually.

Yeah.

But, again, in terms of the film, Antichrist had given me clues about the vomiting sequence.

Yeah.

Exorcist 2 was assuming I knew the story and telling me what happened next.

Yeah. (Laughs.)

Um, and then, I think, was the re-release of Exorcist. 5 years.

So you'd basically seen about as much as you could see of the film without having seen it.

That's right.

Ah, right. (Laughs) Had you read- Was there any- Were you old enough to read the kind of press coverage and that kind of thing when it came out the first time?

Um, I wouldn't have been looking at news perspective just, um, shock horror. I think the tabloids might have just given you the best bits and tried to, um, demonise the movie to its readers.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

But, because it had been such a howling success as a book and in America, um, you know, people made it a hit here as well, I believe. You know, it was like the film everyone had to see.

Yeah.

Especially because it was the director of *The French Connection*. And this is a phenomenon, you know, before *Jaws*, in that it's something horrendous and you've got to see it. There was just so much interest in it. And people telling you not to see it would just people go and see it.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Is that kind of how you were at the time with films or was this an exception?

Um. I was desperate to see horror movies. I was turned on about the same time with Dennis Gifford's book, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*.

Oh, I haven't seen that.

Which gave me a historical perspective on 30s *Frankenstein*, British horror, Hammer, everything. So I was trying to see as much as I could. Um, just from the mythology. The fact they've got monsters in it. And the special effects. So I was more interested in the older horror films. Frankly, the modern ones, with the sort of sexual element of *Exorcist* and the – uh – frankly frightening films like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, I was almost too scared to see because they were real.

Yeah. They're very different-

They were real and modern day, and I think I was more into sort of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, something distanced and more sort of monster friendly rather than psychological horror. I did avoid – well, I don't think we had a choice with *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Certainly the poster was frightening enough. So I didn't actually go rushing out to see it.

Where did *The Exorcist* fit then for you in that kind of spectrum, because it has a monster I guess, but it's, uh, very much in a house in a regular street kind of thing?

Because it was like modern day I saw it very much as an adult movie.

Oh, ok.

Um, and religious.

Yeah.

Neither of which were particularly interesting. So, by the time it was re-released, I was interested in it as a phenomenon.

Oh, ok.

And as a taboo.

Yeah.

And, so, because I went to the cinema so often, it was a natural thing for me to see at that time. And because I'd gotten used to X films and seen more modern horror by then, I just needed to see it to see what the fuss was about.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Oh, OK. Was it kind of as part of your kind of research into horror.

It wasn't research. It was interest.

Yeah.

It was interest. I read about movies and anything horror that I could see I would see.

Ah, right.

By this time, again, I was also going to national film theatre.

Oh, OK.

And I was catching up on old Frankenstein movies that weren't on TV. And modern things, like David Cronenberg's early films.

Oh, OK. So it was like an independent kind of – they showed independent films and things that wouldn't-

National Film Theatre would show- just show, you know, usually, directors' stuff. Occasionally... It was pretty snotty about horror. And I went to see Shivers and Night of the Living Dead there and the audience were sort of taking- they were tittering at it. At the low budget, bad acting and stuff, they really weren't into low budget horror. They all wanted foreign classic. British classics.

Right.

They wanted, you know, classic high art. But obviously there was a lot of demand for stuff and... the BFI were one of the few places showing older films at the time, so when they occasionally did a horror or sci-fi season, I'd be interested, but the regular patrons saw it more of a joke.

Oh, right. Was this around the same time as you saw The Exorcist.

Yeah. This is between the time Exorcist came out and the time I saw it.

Yeah.

But with things like Cronenberg's Shivers I was getting more up to speed with modern horror. And Night of the Living Dead. So those sort of prepared me for you know wanting to know more about it.

You said in the survey that you find the film a bit sort of slow and talky the first time.

Well, when I finally did see it, it wasn't with a great audience. It was an afternoon. There were some schoolgirls there. There was me. I don't think I was even... 78... I don't think I was even old enough to get in there legally. I might only have been 17.

(Laughs.)

So it could've been a Saturday, or it could've been a school holiday. Um, let's see, I've got the date. November... 78... the 7th.

Oh, right.

So I don't know what day of the week that was. But it was pretty empty. It was afternoon.

Yeah.

If it was gonna be busy it'd be like Friday night, Saturday night. So it was almost empty, which wasn't great.

Yeah.

And... The... It was far more talky than I was expecting. There's a detective and a priest and the priest is worried about his mother and, to me, all of this was completely... I mean, police procedurals, they're way behind the audience.

Yeah. (Laughs.)

So all of this was just... I was just only interested in the horror bits.

Yeah.

And I wasn't following the story terribly well. I wasn't- Dialogue wasn't necessarily something you'd hear clearly on speakers back then.

Ah right. You mentioned the um-

You'd have like one mono speaker at the front of the cinema and depending on acoustics and how good the speaker was (laughs) you wouldn't always hear what was being said.

That's crazy (laughs).

So dialogue scenes tended to suffer. So, I mean, I was confused by the candle going up in the attic. I didn't know what that was in terms of the – I mean, I'm used to Dracula's, vampire's silver, stakes

Yeah.

I was interested in the rules. And the rules of what was going on weren't clear to me from this and she sort of urinates on the carpet and didn't know what that meant.

Yeah.

Her talking to her clay bird. I wasn't following the story very well. And, of course, the crux of it, as an adult, now I know it's about the priest struggling with his faith.

Yeah.

I wasn't getting that at all (laughs).

Oh, right.

You know, I was just waiting for the exorcist to turn up and sort things out. And of course all of the scientific tests that she goes through

Yeah

Are very intricately done, but, again, I already knew that they were barking up the wrong tree. There was so much of the film that I was- I was- I was bored by. Because.... I wasn't the right audience for it.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

Yeah.

I was more used to... sort of... pulpier American horror films. Death Race 2000.

(laughs) Ah, right, yeah.

The Devil's Reign. You know, something where you'd have an action scene every ten minutes.

Do you think the- Had the things you'd read about the film mostly focused on the big effects sequences and that kind of thing as well?

Yes. Yes, I did. They were very concerned about swearing.

Oh, right.

Most of which I didn't understand. The masturbation scene, I wasn't quite up to speed with female sexuality at 17 (laughs).

(Laughs)

So I saw it as a violent act... And it was a big fuss, but to me it wasn't... I wasn't a taboo to me. I was just taking it at face value.

Yeah.

I think it was more shocking that she pushed her- her mum's face into it. That was more shocking.

Yeah.

But the head-spinning scene just got laughs.

Oh, right, yeah.

And, again, that was very built up. And, again, I couldn't see any physical reason for it without her neck breaking.

Yeah, of course. Which they've, uh, since-

Well, I was being far too logical about it. It was a shock scene, but that's not happen- And it looked too much like a dummy.

Yeah.

Um, the atmospheric stuff did start working on me. The temperature change.

Oh, OK. Yeah.

But these are more traditional demonic... symptoms.

Things that kind of followed the rules.

Yes. I mean, it's like Devil Rides Out. There are temperature changes when a demon turns up. So when the exorcism starts for real, then I was more interested. I knew what was going on (laughs) and I could follow it better.

Right (laughs).

The scene that actually chilled me was the one of her floating up. I knew how it was done, but there was a top shot of her floating up towards the camera.

Yeah.

And that slow speed and her eyes being whited out, that actually worked on me.

Ah, right.

So it wasn't the jolt effect or the shockingness of anything, because – I dunno – after watching so much 60s and 70s cinema you got pretty used to stuff.

Yeah.

But the creepy aspects did work on me. But, again, I really wasn't interested in the adult subplot.

Yeah. Do you think it would've made the film more enjoyable, or less, if the cinema was full, do you think?

Um, yes. If there were less people mocking it and if there were people who jumped or screamed at the jolts, that might've helped.

Yeah.

Because I'd seen Carrie before then.

Oh, right.

Packed on a Saturday night, and the shock effects actually sort of almost brought the cinema down. I mean everyone jumped at the same time.

Did the ending get them (laughs)?

The ending, yeah. And the screaming. And the blokes all jumped as well. And it was electric.

Brilliant.

So, with a full audience you'd have a better chance of getting something out of the viewing.

Yeah. Was that your regular cinema at the time? You mentioned it was the Granada.

Yes. Yes, it was. So this would be the Granada in Kingston. So it was a big screen. Um. The stalls had been into cinemas 2 and 3.

Oh, OK.

So we were all sat up in the circle with the screen where it used to be, so it was a big, grand screen. But it worked better when there was an audience.

So you were in the big section with the-

Up in the circle, yes.

Ah, right. What kind of things did they usually do there, do you remember? Was it just kind of mainstream-?

Well, it would be all- That was the biggest, best screen in town at the time. So the big disaster movies. The Bond films. And it was all double-bills then as well. You'd get, you know, Planet of the Apes re-runs, Shout at the Devil, and I saw The Omen there. I mean, whatever was the big film at the time would be on that screen.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah. Were you going to see pretty much anything at that time or was it mostly horror?

I was more more fussy than that (laughs).

(Laughs.)

There would be, you know, 4 or 5 films showing, locally, so I'd usually pick one a week. So I'd be fairly selective about it.

Yeah.

But, I dunno. It was cheap and it was enjoyable. And you normally got like 4 hours entertainment out of 50p, so I was really hooked on it.

Brilliant.

Bought the film magazines that gave you a sort of heads up of what was coming up, and you got lots of photographs from Film Review and Photoplay. But there was very little about makings of films. Which is why I latched onto the making of books. So there were a couple making of Exorcist books. And there was one on Exorcist 2 as well. And I was just hungry for how these things were made.

Yeah.

Sort of, horror magazines didn't really kick off until the 80s. Or even making of magazines.

Yeah.

Um... So I didn't enjoy it as a story until the 2000 re-release.

Had you watched it again before then and not enjoyed it or was it just you didn't give a chance again until then?

I must've given it another chance on VHS.

Yeah.

Because, again, it wasn't allowed on VHS in Britain.

Yeah. Yeah.

So, in terms of research and having something that was taboo, you'd get these things that weren't allowed. So, until it came out- I don't know when it came out. It must've been the 2000 release when it was finally allowed on home video.

Yeah.

Or possibly when Ferman died. But it wasn't on VHS for decades. So I'd bought a copy from the states somehow.

Oh, right.

So I must've watched it again.

Yeah.

Aw! I don't know when that would've been.

Did it just sort of not leave an impression on you the second time much either or-?

Well, I'd have followed it a lot better.

Yeah.

Um. But the- the decision... Until Kermode got in and added some scenes back in, which I think was 2000.

Oh, the Version You'd Never Seen.

Yes.

Yeah.

That's the first time that the plot actually made sense. And the priest's conflict of faith and the decision he makes at the end, that was the first time I'd fully grasped it.

Yeah. Had you seen the documentary he'd made before that with the deleted scenes and that kind of thing?

Um. I must've done, yes.

Um. So you thought the second version was clearer and the story was-

Clearer, yes. Absolutely. But, um, is the version, is that the one with the spider walk?

Yes.

Oh, right. OK. Because, again, it cleared the film up, but to put in some extra jolts they put in stuff that I don't think worked as well. Certainly, he was putting in a lot more Captain Howdy places all over the place, electronically.

Oh, yeah. The little inserts?

Yes. It was no longer subliminal. It was staring you in the face.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

And the spider walk looked like a mixture of old and new footage, so I thought they'd cheated, because the actual close up of the face I thought was like new.

Oh, right.

When she sort of hisses at the screen, it didn't look like 70s stuff.

Yeah. I'll have to rewatch that.

I thought that they'd shot the long shot of her walking up and down doing the spider walk and then abandoned it because it didn't look convincing. So, I'm not sure that that whole sequence was completed back then.

Yeah. Did you watch that in the cinema when it came out or did you-?

Oh, yes. Strangely, we were in the states for that. 2000.

Oh, right.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

And it was a chance to see it in the cinema again. And I saw it with a friend who’s a big horror fan and yeah it was... I dunno, it just made sense, I was concentrating more on it I don’t know. But the story finally made sense. And, of course, any anticipation you had that was wrong you’ve sorted out on earlier viewings.

Yeah, of course.

If you were expecting more wow or expecting less chat, I’d already been over those hurdles and knew pretty much what I was getting.

Yeah.

I knew not to expect too much, but I was actually following it properly. The thing about that screening, which was at Universal Studios west coast, nice big cinema.

Yeah.

Pretty full. Was that, just as the film was starting, a family came in with young kids, and the dad was carrying a baby.

(Laughs) Right. Oh dear.

It shows you that in the States if you get an R rating, anyone can get in. With an adult, anyone get in.

Oh, of course, yeah.

If the child’s got an adult with them, they’re allowed in.

That’s crazy. Did the children make it through the screening?

I don’t know. (Laughs.) The baby looked asleep. But just the fact there’s a baby coming into The Exorcist was just... miles... thousands of miles away from our experience of it in the UK.

Of course.

When, you know, we couldn’t have it in the home specifically because of children.

Yeah.

That was the main reason for it staying off home video was so that children watch it at home alone not knowing what the hell was going on. So the American attitude to horror movies is just completely different. They’re just scary things.

Was the- Sadly, I’ve never been America, but I always see in documentaries and advertisements and things like this that American movie audiences are very animated compared to British ones.

Oh, right. Yes.

Is that true or is that like a-?

With comedies, yes. They’ll stand up and clap if they enjoy something.

Oh, right.

They don’t talk to themselves but they do talk at the screen more. You do get more comments.

(Laughs) Oh, OK.

People not- swearing or Oh my God, they'll talk more to it. I remember watching Capricorn 1, again, in an afternoon with about 5 other people in the audience, and at the end the hero gets rescued in the nick of time, and this guy sitting down the front just stood up and started cheering.

(Laughs.)

And it's like – he was completely into it. There was no-one else in the cinema. And that's just how he reacted to stuff.

Sounds great!

(Laughs.) We also saw Revenge of the Pink Panther in a packed sort of multi-cinema audience and we could not hear the dialogue. They were laughing so hard at the sight gags, we didn't hear much of the dialogue.

Oh, right.

They really- not overreacted, but reacted enthusiastically to something, but you couldn't always hear it. But, yes. Noisier (laughs).

(Laughs.) Were you a fan of that, or was that too much?

No, I wanted to hear it as well (Laughs).

Ah, right. So what would you say- So you'd say your view of the film has kind of changed with this new version?

Um, in terms of it being a good story, yes. But I've always held it in high regard as a phenomenon.

Yeah. But less so as a film?

Yes.

OK.

It's something that I watched to sort of analyse. It's like, why was this a hit? Why were the things in this film a hit at the time? It's like that and Night of the Living Dead, these are all like turning points for horror. They raise the barrier. And they're mainstream hits. So, again, that informs, you know, it gets in jokes, it's referred back to, becomes part of the culture.

Yeah.

Where as there are so many horror films which are held by fans as being fantastic but they don't really make an impact.

Yeah. They don't make that jump into the mainstream.

No. Not at all. To me, it's something that I study more than enjoy, I guess.

Yeah.

But, again, going into, reading about the director and the making of the film- I mean, the making of the film is as interesting as the film itself, in, um-

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I mean, reading about it is a lot of fun. The antics of Friedkin and how he dealt with Linda Blair and the other actors and the special effects- all of that – are fascinating. Putting the set into a meat-packing factory so that you could see their breath.

Yeah, of course.

Just, you know, extreme filmmaking, which is sort of logical but it’s tough for the actors. But that sort of thing, is of interest, is more interesting than watching it.

Yeah, of course. I always like the one of him slapping the actor at the end to get him to shake his hand while he’s over the dead priest at the end. That’s insane (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right. Yeah. That’s not standard tactics.

No. Not so much.

Coincidentally, um, down the line. I accidentally bumped into Linda Blair.

Oh, right!

We were wandering around a shopping mall in Las Vegas and she was doing a signing.

Ah, brilliant.

They have these collectible shops, that mostly sell sports memorabilia.

Oh, OK.

You know, signed baseball, signed photographs and stuff. Which are of no interest to me. And they do lots of kind of Beatles covers and stuff like that. But she was just there without any kind of queue.

Oh, right.

And so we ran in and talked to her and got a photograph with her.

Oh, right. That’s a lucky break!

Which is- you know – wasn’t expected.

Ah, what was she like, was she nice?

Oh, absolutely yes. And I’d just read the making of Exorcist 2, and so she knew that weren’t just casual fans we were sort of into it. So I was talking to her about, uh – Well, she’s not portrayed very well in the book. The writer portrays her as a sort of self-centered teenager.

Oh, right.

But she reckons that he spent more time drinking with Richard Burton than the others and was sort of biased against them, because, you know, he was drunk half the time. She wanted to answer back.

Yeah.

To the accusations in the book. So that’s mostly what we talked about. And I also bumped into Dick Smith.

Oh, amazing!

Again, by accident. I went to a horror convention, and it was mostly modern horror makes, but it was accented on the special effects people, people who make masks and stuff. And he was there. I don't know why. He wasn't announced to be there. It was just a lucky coincidence. But I bumped into him.

Brilliant.

Well, we didn't talk much because he was very much in demand, but it was lovely to meet him because certainly his work on the film is astonishing.

Yeah.

More to do with the ageing make up on Max Von Sydow.

Yeah. I didn't realise for years that he wasn't that old. (Laughs.) It's crazy.

That's right. The best ageing make up. And people in Hollywood expected him to be older because of that film. Because he made his name with that. But of course he was 30 years younger than he looked.

Yeah. I think I was shown a Bergman film while I was studying undergrad from the same kind of period and I was just like, "Why isn't he 70 years old in this?"

I think, obviously it was a risk for the director and he had to sort of beg for the role. I'm sure he had someone older in mind. And it's just astonishing. You see close up photographs and you can't tell. It's really astonishing.

Yeah, definitely.

Something else Dick Smith did was the Mohican on Robert De Niro in Taxi Driver.

(Laughs.) Oh, right. Was that him, was it?

Yeah. De Niro refused to shave his head.

That's crazy.

So that hair cut is a bald wig with a hair cut on. Normally you can spot bald wigs a mile away. They crinkle in the wrong places and you can see the seam and that has just fooled me for years.

Yeah. I must've seen that movie about 20 times I've never noticed.

His stuff is amazing, because you don't it's a special effect and that's the best kind of thing.

Is that one of the main draws for you for horror then, the effects work and the skill that goes into that?

Well, I like the mythology of it and connecting it with what made it into an interesting horror film. So I look at the literary origins as well as the technical ones. And I enjoy being frightened. I'm not so keen on jolts, because anyone blowing up a paper bag can do a jolt. But unsettling you is quite difficult. I watch a wide variety- I thought I'd run out of horror films at one point. Thankfully the Japanese cycle started.

(Laughs.) Right.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I was unscareable and I started watching things like *The Ring* and *The Grudge* and I was scared all over again so that sort of revitalized my interest in the genre. I don't know. I'm not- I don't like the religious ones. I just like the offbeat ones. But generally they are supernatural, ghosts and things.

Yeah. So, how do you feel about the religious aspects of *The Exorcist*? Is that part of the reason the film doesn't grab you, do you think?

I think it is. I think it scares religious people more, because it is an actual depiction of how the devil would get to someone in the comfort of their own home.

Yeah.

So that's a worst case scenario for the religious.

You don't consider yourself a religious person in that sense.

Yes. Again, it's not sort of logical. Well, it is a test of faith. They've not been targeted because they're evil people. They're just using the family to get at the priest. I dunno. Normally it would be more of an instant karma thing. Someone's bad and then they get punished.

Yeah. So this was more kind of mysterious and through the side door?

Yes. There's a lot more stuff in churches. There's priests involved. Only the priests can solve it. It's very biblical. (Laughs.) And that stuff I don't know much about, so I was- So that added to me not being able to understand it as well. And, again, you got the impression it was something that happened in America and not in Britain. I'd not heard of exorcisms over here. It seemed like a more distant thing. It couldn't happen here, it was something that was happening in America. And it was supposedly based on a case in America, but it's just not something you hear at all over here. It may have been more of an American fear because they'd heard of things like this. You've got exorcists on the radio over there.

(Laughs.) Yeah, of course.

So to them it's more like a thing that could happen.

Yeah.

I dunno. Their belief systems are more prone to that. People are scared by horror films if they are actually scared by these things before hand. If you're scared of spiders you won't like a spider movie.

Yeah, of course.

It depends on what you're frightened of, so I can see that working a lot better in America where they're more religious.

Yeah. Do you mind me asking, so you didn't have a religious upbringing? Was it something that you sort of had and didn't get into or something that you weren't raised with?

Not raised. My parents weren't at all religious. They were quite keen on it at school. So there'd be religious studies, there'd be prayers in the morning. I even went on a Christian summer camp, which... was starting to work on me. (Laughs.) But I was only going really because it was a week with my mates somewhere sunny.

(Laughs.)

But they had prayer meetings every day and stuff, so they were trying to get you while you were young. So I was thinking about it back then, but it just really didn't take. But, generally, I was just looking for films that would scare me as oppose to thinking that this would scare me.

Is that what the difference was with The Omen? The Omen was just scarier?

I can't explain The Omen, because again it's pretty much the same plot.

Yeah.

I dunno. It's less about God and it's more about Satan.

Oh, OK. Yeah. There's less of the kind of Christians-as-heroes kind of thing?

Yes. Because it's ordinary people dealing with it. In fact, you're following around a non-believer, in terms of Gregory Peck. But it is as religious, but the scares are less religious. It's more like Final Destination where just ordinary things can happen. It was creepy because people would just get knocked off.

Yeah.

And it was easier to follow.

So it was just better as a story in that sense?

They'd have a murder scene every ten minutes. It was just much more my kind of thing. (Laughs.)

(laughs.)

I think I liked it more and it worked on me more because it was set in Britain. It had a couple of American stars but it was all European and London, you know, with the safari park, it was all much more familiar. I think it brought the horror home for me. And I just enjoyed it far more.

You mentioned your interest in why The Exorcist became such a big hit and that kind of thing...

Yes.

What do you think were some of the reasons for that, if you had to guess?

(Sigh.) It was all driven by books back then.

So the success of the book was a big part in the film becoming...

Yes. If the film is a bestseller, then that gets interest going. If millions of people have read a book, people think, "Oh, what's this?" Quite often the movie companies had bought the book before it's even hit the shelves and it gets incorporated into the marketing.

Yeah.

And the writer was a Hollywood script writer, so I'm sure he set it up to be filmable.

Yeah. Course.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

The mad thing about William Peter Blatty is that his previous hits had been comedies.

Oh, yeah. I heard about that.

He wrote my favourite Inspector Clouseau movie, A Shot in the Dark, and it's like, how on earth did you get from A to B? (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

How do you write something so... There's a lot more comedy in Exorcist 3 and 9th Configuration which he also wrote and directed and again those are part of what he calls the Faith Trilogy. So 9th Configuration and Exorcist 3 are about faith. Again, it helps me to know what the movie's about beforehand to know what thread you're supposed to be following. But 9th configuration is half comedy, very black comedy.

Oh, right.

Quite like, sort of, MASH. And, uh, if anything is taboo-breaking, if people haven't seen something in the cinema before, if they haven't heard a child swearing before, if there's something in it's that new and shocking, people like to be shocked and like to be scared. But again it's still madness that it was such a big hit and that the studio put so much behind it. Because there's nothing really that compares to it beforehand.

Yeah, of course. It's one of the reasons I chose it for this study. It's insane how successful it was at the time. Because it's like a cult film now, but at the time it was a mainstream blockbuster.

It was an early blockbuster. It was before the disaster movies. It's when bestsellers could make it. I guess it's down to Friedkin liking it and choosing the story and going ahead with it.

Was that a noticeable trend at the time?> They'd just take bestselling books and transfer them?

It's pretty much what had happened in Hollywood since silent movies. They wanted to know what Ben Hur... Gone With the Wind... and if the public liked it they'd take the bestselling book and they knew they could spend the money, risk the money, and dramatise it.

Yeah.

Though of course in today's spoiler-free land it's anathema because you know what the story is before you go and see it. You like the story and you want to see how they do it. It's like The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. You're interested to see how they changed the book and how they visualized it, but you know exactly what happens. So it was an odd thing back then. Yeah, so it is still, I haven't got the answers for why it was such a huge hit. Like any Hollywood film, you don't know you're making hit film when you're making it. It could be a flop, day one, or it could take off.

Yeah, of course.

You can try and spend loads on marketing and everything. You just don't know until it happens. I know they had queues around the block. They did strike gold with that one.

Yeah. It's crazy. So how do you feel films that are derived from the Exorcist, not even just the sequels but other exorcism films that kind of play with the same formula, how do you feel they compare? Have you seen-?

Exorcism movies, there's none that compare.

Yeah. Were you not into the sequels as much?

Exorcist 2 was very hard to get into.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

The director wanted to make a movie about good as opposed to evil, and the stuff with the locusts and everything. It was very tough to follow.

Yeah. It's mad, isn't it?

The only thing I really remember from that is a nail going through a foot, someone treads on a nail, and that was quite a unusual pre-Friday the 13th prosthetic effect that I'd not seen. And the ending was a mess. It was reshot several times. The American ending was different to the UK ending, so the ending didn't make much sense. And it depends on which version you watch as to which ending you're gonna get.

Yeah. Didn't they do the same thing with Exorcist 3 as well, a lot of that was reshot?

That's right. They realized they realized they hadn't got an exorcism in it. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Problem for an exorcist movie.

Yes. Big problem. So that's sort of spliced into the end. And the remakes, or whatever those recent ones were...

The prequels?

The prequels, yes. Didn't grab me at all.

Again, they reshot all of those. They just seem to struggle to make a sequel.

Yes. They seem to be completely disconnected. But my favourite era is the 70s movies. I enjoyed the surge of horror movies that came after that. There were lots of devil movies. The Omen and those, supernatural horror movies came back. I mean, Legend of Hell House was before The Exorcist but obviously it was rereleased. So it did keep horror films in the cinemas until the slasher movies came out.

You said you were a big fanner of Hammer.

Yes. Which I pretty much missed in the cinema. I saw one Hammer film in the cinema.

Ah, right. You caught up after the fact on video.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

Yes. It was on TV. It was mostly late-night TV that you'd catch the Hammer films. But, you know, those had much simpler stories. I mean, there's subtleties to them obviously, but they were certainly easier to watch as a teenager, which I think was pretty much the audience they were going for. (Laughs.) Which is the main cinema age. It was still young. And certainly they had huge success in America. They lost success in America when they added more sex, and of course that's the thing that tips up the certificate.

Yeah, of course.

So as long as they had, lots of blood, staking, all of that would pass, and the kids would see that in America, so that's all part of Halloween over there. Over here, you know, it was adults only.

Yeah.

I love the acting. I love, again, the Britishness of it, made it more scary over here for me.

So the sort of Americanness of The Exorcist was a little bit of a barrier in way, or not?

Well, it brought horror movies into the present, which Hammer tried to catch up with. Its most interesting film is *To The Devil A Daughter*, which was its last horror film, but that is Hammer trying to do a modern Exorcist movie. There's sex in it. It's based on a Wheatley. So it is black magic, Satanism, and, again, it works for me in being creepy.

Yeah.

Satanism works. Black magic works. All of that. But they did add more sex to it. The Exorcist, again, did mean that you could show more.

Yeah, of course.

It upped the ante. And people sort of work up to Dick's special effects. So you started getting, you know, bladder effects under the skin, tubes under the make up causing spurting blood, spurting vomit. I mean, there's not much that he did in the film, but all of it was revolutionary in terms of horror effects. So, those were all done to death after that. "Oh, we can do this! We can do this!" And he was very open with his technique, so anyone who asked him would be told how to do stuff, and so people would use his techniques. Scanners, all that kind of thing, is basically just Exorcist effects.

Yeah. So it became like a touchstone for...

It was popular, it was affordable, and that kept horror going for many years, decades even, the stuff that he'd perfected.

Um, just one more question if that's OK. I don't want to keep you too long. I was speaking to a lady who saw the film in 74 when it came out originally...

Wow. Yep.

And she mentioned that she saw it in small in Wales, and she was saying that cinema audiences were very different back then, the sort of behavior and the chattiness, and that kind of thing was...

Oh, very much, yes.

Would you be able to talk a little about that, please? Just because I was curious, it never even occurred to me before she...

How old are you?

Oh, I'm 34, so I missed the 70s sadly.

(Laughs.) Bad luck. If you talked or caused a noise in the audience, chances are the usher would either caution you or get the manager.

Oh, right.

So people would very much watch the film. They'd be quiet during the film.

Yeah.

The strange thing about our cinemas were you could turn up at any time during the film. There was none of this booking seats and stuff.

Oh, OK.

You'd go in when you turned up.

And it'd just be sort of rolling on a loop?

Yes.

Ah, right.

There'd be about 5 to 10 minutes between screenings. There'd often be a support film, which I don't think the re-release of Exorcist had.

Oh, OK.

The big budget ones that were over 2 hours, they'd get away with just being one film.

Yeah.

The Omen, the Bonds, the biggest films, would be a single film. But most everything else had a support film with it. So you'd have a programme of about 3-4 hours.

Is that because they could charge, because people just wanted to see the one big film?

Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

It was like an incentive to get people to watch other films?

Yes. To get someone to see a low budget British horror you'd need 2 films as a sort of an apology.

(Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

So there was a lot more 90 minute films that would be released on double bills, otherwise you felt you were being cheating. You’d quite often, even in the local cinemas, quite often get a brochure to go with it.

Like a programme?

Yes, a programme. Again, with the bigger films. But you’d definitely get them in the central London cinemas, but also see those in the local cinemas. They’d also sell Film Review, which would give you interviews and photographs and what was coming up.

Ah, right. Yeah.

But you could go in any time. The only time you couldn’t go in is if it was sold out. This would happen more like on Friday and Saturday nights. The thing would sell out and you’d have to wait for the screening to end to go in. So you’d actually be queuing outside. But during the week. During weekday evenings, I’d go in after school, pick up the film halfway through and then see it through again and see the first half later one.

That sounds crazy.

It’s crazy. And I regret doing it with things like Jaws and Towering Inferno.

Yeah.

I always remember watching these films now when I first came into the film. Bond films, rereleases of Bond films. It was like a rolling thing.

Was it like an interesting puzzle to figure out what was going on when you were halfway in?

Absolutely. Yeah. So it was less about story and more about taking each scene at face value.

Oh, right.

Yeah. No talking. There’s obviously smoking. Usually sometimes all the way through the cinema, sometimes just to one side.

Yeah.

But, behavior-wise, the main thing was that people were just there for the film and they wanted to hear it all.

Yeah. OK.

If they did talk, they’d whisper. It was far better behaved back then.

That sounds nice.

Even as she said, in local cinemas. Anyone who was talking would get, I dunno, kicked. (Laughs.) Or thrown out.

That’s fair (laughs). Brilliant. Do you mind if I ask you just as a background question, what kind of job you do for a living? Just vaguely.

I was very interested in films. I couldn’t get into the film industry. And I took a side branch into TV.

Oh, right, brilliant.

So I got into TV at university.

Yeah.

And that got me a career basically.

Amazing.

So now I'm in what they call post production, where everything's edited and sound mix. I'm more to do with supporting the sound suites and the edit suites and hooking them up with machines and tape decks and everything and copying stuff.

Ah, nice.

Once the thing's been finished, everybody suddenly wants a copy, so making copies, making files, doing the delivery options. So it's usually the last part of the operation. When something's been finished we've gotta get it to the BBC quickly, gotta get it to the client, gotta get a copy to the lawyers, all that kind of stuff.

Yeah.

So I'm in the distribution end, the final step in post production.

Brilliant. That sounds great.

It sounds more interesting than it is (laughs).

(Laughs.) So I think that's all the questions I have. Unless there's anything else you wanted to mention that I didn't ask about or anything?

I'd mention. One of the 2 main film magazines was called Photoplay and they did a special for Exorcist 2, which might be of interest.

Oh, OK.

It's called Devil Movies, so it's a big publicity piece for Exorcist 2, but it does mention all the other horror films that grew up around The Exorcist. It mentions Audrey Rose, Suspiria, The Omen. It's a great sort of thumb guide to the phenomenon, seen from like a 1977 perspective.

That sounds great. I'll have to have a look for that.

There's lots of pictures and interviews and stuff. It's basically to push Exorcist 2, but it's interesting in what else they cover. Especially because Photoplay wasn't very interested in horror films. They'd do 4 pages on the latest Miss Marple film or, who's the other one, Poirot, and you'd get one column for any horror films.

Oh right.

So for them to actually do a special about horror films was very unusual.

Do you think that's because of... Was there a lot of anticipation for Exorcist 2?

I think so, yes, because there weren't many sequels back then.

Oh, OK. Of course.

And because The Exorcist had been a phenomenon, people were interested to see what happened next, so I think as an idea it was a good idea. But the reviews

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

coming over from America sort of dampened our enthusiasm for it. But it is fascinating in what the writers came up with that would happen to the characters after the events of the first.

Yeah.

But it's hard to take as an actual serious movie because there are so many missteps.

It's, yeah, it's crazy.

Well, I mean Boorman can do great stuff. He can do Deliverance, but he can also do Zardoz.

(Laughs.)

Exorcist 2 falls between the two. The tap dancing scene was particularly funny.

(Laughs.)

That would be my best tip as a period snapshot.

Yeah, brilliant. Thank you. I'll see if I can dig that up, if there are any archives up here, there should be.

Ebay might have it.

Oh, yeah, of course. I'll give that a go. Thanks for talking to me, again. It's been brilliant. It's been really helpful, thank you.

That's quite alright. I might need your disclaimer sent to me again.

Oh, yeah. No problem.

If you can send me the link for that, I'll be able to send that back to you.

Brilliant. I'll send it over this afternoon.

Thank you very much.

Brilliant. Thanks again for talking to me.

That's alright.

Thanks. Have a great day.

Thank you and you.

Cheers.

Bye bye.

Bye.

Kristen

Particulars: Female; 36-45; UK. **Format:** Telephone.

Hi, Martin!

Hi, Kristen. You OK?

Yeah, not bad, thanks. How are you?

Yeah. Good, thank you. Thanks for talking to me.

No problem at all.

Can you hear me ok and everything?

Yes. Can you hear me?

Yeah. Brilliant. Thank you. You don't mind if I record this do you?

No. Course not.

Brilliant. Thank you. Sorry, just had to get all of my bits and bobs lined up to record everything. Um. Shouldn't take very long. Definitely won't take more than an hour, I would imagine.

Sure.

And I'm just going to sort of... This kind of stands apart from your survey responses if that's ok, so I'll probably ask you a couple of things that you've already talked about in the survey.

Sure.

And if there's anything you don't remember that's totally OK, because it was a long time ago. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

And if there's anything you don't want to talk about that's totally cool, but there's nothing too heavy.

(Laughs.) No. Yeah, sure.

Okie doke. Right. You said you watched the film for the first time at a midnight showing in Birmingham.

Yes. That's right. Yeah. When I was at university at Warwick. Because it was banned for a long time, wasn't it? It was kind of part of the video nasties?

Yeah.

Yeah. I remember there being sort of really cut versions of it doing the rounds on, like, pre-recorded and then people were copying them. But, yeah. I never really saw it, and that was the first time I saw it.

Ah, right. Was the cinema your usual one? I think you said that you drove from Warwick to Birmingham and Google tells me that's 45 minutes away which sounds like a bit of a hike (laughs).

Yeah. Yeah. A load of us who had never seen it before kind of went and kind of, yeah, drove. So it wasn't really- Although that area, I think the nearest cinema then anyway was in Coventry, so it wasn't much further than that.

Yeah.

But, yeah, it was a bit of an adventure really, to all get – there was about five of us in the car, I think. (Laughs.)

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

Going to see it (laughs). And my friend who’s really really terrified of anything horror related, so I was like, “Oh my god, I don’t know what she’s gonna do, she might actually... (laughs) die of fright watching this movie.”

(Laughs.) Oh, dear.

Cause we’d built it up in our minds as well as this being the, kind of, most terrifying movie. There was a lot of the hype surrounding it, which was still [cut off]

Oop. Hello?

Oh. Hello!

Sorry, I think I lost you there for a second.

Oh, I just said a lot of the hype around it was quite apocraphal, you know. We’d heard that it was the most frightening movie ever made and people had fainted and thrown up in the cinema and things like that.

(Laughs.) Oh, right. So all that stuff was still going around in the 90s for you?

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. In a way, even more so, because you had the fact that not many people really had sort of seen it in that era.

Yeah.

So I think it was just this idea of this, the most terrifying movie ever made kind of thing.

Yeah. So, were they rumours of how people were reacting to it in the 90s or were they kind of rumours of how people reacted to it in the 70s?

Yeah. It was more kind of that, really. As opposed to how people were reacting to it in the 90s. It was more about when it first came out. And then, obviously, the stuff about how the set was cursed and those kind of stories that followed the film and made the film more than just the actual movie itself.

Oh, yeah. So it was a bit of a kind of event?

Yes! Definitely. And I think cinemas did that as well in terms of they had these midnight screenings and screenings at the witching hour to kind of build that (laughs) on that mythos.

(Laughs.) Oh, right. Was it released on Halloween? I can’t remember when it was...

Yeah. I can’t remember either. It might’ve been. I remember it being not super cold like winter, but cold enough that it was kind of like I said an adventure getting in the car. And my car at the time was my first car, and it was like a Ford Escort Mark 2, so it didn’t have the best heating (laughs).

(Laughs.) Oh, right. Yeah. What was your take on all of the hubbub around it, the rumours of people being sick and the kind of cursed set and that kind of thing? Did you believe those things or were you a bit skeptical or...?

Yeah. No. Stuff like that really fascinates me, but I'm not a believer in ghosts or demonic possession or anything like that. So, I think, what interests me is more the psychology of people... that these things become... like I said, there's this mythos around them, and people look for coincidences around things that are just explainable away by things that happen on set everyday, but you look for it, don't you?

Yeah.

Because one thing happened and then, oh my god, it's, "The set is cursed..." It's slightly different with this idea that it's the most terrifying movie ever made and that people are throwing up and fainting and stuff. I was quite interested in cinema history anyway and there was a lot of... from about the 50s I think, when they had a lot of those quite schlocky horrors that people like, erm, Joan Crawford went on to be in... A lot of the marketing around that was that sort of shock factor. They never showed footage from the movie. They would show people's reactions to it. You know, like screaming and fainting and looking away and crying and that sort of stuff. I just saw it as marketing really. I kind of just thought, "How frightening can it genuinely be?" So, yeah. I was intrigued, but I didn't really believe that people were genuinely... Well, I imagine that if you didn't like that kind of thing that you might look away or that you'd leave.

Yeah.

But fainting seems a bit extreme (laughs).

(Laughs). Yeah, it does. Apparently some people did do it, though, but, like, the circumstances are a bit weird.

Yeah.

There were apparently thousands of people to a cinema in the 70s so it got a bit hot, which is one of the main reasons apparently.

Oh, yeah. And I suppose as well there's that kind of group mentality that you work yourself up into a kind of collective frenzy, or that you might kind of build yourself up in advance and the nervousness... I mean, yeah. I imagine you could faint if your breathing became very shallow (laughs) and you're hyperventilating. But, yeah. That was kind of the hype around it, wasn't it? That it was just so terrifying, and that made people want to go and see it all the more.

Yeah. So were you nervous at all to see the film, or kind of excited?

Yeah. Excited. I suppose, I love horror movies. That was probably the... I didn't really realise how much I loved horror movies until maybe I was kind of in my 20s. I always used to watch horror movies and get a real sort of excitement and pleasure out of that feeling of being scared. And I like nothing more than a supernatural horror. And, obviously, even though it's demonic it's supernatural, isn't it?

Yeah.

So I was kind of excited to see it, but also kind of... I don't know. I suppose I was more nervous that it wouldn't live up to the hype (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I wanted to be really scary and I was kind of worried that it'd be sort of stupid and lame (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right. Of course, yeah. Had you watched films that had kind of done that previously? Like films that had been bigged up as classics that had disappointed or...?

Um. A couple. I mean, at that time I think my favourite horror movies were erm *The Shining*, *American Werewolf In London*, so I'd seen quite a few horror movies by that point. I think, really, because there were fewer horror movies then, I think, weirdly, I'd seen *Phantasm*, and I'd hated it at the time and I thought it was the stupidest thing ever.

(Laughs.)

I saw it again recently and I was like, “Actually this is really good!” In light of all the rubbish films that have been made in the past ten years, it actually stands up really well.

Yeah. Like your standards have kind of been lowered over the years because of the current crop?

(Laughs.) Yeah. Exactly. For every *Autopsy of Jane Doe* there's a *Saw 6*.

Yeah. (Laughs.) So you were very much into the older stuff, the kind of, *The Shining* and things like that, you weren't just watching what was coming out in the cinema at the time?

Um, yeah. I suppose my love of horror actually, I think, started – although I didn't really know this until I looked back on it and thought about it – my mum ran a mobile home video service.

Oh, cool! We used to have one of those. That's brilliant.

(Laughs.) So she basically got loads of videos. It was kind of like a franchise thing. This guy bought loads of videos and then would deliver them to various people in areas. So, it's like a sort of Avon lady but with videos. But he used to get loads of stuff that was banned. I'm not sure how. Obviously, illegally.

(Laughs.)

Um, and then, yeah, I would come home – it's terrible now, when you think about it – but I would come home from school when I was 10 or 11 and go through the videos my mum had and just kind of watch whatever. So she'd kind of walk in and see me watching things like *Driller Killer* and *Straw Dogs*, and she'd be like, “What you watching?” and I'd be like, “I don't know” and there'd be screaming and blood on screen and she'd just kind of like go, “Oh, ok. Turn it off it gets too scary.”
(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Oh, right. That's brilliant.

Totally normal.

So you just had all these video nasties and that kind of thing just lying around?

Yes. Yeah. You know. I suppose... I don't know... I think it didn't... I kind of watched them and I was never... The supernatural stuff, I think, scares me more than the blood and the gore and you know.

Yeah.

I mean, I'd seen the original Evil Dead uncut and that scared me.

Oh, right.

A lot, actually. Obviously the first one... The second one remakes it and is funny as you know, but the first one is actually quite disturbing.

Yeah. It gets a little much in a couple of places.

Exactly, yeah. So those were the things that stayed with me really. The more kind of insidious, I suppose, supernatural stuff. So I suppose going to see The Exorcist I was kind of nervous about that and about how much of it would... that I would could kind of remember afterwards and focus on and fixate and build up in my mind, because that's why I love horror movies really, because they give you that visceral sense, I suppose, of being alive, but, equally, through terror (laughs).

Yeah. I know what you mean (laughs). So your mum was very much... Did you watch horror films together or did she just leave to your own devices?

Yeah, exactly, yeah. She would leave the videos and... We were always like a film family. My brother's really into film as well. So, I suppose she sort of didn't really... You know, it was a different time. Parents used to let their kids go out in the evenings and we would skulk around until 10 o'clock at night and then come home.

Yeah.

It was weird. I think most of the horror nowadays is outside of the house, isn't it? You don't want to let children out of the house because we've got predators and terrorists and you know. In the 80s, it was kind of like you watched these movies because the rest of your life was much more cloistered. It was pre-internet.

Yeah. Never really thought about it like that. That makes sense. You mentioned in the survey that your mum like specifically locked away the Exorcist video...

Yes!

Was that standard practice for certain things or was that a special case?

She was... Kind of... I mean, she's not religious now, but she toyed with a lot of different religions. So, when I was growing up, I went to Catholic school when I was 11.

Yeah.

And I think that probably had something to do with it as well. My friends knew that they could kind of come round to my house and watch these kind of movies.

Yeah.

But, I think that a lot of... I was one of the very few non-Catholics in a Catholic school, so there was probably that sensitivity more than... And also as well she's got quite a weird relationship with religion. Like I said, she's tried quite a few. She was

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

sort of a Buddhist for a while and belonged to this kind of... I mean, I would personally call it a cult.

(Laughs.)

This kind of guru, Indiana maharaji – maraji, rather, his name was. So, yeah, I think she was always trying to find that spiritual connection. And she'd seen it obviously in the 70s and read the book. So I would say it was more the fact that she didn't want me going into school and saying to the nuns who taught me that I saw *The Exorcist* last night (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah. That probably wouldn't go down very well!

(Laughs.) No. There'd be an exorcism happening in the actual school if that was the case.

So it wasn't a case that she was worried that the film would scare you too much or anything. It was just a case of, she didn't want you going around telling everybody about it afterwards?

Yeah. I mean, I think it was a combination of both really. I think that she probably... She always said to me and my brother that she wanted us to choose whether we wanted to believe religious or not. She wanted us to choose that. And I suppose I was going to this Catholic school not because of religious reasons but it offering a kind of better education.

Oh, OK.

And, I think, an element of her – that was the most famous, I suppose, of the films that she had. She wouldn't really... The 80s stuff, like *Evil Dead* and *Driller Killer*, were kind of past the time when she would've been watching movies in the cinema. So she probably didn't really know that much about them, whereas *The Exorcist* obviously she saw that when it first came out and she knew exactly what was in there. So there probably was an element of her wanting to keep some of it away from us.

Yeah.

And my brother was way more susceptible than I was. He was much younger. He's 7 years younger than me. So, she probably didn't want me showing my brother *The Exorcist* (laughs).

(Laughs.) Fair enough!

Good parenting there.

Definitely! You'd be surprised at how many people... Some American people took their kids when they were like 3 or 4 years old to see it. Very liberal (laughs).

Yeeah. I suppose, would kids really understand what was kind of going on? It's weird isn't it? Be interesting to see. Maybe it's only frightening to adults because you comprehend what really it's trying to tell us, that there's something out there that is inherently more terrifying than we can imagine, and that there's a Heaven and a Hell. But kids probably just think, “Oh, this is a weird monster and I don't understand it.”

(Laughs.) Yeah. It's just loud and scary.

Yes! Exactly. Kids might even find the projectile vomiting funny.

(Laughs.) Yeah. So was that the only film that was ever off-limits for you?

Um, yeah... My mum came in when I was watching Porkies and she wasn't very happy.

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.) I think it was the scene in the car with the girl where she's giving him a handjob (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right. Yeah.

Yeah, and my mum was like, "What the hell is this?" And I was like, "Oh, it's a movie about high school kids!" and she was like "right." But mostly, yeah, she let us – or let me particularly – explore them myself (laughs).

Just apart from the usual kind of the expected frowning upon sex scenes and that kind of thing?

Yeah. And again I think that was more – she's very liberal and I think that was because she didn't want me to not understand it. I mean, maybe that was the thing with *The Exorcist* as well? I mean, what is there not to understand about *Driller Killer*. It's about a guy that goes around drilling people.

Yeah.

These things are very high concept, but I suppose the stuff that leads to the big questions like "What is religion?" and "What is sex?" that's quite a big thing for a 10/11 year old to comprehend.

Yeah. You're not gonna have any sort of follow-up questions about a slasher film really.

No. Exactly. Yeah. They're just sort of... It's weird. When I say to people I find them funny... That's kind of how they're meant, isn't it? They're not really meant to scare. The ones that... I suppose, Halloween really changed the slasher genre. But if you look at where the slasher genre came out of, the *Giallo*, some of those films are ridiculous and you can't help but laugh them.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

Whereas the supernatural stuff, *The Exorcist* and *Amityville*, where there's this kind of demonic presence that is a sort of pure evil that can really take on anybody and destroy it, that feels, really, much, much scarier.

Yeah. So do you feel the religious aspects of the film kind of ramp it up a bit in that way or...?

I... think so. I mean... (sigh). That's an interesting question. I think what ramps it up, really, is this kind of concept that there is something out there that is a pure motiveless malignancy, to misquote Shakespeare. That there's a thing out there that its sole purpose is to cause as much pain and suffering as possible. You can separate that from religion. Obviously it's got that additional religious element of

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

this epic battle between God and the devil through this priest and this girl and innocence and there's a lot of kind of themes there. But, ultimately, this thing is pure evil and it can't be reasoned with and it will not stop until it gets what it wants and everything and everybody that gets in the way of that is destroyed. So I think that's the terrifying aspect of it.

Yeah. You make it sound like *The Terminator* (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah. That would be awesome, wouldn't it?

So is that kind of how you saw it at the time as more kind of like scary in that way rather than scary in like in an unstoppable monster kind of way? So you weren't really thinking about it in terms of religion when you saw it at the time or...?

Not really. I mean, I... I find... Actually, this is going to sound really weird. I don't know what impression you're going to come away with after talking to me. One of my favourite poems when I was at school and doing English literature was Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Oh, OK.

One of the reasons I like it so much is because the Miltonic portrayal of the Devil is really, really interesting and fascinating in terms of it being this... He's not this evil out there to cause mankind as much harm as possible for no reason whatsoever. He's actually quite seductive. In some places he's quite heroic. So he's this kind of anti-hero who is seductive. And I suppose there is an element of that seductiveness to *The Exorcist* as well. It's a horrible insidious seductiveness because essentially it's this old man who – or this old soul – who corrupts this young, innocent girl in this very visceral, sexualised way.

Yeah.

And I suppose for me that's what was disturbing about *The Exorcist*. It wasn't... I suppose the religious stuff. I watched it yet again recently and I realised how, I suppose, gratuitous maybe(?) some of the scenes are in it that...

Yeah.

That... With... If you look at them with kind of modern eyes and you think about... You would never, ever be able to make *The Exorcist* now, with an essentially, what was she, 13/14, Linda Blair? Maybe even younger.

Yeah.

The things that the director gets her to do in that movie are... There would be outcry now. You would never make that movie. It's interesting. I think all of this is built up around the mythos of it. But the religious aspect of it? I don't believe in God, but weirdly I believe in evil.

Oh, OK.

Not necessarily as a demonic force, but there is this kind of evil in the world. So I suppose from that perspective I thought about it from a religious, I suppose a more moralistic perspective.

Right. OK. That makes sense. So you weren't kind of fearing for your immortal soul walking into the cinema and things like this?

No. No. Actually, that reminds me of going to see... In New York I went to see *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Oh, right.

And there were Christians picketing outside. And I think they did the same thing with *The Exorcist* in the 70s, didn't they?

Yeah. In the 70s, yeah.

So, I kind of walked in, and this woman said to me, "Are you going to see this travesty?" And I was like, "Yes." And she sort of said, "You'll go to hell." And I was like, "That's ridiculous." And she said, "I hope you die. I hope you get raped and murdered on the subway tonight and you go to hell for seeing this film." And I was like, "If your God is the kind of God who punishes innocent people for seeing a film..." And I said, "Have you seen this film?" And she was like, "NO, but I know all about it?" I was like, "Frankly, I don't want to worship a God like that so frankly I'd rather go to Hell." But it was that kind of...

(Laughs.) Oh, my god.

But I've never... Going to see a film is not going to turn you into a bad person.

Yeah.

Playing a video game doesn't make you a killer. It's about context, isn't it?

Yeah.

And about predispositions to these things. So I wasn't at any point... I thought I would be scared and I was looking forward to that, but I didn't think I'd come out and either find religion or become a Satanist.

(Laughs.) Yeah. Growing up watching the video nasties and that kind of thing, did you have a frame of reference for all of the panic around them, or were you just watching them as they were available?

Yeah. I mean, it's only really looking back on it... I mean, I remember the headlines in the newspapers and... But, to be honest, as a child, you know what it's like. As a child, if somebody tells you that something is wrong and forbidden and you shouldn't have it and you shouldn't see it and it's the most awful thing anybody's ever seen then your first reaction is, "Oh my god I want to see that really badly!" (Laughs.) So, you know, that whole Mary Whitehouse and video nasty, all it succeeded in doing really was creating this underground... And it was so much easier to get... It's easy now, obviously, with downloads. But in the 90s it wasn't so easy to get videos that were kind of banned or that hadn't been passed uncut by the BBFC. It was relatively difficult. And you still went to the cinema quite a lot to see these movies. You know, it was just before DVDs when we saw it. But in the 80s it was like, you could literally go into any video store and say to the guy behind the counter, "Have you got a copy of *Evil Dead* uncut?" and he'd be like, "Yeah, hang on a minute," and he'd go into the little basement room and get you the video and

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

come out. It just made it more, I suppose, slightly more illicit and exciting to get hold of these videos.

Definitely (laughs). So would you say you were a horror fan or was that just something you dipped into now and again or were you watching mostly horror at the time or...?

No. There were a lot of movies that I watched. My favourite movies – I mean, this is slightly later in the 80s, but – um, I went to see Amadeus 15 times at the cinema.

(Laughs.) Oh, OK.

I mean, ridiculous. Literally I went to see it the first time and then everybody that I knew that I was friends with I was like, “Well, you have to go and see this film.” And I would go to the cinema a lot and I watched videos a lot, and a lot of different films. But there was something... the horror, I suppose... I do like being scared. I know a lot of people... It’s weird because I do have a very active imagination, so, like, if I go to the bathroom in the middle of the night and I’m home alone... It’s ridiculous stuff. My husband went away on a week’s walking holiday and he left the hatch off of the loft. So the loft was like open. The hatch was open. So it was like this black hole every time I walked underneath it.

(Laughs.) Right.

I was fucking convinced - this was ridiculous – but I was convinced the woman from The Grudge was going to come out of that loft.

(Laughs.)

So I have a super active imagination about stuff that I know is not... Of course the woman from The Grudge isn’t living in my loft.

(Laughs.)

But it’s this kind of weird perversity of loving to be frightened but when something does frighten me, that stays with me for a long time. And I will kind of scare myself again by thinking... Oh, I’ve just seen the bit in Exorcist 3 where – absolutely brilliant shot – where the guy comes out with the shears.

Oh, yeah!

Yeah. I will walk out and if it’s dark downstairs I’m fully expecting to see that or the Woman in Black or something... So these scenes stay with me, but I love it. I can’t stop watching horror. But in the 80s I don’t think I quite understood what it was that I loved about it. I liked being scared. I liked kind of sitting... It makes you feel alive, doesn’t it?

Yeah.

It’s that primal response.

So did The Exorcist kind of do that and bleed over into the outside world or was that not so bad?

I think the scenes that I remembered from The Exorcist that really stayed with me are when he goes in to – the priest, Damian – in to the room and she’s tied to the bed and it’s really cold in there and that scene where he first talks to the priest.

Things like, the spinning head was something that stayed with me really. But I think, ultimately, it was the voice, and that freaks me out, I think. My boyfriend at the time, who's now my husband, would do things like he would start doing the voice when I was in the kitchen on my own and he'd just come home. And it was shit like that (laughs).

(Laughs.)

But I think in terms of... I didn't find it as scary as *The Shining*, for example, because I suppose most of its fear comes from its religious implications.

Yeah.

And to me that wasn't... You know, I was never going to come out of going, "Oh, my God. Hell exists and there are such things as the devil." I was more interested in the psychology of that. Then I read and I sort of became interested in possession and wanted to read about it, but I never came to the conclusion that there really were people out there being possessed by devils.

Yeah. Whereas *The Shining* is like watching a dad kind of go insane and start trying to kill his family which is very different.

Yeah. And *The Shining* has got that kind of haunted, that really sort of very well done haunted house element. And I still don't... You know, those twins and Danny cycling round on his little tricycle, I've seen that film probably 10/20 times and I can never guess when he's gonna go around the corner and actually find those little girls.

(Laughs.)

That anticipation and the build up...

Yeah. Yeah.

And, again, I think that's what *The Exorcist* does really well. I mean, a lot of horror movies now are about jump scares.

Yeah.

And jump scares are fiiiine, if you earn them. But when you get to literally everything is jumping out at you like, you get completely desensitised to it. But *The Exorcist* was that kind of creeping tension and horror and you've got that real... it forces you to watch the screen as her head rotates and it puts you in this very intimate situation I think that is actually quite scary. And there's no real jump scares in *The Exorcist*. Even things like the projectile vomiting and the bed and stuff, you're building up to that.

Yeah.

I think that is more frightening ultimately, because you have the jump scare and then you're like, "Hahaha oh my god that made me jump" and you're constantly in this like... Whereas *The Exorcist* you watch the whole of it and you just feel uneasy and out of sorts the whole time.

Yeah. One of the things a lot of people have mentioned, which I had never picked up on myself, because it must have just worked really subtly for me, was that

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

every time they showed a shot of the bedroom door people would start worrying and giggling and getting nervous in the cinema because it's like, “Oh, we're about to go inside again.” That kind of thing.

Yeah. It is, because it's sort of... But in fairness, there's no safety in that. And this is what was interesting about seeing the stage show was that the way they did the stage show it was pretty much all in the house. But the reason they kind of ruined it was because they relied on making the audience jump out of their seats. The Exorcist isn't about that. It was never about that. The later ones... I mean, 2 is just weird.

Yeah (laughs).

And the Renny Harlin one, there's some interesting stuff in there, but, again, it's this sort of “Let's make the audience jump.” The Exorcist is not about that. It starts off and from the beginning you have just a sense of dread. Even the beginning which is this mother-daughter relationship, you know they're just building up this sweet young girl so that they can scare the shit out of you later. So everything is tense.

Yeah. So, how were you feeling when you were watching the film for the first time? Were you kind of... Was it working on you the first time...?

Yeah. Definitely. I mean... it is hard because you know what it's like. When they over hype films now, the anticipation of seeing something, it can kind of go two ways and usually it goes the way of disappointment because you know that it's never going to live up to the hype. But I did find it really... It's beautifully shot. So from a sort of film perspective, it's a more... And it deals with some very wide-reaching themes, so from that perspective I was really into it, and then it just creeps up on you. It's very insidious. Really before you know it, you're just tense and you feel... And that's how I felt watching it really and there were a couple of times where I didn't really want to be watching it, because I think it sort of seeps into you and, well, yeah, possess you (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah. You mentioned that at one point somebody ran out crying during the screening.

Yes!

Did you get a sense of how other people were taking it at the time?

There were people doing what they do in every horror movie that I've ever been in, apart from when I go to horror festivals and they're the most laid back people ever, you know. Nobody gets scared in those. There were people hiding behind their hands and looking out through. Because somehow that makes it better.

(Laughs.)

I don't know what that is. But if you're only seeing part of the screen through the lattice of your fingers then the thing that's on the screen's not gonna get you. So, yeah. There were people scared. There was obviously a lot of couples there, so the guy had brought the girl there so she'd be scared and burying her in his shoulder.

(Laughs.)

So, yeah. And there was a lot of the... You can tell when people are scared in a horror movie because they start going down into their seats and making themselves smaller and protecting themselves. So there was a lot of that going on as well.

So everybody kind of went with it? Because you hear occasionally about people laughing at the film and that kind of thing.

Yeah. In the 90s when I saw it not so much, I think. I find it interesting that people do laugh at it. I can understand why maybe in 2018 when you've got movies... But even for the 90s the special effects were pretty convincing, because they're not over the top. You know, the make up, it's real effects, isn't it? The projectile vomiting obviously is famous and is kind of I suppose something that is quite ridiculous, but if you're into the movie and you take it within the context of what else is going on then, yeah, nobody really laughed. I mean, there's the bit... They left in the subliminal.

The little face flash.

Yes. The little face flash. They left that in and there was a girl in front of us who audibly gasped and was like, "Did you see that? Did you see that?" So I don't whether she thought that only she had seen it kind of thing (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah.

But, yeah. I find nobody really... The girl, I think, who ran out crying... But people build stuff up, don't they? To the point where they've worked themselves up into this. And that's kind of what happened when I saw the stage show, was that every time there was this noise that they kept really, really, really overusing – of this sort of screeching noise – and they flashed the lights out into the audience... Oh, god, it was so annoying.

(Laughs.)

There was this family who were sitting just a few rows down from us, who kept literally jumping out of their seats. After the second time this happened I was just like, "Ow, that's really annoying," not like, "Oh, god! There's that noise again!" (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Ah, I've not seen that. So they've really gone for the jump scare technique for that?

Yeah. Parts of it were well done. But that was ridiculous. That made me laugh. But the movie never made me laugh. 2 was, like I say, weird. But I've never sat through The Exorcist and even remotely wanted to laugh, because when you think about the stakes and you think about the girl really... And Linda Blair's performance is so incredible. And everybody in that movie is incredible and the actual feat of filmmaking and... Yeah. It's not ridiculous. It's scary.

Yeah. You mentioned in the survey that you hadn't rewatched the film again?

No. So I hadn't then.

Oh, right. But you have since?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah. So we went to see the stage show and then from the stage show we were liked “Oh god, this is really, really bad.” So we decided to rewatch the movies. So I saw 2 and 3 after I saw the first one. And then I think I had seen the Renny Harlin one in 2005 but I didn't really remember it. But I certainly hadn't seen the... Because there's the two that were made, bizarre, like made around the same time by two different directors.

Yeah. Like the big flashy, jump scare one with CGI.

Yeah, that's the Renny Harlin one.

And then the slower, kind of, was it Paul Schrader?

Yes. It is, yes. So you've got Dominion and The Beginning, I think those two are called. So I hadn't seen whichever the Paul Schrader one is. So we thought well, after seeing the terrible stage show, we should... I was like, I was sure it wasn't this bad, and we got them on DVD and watched them, kind of back to back. Not in the order that they were they were made, but in the order they were supposed to be chronologically.

Oh, right.

And, weirdly, the only bit that I remembered – because I'd only ever seen 3 once – the only bit that I remembered from 3 was that scene where he's walking down the corridor with the shears. The rest of it... Like I'd completely forgotten that Damian was in it.

Oh, right.

And what's his name. That amazing actor who's Chucky.

Oh, Brad Dourif.

Yeah. Brad Dourif was in it as well. So I was kind of like, “Oh, wow.” And it is actually a much better movie than I remember it being at the time. I just remember seeing and seeing that absolutely brilliant... Well, it's probably one of the best jump scares ever made.

Yeah, definitely. You mention in the survey that you didn't really want to watch it again because you wanted to remember it as being scary. Was it a case of not wanting to get used to it?

Yes. I think because that's a problem isn't it? I mean, I recently saw – I don't know if you've seen it – but The Autopsy of Jane Doe.

No, I haven't.

It's very, very good. It's a classic kind of haunted house movie really, and in the cinema I found that really, really scary, to the point where I was sitting there – I didn't like it – it was one of the first films in ages where I was super super tense and like going “I don't like this! I don't like this!”

(Laughs.)

And then I said to my mum it's absolutely brilliant. I got it on DVD and I got her round to watch it and I was like, watching the second time, “Why was I so scared?” And that's the problem I think. With horror, horror is a one shot thing. There are

some movies that you can repeat view. There are some movies that are more than the genre. The Shining is an example of that. And actually watching The Exorcist again, with the nuanced performances and the script... But then you are not getting that visceral horror fright experience any more. You are watching a movie that happens to have the setting of the horror genre.

Yeah.

So, yeah. I didn't wanna watch The Exorcist again and not have that same feeling.

So is that how it went when you watched it again? Was it not as intense?

Yeah, no. It wasn't. Especially because we'd not long seen the play. And also I think because it is a lot more subtle in a lot of ways. Because it's weird. When you think about classic scenes that everybody remembers, those classic scenes aren't subtle at all. Head spinning around, projectile vomiting, those are not subtle scenes. But the rest of it is. I think it might not have scared when I saw it recently, but it disturbed me still. And I think that's kind of the difference. You know what's happening. You know what's gonna happen at the end. There's no sense of tension there in terms of are they gonna get out of this alive at the end, who is gonna be left standing at the end of it or are the ghosts gonna get them kind of thing. It's still very insidious.

Yeah. So was there anything...? So I guess you'd just watched the play so you'd been reminded of everything that happened in the film?

Yeah. But I'd read the book after I'd seen the film, so it's not like I couldn't pretty much remember... It's one of those films. I mean, not a lot happens in terms of the story. It's very simply told, which is what makes it so good I think. So you might forget the specifics of what happened when, but you don't forget the story. I didn't forget the film, because the film had made an impact on me. I didn't remember at all, but the original I did remember.

Oh, right. Was there anything in watching it again that struck you as different? Did it strike you as the same exact kind of experience?

No. I'd forgotten there was the bit at the beginning where they unearth the statue.

The Iraq sequence?

Yeah. I'd forgotten there was that so I was a bit, "Oh, what's going on here?" Because we'd seen that in the stage show, again done very very badly. And I'd forgotten that the father. I've forgotten his name now. Not Damien.

Oh, Merrin?

Yes. I've forgotten his name, for God's sake (laughs). I forgot that he actually comes to the party quite late. I remembered that he came much earlier. The first time was a much more visceral experience. I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know where the shocks were gonna come. So, there was definitely more tension. The second time, recently, I was able to watch it more with a... A critical eye isn't right, because it's more of an appreciation, I suppose, of what they created around the shocks.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Ah, OK. So you watched the first time not knowing what to expect and this time you knew you liked it and you knew it was a good film so you're kind of looking for how in a way?

Yeah. And I suppose just kind of enjoying and appreciating it for what it was, which is a really simple story beautifully told with great actors. The fact that it's about what it is about and the fact that it's a horror film has probably done it a disservice.

Yeah.

Because people won't watch it because it's a horror movie or because of its subject matter. And there are scenes in it, like I said, looking through it now as we are through the lens of the “me too” movement, that are very, very near the knuckle. You know. Beyond that. To get a young actress to do.

Ah, of course, yeah.

And I know that she didn't really... I read an article about her and her kind of experience on the film and that they kind of... She didn't know what she was doing most of the time. She had her script bits and...

Yeah. It seems like she was quite sheltered from what the film was.

Yes. But then on that hand you do have those very violent scenes and they are quite gratuitous, which is interesting because it sort of, like, why those decisions were made. So, I watched it now with much more awareness of the time and the history and the mythology around it so it almost becomes from a historical film perspective, film history.

I hadn't really thought about it in those kinds of terms before, of a kind of child actor doing these kinds of things. That's really interesting.

Yeah. Because, some of those scenes, like I said, I don't think you would get it made now.

No. Because the TV show they've got actresses who are like 20 years old or so, haven't they?

Yes. Yeah. And I thought the TV show was brilliant. I really really thought the TV show was brilliant.

Yeah.

Have you seen the TV show?

I've seen season 1. I thought it was great.

Yes! OK, yeah. So I've season 1. So when it revealed that she was Regan, I was like...

Yeah! That was great.

(Laughs.) So excited! And my husband was like, “Oh, my god. You're such a nerd.” But again they really played on that kind of... this very horrible, sexual possession that is in *The Exorcist* and they kind of brought out even more of in the TV show which is there's this disgusting old man sort of personification of this demon.

Yeah.

And, as you say, with teenagers it's still near the knuckle. But she was a child. It's unsavoury in that respect.

Yeah.

But that's part of its charm, isn't it? You know.

Yeah. I guess it's part of the horror of it isn't it?

Yeah. That's what I mean when I say charm. I don't mean, "Oh, isn't it fun to abuse children?" (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah.

That's what makes it fascinating and it draws you into it is that this is something that doesn't shy away from that. It shows you that really terrifying aspect of evil, I suppose.

Yeah. Um. So how did watching... Do you think it's different watching horror movies at home rather than in the cinema? Do you have a preference?

Yeah. Definitely. Definitely the cinema. The cinema really is my preference for watching movies full stop, but I think I do like the collective experience of watching a horror movie. Even though people scream and... Because when I went to see *The Woman in Black* in the cinema, it obviously had Daniel Radcliffe in it so there were loads of teenage girls in there who were obviously expecting to see Harry Potter.

(Laughs.) Right.

And they did a really... That film is quite scary. They did a really good job of making it very tense and, you know, seeing things slightly off camera that he doesn't see and you've seen and you're not sure whether you've seen and literally these girls every five seconds were screaming. My husband got super annoyed about that but it actually really added to the experience for me. So, yeah, always in the cinema. I felt more detached from *The Exorcist* watching it at home.

Yeah.

Because you're sort of sitting in the comfort of your own home and the cinema is also really dark and often quite anonymous but you sense these people around you who are having either a similar experience to you or a very different one and you get that kind of sense in a cinema that you don't get at home.

Yeah, definitely. I think that's about it really. I've taken up an hour of your time. Is there anything you want to mention that I've not brought up or anything you think might be relevant in your background about how your look at the film and that kind of thing?

No. I mean, I suppose the only kind of thing is in terms of it was one of the things that inspired me to want to tell stories. So I'm a writer, so, yeah, that kind of formulative experience, and *The Exorcist* was kind of one of them, it kind of made me want to scare people. I love that idea of this very... because you have the audience completely in the palm of your hand if you make them laugh or you make them scared. Really that's two of the most visceral experiences you can have.

Yeah.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

And really fear is the most visceral. So I've written plays after that which were in the horror genre and that is because of those formative horror experiences as a kid and wanting to recreate that for... Wanting to be the puppet master (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah.

So, yeah. The Exorcist was one of those movies that added to that.

So you carried that into your career aspirations and it's kind of formed what you wanna do?

Yeah. Exactly, yeah. And I think even though I don't find it as frightening... I didn't find it as frightening as things like The Shining... It is still a beautifully made movie that really stays and gets under your skin, so that's what... It kind of showed me really that horror can be more intellectual and challenge you more, that it doesn't have to make you jump and scare you, that it can challenge you intellectually. And I'm not sure how many horror movies... Really we've kind of gone the other way too far.

Yeah.

People should watch The Exorcist more and really realise how to do a good horror movie.

Yeah. Definitely. I agree.

Yeah. That's all really. If you need anything else from me let me know.

Brilliant. It's been lovely talking to you.

You too, Martin.

And this has been brilliant. Lots of great stuff.

Oh well I hope it was useful.

Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you very much.

Good luck with it all.

Thank you. I'll let you know how it goes. I'll probably be spamming everybody about articles and things as they come out.

Fantastic. Well, take care.

Thank you.

Bye.

Bye.

Jan

Particulars: Female; 56-65; UK. **Format:** Telephone.

Good morning.

Oh, hi. Is that Jan?

Yes it is.

Hi. It's Martin Smith from Northumbria.

I was expecting you. It's nice to hear from you.

Thank you for talking to me. How are you? Are you OK?

Good. Yes. Very well indeed. We're living in the frozen north, so I've got a bit of a sniffle, but apart from that I'm fine.

Ah, good. Thank you for talking to me. It shouldn't take more than an hour if that's OK. It probably won't take that long. Just have a few questions. Do you mind if I record this. Is that OK?

Not at all. I fully understand that. You'll want to sit and listen, won't you? You can't try to write notes while we're talking.

Brilliant. Thank you. I can't write fast enough sadly. Just to say, if you'd rather I didn't use your real name in the research when it's written up, I can change that if you like.

That's fine. I don't mind either way. I'm quite happy using my name.

Brilliant. If you change your mind-

I'm Jan. You probably just say Jan?

Yeah. We wouldn't have your surname or anything.

Not my full name and postal code? (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) No. I wouldn't publish your phone number or anything.

No. I'd be fine about.

Brilliant. Thank you. If there's anything I ask and you can't remember that's to be expected. It was quite a while ago (laughs).

Yes. When did it come out, The Exorcist? 19...

74.

Correct. I said to a friend yesterday evening. I think it was 72 or... Anyway, it was years ago. 74. Quite a few years ago, yes.

Yeah. Would you mind telling me about the first time you saw the film? Did you say it was in London in 74?

Yes. I can remember. I think I mentioned it to you before.

Yeah.

There was quite a buzz about seeing the film, I remember, when I was living and working in London at the time. And I remember feeling really well, "I don't want to see this film at all. It sounds really scary."

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Right.

But I was very excited to see it as well. So there was that combination. “Oh, do I want to go and see it?” And everybody was saying, “Have you seen The Exorcist yet?” It was quite the film to be seen at that time.

Yeah.

At that time, some music was out: Mike Oldfield, Tubular Bells. Everybody loved this music.

Oh, the theme?

It was really really super. Just very nice, alternative. And I think the 70s was a time when so many things were going on and I feel very lucky to have lived in that time.

Yeah.

And so, I was working. I was working in a hospital as a nurse and my husband was also working. So we thought, “Oh, we’ll go and see it. We’ll go and see what it’s like. It’s probably a load of rubbish.”

(Laughs.)

Before going to see it there had been people talking about it on television and on the news talking about this very anti-Christian film and it’s very frightening and there are people outside the cinema with placards and leaflets and flyers. So we went to Leicester Square to see The Exorcist.

Yeah.

And the pre-going to see it was oddly excited, because so many people were there (laughs). Milling around. Some going to see the film. But a lot of people were, “Don’t go and see it. It’s really frightening. It’ll really change your life.” Which I think for people either meant, “Alright, I’m going.” Or “I’m not going.” So we went into the cinema and I do remember one thing that... We were sat quite near the front and the cinema had red screens... Not screens, curtains. Very deep beautiful curtains. We’re talking the 70s, not the new cinema things. And they used to come back before the film started. But before, there was a mouse – alright, I don’t know what. I think most people saw it and didn’t do anything. But there was just this mouse and that was bad itself. Quite scary at the beginning of the film.

(Laughs.)

I’d never seen it before and I’ve never seen it since. So when the film started, Tubular Bells was the theme music for the film. Which you probably know?

Yeah.

I found that really interesting with that going on. My experience of seeing the film, it was definitely scary, because I think it had not only got the theme of the devil and how that devil can come into a person, but also it had the cinema effects of spinning heads and vomiting, and that had never been on screen before, I don’t think.

Yeah.

So it was quite a different use of camera, I suppose, or special effects.

Yeah.

Um, I was definitely frightened by the film, quite frankly, because of the visual effects of the film and the Tubular Bells and the way it progressed.

Yeah.

And we lived in Forest Hill at that time. It was a lovely flat, actually, in Forest Hill, and the next day I remember definitely being frightened at home for some unknown reason. I don't know why.

Oh, right.

It just felt a frightening thing, that this little girl with her head, and she's really quite scary – this little girl who played this person who's possessed by the devil –

Yeah.

And I think, the turning of the head, the way she gradually became gross in every respect. But also it was the Tubular Bells music that I couldn't play, and would never play, to this day. And couldn't play. My husband was at work the next day and he rang me at lunch time and asked me, "Are you OK?" "Well, not really. I've been a little bit scared. And I don't know why I'm scared, because it's only a blinking film and it's only special effects."

(Laughs.)

So my experience of going to see the film, I think, I can truthfully say was different to any other film I've been to see. And I thought it was the first, I think – you would be seeing in your research – kind of horror experience that people were having at that time as well. It was the first. It was a horror film that was different to Frankenstein and stuff like that. Psychologically, it had an edge to it.

Yeah.

Like, could this really happen?

I might be wrong, but I think it was one of the first that was set in a regular house in the present day.

Yes.

Did that make a difference at all, do you think?

I think it made it more, "It could happen to anyone." What do you thi- It could probably be... Well... "If something like this could uncouple the household..." As you say, it was the normality of it, wasn't it really? The normalness. Something like this happening when you weren't expecting it in the most ordinary of households. You're right. Yes. It wasn't something like going off somewhere, like other films where... I can't remember what it's called now. Doesn't matter anyway. The Shining.

Oh, yeah.

Where they go off to this old house, the Jack Nicholson film, do you remember?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah.

It was this old house. They moved away from your normal habitat. But this was everyday place, wasn't it, really?

Um, I'm not really familiar with... Like, I've literally only heard of Mike Oldfield because of The Exorcist. Was he quite big before the film came out?

Yes. I think everyone who was anyone had Tubular Bells (laughs).

(Laughs.) Right.

Everybody played Tubular Bells, and there was the other, the Osmand family, I think. I can't remember. There was certain music that was around at that time.

Oh, right.

But everybody knew. Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells was one. It was very, very popular in alternative- (laughs) alternative! I suppose they weren't popular to everybody living at that time. But certainly he was. Have you heard the music Tubular Bells?

Yeah. It goes very strange, doesn't it? So did you find the music creepy before you'd seen the film or is it just the association?

Not at all. No. Not at all. But it wasn't... No. The honest answer is no. I didn't associate that music with scary things. I didn't have that thought process going on at all.

Yeah.

But afterwards, certainly. I don't play it back, because we move on as well, don't we? But it was very much music- oddly enough, in that period... a few friends said, "Oh my god," you know, "playing Mike Oldfield is definitely not on at the moment. It just reminds me of that ghastly film." That sort of thing. "That scary film."

(Laughs.) Yeah.

A lot of people didn't play it for a while afterwards. Yes. I think most people who would've seen it would've associated that music with...

Yeah.

In fact, I can probably say it's one of the films that I remember and tell a story about, with the weird mouse at the beginning and people queuing up, people outside with placards. I've never usually gone to films with that going on. So it was a big hype.

Yeah. So the people outside, were they the protestors handing out leaflets and things like that.

Oh, the people outside... I think some people were curious. It's a spectacle, isn't it, anything like that going on?

Yeah. Of course.

There was certainly... I would say most of them... Most of the people... Thinking about it... 1972, there's a big wave of a lot of things going on. There's a lot that

going, I think, in England and in the world in the early 70s. There's certainly an anti-religious thing going on, and people thinking their way out of anything like that, like it wasn't rational, etc etc etc. "There's no such thing as devils and all that sort of stuff." I think it drew a lot of people into sharp relief as well. Like, well, "This is quite interesting. Perhaps it could... Perhaps we can't completely exclude this phenomenon in our life."

Yeah.

Most of the people that were there were Christians with Christian leaflets on not going to see the film.

Yeah.

I would say that most of the people that were there were. And there were certainly people interviewed on telly if you can hold of footage, I'm sure there is, of that time. There was certainly Christian demonstrators. And if I remember, I think, at that time, feminism and socialism were more important to people and worth looking at rather more than spirituality and what could happen to us and about our life as spiritual beings, if you want to put it that way. We were moving... Society was, if you like, thinking their way out of religion, so "It's a load of rubbish." But it made people think (laughs), maybe something could happen like this.

Yeah. Was that kind of the impression you had of the film before you went to see it, that it was an anti-religion film?

Um... no. I don't think it was... Well, was it, is the thing, isn't it really? I mean...

Yeah.

I think that it's... I can't remember the finer details, but the director was interviewed, and it wasn't... I can remember that, but I can't remember the finer details. I think it might even have been what's-his-name, Michael Parkinson, we're so far back (laughs). But, definitely, it was just about pushing forward something, he wasn't trying to put himself in any political frame of reference. It was more that "This is what could happen and I'm just telling stories of what could happen." I didn't feel it was... Well, I suppose in a way you could think in a way it was more calling you to look at faith, wasn't it, rather than not?

Yeah.

You could say. It was more, "Watch your step. You don't know what's around the corner." (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Yeah. I believe the writer has said something along that line, hasn't he? He wanted to convince you that the devil exists so that you'll, you know, go in the other direction.

Sure. Yes (laughs). True.

Was this the kind of film you watched very often or was this something out of the ordinary for you because of the hype?

The Exorcist?

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Um... I’m usually quite scary with horror and special effects.

Yeah.

And the psychological. But the thing about *The Exorcist*, it had that combination of both things, the physical and the psychological. The deterioration of this young girl into grossness and the in every way gross and incredibly frightening scenes of her in the bedroom, and her relationship with the priest. But also, psychologically, I think it an effect that, yeah, that... “Can people get possessed like this?” It was questioning really. And the other side of the coin, of course, is that people could be possessed with the light as opposed to the dark.

Yeah.

This is all about darkness really, wasn’t it? And how do you deal with that, and sacrifice and the priest sacrificing himself and...

Yeah.

It was a complicated film which I wouldn’t normally go to see (laughs). I would normally go to see a film... I dunno. There was lots of stuff around, you know. Woody Allen was around at the time.

Yeah.

Lots of other films. What was it? *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Lots of other films that were more fun to watch than that film, put it that way. But it was definitely a film to see.

Do you mind me asking, were you religious at the time or did you have a religious upbringing or was that something...?

I was brought up Anglican, Church of England, as we all were really, but I wasn’t practicing.

Yeah.

And I think it’s true to say, at that time, I wasn’t particularly religious. Not because I’m not religious. I’m now an ordained interfaith minister so I’ve moved along in my journey of life. But, at that time, it was not, to want of a better word, de rigour to be religious. It was seen as absolute and utter nonsense and based on absolutely no truth at all, and basically, um, Karl Marx I think had said it was “the opium of the masses”, so it was very uncool to be religious.

(Laughs.) Right.

So, I think I’d plumped for self-development at that stage, a little bit of socialism but not particularly, and feminism. So I didn’t acknowledge that side of myself at all. So, I think I was spiritual then, but didn’t acknowledge it. So, you know, kind of like disbelieving or “It’s just nonsense,” and all these people that believe in stuff like this... It made me think... And I’m not religious now. And, obviously, I would never a religious person at all. I’m much more interested in how we express ourselves [unintelligible]. I’m not religious regarding control. I hope I’m never... I can see how that can be quite damaging, especially for women, so I try to avoid that (laughs).

Right. Of course.

So, no, I wasn't religious in that way at that time. But I always knew that there was something there, that I didn't always express to other people, because people just didn't. Does that make sense?

Yeah. Definitely.

It was very much... At that period, it was almost like I had a secret, if you thought, "Actually I do believe. I do have a faith. I do believe in something bigger and more powerful than myself." Which I think is why, partly, I can think that things like that can happen to people. I suppose it is that, but it isn't then. But it's not the sort of thing... It seems a bit soft in the middle in those... in the 70s. It was much more about self-expression in many many different ways. Certainly not religion. And certainly it didn't feel that was the way... People just used to turn off I think, and still do, if you talk about faith. They still turn off in a way (laughs). I don't know if that's answered your question at all.

Yeah. That has. Thank you. So, were the religious aspects of the film interesting to you or important to you or was it more kind of a horror film in that way do you think?

It was definitely a horror film. Definitely a horror film. But I think the interesting aspect to me was the faith of the priest that wanted to help this person, altruistically. And he chose to sacrifice himself, which is a theme, isn't it, of many religions.

Yeah.

Of altruistic self-giving and self-service. I did kind of think, that was a really, really brave man to bring that into me. You know what I mean? To bring that, whatever it is, I will carry it so you can carry on with your life. And I think that was really... I can remember that now actually... Really... powerful. There was this choice going on really, wasn't there? Choosing good over evil. And he chose life and goodness for the girl but he died as a result. He sacrificed himself. So there was a big religious thing there. But I don't think I analysed it in that way, or thought about it in that way, but it's very much about... I mean, he was great. He carried it, of course, the priest. If I've remembered the film correctly, I wouldn't say he was skeptical, but he came in quite early and there was a definite, definite dialogue and relationship very early on with her. It was almost as if a bit of her, the other side of her, not the little girl of her, was prepared to face him out.

Oh, right.

Do you know what I mean? It was prepared to go the whole way with him. There was quite a lot of stuff going on with her and him. You know, she was possessed by something (laughs). She was certainly gonna take him on. Which she did.

Oh, right. Yeah. That makes sense. So, did the film match up to the hype in your opinion?

Definitely.

Yeah?

I think so. I think so.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Was it what you were expecting?

I think people seemed to be scared by the film and it met those expectations of being scared witless. (Laughs.) And people thinking, “Oh my God, that is really...” I can’t think of many films... There must have been other films, actually... I’m by no means a film buff. But I think I saw those films around in those days. But I don’t recall any other film having that amount of shock factor with it. I think definitely the visual effects of her and her voice and her something else, the whole idea of something coming into her and taking her over...

Yeah.

I think was scary. Something that gross and that evil and she was only a small girl so that was even more distress- more upsetting for people. But I do find that interesting as well about it always feels more gross with children, you know?

Yeah.

That Mary Bell stuff. That was going on before then. She was only 12, wasn’t she? With the murders?

Which one’s that, sorry?

There’s always something about... And that was very much... She was seen as having evil in her and the devil. I remember a lot of stuff around that. And with Bulger. Very young children. It seems to be... We find it even more difficult.

Oh, of course. Yeah.

With small children being... doing things that seemed wrong in absolutely every way. I think it’s more difficult when they’re young. It’s more frightening. More scary (laughs).

Yeah. Definitely. So you said the fear you had from the film stayed with you for a little bit afterwards?

Yes.

Has that happened before with other films or is that...? Are you usually kind of..?

Not in the same way, for sure. Not in the same way. It had a... one of those sort of looking-behind-you feelings. Hmm. Yeah. I honestly couldn’t say that any other film I’ve felt like that after seeing. It’s more like, well, you watch the film and forget it afterwards, really.

Yeah.

And there’s so much stuff that we can watch and you watch the film and it’s good and people talk about it for a while and think, hey, that was really good or the ending was really nice or not nice. But, no, it didn’t stand out like that stood out, definitely.

Yeah.

No, I think it turned a corner in (laughs) horror, if you know what I mean. People didn’t expect that really, I don’t think. I think as you say, the ordinariness of it, in

everyday life, just in a suburban area with everything going along OK and then one day your life is turned over.

How much did you know of the story before you went? Had you read the book or anything like that?

No. No, I hadn't read the book and I didn't know that much about it. I just knew that this girl was possessed by the devil. I just knew that. I didn't sort of know... No. I hadn't read the book.

Oh, right. Have you rewatched the film since at all?

No (laughs).

Oh, right.

I haven't. I wonder actually now if all these years later I'd still find it as frightening, because there's even more difficult stuff we can watch and see now.

Yeah, of course.

That could psychologically be as effective. I think it kind of normalises stuff in a way really, doesn't it? You get a bit more immune to watching it. But I think after watching a film like that you could probably think, well, I've prepared myself for worse or more frightening stuff. I wouldn't normally choose a horror as my first choice of film, but this one, I wanted to go to see it, because of the hype and because everybody was going to see it. And it hasn't put me off seeing horrors, but, usually, with horrors... That's another thing that you've made me think about actually.

Yeah?

Normally with horrors I can move along quite well watching it, but then I put my hands over my eyes and peek through, but I didn't with *The Exorcist*. I wanted to see.

Oh, right. OK.

Which was quite interesting. I wanted to see what happened when her head swivelled and her voice and her really horribly frightening face and I wanted to... It was a complete takeover of her, and I wanted to see it, that transformation. Whereas normally I wouldn't... I would say after to my husband, "What happened? What happened?"

(Laughs.) Right.

(Laughs.) But with this I didn't do that. Because I know a lot of people go to horrors with their hands over their eyes. Particularly women. I don't know if it's a gender thing. It probably is. But I didn't want to miss any of this. I was very interested.

Did your husband usually act like a safety device, in a way?

When he was there, I would normally just say to him, "What happened?" If we watch a late film at home or something or if we go to see a film like that had something quite scary in it, I will be... Yes. I'll just put my hands over, I don't want to know. Or if I'm going with friends or whatever in a group, normally it was somebody else that I would... Yes. I must say, I'm quite pleased. I wouldn't go to see anything

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

much on my own, I don't think. That's the other thing. It's quite nice to have companionship, other people around, and talk about it, isn't it?

Yeah. Definitely.

Because everybody was talking about it. It wasn't the only issue everybody was talking about, but there was a lot of conversation around that film, disbelief and belief, could that happen. Just like that.

Oh, really? So it was more about the plausibility of it rather than the effects and things like that? Or was there some of that as well?

Yeah. I think certainly, things like that and...

Ah, right. Did you go and see it in a group when you went to see it?

No. Just Paul and I, just my husband and I went. We went one night after I finished work. I was on a shift at the hospital and we went for the early performance. It was a beautiful sunny evening I remember (laughs). It truthfully felt rather exciting.

Yeah?

We were going off to see this film that had created rather a stir with people, you know? There's something about connected decision making as well, isn't there, that a lot of people were going? And it usually it was full. I think it filled out when it was first at the box office. Packed! When people came.

Yeah?

I think it was the newness of it wasn't it, or something like that? We all watched Frankensteins, I think. Things like that. Lots of other horror films that were pretty tame compared with The Exorcist. I would definitely say that (laughs).

Yeah. Did you get a sense that other people were excited and a little wound up?

Yes. Definitely. I would say so. I wonder if... It was more about... if you had the stamina, or whatever word you want to use, if you felt you could go to see it, then you would.

Yeah.

Quite a lot of women friends at that stage, and still, they're still, "No." They would've found it too frightening to go and see. They knew, they sensed they would be too frightened, they didn't want to go and see it, and still haven't ever been to see it because they felt it would be too frightening.

Yeah.

And they're predominantly women friends that are very strong – they're women that would soldier on – but they wouldn't go to see something like that. They'd just find it too frightening. It's to do with the imagination as well, isn't it, I suppose? Oh, my god.

Yeah. Of course.

And, of course, moving on from that. Having children. Most of us did have children. Not then in 72, but 2 or 3 years after that.

Yeah.

So the thought of anything like that happening to your child would've been a big thing for people as well. What if that would happen to my child, you know? And all those funny feelings that you can have with your child, that you might look at your child after watching something like *The Exorcist* and thinking, "Oh, I wonder," if she does something a bit naughty.

(Laughs.)

I think it can be very psychologically quite unHINGING for people (laughs). If you don't have an imagination, you can watch it, leave, fine. It didn't have any effect. And I suppose most people who have seen it, it has some effect. Have you found that with your research thus far?

Yeah. Definitely. Yeah. Some people have... It's quite interesting because some people weren't particularly taken with it whereas other people... I had one chap respond to the survey who said he had night terrors for 10 years after seeing the film.

Oh! Really? Wow.

After seeing a film about the devil and that kind of thing. So it's strange how it can have such a different effect on so many people.

Definitely. Definitely. And also whether it develops... I suppose I have a faith.

Yeah.

But I think we always have a choice of being evil, being good or bad, do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And I think it's... I suppose, as well as there are extremely good people, there are people who might carry that evilness as well. That's a real thing that we should be aware of. Something you can do, when you're programmed in a different way or receptive to different things. It's quite important. I had a friend actually – well, I still know her – and she used to say – she'd never seen *The Exorcist* – but she said, "Have you ever walked down the road and saw someone who's just evil?" I said, "I've never had that experience real." But I have had times where I don't feel comfortable around somebody.

Yeah.

Or something. So I guess it's about what we don't see. It doesn't mean it's not there.

Yeah.

If that makes sense. If it's something we don't see or if it doesn't have a fancy explanation, it doesn't mean it's not there. And I think after *The Exorcist* we ask those questions. We're all very very happy to believe in goodness but we also have to take the shadow side of that, the paradox of that, the other side of that.

Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Where there are things that are not good in people. It depends how reflective you are when you go to see these films (laughs).

(Laughs.) Yeah. Definitely. So do you think that... One of the things I’m quite interested in in the research is just the age of the film. Because you’d obviously have people watching it when they were children, as well. So I’m really interested in the idea of how people might relate to the film differently or see different things in it...

Sure.

If they watch it when they’re the girl’s age compared to when they watch it at the same age as the mother and that kind of thing.

Oh, my lord. Do you think people that young would watch it?

Oh, yeah. The sort of average age seems to be about 12.

Oh! Really?

Especially in America because the film was...

Gosh. I am stunned. Really it was X, it was 18 and above, really, wasn’t it?

Yeah.

That’s interesting. That’s really interesting. Certainly I wouldn’t have let a child of mine watch it. I have 4 grandchildren now and I don’t think any of them would cope with it.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

The eldest is 10.

(Laughs.) Oh, right.

So, 10, 8, 8 and 5. I don’t think any of them would... But that is extraordinary, isn’t it?

Apparently it was rated R in America so anybody could go as long as they had a parent, so I’ve had some survey respondents. One lady was taken when she was 3 years old to see the film.

Oh, wow.

Which is incredible.

Totally incredible. At 3, what is she supposed to make of it?

Yeah.

I wonder if her parents wanted to see it. How strange is that? Or maybe, maybe there’s a whole thing, isn’t there? Like evangelical Christians might want them to see it, “I want you to see that so you don’t end up like that.” (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) Maybe, yeah.

The fear factor thing going on with it. Well, I am amazed at that. Although I shouldn’t be, because I mean I think nowadays what people watch at a very young age I certainly would not be open to or we didn’t have anyway. And certainly when

bringing up our son, I was extremely judging of what they would watch and what they wouldn't watch, and that would not be on their watch list at all. No.

Yeah. How do you think *The Exorcist* compares to more modern films in that way?

I think as well about how we move, isn't it? As you say. We seem to more accepting of a lot of stuff and maybe the same social norms aren't there, are they really? And social media must have made such a difference to watch children can watch and not watch, whereas we didn't have those facilities at all.

Yeah.

And my son didn't really. It was just blossoming all that, really. So there wasn't the access to all that there is now.

Yeah.

Hmm. That's a stunning bit of... I'm really surprised. (Laughs.)

(Laughs.) I was as well. It's crazy.

You future audiences will be, I'm sure, when you're telling about your research (laughs).

Hopefully (laughs). So were you into films when you were growing up or were you more of a reader?

Yes. I think it's true to say, not particularly when I was growing up. I grew up in the South of England and I was into different things. But it was actually when I left home and moved away. I came to college hospital to train as a nurse in London and I met my future husband and I thought that that's what you did. A really lovely... Well, it was all tied in I think. My sister went to university and I went to nurse training. And there was the whole thing that was opening up, for want of a better word, for white middle class people.

Yeah.

We were the first wave generation going to university or leaving home and doing what you're doing. It was a hugely creative time. There was no doubt about that. So going to see films was amazing. Going to see music and pop concerts was wonderful. Going to the theatre. There were all these things. There was just really a wonderful opening. I didn't do it before. I lived on the south coast of England in Christ Church and it was a lovely, near bournemouth, a really sunny resort, and we were out and about and youth clubs and things (laughs).

(Laughs.) Oh, right. Just finally then, is there anything else you think you might want to mention that I've not asked about or anything I've not asked about or anything, or anything you think might've influenced how you felt about the film?

Hmmm. How I felt. I'm definitely pleased I went to see it.

Yeah.

I'm not feeling I wish I'd never seen that, it's disturbed me forever. I don't feel that.

(Laughs.) Yeah.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Yeah. I actually do feel that we should be aware of evil influences as well as good influences in life and how do they become visible to us.

Yeah.

Yeah. I suppose, how I lead my own life really, is what do I think is important in my life, and certainly seeing all those things at that time, it was important, no doubt about that. No doubt about that. There's nothing that I'd really want to add. I just wish you the best of luck with it as well, that you get the right people that you want to talk to to answer the questions you want to know.

Thank you.

[Business talk. Asking if I need more interviewees, etc. 10 minutes of that.]

Courtney

Particulars: Female; 19-25; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Was this the first time you'd seen The Exorcist?

No, this wasn't the first time that I've seen The Exorcist!

b. If not, can you describe the first time you saw the film? Who were you with? Where was it?

I remember watching The Exorcist for the first time when I was absurdly young, with my much older brother, a seasoned horror fanatic of course. In the comfort of my own home.

2) How did the film make you feel? Was it what you were expecting? Or, if you've seen it before, was it as you remembered? Was there anything you'd forgotten or remembered differently?

As I was very young at the time of viewing it for the first time; I can definitely say that I've grown to respect it a lot more! Definitely old enough to actually understand the content at least! It's a lot more enjoyable now for sure.

3) Are you a horror fan? Can you describe your history with horror films? Did you watch them as a kid? How did you get into them?

I love horror! I'd go so far as to say I'm fairly passionate about the genre. Watching horror was a form of rebellion for me as a child. I have fond memories of my family sitting round to watch films like Final Destination (weak, but very enjoyable) and I'd constantly have to miss all the 'good' bits incase I'd get nightmares! Fortunately for me, my older brother was a huge horror fan and helped me get into the proper cult classics. It brought us closer together and it helped me find my grounding in film!

4) Can you talk about what you like (or dislike) about horror films generally?

I personally think that horror is the most emotive and powerful genre of all. The excitement, relief, panic, anxiety, terror - it's all necessary to really escape the pressures of real life for a couple hours.

That being said, the common ploys and cliches are becoming exhausted. The

stigmatism of issues such like mental health etc. I feel it's rare to get a good horror release as of yet, but that being said, when one eventually comes around it's a huge deal.

5) Do you enjoy films that scare you? Which films have scared you the most, and how do they compare to The Exorcist?

It takes a lot to scare me in the cinema, so when a film finally comes along that gets right under my skin I definitely appreciate it. I think the only film that's really conjured some kind of panic and fear for me was Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange. The themes of violence and rape, the vulnerability etc. That still makes me feel unsteady to the point it's #1 on my list of 'films I love to hate' (hahaha) but currently I think Hereditary deserves an honourable mention. It's getting compared to The Exorcist quite prominently in the media at the moment and for good reason too. For me The Exorcist never had any scare factor, though that's partly due to not being able to relate to the characters personally. I'm not a religious person so the fears presented didn't quite reach me. Whereas with A Clockwork Orange, the themes of home invasion and violence are prominent to anyone.

6) Are there things in films which work better than others in scaring you? Are there films which try to be scary but they just don't have any effect on you?

I love a good tense atmosphere, really string the audience in. I love a good classic clean scare. I really wanted to like the Insidious franchise but I just couldn't. I found the scares to be so cheap that they were laughable. It felt like it tried very hard, and I completely see why it's scary for some, but I just couldn't get into it! I love to be genuinely surprised and it's difficult to find a horror lately that hasn't recycled the same old cliches as the many years prior.

7) Has what scares you in films changed at all over the years?

I think getting into horror properly and studying film for some time now, I've become more aware of the reuse of narrative structure and seeing the same techniques being used over and over. When I first started to enjoy horror I was drawn in by the gore and the excitement it brings. As I've gotten older I prefer more tense, atmospheric thrillers. Fear wise, I feel like audiences are definitely becoming a lot more desensitized to stimuli. As a young woman, I have become less afraid of body horror and tend to sweat more over issues like rape/revenge flicks and home invasion. I guess it reflects the saying that all monsters are human, after all. More realistic issues tend to provoke more of a response for me.

8) How did your family feel about The Exorcist or horror films in general? Did they have a lot of say in the kinds of films you watched as a child? Would you watch films much as a family?

Having older siblings, when I got to around 10, we'd sit round whenever channel 4 would be screening some soft gore film together - to which I wasn't actually allowed to watch the good bits -

My parents were horror fans both growing up in the peak of the slasher period. But before this my comfort was most likely in Disney flicks at the time! Child friendly, at least.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

9) Do the religious elements of The Exorcist matter to you all? Do they make it more/less interesting/scary? Did you have a religious upbringing at all or do you think your religious beliefs (or non-belief) changes how you look at a film like The Exorcist?

As a non believer, I think this is one of the reasons why The Exorcist didn't reach me, in terms of being 'scary'! Though I do find the paranormal and issues of possession interesting. I feel like if I had a religious upbringing then it'd conjure a lot more emotion - as religion would be a safe place for me and stimuli like The Exorcist would make me question that place.

10) The setting for the screening was a bit unusual. Did that make a difference in how much you enjoyed the film or how you approached it? How would the experience have been different at home or at the cinema? And which is your preferred way to watch scary movies?

First and foremost, I really enjoyed the venue! The screening felt a more cosy and intimate than watching it on an actual cinema screen. I prefer to watch horror releases in the cinema because I feel completely immersed watching films on the big screen in the complete darkness. No distractions, no glance theory in practice! Sound is a huge thing for me and you just can't mimic that at home.

Follow up...

11) I was really interested by how you said your interests in horror have shifted somewhat, or at least different things are scarier now, with watching gory, exciting things at the start and now being more disturbed by sexual violence and home invasions. Have the goofy, gore-filled horror films lost their appeal for you? How do you feel generally about horror films which feature sexual violence? How did you feel about the violent sexual scenes in The Exorcist, with the masturbation etc?

Honestly the goofy/gory flicks I still find fun and entertaining, but with horror I guess there's that boundary of films you watch to just generally have fun then new waves of extremism which you watch to try and push your own physical boundaries. It takes a lot for a film to really get under my skin so I'm constantly pressing to find one that will. Horror films with sexual violence always seem to reflect upon that vulnerability and I think it's that vulnerability and internalized fear that makes all the difference in whether a horror is effective.

Honestly the elements in The Exorcist are so outlandish that they're rather amusing and deserve a few wry giggles today. I think there's something about those elements and the bright colours present in the scene that doesn't take itself too seriously, thus feels much lighter to watch in comparison to films like The Last House on the Left or the French extremity film Irreversible.

12) How were you stopped from watching all the cool bits of horror films when you were younger? Were you sent out of the room? Do you remember the first time you were allowed to watch the gorier scenes of a film?

My mum would simply just tell me not to look! I mean it wouldn't stop me, but this peak some form of rebellion in me that sparked my interest in horror. The first times I was allowed to watch gorier horror was when my older brother introduced

me to the cult classics of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (I was thrown deep in), Sleep Away Camp, Friday 13th, Nightmare on Elm Street etc. To which from then my mother changed her stand point to "I won't stop you but if you get nightmares, that's on you" 😊

Chris

Particulars: Male; 46-55; USA. **Format:** Email.

1) You said you were 3 / 4 years old the first time you saw The Exorcist. Can you remember very much about that first experience with the film? You mentioned just listening to the film. Were there particular things that stood out to you?

I was the sort of kid that always loved monsters. The Universal Monsters and The Planet of the Apes were my best friends. As you know, when The Exorcist opened it was a phenomenon...and it was EVERYWHERE. In the paper, on the news...a topic the adults talked about in whispered conversations at cocktail parties. I didn't understand it...but I knew I wanted to experience it...or more likely...SEE THE DEVIL.

My father didn't like horror movies. But my mother was very interested in this. They went to see it, leaving me with a baby-sitter. I learned later that the film frightened my father so badly that he refused to drive the babysitter home at the end of the evening...electing my mom to do so. I can recall pestering my mother for details about the film. I don't recall getting much out of her save for "its a story about a little girl with the devil inside her." Yep, I wanna see that.

I don't know how it came to be, but we somehow went to the drive-in to see this and I was very excited. Back then, I recall drive-in ran triple features. I can't begin to remember what ran first that evening. The Exorcist was on later and my folks were certain I would be "sacked out" in the rear of the family station wagon by that time. I pulled a fast one, feigning sleep and awaiting for the appearance of the devil.

I must have come in and out of sleep. I do not recall any visuals of the movie at that time. But I DID listen to it. The voice of Mercedes MacCambridge terrified me. I distinctly recall the line, "And I'm the Devil! Now kindly undo these straps!" it sent me under the blankets and into another realm of imagined nightmares.

2) Did you often go to see movies at the drive-in with your family? As a British chap, I've never been to a drive-in. Is it a very different experience to the cinema? Could you describe a regular trip to the drive-in?

We went to the drive-in fairly often. I believe because it was cheaper and my dad could sleep. It was a party sort of experience. You would load up the car with a cooler of soda and snacks, blankets and pillows...good fun. Later on, I remember the projection and sound getting shoddy...and preferred to see films in the cinema proper. But now I sure miss them.

3) What had you heard about The Exorcist before seeing it? What was it that made you want to see it so much? Did you read much about it afterwards?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

I probably covered most of this above. There didn't seem to be a lot to read about it later on...it was sort of elusive. I finally tracked down the paperbacks William Peter Blatty on *The Exorcist* and *The Story Behind The Exorcist* which both fascinated me.

4) Can you talk about the second time you saw the film? Was it a long time before you got to see all of it? Were you excited to see it again? Did it match up to what you had imagined? Was it just as scary?

I hate to admit it, but I suppose the second time I saw the film was in the early days of home video. Rented with a few friends for a sleep-over and I can remember a few of them being bored with the slow-burn aspect of the film...but when things really got into gear...I can literally remember one of those boys hiding behind an arm chair. It scared us badly. No one slept much that night. No matter how many times I see it (and it has been MANY) it never loses its effectiveness.

5) What, to you, is scary in a film? Are there films which have scared you as much as *The Exorcist*? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else? Maybe a supernatural or a religious theme? Or do other kinds of more human horror films scare you just as much?

That's a hard one. Not many films have really scared me much. When I was eight, John Carpenter's *Halloween* spooked me...I mean, I felt Michael Myers could be in MY neighborhood or even MY closet. But again, I was eight. I was surprised more recently that I found *The Conjuring* to actually be rather effective.

6) How do you feel about *The Exorcist* as being called “The Scariest Movie of All Time”?

I suppose this is accurate to a degree...but it also over-hypes it and sells it short. It wasn't meant to be just a scary movie.

7) Has what you find scary in films changed at all since you were a child?

Sure, real life has become much more frightening. The fear of the unknown is scary.

8) You mention in your survey response that you've come to see *The Exorcist* as a deeply spiritual film. Is this something you've noticed as you've got older? What about *The Exorcist* makes it a spiritual film for you?

I believe that is probably because I have grown older and matured and come to look at cinema on a much deeper level. In all fairness, it has a lot to do with reading what Mr. Blatty's intentions always were when setting out to write the novel.

9) Is it important to you that it's a spiritual film?

Yes, only in that it deepens the story, the characters and reality of the film.

10) Are you aware of the religious debates around the film when it was first released? If so, what do you make of it now?

I don't think as a child of three I was interested in religious debates...except perhaps confirmation that the devil was real. I think its a hot-button topic and really helped promote the film.

11) What kind of feeling does the film leave you with when you re-watch it now?

It always amazes me what a cinematic accomplishment it is. And leaves me thinking a lot about...just life.

12) Are you a spiritual person?

Not especially.

13) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years?

Again, not especially. Which leaves me wondering why the film has such a profound effect on me.

14) Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at The Exorcist and what you get out of it?

Probably not for me. But for most people most certainly. I know people today who still haven't seen it and are afraid to.

15) Would you describe The Exorcist as a film which is special to you? Do you have films which are special to you? If so, what makes them special?

The Exorcist is without question a special film to me. Films that are special to me strike that certain nerve...you find it relatable on some level and you feel something. My favorite film of all time...the one that changed me forever is JAWS.

Follow up...

16) With regards to the drive-in, could you describe the set up a little for me please? How did the sound work? Was it little speakers next to cars, or from the screen? What kind of people tended to go to the drive-in as opposed to the cinema? Was it more families, younger people?

The drive-in sound systems I recall were posts you parked beside. You would then take the speaker from the post and hang it on your car window. Needless to say, this kind of low-tech single speaker system was less than dynamic. I recall later on in the decade, the sound was being broadcast over a specific radio station you tuned into. The drive-in crowd varied depending on what was showing. Sometimes it was family fair...sometimes just "big hits." Funny story...one drive-in theater near me was located just off a major high way from which you could see the screen from as you passed. It actually turned into an infamous "adult" drive-in that showed porn. There were a great many accidents caused on that stretch of high way before concerned citizens could have it shut down.

17) How often did you go to drive-ins? What do you miss about them?

I don't recall it being easy to get my dad to take us too often. It had to be a big deal. My dad-- the exact opposite of me-- was never a big movie guy. I can remember going to Jaws, Smokey and the Bandit and The Muppet Movie. But once I was old enough...I chose to go more on my own. If I miss anything about that experience, it would have to be purely nostalgic...that, and I never got to take advantage of taking a good date to the drive-in....

18) You mention that the second time was a sleepover with friends. Were movies a common activity at sleepovers? About what age would you have been?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Movies were always a common activity where I was concerned. I can't pin-point what age VCRs began to be common place in most homes...must have been around the time I was eleven or twelve I think.

19) With Halloween bringing the monster (so to speak) in to the everyday neighborhood, do you think it's the everyday aspect of it that scared you about it, and about The Exorcist? With The Exorcist, was it more “This could happen to me” because it seemed realistic or was it more of a fear of that unknown evil, do you think?

I think with The Exorcist...there were always sensational stories and rumors circulating that it was based on a true story and that things like that really happen. And again, fear of the unknown is always the most unnerving.

20) Are religious stories something you find interesting in general, despite not believing? Such as religious horror, like The Omen or Rosemary's Baby, or such as Biblical stories, like The Passion of Christ and the old epics?

Not per se. I just love a good yarn. I love Rosemary's Baby and didn't come to appreciate The Omen until much later. I always looked at it as an Exorcist cash-in/rip-off. But I have come around to enjoy it now.

21) I'm absolutely with you on Jaws. It's a classic! Can you talk about what it is about Jaws that you love so much?

Boy, Jaws just changed my life when I saw it. I saw it when I was five (at a drive-in) and loved it. But I REALLY saw it when it was re-released in theaters (must have be '77 or '78 just prior to the sequel) and it played to a packed house that reacted to every nuance perfectly. It blew me away. As the audience cheered and applauded the destruction of that shark, I decided right then and there that was what I wanted to do: Tell stories that really had an effect on people.

Jaws just covers all the bases. Its a primal fear of the water...and the unknown. Of being devoured and eaten alive. It's a great character study. It's often hilarious. It's scary...and it is an adventure film as well. I never grow tired of it.

Owl

Particulars: Male; 56-65; USA. **Format:** Email.

1) Do you remember very much about seeing the film that first time? Do you remember how you felt during the film or how other people were responding?

I remember there being a lot of excitement and nervous anticipation the night The Exorcist played in my hometown, and in the days leading up to its showing. I saw the film in the small town of Warrenton, Missouri, which only had a population of 1,200 people at that time. So, we didn't get to see the movie as quickly as people living in big cities. That probably helped build up the anticipation, because we had been hearing about The Exorcist on the nightly news: stories about people fainting, freaking out, getting sick, etc.

The news reports about the movie really got me excited. I had read the book and was hoping the film was every bit as good as the novel. There were also rumors floating around that the movie was cursed, stories about strange fires on the set and the relatives of actors having accidents or suddenly dying. Some people believed just watching the movie could lead to possession or an unwelcomed visit from Satan. I had also read that author William Peter Blatty based his novel on a case of real possession which had happened to a boy in St. Louis, Missouri, a city only seventy miles away from Warrenton.

The theatre was packed that night, something I had never seen before. Even the balcony was full. Being a fourteen-year-old horror lover, I was all smiles as the movie progressed and the suspense started to slowly build. But some of the people around me appeared uncomfortable, fidgeting nervously. A lot of it had to do with the fact that bad things were happening to an innocent child, something you rarely saw in movies of the seventies.

You don't get to see the possessed Regan until about forty minutes into the movie, and by then a lot of people were on the edge of their seats. And when you finally see her, and that stunning Dick Smith makeup job, it's absolutely chilling. And the voice of the demon speaking through Regan, actually the voice of actress Mercedes McCambridge, was incredible. It scared the hell out of a lot of people in the theatre that night. I heard people scream, saw folks covering their eyes, even watched a few people get up and leave. Me, I was loving every bloody second of it.

2) Do you remember much about the cinema or how other people were responding that first time? Were there many other kids there?

I don't remember the name of the cinema, but it probably dated back to the 1940s or 50s. It had a single screen, and a lower level and balcony. The balcony was usually roped off and not used, but it was open for business that night.

There were a lot of kids in attendance. Not little kids, but those in middle school and high school still too young to get into an R rated movie without an adult. The adults and kids came together, but they didn't sit together. I remember sitting with cousins and classmates, popcorn and soda in hand, waiting for it to get good and scary. Many of us had read the novel, and were hoping our favorite scenes had made it into the film. All the teenagers I sat with loved the film as much as I did. And those who covered their eyes during the movie got royally teased afterwards.

3) Was there much talk about the film in school? Did the local press have much to say about it, do you remember? The film was very controversial here in the UK, being banned by a number of local countries, but I don't know much about how it was received on a local level.

A lot of people in school were talking about the movie long before we got to see it. The book had been very popular, and a lot of school kids were reading it. Prior to the release of *The Exorcist*, the novel, the only place in town I could buy books or magazines was at the local drugstore. But when *The Exorcist* came out in paperback, it was everywhere.

There was a lot of talk about the movie on the local news out of St. Louis. We were hearing that *The Exorcist* was selling out everywhere it played. They showed people

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

standing in long lines to buy tickets, and interviewed people who had gotten frightened, sick, or passed out while watching the movie.

But it wasn't just the reports about the movie. Suddenly, because of *The Exorcist*, everyone seemed to be talking about possessions, exorcisms, the Catholic church, God and the Devil, Ouija Boards and all manners of the occult. There were experts talking on television, and the local newsstand was crammed with books and periodicals on the subject. It was a real phenomenon, and as a horror fan I was loving every minute of it. All my friends were dusting off their Ouija Boards and trying to talk to Captain Howdy.

4) Was there a sense at the time that the excitement for the film was a product of the success of the novel? Were people excited to see how the novel had been adapted? Or was it more the case that people read the novel because they were excited for the film?

At first, the excitement for the film was due to the success of the novel. I had read the book, and really wanted to see how they could adapt it into a film. Same was true with most of my friends. But when the movie came out and talk about it started to build, people who hadn't read the book were grabbing copies anxious to read it. This was especially true for those who didn't live in cities where *The Exorcist* opened and had to wait to see it. They were hearing about the movie on the nightly news, and bought copies of the book so they too could share in the excitement.

5) What is your earliest memory of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

My earliest memories of watching films is when I was four years old, and my mother and I were living in the attic of her sister's home in St. Louis. I used to go down before bedtime and watch their big black and white television in the living room. Mostly it was old television shows, like episodes of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits*. Even though I was a child, those shows didn't scare me. I always liked the monsters on *The Outer Limits*.

The only movie that ever scared me at that age was an old Japanese film called *The Manster*, where a man ends up growing a second head. There is a scene in the movie where the man is looking at his shoulder in the mirror, and an eye suddenly opens. That was enough to send me running for my bed. It took me over thirty years to find out the name of that movie and buy a copy of it on DVD.

6) Could you please talk a little about your interest in horror, and how you came to it? Did it stem from books or films primarily? What do you think drew you to it? Was it an interest for someone in your family that was shared? Has this love of horror grown or changed at all over time?

I was a big fan of all things spooky, even when I was a little kid. I loved films and books about ghosts, haunted houses and unsolved mysteries. And I've always loved Halloween, which really is all about ghosts, goblins and things that go bump in the night.

But I probably became a hardcore horror film fan at the age of nine, when my mother gave me a weekly allowance of fifty cents. She drove me to the Rexall

drugstore in town, which was the only place with a magazine and book rack. I planned on buying comics, but then I spotted issue #51 of Famous Monsters of Filmland. It was a young horror lover's dream, a magazine filled with articles and photographs of horror films and movie monsters.

Famous Monsters of Filmland introduced me to such classic films as Frankenstein, Dracula, The Wolfman, The Creature from the Black Lagoon, and The Mummy. I was fascinated with these creatures. I devoured every issue of Famous Monsters I could get my hands on, watched the films featured in the magazine when they came on television or at the theatre, collected monster models and toys, and did everything I could at that age to totally embrace horror.

Luckily, my family also enjoyed horror stories and films, so they understood my obsession. And over the years my love of all things scary has continued to grow, especially after I started writing horror stories of my own. My house today is filled with signed photos of horror actors, movie posters, hundreds of horror films on DVD, life-size zombies and other scary figures, a real casket in the living room, and even a hearse in the driveway.

7) What for you is scary about certain stories? Are there certain stories that affect you more than others? Has this changed over the years?

I love supernatural horror and monster stories, but I find them more fun than scary. What I find scary is human nature. The nightly news frightens me much more than a horror film, because people can be evil and more dangerous than a pack of vicious dogs. Man is the only creature that kills for pleasure.

8) As an author of horror novels how do you approach the task of scaring people? Do you think there are things which are universally scary? What is it about horror fiction that you're drawn to, creatively speaking?

I have to put my readers completely into the novel, so they're no longer seeing the printed page but instead seeing the story played out in their imagination. To do that I have to create an environment they can connect with: small towns, lonely country roads, casual urban settings. I also have to create likable characters to terrorize. If they're not likable, then the readers won't care what happens to them.

And yes, there are things that are universally frightening and I often draw on those elements for my stories. For one thing, we're all afraid of the unknown that lurks in the darkness. In addition, there is the fear of death and physical pain.

I'm drawn to writing horror fiction, because it's a way to tell stories that pits good against evil, allowing characters to either rise to the occasion or face a horrible demise. You also get to test a character's strengths. How will a mother respond when her child is in danger? What will a father do to protect his family when the only option is kill or be kill? But the best thing is the response I get from readers. I love it when someone says my novel scared the hell out of them, causing them to sleep with the lights on.

9) You said you've seen the film around 60 times. What makes you decide to re-watch it? Do you find yourself getting something different out of the film now? If so, what do you think that is?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

The best thing about a horror film is you can watch it over and over, even when you know the ending. You watch it the first few times for the story. Then you watch it for the frightening parts, to see how the director, actors and special effects artists pulled off the scares. There are so many wonderful special effects in *The Exorcist* that watching it never gets old. And the makeup Dick Smith did on Linda Blair is just as frightening today as it was thirty years ago.

When I started writing horror stories, I would also use *The Exorcist* as a learning tool to better understand how to slowly build suspense. It doesn't rely on cheap jump scares, like a lot of today's horror movies. The scares are carefully layered in with the suspense.

10) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at *The Exorcist* being a film so steeped in religious themes?

My upbringing was more spiritual than religious. Native Americans believe in a higher power, a Creator, and we believe in the existence of spirits and life after death. We also believe there is evil. And while I've attended church on numerous occasions, and even read the Bible several times, I consider the forest and fields—rather than a brick and mortar building—to be a better place to offer prayers and hold ceremonies.

I believe *The Exorcist* does an excellent job in making us think that perhaps there are greater forces at work than those we can see. It also reminds us how ancient religion really is, and maybe there are things the church knows that we don't.

11) Would you say *The Exorcist* is a special film for you? Do you have other films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

The Exorcist is definitely a special film for me. For one thing, I think it's one of the scariest movies ever made. And it's one of the few horror films ever to create a media frenzy. I'm very thankful that I got to see it on the big screen when it first came out, for it's an important part of horror history.

Other films that I never get tired of watching are *Jaws*, the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and the original *Halloween*. Like *The Exorcist*, these three movies are just as scary today and have earned a place in the horror hall of fame.

Follow up...

12) You mentioned that the kids and the adults arrived together and then split up, with all the kids sitting in one area and the adults in another. Did this happen for a lot of films? Were R-rated movies popular with kids, with yourself and your friends? Or was *The Exorcist* a special case at that time?

I can't say that “all” the kids separated from their parents, but a lot of high school and middle school kids did to be with their friends. And they weren't just in one area, but sitting together in different clusters throughout the theatre.

Not sure if it happened a lot with other films, because I only saw a few movies at that theatre. Most of the time we went to drive-in theatres, especially as we got older and owned our own cars.

R-rated films were definitely popular with underage teenagers, because we weren't allowed in to see them without an adult. They were the forbidden fruit, making them all the more desirable.

13) You mentioned that *The Manster* particularly frightened you when you were a kid. Do you know what it was about the film that scared you so much? Was it the whole film that scared you or just that one scene with the mirror?

What scared me in *The Manster* was the scene with the human eyeball suddenly appearing in the man's shoulder. I didn't stick around to see the rest of the movie, and only learned about the character growing a second head the following day from those who had watched it all the way through.

14) Are there any other films that have that same kind of religious aspect to them, for you, making you think about higher powers? Are there any films that maybe reflect or are just relevant to your own spirituality? The reason I ask is that I was very interested in news reports about *The Passion of the Christ* when that came out, stories about entire congregations hiring buses to go see it together. So I'm very interested in how people might relate to or see their own beliefs represented in films, and what that might mean for them. Of course, this probably won't be a factor for most people and most films.

I can't think of any other movies that made me think about higher powers. I've never seen *The Passion of the Christ*. *The Exorcist* made me think about the Devil and demons, and the possibility of such things coming into a person's life and doing harm.

15) With regards to your love of (and the scariness of) *Jaws*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween* (great list!), how would you say they compare to *The Exorcist*? Are they scary in the same or in a different way? Might the scariness be linked to what you talked about regarding your own writing, the fear of the everyday threats? (*Texas Chainsaw* doesn't seem very everyday to me, admittedly, but maybe it does if you've grown up in rural America with those kinds of surroundings closer to hand?)

The Exorcist has a very dark, forbidden feeling to it, like you're experiencing something more than just a movie. There are no moments of levity, nothing to break the slowly building tension. Hearing stories that it was based on an actual possession, and the cast and crew were cursed for doing a movie about the Devil, only added to the heavy atmosphere in the theatre that night.

Of the other horror films, the one I think compared closest to *The Exorcist* when released was *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* because of rumors it too was based on actual events. The film's creepy beginning, with the still camera shots and what sounds like a camera flash recharging only helped to fuel those rumors. I heard years later there really wasn't a murder house in Texas, but the film had been inspired by the story of serial killer Ed Gein.

Jaws relies heavily on the fear of the unknown to scare its audience, because we don't see the shark until very late in the movie. I used that technique when I wrote my Bram Stoker Award winning novel *Crota*, by not describing the creature in detail, leaving it up to the reader to create a mental image of it. And *Halloween* is

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

frightening, because the characters are likable and we care about what happens to them.

Dan

Particulars: Male; 36-45; USA. **Format:** Email.

1) Could you talk about how you first got into horror films? Was it as a result of a friend or family member or did you simply discover it yourself? Do you remember what it was that first grabbed you about it? Can you describe the appeal of it? Is it because it scares you, because of the stories or the technical aspects, or something else?

I don't remember a time when I didn't love horror films. If I had to guess, I'd say that I encountered the genre through "gateway media" like Scooby Doo, the Crestwood monster movie books, and the Time-Life Mysteries of the Unknown series. No one else in my family was a real horror fan, though my parents and siblings indulged my horror tastes with things like monster-themed birthday cakes.

I think the appeal of horror films was a combination of being safely frightened and the technical wonder of "How did they do that?" Like lots of horror fans I played around with crappy special effects as a kid, and I've kept an interest in effects my whole life. The other part of the appeal is the story of the Outsider. Some films are about a destructive force (which are fun!) but others clearly have sympathy for the monsters, and see them as misunderstood victims. Those tend to appeal to me a great deal.

2) What did you find scary in films as a kid? Has this changed much over the years? Are there horror films you don't find scary particularly? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else?

Honestly, they all scare me while I'm watching them, but the ones that stick with me tend to be stories of the supernatural than of more mundane horrors. One thing I have noticed is that as a kid, I was scared when I learned that something I didn't know to be dangerous turned out to have a darker side. For example, one made for TV movie (I can't remember the title off-hand but it wasn't even a horror film) showed a group of tourists held hostage in the desert. Exposed to the sun, they suffered dehydration, heat stroke, and burns and blisters. And that blew my mind! Until then I'd associated sunny days with summer and playing in the park; learning that it could be dangerous was a terrifying revelation. Maybe that's because it was an introduction of the idea that my perception of reality wasn't always accurate.

3) What is the scariest film you've ever seen? Can you describe what about it affected you? How does The Exorcist compare?

I get scared by most horror films, and that's one of the reasons I watch. But that feeling of dread doesn't often stick with me past the credits. One exception was The Ring, which really got under my skin. It has a lot of the hallmarks that creep me out

(supernatural, good effects, etc.) and it's really well done. The Exorcist struck many of the same nerves, though it didn't stick with me quite in the same way.

4) What is your earliest memory of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

My earliest memory of watching a horror film is sitting alone on our porch, beaten-up black and white TV rolled out on a cart, antennae cocked 'just-so' to get decent reception. On the air was a horror film -- something about a haunted hotel -- but before the story began a host introduced the film. I have a strong memory of the host delivering a warning that we'd be seeing stories of ghosts and ghouls, and hearing tales of terror and revulsion, so fair warning: turn off your television now! Then the host paused, as if giving the audience time to walk away. After a moment he leaned forward, grinned into the camera and, beaming out at all of us who'd chosen to remain, said: "Good... You're my kind of people." From that moment, I was HOOKED. I felt like I'd just joined an exclusive club.

In the cinema, I remember going to see THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY with my mom, and later GHOSTBUSTERS, which was the first time I sat separate from my parents at a movie. I know that I was taken to other films, but I don't remember them myself, only in stories from my older siblings. (I must have been pretty young, as their stories often involves weighing down the front of the seat, so that it wouldn't fold up and pin me in place.)

5) You said you've not seen the film again. Is this standard for you, not rewatching? Or are there some films you do rewatch? Can you talk about why you do or don't rewatch films and what you get out of that if you do it? Or the reasons for not doing it if you don't?

I rarely rewatch films as an adult. When I was younger, and the number of films was limited by what I could rent/borrow from the library for the VHS, I rewatched obsessively. But now streaming services mean that there's always something new to check out. In all honesty, there are more good films out there than I'll ever be able to see in one lifetime.

The exception to this is when I'm studying a film to learn some storytelling trick. Then I might rewatch it, pausing & rewinding to hear the dialogue or see what visual clues the filmmakers use, etc.

6) Can you talk about what effect knowing much of the story and all of the famous sequences had on your viewing of The Exorcist?

When I see a new film I generally avoid too much info, as I enjoy the thrill of discovery. And of course, there are some films that hinge on the unexpected. That said, I'm not too put off by spoilers. The real joy of the story is how we get there. It's like going to the opera and seeing the full synopsis in the program-- you can know how Barber of Seville ends, but the spectacle is still enjoyable.

7) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at The Exorcist and what you get out of it, e.g. how scary it is?

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

I was raised Catholic, and attended Catholic school growing up, but we were always in the "focused on charitable deeds" camp, rather than seeing the world as filled with demons and evil forces.

Having said that, the Old Testament always appealed to me in part because of the gory imagery and lots of the religious materials I saw leaned into that aspect. (see attached photo) I think it would have influenced how scary I found *The Exorcist* had I seen the movie as a kid. For comparison, the book *The Demonologist* about Ed & Lorraine Warren terrified me when I read it as a child, and gave me several nights of horrific dreams.

I'm no longer a practicing Catholic, so seeing *The Exorcist* as an adult took away some of those trappings. But I still found it a frightening story, filled with powerful performances.

8) Would you say *The Exorcist* is a special film for you? Do you have other films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

I would say that while it's undoubtedly a special film, it's not special for me personally. Sitting here, I'm having trouble coming up with a list of films that are truly special for me. Maybe it's that I have a fundamentally optimistic mindset, or maybe it's because I'm lucky enough to tell stories for a living, but most every film has something magical in it somewhere. When I talk about movies (and horror films in general) sooner or later I'm going to say "I love that film!" no matter what titles we're discussing.

Films that really stick with me are the ones that have a deep emotional impact or create a very specific state of mind (like *The Descent's* feeling of claustrophobia) or ones that startle me with the power of the artistic voice (*8 1/2* or *Rushmore* or *Lost in Translation*). As far as horror films, *Evil Dead 2* and *House* were touchstones for me when I was younger, probably because of their blend of humor and horror, but now modern films like *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* or *the Babadook* really sparked my imagination.

Follow up...

9) Could you talk a little more about why you think it might be that supernatural horror affects you more than stories about more realistic, mundane sorts of horror? Is there something about more realistic stories that doesn't appeal to you? Are the supernatural stories more a kind of escapism, do you think? Or is it that you just find them more interesting?

I've had a few discussions about this with other horror fans, and as best as I can tell, the supernatural elements frighten me more because they seem beyond my ability to fight back. Even though it's infinitely more likely that I'd encounter the nightmare of a home invasion, the "masked killer" seems like a foe that can somehow be bested. The supernatural entity, on the other hand, is unknown and unknowable. And to me, that's both more interesting and more frightening.

I'm fully aware that this is kind of foolish. If someone breaks into my home and takes me hostage, chances are that there's nothing I can do about it. But it feels like something I could resist.

There's also a range of realistic horror. A film like *You're Next* is worlds away from *Hounds of Love*. Something like the latter is more likely to make me sad than frighten me; both to know that it really happened, and that it's going to happen again.

10) Do you believe in the supernatural at all? What do you think about the supernatural scares you more (or scared you more as a child)?

I'd call myself "optimistically skeptical", which I guess is me trying to have my cake and eat it, too.

I'd love for there to be truth to supernatural events, and I certainly believe that there are things not yet understood, but I don't think that there are supernatural events to the level displayed in horror films. But the optimistic side of my skepticism lets me avoid the flip-side of belief in the supernatural, the one that's perhaps even more frightening: that there's nothing else out there. I think that's what makes *Cosmic Horror* so appealing. In those tales, there are greater intelligences and worlds other than this one, it's just that they can't be bothered to notice us. For all of Pazuzu's malevolence, at least it cares deeply about humans and how we react to its power.

11) Do you mind if I ask what it was that made you stop practicing religion? Was it just a slow drift away? How do you feel about the Church, generally? And how do you feel *The Exorcist* portrays Catholicism?

For me, it was a gradual process of learning that what I believe to be kind, moral behavior doesn't need to be guided by an organized religion. Once I made that leap, the structure of the church began to appear more about maintaining the power and prestige of the organization than effecting beneficial change. Although that sentence reads harsher than I mean it to-- there are many good people involved in religion (of all types) who are dedicated to helping those in need and making the world a more welcome place. I just found that although I shared that goal, my motivation stems from a sense of connection with other people, rather than as a directive received from an outside entity.

I have an overall positive view of the Catholic church, and know many people who are still active in it. The Church's portrayal in *The Exorcist* was very well done. It's clear in the film that religion means different things to different people, and that no one is entirely free of the questions and doubts that visit us when we're tired or afraid.

12) With horror movies specifically, do you like to watch them much with other people? Are they something to be shared for you? Or would you rather watch them alone? Does this differ between the more fun films (e.g. *Evil Dead 2*) and the more straight-faced ones (e.g. *The Exorcist*)? And does this differ for other genres of film?

I much prefer to watch alone. I get really immersed in the story, and prefer the experience to be as immersive as possible. Having other people talking or interacting with me can pull me out of the film very quickly, though I do enjoy introducing movies to a new audience and seeing their reaction first-hand.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

The twist is that today I live with my fiancée. So while I almost never watch movies alone, I've never been happier!

Kirsty J

Particulars: Female; 26-35; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Was this the first time you'd seen The Exorcist?

No this was not the first time watching The Exorcist, the first time I saw the film I believe I was about 13-14 years old, I watched it at home with my mum and step dad after purchasing it on DVD whilst out shopping that day. I remember trying to create a "creepy" atmosphere by closing the curtains and switching off all the lights.

2) How did the film make you feel? Was it what you were expecting? Or, if you've seen it before, was it as you remembered? Was there anything you'd forgotten or remembered differently?

The film made me feel reminiscent of being 13-14 again, it was also completely immersive being able to view the film on the big screen (which I obviously missed first time round). The majority of the film was exactly as I remembered it, the fact it was on a larger screen with the added sound effects of the other people in the building seemed to add to the overall experience of it, almost making it a completely new film I was viewing.

3) Are you a horror fan? Can you describe your history with horror films? Did you watch them as a kid? How did you get into them?

I can honestly say that Horror is without doubt my favourite genre of film, I believe I started watching horror films around the age of 11-12. It started with getting a television in my bedroom, which being that age mainly consisted of staying up late to watch things I probably shouldn't have.

I believe it was Bram Stoker's Dracula or possibly another black and white 1950/60's horror film which I managed to catch one night and at the time in the dark, sneakily trying to watch something well above my age rating I can say I honestly got a little scared watching it. From that point on I can tell you I was hooked, I wanted to feel that tingle of fear/tension/nervousness again so kept watching anything and everything I could possibly find, even rooting through parents tapes etc looking for anything which could possibly frighten me.

4) Can you talk about what you like (or dislike) about horror films generally?

The main thing I love about horror films is the uncertainty of what's coming next. The build up and suspense of the next big scare, wondering who/what is going to make me jump, I also thoroughly enjoy horror films which have a good plot twist in them, all the way through your convinced you know what the ending is going to be etc but then it all changes at the last minute leaving you shocked.

5) Do you enjoy films that scare you? Which films have scared you the most, and how do they compare to The Exorcist?

I thoroughly enjoy films that scare me, my only problem is there aren't many that can! The last film I watched which scared me was 11.11.11 (not sure of its other titles sorry). I say scared me very loosely, as I would describe it more as jumpy rather than scary.

The Exorcist compared to 11.11.11 is quite different as they don't play to the same jumps/scares, they frighten you in different ways but both based around Religion/The Devil.

I find most horror films tend to be quite predictable when it comes to scares, they play the eerie music or pan into a certain room feature or person which let's you know what's coming in a way.

The closest film to making me feel the way The Exorcist did would be the first time I watched The Omen, both of these films have a special meaning to me personally.

The films make me feel both uneasy and yet oddly comfortable at the same time, they both are based in a way around the supernatural/religious ideas/ideologies which makes them both believable yet unbelievable....

6) Are there things in films which work better than others in scaring you? Are there films which try to be scary but they just don't have any effect on you?

Things I think tend to work well in scaring me in horror films are unknown or unexpected scares or complete plot twists which you just don't see coming, I find things in the corner of the screen suddenly moving or appearing make me nervous or put me on edge too.

Most films as I said previously tend to "warn" you that a scare is coming by playing an eerie little tune or everyone suddenly going silent etc. This to me makes it too obvious and less frightening, taking the true "fear factor" away from the moment.

One of the main films that stands out to me as trying to be scary but just isn't is Jeepers Creepers, this film bored me to sleep literally, it tries to put all the right things in to make for a perfect film but just didn't manage it at all.

7) Has what scares you in films changed at all over the years?

I think it has changed from the very first horror films I watched to nowadays watching a film what is needed to scare me in the film.

I largely believe the reason behind this is purely based on the fact I can now watch whatever I want, when I want because I'm an adult in my own house, whereas before I was an 11 year old sneakily watching films on a school night whilst risking being caught out and missing the end of the film and losing my television!

8) How did your family feel about The Exorcist or horror films in general when you were growing up? Did they have a lot of say in the kinds of films you watched as a child? Would you watch films much as a family?

As I said the first time I watched The Exorcist was with my mum and step-dad so they were quite open to watching horror films once I showed I was old enough to watch them, we had always watched films together as a family while I was living with them, right up until I moved out at 19.

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

Obviously as a younger child they were cautious about what type of film I was watching in one sense, then again I remember watching Jaws at a very young age with my family which some people would class as a horror film and not appropriate for children to watch.

I would say my step-dad was more into horror films than my mum but she would still watch some with us, he watched The Exorcist at the cinema when it first came out so was interested to see how different it was watching it at home and with someone who had never seen it before.

9) Do the religious elements of The Exorcist matter to you all? Do they make it more/less interesting/scary? Did you have a religious upbringing at all or do you think your religious beliefs (or non-belief) changes how you look at a film like The Exorcist?

I feel that the religious elements of the film add a depth and slight "fear factor" to the storyline. It makes the film more interesting, even if your not a religious person you at least know of religion so have a base understanding of good vs evil etc which plays on your own beliefs while watching it.

I was not brought up in a religious household, I am open to the idea of religion but not a believer or follower. I can honestly say that films like The Exorcist make me question my views and thoughts around the subject, as even if it is "just a film" somebody had to think of or create the idea to begin with so where did that come from?!?.

10) The setting for the screening was a bit unusual. Did that make a difference in how much you enjoyed the film or how you approached it? How would the experience have been different at home or at the cinema? And which is your preferred way to watch scary movies?

I felt the setting for the screening was perfect, the added noises around the building perfectly complimented the film, they almost added extra jumps and scares in to the film itself.

Watching the film at home compared to this was nowhere near the same, it's nice watching films indoors where you can pause it, go get a drink or pop to the toilet etc but it's also less tense and frightening in my opinion.

If I had to choose which I prefer I would definitely have to say the cinema is better for watching horror films, it's more atmospheric, maybe it's because of the added tension you can feel from the other people in the room which adds to the whole experience. It makes for a "scarier" film overall when your watching it whether it's the first or the thirty first time.

Follow Up...

11) You mentioned that you'd watch horror films sneakily when you were 11 and if you were caught you might have the TV taken away. Do you remember what kinds of things you were watching and what kind of things they were worried about you seeing? Did you ever get busted? Did those films scare you or was it more the fun of doing it because you weren't supposed to?

As far as I can remember it was old black and white horror films i.e Hammer horrors or the the 1930/40's films like Dracula or Frankenstein through to Night of the living dead etc, I can't honestly say I know what they didn't want me seeing as the only reason I ever got given was "That stuff will give you nightmares, it has an age rating for a reason".

I remember once being busted and having my tv removed for a week (it felt way longer than a week at the time I'm sure lol).

I think funnily enough the main ones which actually frightened me in some way were the silent ones, I feel maybe the music in some way spoils the fear element as I previously said. I think the fact like anyone because I had been told not to do something, the added fear element of being caught makes it more risky, as your trying to get into the film while at the same time trying to listen to sounds around the house!

12) Did you often watch movies with your mum and step-dad? If so, who would generally get to choose? Did you all have similar tastes in films, or did you have to sit through some that you weren't into? Did you make them sit through horrors that they didn't like? (My mum had to put up with a lot of that from me!)

I must admit we did watch quite a lot of things as a family, not just movies but also tv programmes.

We used to go into Blockbuster and pick a film each for 2 nights then watch all 3 together over the 2 days! We have quite different tastes in general, my mum would like "story films" as she called them but usually with a crime tale, so films like The Shawshank Redemption, Goodfellas, The Green Mile etc then my step-dad liked all sorts from thriller films like Face Off or Identity through to James Bond and Die Hard...

There aren't many films I have Sat through luckily which I didn't enjoy as I like most genre of film, I highly doubt my parents would say the same as yes most of my choices would be Horror films which weren't always their cup of tea lol.

13) I was interested in what you were saying about how different films scare you in different ways, like 11.11.11 being jumpy (I'll have to check that out!) and The Exorcist being less about jump scares. Besides the different ways of scaring you, with big noises or things hiding in the background, are there kinds of stories that you find more scary than others? Does believability factor into it at all? I know some people are more scared by more human-based horror, but some people are absolutely fine with that but ghosts completely freak them out.

I absolutely love films which are both based in real locations/on real events and in some way ghost/entity/demonic based...

I find if it is either a real location (for example an abandoned underground military bunker which still has a few broken bits of equipment/pieces of paper scattered around etc, which you can actually go and find for yourself because it exists, not a made up movie set) mixed with either some sort of horrific past event which took place nearby and a good dollop of paranormal activity or a demonic representation

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

of the said event is manifesting itself in some way is for me the most frightening type of horror film.

I know in my mind its just a film and not real but the fact that the place does exist, or the tale is well known in an area it adds that spine tingling fear to it of well is it real then?!?

Kind of like Outpost if that bunker actually existed, that's an unbelievable yet believable story which creeps me out but manages to make me jump at certain points ha ha.

14) Had you heard very much about The Exorcist before you saw it? Had you heard about it from your step-dad or film magazines or anything like that, or was it more of "This looks good" DVD buy?

I remember my step dad talking about this film coming out in the cinema when he was younger and everyone was going "hysterical" about it, him being nose of course had to go and see what all the fuss was about and thoroughly enjoyed the film.

When we were out that particular day I remember looking through the films and my eye caught the cover of The Exorcist, thinking from the write up on the back this seems pretty cool. I took the DVD over to my step dad with my money and asked him to buy it for me as I wasn't old enough, he took one look and laughed saying "at least I know you will take film advice from me if nothing else" which of course I then realised this was the film we had been talking about a few days before lol.

Johnnie

Particulars: Male; 56-65; Canada. **Format:** Email.

Email 1

Hi Martin,

I did wonder whatever happened to this survey, thank you for sharing your note with me.

Funny how life works out at times, don't you think? Since driving in the final nail into the coffin of religion - I have been demon free for 3 years this Christmas Eve, I have had one (tiny) night terror that tried to sneak into my mind, but I laughed it off out of my subconscious and I have never had any additional dreams. I truly believe the therapy was coming down off the agnostic fence and believing in science and not fairy tales.

Watching the movie was no different than being a childhood rape victim, really. Mainly, PTSD, is real! It is the mechanism of the brain to not process the information that is real in order to protect itself from harm, but sadly the information is caught up in a short term memory bank and cached there for life if not 'exercised' out of short term and into long term memory so that it may just fade away on its own.

It just goes to show how impressionable a child's mind is in the end. That being said, the movie still is scary as hell -- don't you think?

By the way, how will I get the results of your future findings? I would love to hear other stories about your project.

Johnnie (Canada)

Email 2

I am interested in following this study, (the link that you supplied was broken.) I truly believe that it is a concept that has been in the making for centuries and I wonder if today that society is less believing because of today's technologies and also knowing that the opposite is true as well.

As for my personal opinion, I think that somewhere deep inside the double helix structure of our DNA, there is a gene that is coded into believing that the entity will survive. However, over time, the mutated gene has been hijacked by way of religion, so that the upper echelon of scholars and Charlestons alike, can and do, extract goods and services from the the weak, scared and timid. One just has to look at the generations of Catholics, from the Baptisms to the funerals, that the "Christ-gene" has been spliced into the very fabric of our primordial nucleic acid soup for the better or for the worse. It is that reason that we are hard wired for the need of a God perhaps -- I don't know in the end. But what I do know is this: no matter how the world ends, and if there are survivors - history will repeat itself and there will be something that the "self" will need to attach to, via proxy, to ensure its continuity. Ironically, it stares them right in the face on most days, she is called the Sun, along with her night time cousins -- the stars. The one and only true "God" of our world that gives, sustains and ultimately will consume every single element that our bodies have to offer and whoever said "Ashes to Ashes" sadly, got it all wrong, very well wrong indeed.

Johnnie (Canada)

Email 3

Yes, I am looking at Mars this very second and don't forget the last few days of July when Mars will be at perigee and will shine 5 times brighter than normal. I do hope that you signed up with NASA to have them engrave your name on the microchip that is now on its way to Mars via the InSight Lander mission. Scheduled landing is November 26, 2018. That way you can view Mars and get a real 'buzz' that your name is on a different world. Why does all this matter and why do I tell this to you? It's simple. You can pray to all the gods that you want, but not one of them will etch your name on a chip and put it on Mars, but STEM can and STEM will. I get chills when I think of how amazing are times, right now, that we live in, this very second. Don't believe me? Just look at your mobile phone. It is a product of the imagination that incorporates nearly everything from glass to gas -- not to mention the things that you can do with it.

I have read over those questions and I am giving myself about 10 days to complete the assignment. The questions are extremely thought provoking and I love them. Not that I am looking for a 'Pulitzer Prize' or anything for my writing, but I do want

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

my answers to be genuine and not sound scripted. If that is okay with you of course? Besides, I am going on a Scuba diving trip this coming weekend and I need to brush up on my diving safety stuff so, (as I always say), I don't get dead!

You haven't been to a drive-in movie theater? No way! Where do you Brits lose your virginity then if it's not in the back seat of your mom's Vauxhall? Ha ha.

Email 4 (w/ sunset picture)

Indeed I have. This has been on my mind for many nights. I have been traveling on adventures like mad. In fact, I'm going on another on September 10th for 3 weeks and I just got home from two others.

So here is my promise. You will have my completed text on September 4th. That is my word and if you knew my character, then you would know it's as good as gold.

Hope you're doing well in your world!

Johnnie

PS. As I am a devote atheist the caption for this picture is: "Without my God -- your God couldn't exist." That photo was me praying to my God! Think about, without it there would be nothing, just a cold dead rock!

Email 5

You're very welcome, but you are incorrect, because talking about the Exorcist is extremely important to me. In fact, it is the second thing on my "To Do" list after my Last Will and Testament. I have procrastinated on both of these tasks because of two reasons:

First, why would I need a will? I am never going to die. (I once heard this quote: "I always knew that everyone would die, but I always thought that I would be the exception.")

Second, my brain and subconscious are in a very comfortable place right now after so many years of being tormented by night terrors because of this movie; I have been proceeding cautiously. No, I don't believe that I am going to open the gates of Hell again, but I have enjoyed that the gates have been locked at the same time. My delay has an element of PTSD associated with it I think.

See 'ya Martin,

Email 6

1) Do you remember very much about that first time watching The Exorcist at the drive in? Do you remember your reaction to it as you were watching, if there were any moments or if there was any one thing in particular that affected you?

Unfortunately, I remember everything about everything about this night at the drive-in theater that has left an indelible mark on me . I went with my girlfriend, my sister and my friend and we were all the same age, except my sister was 16 and the rest of us were 17. (My girlfriend's grandparents owned the theater chain in Canada that showed this movie, even though the movie was Rated X to anyone under the age of 18, no one questioned our ages once she showed the staff her life time movie pass privileges.)

Usually at a drive in theater, most cars jostle for position in the last few rows of an outdoor theater, but having little sister sitting in the back seat of my mom's car made that premium parking completely unnecessary and so I parked fairly close to the giant white screen of the drive in. It was a good thing too, because the weather had a misty hue to it. All around the screen, the concession stand and even the cars -- it appeared everything had been engulfed in the same type mist as when you add water to dry ice -- you know that look that you see when you go to a rock concert and the 'smoke' seems to be coming of of nowhere and the lighting through the 'smoke' has an impact to the content of what it is you are watching. To say that the outside weather conditions were ideal for this particular movie would be merely coincidental, but never the less, the weather conditions were all part of the "Mise-en-scène" that night and I am sure if I were promoting such a film -- one could not ask for better conditions.

The four of us sat in the car in a kind of paralyzed state throughout the movie. I know it truly was the first real scary movie that any of us had ever seen before. Even though we were in our 'ripe old ages of 16 and a little bit, we were basically just children at the time. I can distinctly remember that it was me that was supposed to be the care taker of everyone in the car and could not show that I was frighten in the least, I guess it was my very first masculinity test and I didn't want to fail in front of the girls, but I was! Yes, if you ask anyone which scene was the scariest, I am sure it was when 12 year old Regan spun her head around, but not for me. It was when the child rose into the air and the Priests were chanting and commanding the demon(s) to leave her body and when the little girl said to the Priest, "Damien... why you do this to me?" The little girl's room was filled with same blueish lighting conditions as was the outdoor drive in theater. To me, I felt, that I was not merely watching a movie, I was part of a blueish reality via the extension of fear and a connection to the local misty weather. The outside weather, that misty blue, was the same as when I began to drive my mom's car home; but before dropping off my girlfriend first, I thought that it would be cleaver for me to drive through the local cemetery of the dead. Not a good idea in the end, I think that I scared myself even more than the girls and my buddy. They screamed in fright, but it was me that took the memory home for over 40 years or more and how all the dead souls wanted mine for mocking their rest. Who could blame them, right?

When I got to my bedroom, later that night, I was terrified and I was glad that I was alone so no one could see it in my eyes. I turned out the lights to go to sleep, but that didn't last long at all, because I turned on the lights because of the thoughts of the movie and the graveyard drive through that was locked in my short term memory and it never really left my consciousness because it was cemented there permanently via the Exorcist soundtrack of Tubular Bells. The perfect storm.

2) Were you scared while watching or was it something that developed after the more you thought about it? Do you remember how the other people there reacted to the film?

No one seemed to be affected by the movie more than me. In fact, I don't even remember anyone mentioning it soon after we all saw it together. I do remember

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

that my mom was really angry at me for taking my sister to see it. I thought that I was going to lose my mom's car for awhile as punishment, but that never happened. Perhaps she instinctively knew that I was paying the price of my own hell of my own making.

Interestingly, the more that time went by, the more the movie had its effect on me. 17 is a particularly peculiar age for human being it seems, at least it was for me. So many things were happening in my life at that time. Hormones, brashness, dealing with my step father in a combative manner, getting kicked out to live with my dysfunctional grandparents because I just couldn't be managed at home and the constantly blaming myself for my dad's death because when he called me on New Year's Eve to come over and see him that night -- I never knew that he would have a heart attack and that would be the last time that I would ever hear his voice again. I had plans with the girlfriend to go to a party and they had alcohol there too -- did I mention that she had an abortion in around that same time as well? If all of that didn't pile up on top of my immature and naive brain another interesting facet was being carved into my 'grey matter' that had phenomenal influence in my perception of reality. There was a convenience store directly across the street where I lived and the owner was a soon to be ex Priest because he had to leave the church because he got a girl pregnant, he was a religious teacher at the Catholic school where he taught. I would always see him reading his Bible and I asked him about exorcisms and the Devil et al. He told me how he was one of the Priest in this article and he told me how "the room was cold and smelled like shit." If a grown man, with connections to the church was telling me that he witnessed this hell just 7 years earlier, then hell was real to me as well and the dreams were not dreams at all - but they were messages to me from a spiritual world that was unseen, but most certainly felt.

3) Could you talk a little about the drive in? Was it usual to watch movies there? How was it set up? Having grown up in Wales over here in the UK, I've never had the chance to go to a drive-in theater. My only experience of them is through seeing them in movies. Is it very different to watching a film in the cinema?

It is exactly like they are portrayed in the Hollywood movies. However, one thing has changed over time and that is the sound. Earlier I mentioned that we were all in paralyzed state while we watched the movie? That was true, but there was a tiny little speaker that was attached to the driver's side window and the sound quality was not that great. So, really, if anyone wanted to really watch the movie - then everyone had to be very quiet. Now a days, you tune in a prescribed FM station on your car's stereo and all hell breaks lose inside your car. It really is an awesome experience. There is usually two movies played in a night, good thing too, because that is when the back row of the parking lot gets full of attention while the occupants wait for the main feature. Wink!

4) Have any other movies or any other kinds of stories had as extreme an effect on you as The Exorcist did? You mentioned in an earlier email that you had PTSD about the film and that it was like being a childhood rape victim. Have any other movies come close to that? You mention that your night terrors were always about the devil. How have you been in the past, before becoming an atheist, with

other films about the devil (such as The Omen, Rosemary's Baby, and more recent ones)?

To be continued.....

I will answer this question tomorrow or perhaps the next day to complete this survey. To be very candid with you, I have procrastinated this Canadian long weekend and I promised you and myself that I would have this completed. In fact, I did not go away for the weekend because I wanted to keep my delivery promise to you, but I did not attempt to do anything about this survey. I did not want to relive this time period of my life, as I believe that I mentioned to you earlier, that I didn't believe that I was going to open the gates of hell again, mainly because "Pandora" (of all people) has been a great sentinel and gate keeper. So that is why it has not been completed -- it really has been a bit uncomfortable. One thing that really strikes me is my clarity of all the events that I have mentioned or will mention in the following email. Nothing has been embellished and I believe that I am telling you an account of actual facts, not to the best of my memory, but as if I was reliving them as if it all happened just a day or so ago. Although the memories have been suppressed and dormant for 40+ years I have no problem remembering everything about them -- I only have a problem if I really want to remember them at all in the first place. Lastly, my brain is telling me "no more for tonight." It's feels like "misty blue" all over again and I will tell you if I experience any night terrors no matter if and when they occur. Okay?

Please excuse any spelling or grammatical errors that you find within - I tend to just write and not proof read too much because I am afraid of losing the validity of my thoughts that could be lost due to corrections. I am not even sure if that makes sense.

Yours truly,

Johnnie

Email 7

4) Have any other movies or any other kinds of stories had as extreme an effect on you as The Exorcist did? You mentioned in an earlier email that you had PTSD about the film and that it was like being a childhood rape victim. Have any other movies come close to that? You mention that your night terrors were always about the devil. How have you been in the past, before becoming an atheist, with other films about the devil (such as The Omen, Rosemary's Baby, and more recent ones)?

Interesting questions. Over the years, I have had a few run ins with movies that have made my skin crawl for sure. I have been awakened once by the little Chucky doll in **Child's Play**, but only once in 1993. I remember the year because I remember exactly what bed that I looked under somewhere during the night, but again, I remember everything about that dream with such vivid detail.

An episode of the Twilight Zone called "Long Distance Call," has been with me all my life. A little boy gets a toy telephone from his grandmother just before she died and the parents get concern when he is on the phone with her at all hours. At first it

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

seemed harmless, but the mom gets angry that the boy won't let go of the grandmother, so she grabs the phone and the woman can hear the grandmother say, "Billy, are you there Billy?" To this day, I think twice before picking up a toy telephone. Now, remember the Twilight Zone was the product of the mind of Rod Sterling who witnessed horrific tragedies of war while he was in the army. I think that the ordinary mind can't write truly scary movies or novels unless they have experienced an event that serves as a marker. This is a quote from his Wikipedia page, "Serling's combat experience affected him deeply and influenced much of his writing. It left him with nightmares and flashbacks for the rest of his life.^[5] He said, "I was bitter about everything and at loose ends when I got out of the service. I think I turned to writing to get it off my chest."

Yes, I did use the analogy of being a rape victim and the affects of PTSD in a earlier email. My mind was 'raped' with the insertion of the Christian religion via mandatory classes that my sister and I had taken when we were about 13ish. We had to go classes so that we could be "Confirmed" at the Anglican church. I fought like crazy with my mom about going, but she insisted and I lost in the end. I remember who taught the class and I remember where I sat in the class and I remember how frightening this Bible book was at the time. If we love children so much, then why do we inject so much fear into them at such a crucial junction of their mind's development? We lie to them about the Tooth fairy, the Easter Bunny and a Santa Clause and then we tell them that was all a lie, but the lies are conveniently used as segue to the greatest deception and conspiracy of all time: Jesus!

I believe that I was so traumatized by the movie is because of all the events that I have mentioned previously to you. In fact, PTSD is characterized by events that have been witnessed by the brain and is lodged into the area of the brain where short term memory resides. The theory that Dr. Francine Shapiro has hypothesized is that events that occur in everyday life are removed completely, allowed to fade away by the brain or if it is significant to remember in the long term memory - if so, then those memories are moved into the areas of the brain that make up long term memory and can be accessed even today. She believes, that is what REM sleep does and it is then, as the eyes rapidly moving from left to right, is when the dreaming person processes daily information. But when the brain sees or experience an event that is so odious to the consciousness, then the memory of a scary movie, a rape, a war, etc. will get caught in the short term memory because the brain wants nothing to do with that memory at all, so the memory gets stuck in a perpetual conscious limbo of realistic flashbacks. Dr. Shapiro pioneered a controversial therapy called Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), but there is lot of merit to her work.

I told you that I had night terrors of the devil throughout most of my life. The conclusion of all the dreams where the same. Whenever I figured out who the guy was in the dream, he would end the charade the second I said to him, "I know who you are" and then he would come up to my face and say this, "I am coming back and I am going to get you."

Except only one time was different like no other time before.

I experienced an extreme low, a long-term relationship was over because she was been engaged to someone else for over a year and a half, so I just got on a plane that morning and went to Miami Florida for a few nights because my discovery was devastating. I got really, really drunk in my room and just passed out stoned-cold. In a dream that I had that night; I found myself driving in a car with a passenger that resembled the 'The Grim Reaper.' As we drove into the night, I looked at him and said, "I know who you are, so just take me, I give up!" He did nothing; in fact, I think I felt a calm in my dream that everything was ending, no more broken heart, no more fear -- just defeat and soon these dreams of 40 years will be finally over. I was startled out of the dream in the most alarming way, I felt two Angel like women on each arm pulling me out of a deep sleep, so that I would not continue driving down that dark road with death. I have said to others it was as real as anything that I had ever experienced to date. To me, it wasn't a dream, it was a divine intervention of sorts. I say those Angels with my own eyes. (I still wonder to this day, if I was really dying via a mental suicide because I just wanted to give up all together anyways.) When I finally became an Atheist from being agnostic due to my sisters brush with death, I could finally see every night terror succinctly and it was no different from a guy dying of thirst in a desert when they see a mirage, you see what you see, because it is what you want to see.

I have had approximately three dreams that attempted to invade my night sleep, but somehow, I just laugh it off and briefly wake up and I thank my God - The Sun -- for supplying everything that I need in my daily life and having a brain that understands the universe and how it was formed via the Big Bang and there is no room in my mind for, as Carl Sagan titled one of his books, "The demon-haunted world."

5) You said in your survey response that you had no idea this type of horror existed before seeing The Exorcist. Had you had much experience with horror movies? Do you still watch them now, or was The Exorcist a one-off?

I can assure you that I had never seen a movie like the Exorcist, I never want to see another movie like the Exorcist and I will never see another movie like the Exorcist! It was a one off alright, but now, I really enjoy movies of science, like The Martian, Schindler's List, Hidden Figures, Gifted and the Steven Hawking movie (to which I have an unexpected connection with.) I can't understand why people eat hot peppers and suicide hot sauce for the life of me, and I can't understand why people want to scare themselves half to death either?

6) What made you go to see the movie at the time? Were you interested in the film or was it more of just a social thing, going to a movie with people for fun? Did you think it would be as scary as it was?

This question was answered in Part 1 of 2.

7) If it's OK with you, might I ask a little about your upbringing, in terms of religion? Were you raised in a very religious household? Was the place you grew up a fairly religious community? Was anyone in your family interested in horror movies? Is the religious element of The Exorcist something you were already very familiar with? Some people have mentioned that the religious ceremonies and prayers in the film are something they grew up hearing over and over again, so it's

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

quite a comfortable setting (even if the story is horrific). Whereas for me the ceremonies and the prayers seem quite exotic and fascinating, because I wasn't raised Catholic. I'd love to hear your feelings on that, if you don't mind.

I knew nothing about Catholicism; but I do remember when I was growing up, that the Catholic church was the largest church in town. I clearly remember how grand the structure was and thought to myself that the building alone was intimidating, and I felt uncomfortable even being near it. My mom was Anglican and my dad had no religion, if fact, come to think of it now, it was probably the best thing that he never gave to me. There really was nothing that indicated any religion in our house at all, BUT, now that I am reliving all this, my mom married my step-father in the same church where my sister and I were confirmed in and years earlier, baptized there as well. Maybe that's why my mom had a resurgence of religion and thought it would be best for Lori and myself to attend religious classes. After my step-father died, her parents died and litany of other tragedies along her path of life - she now believes in science - and yes, she can and does thank me for my wisdom. I took her to see the 2017 total eclipse of the Sun in Nebraska and science predicted right to the very second on the clock of when the eclipse would begin and when the eclipse would end. No god needed!

8) How do you feel about The Exorcist now? Do you see the movie as potentially harmful because of your experience with it? How do you feel about it as a movie? How would you describe the film to someone who asked you what it was, and would you recommend it? How do you feel about children seeing the film? A lot of people seem to have watched it when very young. I'm just wondering where the film stands for you in your mind now, what you think when you're reminded of the film?

What a great bunch of questions to end my survey with and I feel many things about the movie now and I thank you for the opportunity to face this movie in words for the very first time in my life.

My mind has guarded my memories like Moses has guarded the Ark of the Covenant. (I couldn't resist - I just had to take one last shot at religion.) After everything that I have written to you about my experience with this movie, I feel that it has had an extremely negative impact on my life and as had a detrimental effect on my psyche that has left its invisible scars upon that can't be seen or erased.

As a movie, I believe the Exorcist was brilliant beyond comprehension. It certainly must be as well, because society still talks about this movie today and you are doing a survey regarding this classic as we speak. I think that I remember reading at one time it was voted as the scariest movie of all time. I personally believe that the Exorcist is the benchmark and touchstone of this genre of all time and no other movie will even come close to it. Ever!

Recently, I was talking with a friend about this movie because I mentioned that I was doing a survey about the Exorcist. She said she had heard of it, but never had seen it and she said that she would never see it as well. I told her that I thought that no one should see it. This movie is not a movie - it is a conduit to a very special hell that lives inside of all of us. I would believe, it is a movie like this one that can

eventually 'tip the bucket' with the sight of just one drop of blood and will turn on a benign gene within the double helix that turns a person into a psychopathic killer. (But that is a whole other story, isn't it? But I think should be explored never the less.)

Under no circumstances should this film be shown to children and maybe no one under the age of 25 for that matter. This is not a movie about exorcising a little girl - this is a snuff film of human intellect. I say this because I can still feel the effects of this film this very minute. And even though, I talk like a tough guy now, but the sound of Tubular Bells is no different to me, than say, is a car backfiring thunderously near a war veteran's ears. BANG!!!

Thank you for doing this survey and thank you for allowing me to participate in it as well. I have no idea what the outcome of it will be for you at all, but for me, it is the final piece of closure to a movie that has been playing inside my mind well after the Exorcist ended one misty blue night at a drive-in theatre.

Sincerely,

Johnnie

Natalie

Particulars: Female; 36-45; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) You said you made sure to watch The Exorcist in the daytime and played a game at the same time? Had you done that before? Was that standard practice? Did you have to watch and make sure your sister wasn't upset? Did you watch movies together a lot?

That wasn't something we usually did. Although I would often have films playing in the background while I did something else, that wasn't usually during a horror movie that I had been wanting to see. I think we played the game because of the notoriety The Exorcist had what with being banned for so long. It felt like I was about to watch something dangerous and that it must be much scarier than anything available to view legally.

2) Did you parents know you were watching it? How did they feel about horror films? Did they ever tell you that you couldn't watch certain films or were they OK with it?

I lived with my Mum in the North East and my Dad lived in London. He was very against me watching any films he deemed too mature for me. Once when I was very young, about 6, I persuaded him to record the old Universal monsters 'Frankenstein' for me. When I got scared he got very angry and said that was why he didn't want me watching that stuff. I can't imagine my dad has seen another horror film in his life! My mum was fine with me watching anything that didn't include too much sex though. Horror films didn't bother my mum, I think she quite enjoyed watching them with us. My mum was coming in and out of the room while

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

we were watching *The Exorcist* for the first time, sitting down for bits of it, popping out to do housework or make a coffee. She wasn't paying much attention to it.

3) How did you feel about watching the film? Nervous? Excited? What had you and your sister heard about the film? What made you want to watch it?

I was both nervous and excited about the film. It was forbidden, and that made it feel like it must be something quite wicked. Although I was not 100% a believer, my background in the church meant I couldn't quite shake the feeling there might be something evil about *The Exorcist*. I'd heard very little about the actual film itself, more the response to it when it was released in cinemas. People fainting and crying in the aisles, accusations of blasphemy from religious figures and of course the decision to ban it outright in the UK. Pretty much all of that, rather than scaring me away is what made me WANT to watch it. I've always been a slightly odd duck!

4) Were you quite horror savvy? Did you know how the effects were done, etc.?

I wouldn't say I knew how the effects were done but, yes, I had seen a lot of horror films. I watched a lot of Freddy Krueger films so the seemingly impossible didn't faze me by that point.

5) Did you believe in possession? Did you have a religious upbringing at all? Did the religious elements matter then? Do they now?

I believed it enough to fear possession. I lived with my uncle for a while and was very close to him throughout my teen years and he was a very devout evangelical Christian. I spent a lot of time in Church with him and at that age it was bound to have an impact. The form of Christianity I was exposed to absolutely espoused the reality of evil and of Satan and demonic forces. I do wonder if I had a sort of “my uncle and his mates could sort that demon lass out, no bother” attitude which stopped it being as scary as it might have been! That I still believed enough that I thought God wouldn't allow it to go too far. Now I'm an atheist and the film scares the life out of me which seems entirely the wrong way around.

6) You said you loved Freddy Krueger movies. What was it about them that you loved? What was it that *The Exorcist* didn't have compared to them? Did you find Freddy scary?

I loved Freddy's quips and puns, the cool teenagers, the inventive kills, the way he subverted reality in a way which oddly appealed to children. I did find Freddy scary and I don't think I would have liked the films if I didn't. *The Exorcist* by comparison is a slow burn dread. It doesn't give you something funny or gory or a jump scare every 5 minutes to keep you watching. It's an adult film that requires a little something of you.

7) What kind of horror scared you most as a kid?

I don't know that there was any subgenre or franchise that most scared me. The films from my childhood/teens that frightened me the most were *IT* and *Candyman*. So, I guess supernatural boogeymen.

8) Has that changed now? What does “scary” mean to you?

I find well-crafted ghost films scary. And I saw Hereditary last week and didn't want to go to bed that night. I think what's most scary about ghosts is that in one moment everything you thought you knew about the world could be thrown into chaos. Either that or you've gone mad and your brain is tormenting you, both possibilities are terrifying.

9) You said in the survey you watched the film again in the cinema as an adult. How was that? Was it very different to how you remembered? Did you notice new things?

There was a long gap between the first time I saw it and seeing it the cinema, so I didn't remember it well enough to see new things, but it was like watching a different film. I couldn't believe this was the film I'd thought was so mediocre as a kid. All 4 of us who went to see it came out dumbstruck, mostly with fear but also with how blown away we were by the film.

10) What difference did the cinema make when watching the rerelease? How was the crowd?

The cinema made a world of difference. We were the only ones in the whole place and I am honestly glad I didn't need to go to the toilet because I was afraid to move! I wouldn't have liked to have seen it with people going "ewww" at the vomit scene and all the other things horror crowds do. It needs to be seen in silence, in the dark, scared stiff!

11) Where would you rather watch horror, given the choice, at the cinema or at home?

I like to watch it at the cinema but usually in the VIP booths because I get really peeved off by teenagers laughing, talking and screaming through the whole thing. I don't mean the kind of thing you get at horror cons, but poor cinema etiquette which you get a lot of when scared teens are trying to act tough!

12) Are there many other films that you've seen as much as The Exorcist?

Halloween and Ringu I've seen as often. I don't think a lot of films hold up to multiple viewings as well as those.

13) How do you feel about The Exorcist's reputation as "the scariest movie of all time"?

I think it's absolutely justified. The Exorcist never gets old. Films usually become less frightening the more often you watch them but The Exorcist always crawls under my skin. I don't believe there has ever been anything that can compete.

Follow up...

14) You mentioned your mum carried on about her way, popping in and out of the room to do housework or make coffee here and there as the film played. Was this pretty standard? How would you normally watch films with your family?

We watched so many films when we were kids that it differed, really. My mum watched a lot with us but with housework to get on with she couldn't keep up with the sheer amount my sister and I got through!

REMEMBERING "THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME"

15) I found it fascinating that you were less scared by The Exorcist as a kid because of your religious upbringing. I would've thought usually it went the other way! Why is it do you think the film scares you more now as an atheist?

I think The Exorcist is quite good at making a person doubt their atheism. I see it as a religious film almost as much as a horror film. And as someone who had "backslidden" I didn't feel protected by my faith and the church. When we came out of the cinema after I saw it for the second time we "jokingly" drew crosses in the condensation on the car's back window. We laughed but we were genuinely frightened.

16) Do you mind me asking how you've come to be an atheist and what kind of difference that's made for you? (Feel free to skip this if it's too personal.)

I studied Theology at uni and came to see religion, spirituality, ritual and belief systems as essentially different ways of coping with the random and often unfair nature of life and the finality of death. I'm sorry if that seems very bleak but it hit me during a social anthropology lecture on Azande funeral rituals and I've not quite been the same since.

17) You talk about watching The Exorcist again after a long gap and it seeming like a different film. Has that happened a lot with films you've revisited? Are there any other films you've come to like more as you've gotten older? Any you used to love that you now can't stand? I generally like films less if I watch them as an adult, I'm much more discerning now! Though I've come to appreciate films I once thought boring like black and white films starting James Stewart and Cary Grant.

18) You mention VIP booths at the cinema. Is that as it sounds? Does it make a big difference? I don't think I've been to a cinema cool enough to have that, so I'm not sure what it is!

The VIP booths are self contained areas behind the main auditorium with a large glass viewing panel at the front, 8 extra comfortable seats and buttons to control the film's volume. Usually they are empty during the day so although there is room for 8 we get the whole booth to ourselves.

Hope

Particulars: Female; 19-25; USA. **Format:** Email.

1) You said you were 6 or 7 years old the first time you saw The Exorcist. Can you remember very much about that first experience with the film? You mentioned that your mom was applying medicine to your hair while you watched it. Were there particular things that stood out to you about the film, or is it mostly the surroundings you remember?

I remember mostly my surroundings and overall feelings towards the film. Like waiting at the top of the stairs for an hour in eye shot of my mom because I was too afraid to wash the medicine out of my hair; if I closed my eyes in the shower Regan would get me!

2) What is your earliest experience of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

My family has always been big movie watchers. We would have a movie night at least twice a week where we would go to the local movie rental, pick something out together, sit down in the dark after dinner together, and watch together. Going back as long as I can remember. We love movie trivia and most of our inside jokes and phrases come from movies. Unfortunately, I don't remember my first movie or anything along those lines.

3) Did you often watch films with your mom? If so, what kinds of films would you watch? Did she ever stop you from watching certain films? Who decided to watch The Exorcist, do you remember? Do you know what your mom thought of the film at the time?

There was never a time where I was restricted from certain movies. I remember being in elementary school and asking other students if they've seen certain films and getting blank stares because everything I mentioned was rated R. I thought it was normal. We watched everything from horror and psychological thrillers (my mom's favorite) to children's animated movies and everything inbetween. I believe we were flipping through channels and The Exorcist happened to be on. She decided to keep it on that channel. To scare me? Because she actually liked the film? Who knows? Haha. I think she was pretty neutral about it. Even now she'll say it's scary, but she doesn't have much trouble watching it.

4) What had you heard about The Exorcist before seeing it? Did you read much about it afterwards?

I had no idea about the Exorcist before I watched it. Afterwards, I tried to keep it off of my mind as much as possible. Until I became a teenager, and started to get more comfortable with it. I read the book when I was around 16, and now I'm even cross-stitching the face of Pazuzu. (Weird how that turns around, huh?)

5) You said you were scared for a long time after watching The Exorcist. Was this quite a common thing, or unique to The Exorcist? Have you experienced it with other films?

This fear was absolutely unique to the Exorcist. As I've said, I was never restricted in the types of movies I could watch, and I loved horror as a kid. But no other horror movie affected me to the extent of the Exorcist. It was always fleeting fear that lasted until the next morning.

6) What did you find scary in films as a kid? Has this changed much over the years? Are there horror films you don't find scary particularly? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else? How do you feel about The Exorcist as The Scariest Movie of All Time?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

As a kid my fear was surface level. Jump scares, grotesque faces, bogeymen, etc. As an adult watching horror/thriller movies, I'm afraid of the realism; the thought that some of these situations could potentially happen to me. Soundtracks also play a big role in how scary I find a movie. The soundtrack for *The VVitch*, for example, is heavy hitting for me.

7) Was it pretty common for your family to play pranks on you, like how you talk about with *The Exorcist*? Would they leave pictures up or play the music and that kind of thing?

Scaring each other in my family happened often. Everyone knew how terrified I was of Regan, so they'd purposefully leave a fullscreen picture of her on the computer, or play a sound clip of her voice. My mom and I would be laying together in the dark, and she would put a flashlight underneath her chin to spotlight her face and she'd let out a maniacal laugh as I begged her to stop. She once chased me around the house with a full raw chicken while I sobbed. Hahaha.

8) Can you talk about the second time you saw the film? Were you nervous to watch it again? Did it match up to what you had remembered? Was it just as scary?

The second time I watched the movie I was terrified. I think that I was hyping myself up to be scared because I remembered how much it affected me the first time. The influence of my childhood fear may have skewed my perspective.

9) How did watching it that second time in a group of people change the experience? You said it was easier?

Watching it in a group helped a lot. Watching any horror movie in a group really lessens the scare factor. It makes it more fun (snide jokes about the 70s props or laughing at a particular crude line), and it makes it feel less likely that a monster is going to pop out of the closet.

10) What made you rewatch the film as many times as you did? Do you see new things in the film or do you want to just recreate the experience of that first time?

I was partly trying to desensitize myself to it, but mostly I just realized what a great film it is. Once I started looking at it like a piece of art rather than a traumatizing film it became less unbearable for me.

11) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at *The Exorcist* and what you get out of it, e.g. how scary it is?

I didn't grow up with any religious beliefs. My parents believed in God but it didn't go further than that. I've always had an indifferent attitude towards religion/spirituality. Having said that, one of the biggest reasons I hated watching *The Exorcist* is that I was afraid that doing so would open my soul to being possessed. As if the movie gave my body a giant WELCOME mat for demons to fester inside of me. I never thought about angels or demons, God or the Devil outside of this movie. It's the weirdest thing.

12) Would you describe The Exorcist as a film which is special to you? Do you have films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

The Exorcist is absolutely special to me. Being terrified of it is one of my notable childhood memories. It's the only horror movie that truly scared me, and I find myself comparing the fear level of other horror movies to the Exorcist (which probably isn't fair, honestly). There are many other films that hold a special place in my heart, such as How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Willy Wonka, Young Frankenstein, Joe Dirt. All wildly different than the Exorcist. Every film besides the Exorcist is special to me because they were films that I watched and loved with my family.

Kirsty C

Particulars: Female; 19-25; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Were there particular things that stood out to you about the film that first time you watched it? Were there any particular moments which struck you as being disappointing, or looking dated?

Nothing about the film particular stood out, but I think this is mainly because I have watched many horror films before I watched this one. I think the possession scene was especially disappointing in my opinion, but I think this is only because I have watched more recent films about demonic possession which have been more up to date, and had the technology to make them especially realistic and scary. I do think however, that it had a more developed narrative than more recent horror films, and everything was explained one way or another, which is something you can lack in more modern horror films.

2) Did you get a sense of how other people were responding to the film? Were they disappointed in the same way? I've heard a lot about people laughing at the film when it was rereleased. Did you have any of that? Can you see how people might react that way?

The audience who attended the film were clearly people who really liked it, it wasn't a crowd of people who were about to watch it for the first time. There was some laughing which I noticed mostly because I laughed at these parts with them. I can understand that some people find the film scary, it is not meant to be a film that is taken lightly, however if you are a fan of horror films, like myself, it is clear to see the development in the genre since this film was released, so there are films that could be argued as scarier than this one. I do not think that the audience reacted in the same way, if you love a film then you will normally (with small exceptions) always enjoy viewings of it.

3) What is your earliest memory of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

My earliest memory of going to the cinema was to see *Treasure Planet*, which was released in 2002, so I would have been 6 years old, and I went with my mum and my best friend and her mum. My first cinema experience going myself with just a friend was the *bee movie* which was released in 2007. I didn't see my first horror film till I was about 11, which was the *El Orfanato* in 2007 as well, my best friend was 2 years older than me so I normally watched things with her, but I could say that if she hadn't been older than me I probably wouldn't have been introduced to horror films until a much later age.

4) What was it about the film, do you think, that made your mum want to warn you off it? Was it because it was too scary or sexual or because of its religious themes? Did you understand, when seeing it, what had made her tell you not to watch it?

I remember her telling me about her visit to the cinema to see it with my Aunt (her sister) and she always recalled people being sick, having to leave and she said that someone fainted at the classic head turning scene. As I got older, I don't understand myself why I didn't just watch it, I mean I had watched probably worse films, such as the *Ring* and the *Grudge*. I think it was mainly because she found it terrifying rather than it being too sexual or religious, she was obviously genuinely terrified after watching it, and didn't want me to have the same experience.

5) Did you watch films much with your mum as a kid? Did she warn you away from other films in the same way? How did she feel about your love of horror?

I normally watched Disney films with my mum as a kid, which is probably the norm for most people born around that time. As I got older, we watched the *Bourne* films as these were her favourite. It is hard to say how I got into watching horror films, they definitely weren't introduced to me as a young child, and I did not know many people growing up who enjoyed them. Most people I know seem to find it quite weird that I enjoy horror films - my mum is no exception - but they don't understand the thrill you get of being scared of what will happen next. Is it a difficult thing to explain, but in my life, I only have one person who enjoys horrors as much as me, and he has introduced me to a wider variety and we usually go together to see horror films in the cinema.

6) What did you find scary in films as a kid? Has this changed much over the years? Are there horror films you don't find scary particularly? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else? What is the scariest film you've ever seen?

Weirdly enough, I was scared of the evil villains from Disney films, as this was the films that I watched – particularly the witch from *Snow White* (which gave me continuous nightmares). As you can tell, this has developed and changed over the years, and it takes an extremely different path now as it takes a seriously scary narrative to frighten us.

Horror films I don't find scary would be the *Paranormal Activity* stories, these were much overhyped and were not well developed stories.

I watched *The Candy man* a couple of years ago and for some reason that really made me scared, and looking back at it there was specific reason for it to do that,

but for some reason it just stuck with me as being really scary. In the horror film genre however, I especially enjoy the conjuring universe films, such as Anabelle, The Conjuring and the highly anticipated film (in my opinion) The Nun which will be released very soon! I also particularly enjoy Sinister, The Boy and the Babadook. These are the horror films that do give me goose bumps and I was scared the first time I watched these. The scariest film I have ever seen would probably be The Blair Witch Project, The Ring or El Orfanato (which was the Spanish version of The Orphanage, which somehow made it scarier). However, I do think I will find The Nun scarier than these ones, because the character looks scary, and like I said it does give me goose bumps even thinking about it!

I think that horror films are going to slowly either get less scary, or they will be not as good as their predecessors purely based on the fact that there are now a large number of horror films released. It will be hard to not do the same type of topic without copying the previous, or without making things repetitive.

7) Why do you think The Exorcist has this reputation as The Scariest Movie of All Time?

I think it has the reputation of being the scariest film of all time because when it was released it was the first of its kind, and the legend of it carried on. The older generation told the younger that this was the scariest and nothing would compare to it, and if you are not an avid or regular viewer of horror films like myself, then you probably would find it terrifying.

8) Do you rewatch films much? If so, what kinds of films do you rewatch most, or what might make you rewatch something?

Working in a cinema means that you will inevitably watch the same film multiple times. If I really like a film, I will limit my re-watching to every so often purely based on the fact that when I have to watch a film numerous times in a short span, I end up hating it and cannot wait to never watch the film again. I wouldn't say there is a specific genre of films that I re-watch, normally it is just my all-time favourites that I will watch.

I feel like some horror films cannot be re-watched, for example, a film called 'the Boy', released in 2016, was a horror based on the element of not knowing, and when it is revealed at the end it all makes sense, so to watch this when you already know everything doesn't have the same impact.

9) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at The Exorcist and what you get out of it, e.g. how scary it is?

I did not have any kind of religious upbringing, I was christened as a baby however we didn't attend church or anything like that. My religious beliefs have not changed over the years, I still do not have any religious influences in my life. I don't think my non-religious upbringing affected how I watched the film, to me it was a film about demonic possession more than anything else, although I know there is a very religious tone surrounding the film.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

10) Do you have films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

My favourite film is Shrek, far from my beloved horror genre. This is simply because I am a huge fan of DreamWorks films, and it mostly just makes me feel happy when I'm sad and can really cheer me up.

Follow up...

11) El Orfanato is terrifying! That's a great first horror movie! Do you remember much about seeing that for the first time, about how you reacted to it and what you thought of it?

It really is terrifying! Even now I am definitely scared of that film, not sure if it's the memory of being scared that is the reason for this or not! I definitely remember telling my friend I didn't like it and didn't want to continue watching it, but of course we did! I have watched the English version since then - not as scary - but still a creepy horror film to watch!

12) Do you think you would have gotten into horror films at a later age if you hadn't watched El Orfanato at 11 years old? Was it just because that movie made you interested in horror, or were you interested in horror before then, in books for example?

I think I would have began to watch them later, I find the horror genre fascinating and love to see it develop. I read Dracula not long after watching El Orfanato, but again I can't say for definite that this was because of watching the film or because of looking at it and thinking it would be something I enjoyed. However, now my kindle is currently full of books in the horror genre that I am slowly making my way through!

13) It sounds like the films you found scariest seem to be more supernatural ones. Do you find more human-based horrors, such as serial killer movies, that scary? Is it more the story or the kind of horror that it is do you think that scares you?

In all honesty, I do find serial killer stories scary. I think everyone finds serial killer stories kind of creepy because there is a slim chance that it could happen, it is very slim, but it is more realistic than a demon possessing your home! The feeling of being scared when watching them is different - the feeling watching a supernatural horror is less ingrained and more of a jump scare at the time it happens, but when watching a serial killer film, I will admit that for a few hours, or maybe days depending on the film, I will find myself checking over my shoulder and hearing little noises in the house if I am alone more. I hope this makes sense!

Holly C

Particulars: Female; 19-25; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Do you remember very much about your first viewing of The Exorcist? Was it your idea to watch it or your mum's? Was she as excited as you were to watch it? Do you remember how your mum reacted to it?

I remember that me and my mum were shopping in a secondhand dvd store in Manchester, and we came across a battered copy of the film. It was one of those old cardboard clip cases and we decided to buy it and watch it when we got home. My mum was excited for me to watch it for the first time, and hadn't seen the film in a long time so was probably excited to view it again too. She got just as scared as me, because she didn't remember a lot of details on her rewatch.

2) Had your mum told you about the film before? Had she already seen it and wanted to share it, or was it just that you both wanted to see it?

Yes, we'd spoken about it briefly and my desire to watch it and how much it scared her when she was younger, and seeing that destroyed copy in the shop just reminded us.

3) Do you often watch horrors or any other films with your mum? Do you share horrors with each other? Did she say you weren't allowed to watch certain films growing up? Does she have similar taste to you? Can you talk a little about how she got you into horror films?

Yeah, me and my mum both adore the horror genre, so most of the films that we watch together are horror. The only film I can remember her not wanting me to watch, although not particularly horror, is Kubrick's 'A Clockwork Orange' when I was quite young, but I did anyway. It didn't really affect me, it still doesn't to this day, even though I enjoy it. My mum has a similar taste in horrors as I do like supernaturals, monster movies, demons etc., but she enjoys the gore genre a little more than I do. Sometimes I can't stomach it, although I'm working on it. She got me into horror films properly with 'Jeepers Creepers' and the 'Wrong Turn' franchise, which she bought online after realising I hadn't seen them, and we waited impatiently for them to come. That's how it started, really. 'Jeepers' is still one of my favourite horrors today.

4) What is your earliest memory of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

My earliest memory of watching any film would probably be just one of the 'Toy Story' films at home. I can't really remember it that well, though. As for horror, the only thing I can think of is watching 'The Woman in Black' in the cinema for my 13th birthday. It was pretty good.

5) What did you find scary in films as a kid? Has this changed much over the years? Are there horror films you don't find scary particularly? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else? What is the scariest film you've ever seen?

Okay, so I had a bad fear of Spielberg's 'War of the Worlds' when I was younger and I still hate it. I had nightmares for years. I was also scared by the beetles in 'The Mummy' movie with Brendan Fraser, although I grew out of that one pretty quickly and now I just enjoy the cheesiness of it. I think aliens still scare me a bit, but I do enjoy 'The X-Files', so I don't really know. Horror films that I really don't find scary are any with zombies or vampires, because I just think they're boring. Bar '28 Days Later' and '30 Days of Night', though. They were entertaining. Demons are always a good way to go if I want to be spooked. Or anything with a similar sense of dread in

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

it, like ‘Hellraiser’ or ‘Event Horizon’. They just give me the creeps and make me super uncomfortable and I have so much fun. Although, the scariest film I’ve ever seen and haven’t watched again since my first viewing is the original ‘Martyrs’, which has themes of Hell in it. That film fucked me up, and I was thinking about it for weeks after.

6) You said you’ve seen the film 3 times. What makes you decide to re-watch it? Do you find yourself getting something different out of the film with new viewings? If so, why do you think that is?

I think I just forget a lot of details about the film, since I watch so many. I rewatch it most of the time because the person I’m with hasn’t seen it, and it’s just not acceptable. The film doesn’t particularly scare me anymore, more so just entertain me because of the great practical effects and just how chilling the overall film is. I think I get a bit of nostalgia from it, too, as I always watch the film from that old dvd.

7) You mentioned that some parts are a tad cheesy now. Which parts do you find cheesy and why do you think that is? Is it a result of the age of the film? The effects? The story? The religious themes?

I think the religious themes in the film are still relevant today, with the recent popularity of ‘The Conjuring’ series and such, however, I think that the whole film has just aged slightly, with the overreactions of characters and the way the film is shot comes off a little cheesy sometimes. An example I can think of is how Regan is so vocal with her mother when possessed, I think the dialogue is a little laughable sometimes and a little over the top.

8) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at The Exorcist and what you get out of it, e.g. how scary it is?

I did not have a religious upbringing, I wasn’t even baptised, and the only times I went to church was for harvest festivals with my primary school. We also did a bit of maypole so my upbringing sounds more like the original ‘The Wicker Man’, to be honest, haha. I’m still agnostic now, but I’m open to proof of demons existing and I think that’s why I’m still intrigued in the film and its themes, although I am not a Christian or Catholic.

9) Would you say The Exorcist is a special film for you? Do you have other films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

I like the film and it has some memories attached to it, but I treasure different films, really. My favourites that are outstandingly special to me are ‘Jeepers Creepers’, ‘Evil Dead (2012)’ and ‘The Blair Witch Project’. I love ‘Jeepers’ from the fact it genuinely does give me the creeps, and the whole atmosphere of the film is brilliant. It’s like a standard monster movie; I love it. Now, the original ‘Evil Dead’ is very good and very fun, don’t get me wrong, but there’s something about the remake that is just better. It has the same cheesiness and goriness as the original but it’s just a tad darker, and that’s what I like. And I genuinely don’t understand the hate for ‘The Blair Witch Project’, like I get that people are mad it never shows the witch but when I first watched it, I didn’t even care. The sound design in that

film is phenomenal and watching that was the first time I ever got chills from watching a horror. A few more of my favourites, though not as special, would be; the first four films of the 'Final Destination' series, the first three of the 'Saw' series, my favourite slasher, Tobe Hooper's 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre', 'Scream', 'Child's Play' and 'The Descent'.

Follow up...

10) I don't want to bring up bad memories, but I'm fascinated at how War of the Worlds affected you so much. Have you tried to watch it again? What do you think it was about it? I watched it myself recently for the first time in ages and it's ridiculously intense all the way through. Do you think it's something to do with the people involved? Because The X Files is professional FBI types whereas War of the Worlds is average people? Or maybe the tripods and the sound design? (Their fog horn sound or whatever that is is properly creepy.)

Honestly, I tried to watch it again last year and I got through it, but had nightmares and panic attacks for weeks after! It was horrible, like everything had resurfaced, and I think part of it is the fact that it's happening to masses of ordinary people, and there's just mass panic everywhere, yeah. One scene in particular that affected me was when the mob of people steal Tom Cruise's car from him and his daughter, and there's just chaos everywhere. That really stuck with me. The big, huge thing with this film that haunts me after is definitely the tripods though. How big they are, and the awful booming, groaning noises they make. I mistake airplanes for them sometimes and have to calm myself down!

11) You have a really varied taste in horror movies! A lot of people I've spoken to tend to either like monsters and gore or ghosts and psychological stories, but you seem to love both, between Evil Dead, Blair Witch and The Conjuring. Do you find you get something different from these films? Or is it just one kind of thing you look for, like a good story or some great visuals?

What I look for, mostly, in horrors is usually just a creepy as fuck ghost, demon or anything in between. I love to be creeped out majorly, but I think the main reason I have such a varied taste is because nothing really puts me off in horror. There are a few snuff-style films like A Serbian Film and Salò that I don't think I'll watch anytime soon, just because the torture porn aspect of it is a bit too much sometimes. It's not like I'm squeamish, though; some things just aren't for me unless I'm in the right headspace and fully prepared. I tend to love English horror, too, as they're just so realistic (for me, being English) and I just see these places and these accents that are way too familiar, and that aspect helps me to immerse me in the story really well and get spooked. One of my favourite English horrors is Kill List, and of course The Wicker Man!

Jeff

Particulars: Male; 46-55; USA. **Format:** Email.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

1) Can you describe the first time you watched The Exorcist? Including the setting, who you were with, anything you can remember. Was it busy? Can you remember other people’s reactions? Was the cinema your usual?

I saw The Exorcist for the first time in 1976/77, I was in the fourth or fifth grade. It was re-released and I begged my parents to take me. We went to a nearby theater called Town & Country 6, which was our usual theater (it’s an LA Fitness now). My parents and two siblings came along and from what I recall, attendance was sparse but vocal - there were a lot of gasps, a few screams during the movie; no fainting, vomiting or possession of theater patrons - which what what I was expecting based on what I had heard over the years.

2) How did you feel about watching the film? Nervous? Excited? What had your brothers and sisters told you about the film? Were you quite horror savvy, with reading magazines? So did you know how the effects were done, etc.?

Honestly, I was an anxious mess walking into the theater. As a part of the agreement with my parents, I had to call Father Valentine to get his opinion/blessing to go and he said “It’s only a movie” ... but it wasn’t. The whole family seemed to love the movies, we saw just about everything that came out and censorship was not high on my parent’s list of priorities so when it came to “forbidden films” it just made me want it more. I was raised on “World Beyond” on Channel 5, all the classic horror films and monster movies. My older brother Greg was a horror movie fanatic, he had several books on horror movies and an amazing collection of Famous Monsters magazines (which he still has somewhere). The Exorcist cover was pretty great, and it covered the effects pretty extensively, I remember a few photos of Dick Smith and Linda Blair, working on the make-up and other gags and I had experiments with make-up and animation on Super 8 by then. One would think I was on solid ground, the whole suspension of disbelief thing, but it wasn’t enough to keep my grounded during the movie.

3) Could you talk a little about your religious beliefs at the time of seeing the film? Do you think that affected how you looked at the film? Did you believe in possession? Were you aware of any religious debates around the film at the time?

I was raised Roman Catholic, I was the youngest of seven kids, and the only one attending public elementary school. My Dad had heart attack in 1973, bypass surgery (one of the first in Phoenix) and he was a little hyper-religious when he came home from the hospital, so it was suddenly time for me to go to a Catholic School like my brothers and sisters had. I was transferred to a Catholic School (St. Agnes) for the fourth grade... it was a difficult transition. As stated above, I had to call a priest before going to see the movie, so we were pretty religious, my Dad went to morning mass every day and I was the altar boy for most of them. I wanted to be a Priest at that point because it seemed the most worthy thing to do, and I absolutely believed in God and the Devil and was convinced that the Devil was constantly fighting to gain control over all of us, so for me, possession was not only within the realm of possibility.

4) How did your parents feel about the film? Did they have a lot of say in the kinds of films you watched as a child? Would you watch films much as a family? Were there any kinds of films you’d watch more often with your brothers and

sisters? Did you always play and act out films like how you described playing Exorcist?

My mom loved it. It scared the hell out of her. My Dad hadn't seen it, and as stated above, his heart attack was in 73 and he had told my siblings they couldn't go, but my mom took them while he was in the hospital. I think it was a problem for my Dad when he came home from the hospital, I remember a lot of anger and fear (beyond losing him), but nothing really specific, looking back on it, it probably compounded the way the movie was built up in my head.

5) I'd love to hear more about how you had to ask permission from your priest to go to see the film. Was it your idea to ask him or your parents'? Was this something you had done before, or had to do since? If he'd said not to go, would you have not gone?

Honestly, I don't remember how the idea was presented, but the fact that it seemed reasonable strikes me as a bit odd now (I am now Buddhist, non-theist, the idea of an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God that behaves the way this one does in the Bible seems ridiculous - no offense) but it may have been my idea, part of convincing my parents it was okay because it was the only movie they seemed reluctant about and a little but about convincing myself it would be okay. I hadn't really considered this until now. I think if he had said no, I wouldn't have gone. The Priests represented God in my mind, so if he thought it was a bad idea I would have agreed.

6) Having watched the film so many times, do you feel the experience of watching it has changed much since that first time? Is it any different to you now that you're older, or now that you're so familiar with it? What keeps drawing you back to the film? Has anything changed for you since that first time that might change how you look at the film?

I don't even believe in God anymore, but the Exorcist is definitely a trigger, maybe some association to trauma (my brother Mark, attempted suicide around this time) so that overall unease and anxiety may be connected to other things, but it all seems like an obvious Good vs. Evil dichotomy now, but it still makes me uncomfortable. When they did an Exorcist sketch on SNL, it scared the hell out of me. I remember hiding behind a chair while Gilda Radner threw herself around and said things like "Your mother sews socks that smell" and "Your mother eats kitty litter". Living with my roommate in the late 80's, we watched it a lot on CED, but just side two. We shouted "The Power of Christ Compels You" every time something weird happened in our house, and we were using a lot of drugs back then so weird stuff happened a lot, but I think it helped to normalize it, kind of like exposure therapy.

7) Can you talk about what it is about The Exorcist that scared you so much? Is it still scary to you? What does "scary" mean for you in films? Are there films which have scared you more? What kinds of things would get to you in that way? Might you know why?

There was one particular scene that drove me to the back of the theater. When "help me" appeared on Regan's stomach, I knew she was in there. She was witness

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

to all that was happening around her and had no control over her body, she was trapped with the most vile, evil thing imaginable. That idea completely freaked me out. After all these years, I still don't watch *The Exorcist* alone. It just makes me uncomfortable (for psychological, not spiritual reasons). No movie has had a more profound effect but it is not the only film that has scared me, the first two *Insidious* films, and the *Conjuring* films (all James Wan) have frightened me at times, the claps, the creepiness of the possession, but it returns to the basic theme of possession, of being helpless in the presence of evil.

Jim

Particulars: Male; 46-55; USA. **Format:** Email.

1) Do you remember very much about your first attempt at seeing *The Exorcist* when you were 10? Was there a particular point in the film where you decided it was too much and you had to leave? Do you remember what it was about the film that scared you so much that first time?

I don't recall that first time watching all that clearly, but I do know that the scene which made me want to leave was the first time Regan's head spun around. I was uneasy from the get go but I think that was more due to me knowing it was supposed to be scary so I was scared. Although the very beginning with the dogs fighting and growling near the statue of the demon (I didn't know then it was the demon) definitely had me on edge.

2) Do you remember much about the cinema or how other people were responding that first time? Were there many other kids in there?

I can't really recall anything about the theater or other's reactions. I'd be very surprised if there were any other kids in there though...I know I shouldn't have been there!

3) Did you go to the cinema often with your mother? Was it her idea or yours to go to *The Exorcist*?

We did go to movies but not a whole lot – maybe five or six times a year. Most of our moving outings had me in the back seat of the family car at the drive in with mom and dad up front. *The Exorcist* we saw in an actual theater though, and no, I don't really recall whose idea it was for us both to go.

4) Do you remember very much of how the film was being talked about on its release? Was there much in the news that you were aware of? Were people discussing it at school?

As best as I can remember, I only knew of it from other kids at school. Nothing that we imagined as kids was anywhere near as frightening as the actual movie!

5) What is your earliest memory of watching films either at home or at the cinema?

I'd have to say my earliest memory was of seeing “*The Jungle Book*” when it first came out, I must've been five years old. I sang that song “*Bare Necessities*”

incessantly and I'm sure drove my mother crazy with it. I also watched a lot of the Saturday afternoon "creature features" with some sort of scary monster, Dracula or Frankenstein or the Mummy, making me hide my eyes. The Blob was another movie that scared the daylights out of me.

6) What would you say was different about the second trip to see the film in 1979? Did the film seem different as you were older?

I was fifteen or sixteen by the time I was able to give it another go, so I'd seen a lot of scary movies by then and read a good deal of horror fiction. Stephen King's *The Shining* had been published just a couple years before and reading that was a delicious dread. So I figured I was ready to brave *The Exorcist* that second time.

7) How did your mother react to the film? Did she enjoy it? Was she scared? How did she react to your response to it?

My mother's reaction would be hard for me to gauge. The first time we went I know she spent an inordinate amount of time making sure I was doing okay, so I think she probably watched me more than she did the movie. The second time around was a true chance for her to enjoy the movie but I think she was still seeing it more through my eyes, again making sure I wasn't freaking out. And other than that night when she scared the crap out of me by shaking my bed, we never really talked about it.

8) What did you find scary in films as a kid? Has this changed much over the years? Are there horror films you don't find scary particularly? Is there a kind of story which scares you more than anything else? What is the scariest film you've ever seen?

As a kid, just about anything that put someone in peril was scary. Maybe I was sensing my own immortality (I know, that sounds pretentious) but it didn't have to be some sort of monster or demon – a man menacing someone with a knife was enough to get a fright out of me.

Nowadays for a movie to scare me it must be something wholly unexpected. Just chopping someone into pieces, like the *Saw* movies for instance, doesn't scare me or appeal to me at all – my friends and I typically turn those into comedies and laugh at the gore. Most scary movies fail to scare me anymore. When "*Hereditary*" came out recently being billed as "*The Exorcist* for a new generation" I couldn't wait to see it and ultimately spent most of the time bemoaning weird plot choices or clumsy film techniques. I saw the first installment of the new version of "*It*" and enjoyed the film but I wasn't scared (even though the book did scare me when it first published).

I guess I am no longer able to tap into that sense of dread that was so accessible when I was younger. Who knows why that is – maybe I feel more secure in the world or my place within it?

As I mentioned, for a story to scare me now (which isn't really fright any more, something more akin to trepidation) there has to be a good deal of suspense with a surprise pay off. I thought the recent movie "*The Quiet Place*" did a great job of providing both suspense and originality.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Scariest movie? As a kid, without a doubt “Night of the Living Dead”. As an adult, probably “Alien”.

9) You said you’ve seen the film probably 20 times. What makes you decide to re-watch it? Do you find yourself getting something different out of the film now? If so, why do you think that is?

I actually just sat down to do a re-watch before tucking in to answer your questions here! As for the other times, I can’t really pin down what draws me back again. Some stray thought will remind of something in the movie or I’ll get nostalgic.

I do get more out of it each time I watch and once again this time noticed things in this viewing that I hadn’t before. In this particular case, I noticed there is a picture of Regan next to her mother’s bed. She has her hands clasped as if in prayer and is looking a little sidelong at the photographer. It is very unsettling and I’m very surprised that has never popped out at me.

Each viewing does lead to new insight or just picking up on some small thing that didn’t register before. Some things are just noticing small props in the background that clearly have significance but you don’t notice because you are caught up in the narrative. Repeating viewings allow you to focus on and dissect dialog or pictures in the background or...just the craft and detail that went into the making.

And of course, as you get older and gain more perspective, different elements resonate that may never occur to your younger self. That’s not unique to The Exorcist of course (I re-watch a number of favorites) but that movie does touch on themes that only get more complex as one gets older (unlike, say, The Princess Bride which deserves to be seen every once in a while but is certainly more light hearted).

10) Did you have a religious upbringing? Have your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) changed over the years? Do you think your religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) affect how you look at The Exorcist and what you get out of it, e.g. how scary it is?

I was not brought up with any religious background at all and have always been more of an atheist. That said, movies like “The Exorcist”, “The Omen”, or even “The Devil’s Advocate” did give me pause and have me wondering if there really is a monumental struggle being waged by some greater forces between good and evil. The possibility, however remote from my own beliefs, that it might actually be real certainly did ramp up the fear factor.

I don’t view them in that light any longer – the devil (or demons) have become more of a Dracula or Frankenstein type of monster for me.

That said, there are still times when I’m heading into bed, after the lights have been turned off, that an image will pop into my head from one of those “spiritual” horror movies that will make me think I’m being watched and cause me to scurry for the covers a bit faster.

11) Would you say The Exorcist is a special film for you? Do you have other films which are special to you? If so, which ones, and what makes them special?

I definitely would say “The Exorcist” is special to me. I revisit it often, in some ways, to retain a connection with my mother (who passed away some years ago). I realize that that is a really odd movie to cherish in that particular way but that’s where I’m at.

I do have other movies that I re-watch. If I want to feel grounded again and reminded of the good things in life I’ll watch “Parenthood”. If I just need a good cry (don’t tell anyone) I’ll watch “Autumn in New York”. If I need a little of both of those I’ll watch “Love Actually”. I will also go back to “The Breakfast Club” if I feel a need to recharge.

There are others that I watch time and again simply because I enjoy them, but you asked for the special ones and those three are top of the list. They have an emotional payload that never fails to get me reconnected and to remind me of the reasons why we are all here.

Follow up...

You said you saw The Exorcist in a theatre, but that you usually went to the drive-in. Being from Wales, I’ve sadly never encountered a drive-in theatre, so all I know about them comes from horror movies. Could you talk a little bit about what it was like to see a movie at the drive-in? How was it set up? Did it feel different to the regular theatre? Did you only really go to drive-ins as a kid? How do you feel about them now? I understand there’s not too many left.

Drive-in theaters were pretty awesome.

My friends and I continued going to see movies at the drive-in, from time to time, all the way through high school. I graduated in 1981 and I think that was probably also the last year I ever went to a drive-in. By that time there was only the one still open anywhere near us and it just became so much easier to go see a movie at a sit-down theater since it was just a short drive away.

But, oh boy, the drive-in. When I was a kid going with my parents it was absolutely perfect. They loved it because they didn’t need a babysitter just to go watch a movie and I loved it because there was always a playground at the front of the lot where you could go be a kid while they watched some boring movie. The screen was massive which was also kinda cool. And if your movie wasn’t really capturing your attention you could always turn around to get a peek at a one showing on a another screen (no sound of course, but still).

You didn’t have to worry about people talking, or conversely, you could talk as much as you wanted. At the time, it was as close as you could get to watching a big screen movie from the comfort of your own home. When I was a kid, I’d frequently go in my pajamas. There was also often something going on in other cars or around the lot that could be more interesting than the movie itself (more on that in a bit).

Driving past the theaters at night was sometimes a treat as well, as a kid anyway. From the right angle you might get an illicit glimpse of whatever movie was playing. Which was interesting for those theaters that actually showed XXX movies...they did their best to make sure you couldn’t see the screens but still, as a kid, I tried my best to steal a glance.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

As a cinematic experience a drive-in certainly wasn't your best bet. Each space had a pole next to it with a speaker you'd hang inside the window. Just the one speaker with less than ideal sound quality. Watching from the back seat always meant the rearview mirror was going to be annoying and hard to ignore. Or the back of someone's head. There was a certain atmosphere about them though, on those warm summer nights, that was almost magical. Perhaps ironically for our discussion, scary movies were pretty much the ideal drive-in fare. I kinda wish I could go back in time and see Jaws at the drive-in.

Now, speaking of warm summer nights, are you familiar the Bob Seger song Night Moves and that one lyric?

Out past the cornfields where the woods got heavy

Out in the back seat of my '60 Chevy

Workin' on mysteries without any clues

Workin' on our night moves

Trying' to make some front page drive-in news

Workin' on our night moves in the summertime

That might have been the one thing that could keep the drive-in business going...teenagers looking for a place to work on their moves. Whenever you saw a car with the windows all fogged up you knew some couple was not bothering to watch the movie anymore. And I hope this isn't too crass, but when you saw that same car start to sway, well, I did say sometimes there could be things of interest other than the actual movie. I confess there were a few trips to the drive-in where I didn't even care about the actual movie. It was a fairly common joke when someone heard you were going to the drive-in - they'd remind you to find out the plot of the movie so that when your parents asked you could escape detection by telling them all about it. J

The drive-in is definitely something I'll always have fond memories of, especially as a pajama-wearing kid, and it's too bad that that experience is no longer part of our culture.

Caitlyn

Particulars: Female; 26-35; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Do you remember very much about that first time you saw some of The Exorcist? Do you remember what it was that frightened you, and why the babysitter put it on in the first place? Had you asked to see it or was the babysitter trying to give you a little scare?

I can't remember how old I was, but I'm pretty sure I should have been in bed by the time it went on, so it was probably something the babysitter and her friends decided to watch to pass the time without watching me, as such. As far as I can remember I just came back downstairs as they were watching it and so all I saw was Linda Blair in full green makeup with all the scars, etc. Looking back on it now, I

think that what made it so scary was the lack of context because I'd just happened upon that scene, rather than watching the whole thing. It was just totally uncanny and unexplainable. I can't remember too much if I stayed to watch very much of it, but the face on the screen stuck with me for some time.

2) Had you seen much in the way of horror films before this? Can you talk about how you got into horror films? Were there some films that grabbed you early on? Do you think your mum had anything to do with your interest?

I don't think I had, honestly. I think this was even before I really got into the Goosebumps books or watched stuff like Are You Afraid of the Dark on TV, so before the kid-friendly horror came up. I was always kind of fascinated by that feeling of being scared. I remember having one particular video which was a Scooby Doo mystery which I used to watch in my room. There was one bit I always found scary which involved a Cheshire cat appearing. It always gave me the creeps to the point that it became a bit of an endurance exercise for how long I could keep watching before I had to leave the room. I was also obsessed with Ursula in The Little Mermaid cartoon, even though she gave me nightmares. I'd want to watch it again and again. The only time I saw something which scared me that I didn't immediately rewatch constantly was (I think, although I've never found it since) was an episode of something like Strange But True where there was a tiny skeleton found somewhere that my dad had put on. He didn't seem to realise just how badly I was taken it until the solid fortnight of nightmares that followed. In terms of my mother sparking an interest - I don't think so directly. She was far more into horror books, so I suppose I'd have seen the covers and titles of those, rather than there being films on. An interest in horror films was definitely much later on, even though I can look back and see that interest in being scared manifest quite early.

3) Are there certain kind of horrors that interest or scare you more than others? I don't want to sound like I'm shopping your mum in, but she mentioned that you're interested in true crime, murder documentaries and such. Is that related to your interest in horror, do you think? Or is it separate from it? How do you feel about more "realistic" or non-supernatural horror?

My Google search history is far more likely to get me in trouble in those terms haha! I am probably more scared by religious or supernatural horror really, which is quite strange as I'm an atheist and sceptic. I do sort of separate my interest in true crime from horror really, even though there's an obvious overlap. I suppose the interest in true crime documentaries always has something a little more behind it. One of my main interests is the case of the West Memphis Three – it's a horrible case with a long-lasting impact for everyone involved but you can also look back at those documentaries now and see the beginnings of almost crowd-sourced investigation, way before things like Making a Murderer. The fact that there are websites out there dedicated to documentation from the case adds to it to as you're able to look further than the film allows you to.

I suppose I look at the true crime genre as something where the investigators and the family of victims are allowed a voice and the science behind how people are caught is fascinating too. With fictional films that take on true crime stories I'm always aware that there are potentially real people behind it. For example, last year

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Hounds of Love came out which was very clearly based on an Australian abduction and murder case (to the point that the house within the film reflected the real house) and one of the girls who escaped the real couple said she was uncomfortable with it. The filmmakers denied that it was based on it at all, and while the film is very good there's that element of me that thinks about the girl who escaped having to face that. I suppose with the religious and supernatural horror, my belief that it doesn't happen acts as a cushion and allows me to actually enjoy it. That's not to say that I don't enjoy films where there is a true crime influence – I just have to think about it a little more. I also have certain crime cases that I just can't take interest in at all – the Charles Manson stuff – I have no idea why exactly, but I always find it too difficult to read about or watch documentaries on.

4) You said you got the film for your 13/14th birthday and fell in love with it. Had you asked for it as a present? What made you want to see it after that first time? Was The Exorcist similar or different to other kinds of things you were watching at that time?

I did. There was a shop in Cardiff (in the Hayes), which I think ended up being bought out by HMV and I remember seeing it in there on a shopping trip with my mother. I've just looked up the initial UK VHS release and it would have been when I was 11, but that trip was the first time I'd seen it out on shelves and been old enough to take an interest. I think the majority of the appeal was that it had been 'banned' and that people didn't really want you to see it. I think the VHS we bought had THE VERSION YOU'VE NEVER SEEN across it, so yeah, genius marketing for attracting contrary teenagers. I was slowly becoming aware I think, that some films were banned, but The Exorcist (probably because my mother had watched it) seemed like a more respectable starting point. Some of the other titles like Cannibal Holocaust, I Spit on Your Grave, etc that turned up on pirate video lists were intriguing, but a little more difficult to ask for. So yeah, I think as a group of friends we were starting to watch stuff like slashers, but they didn't come with the kind of baggage that The Exorcist did.

5) Did you often watch horror films with friends when you were younger? Can you talk about how that might've fit into other things you enjoyed doing? So if you weren't watching films, were you playing outside or playing video games, that kind of thing?

We watched things more like Halloween H20 (although likely a few years after it actually came out). The time I remember watching most of them was when the Spar shop did a short-lived DVD rental scheme and the people working behind the counter genuinely didn't care about the age ratings we were picking up. So we would have seen stuff like Stir of Echoes, Halloween H20 and Blair Witch 2: Book of Shadows. I always associate those kinds of films with nu-metal music and a little bit with wrestling which I was also getting into by the time I was in early secondary school. There's a lot of references and similarities between horror and wrestling and I think some of that is to do with the music, but also themes of transgression which really suits teenagers. I was an only child, but a few friends had older siblings who had kind of passed down DVDs/videos so it worked that way too. When I was much younger I was mainly out – I had horses and was more interested in books

than TV/movies and that. It was only as I was older that I really got into the appeal of horror.

6) How did the birthday party screening go? Did the other kids find it scary?

It was a strange one. People were either totally disinterested in watching it and were convinced it wouldn't be scary because it was old, or they'd totally bought into the 'curses'. I know my best friend at the time had been told by his nan that he'd better not watch it because it was horrible and would definitely cause problems. He's now the one I probably quote the film with the most, so the warnings definitely worked haha! Aside from a few people being a bit scared, I think to some, it had dated a bit and wasn't quite as impactful as it had been for me. I think some people may have been showing off in terms of how scared they were too, but that's fairly typical.

7) Did you believe in the curses on the film and that kind of thing at the time? Do you believe in the supernatural at all now? Are you religious at all? Do you think that changes how the film is for you?

No, I didn't, but as mentioned, there were certainly people who did, or had been warned about the film too. I think, weirdly that even though I'm not a believer in the supernatural or God or anything like that, *The Exorcist* has a resonance in terms of it being about guilt and redemption. Certainly, Father Karras' feelings toward his mother aren't related to spiritual guilt, it's just good old-fashioned guilt about not having done enough, or not doing the right thing, which I think is a pretty universal thing. In the heart of it, the film is about someone redeeming themselves (granted, in a pretty extreme way), and it is about faith, but for me, that comes in the way of faith in human strength. Karras might go out of the window because he's serving God, but the main thing is he does it to save a young girl. That's my reading anyway.

8) Your mum mentioned that you act as a bit of a safety net for her when it comes to horror, steering her away from films that might be a bit too much for her. She mentioned *Martyrs* as an example. What kinds of things are usually off limits? Is it usually graphic violence like that, or is it scariness too? (I think my mum would have a very bad time with *The Orphanage*, for example, even though it's not really violent.)

Yes, definitely. I rave about *Martyrs* to anyone who will listen, but I know she would hate it. Same with stuff like *The Woman*. If it's an 18 certificate, I'm definitely watching it first because it's more likely to dwell on violence or the results of violence a bit more. I don't have to watch out for jump scares particularly, it's mostly violence. She's been watching the *Westworld* TV show though, which I've not seen and I've heard that can be kind of graphic, so I guess she's getting better with it. I think she'll always prefer books over films and I'll always prefer films so part of me watching something first is usually because I'm interested in it and then I think about whether she'll like it or not. I've been raving about *Hereditary* for ages and I'm still not sure how she'll feel about it, but whenever we see something which really clicks with one of us, we'll usually show it to the other one and chat about it.

9) Did your mum stop you watching certain films when you were younger? She mentioned that maybe she would’ve waited a little bit before letting you see The Exorcist.

I don’t remember anything that was off-limits really. We’ve always had a certain amount of compromise in how we deal with things. So, I’d go to her and say, ‘I want to do this,’ or ‘I want to watch this’ and she’d think about it, read about it perhaps and then come back to me and say if she’d rather I didn’t, but there would always be a reason, rather than just a blanket ‘no’. Again, there’s the thing about context – so I think there’s a difference between seeing something devoid of context (as in the case with the babysitter), vs seeing an entire film, knowing that it isn’t real, grasping the themes, etc. Having a chat about it sets everything up properly really.

10) How do you and your mum watch films together? How do you decide what to watch? Do you have any shared favourite kinds of films, or shared favourite actors or anything like that?

Usually, it’ll be that I’ve seen a film, either at the cinema, or a film festival, or now that my blog is up and running again, through a screener and if I like it and think she would too, I’ll recommend it and we’ll watch it together. At the moment, we’ve got Ghost Stories lined up to watch which I’m really excited for her to see. A few weeks ago we did a ‘troubled parenting’ double bill of Prevenge and The Babadook. Before that, she showed me Marvel’s Black Panther so I showed her Coherence, which is a low-budget but pretty clever sci-fi. A lot of what we’d watch is now on TV rather than a film. We watched The Exorcist TV show, and while she wasn’t too keen on the first season, I loved it and we ended up watching both seasons and were genuinely disappointed when it wasn’t renewed. Equally, because of the times I work, I’m often in bed earlier than she is, so she’ll occasionally stumble across something on Sky and record it for us to watch another time. We also watch a dreadful amount of trash TV (Real Housewives and other stuff like that), which is probably more shameful than anything horror-related. We’re usually pretty aware of what the other one will like – she watches all the superhero and some of the SyFy TV stuff on TV which I can’t really stomach too much so she knows not to bother recommending it to me, in the same way that I won’t recommend the latest Sharknado to her. But anything usually comes from a place of having seen something really cool or interesting and wanting to share it really. We probably quote The Wicker Man to each other quite often. We’re currently looking forward to Luther returning because Idris Elba is great and the show is so dark, but also quite silly. I made the mistake of binging the first 3 seasons over one Christmas and then refusing to answer the door in the New Year. We’re also hoping that they’ll do more with the Midwinter of the Spirit books from Phil Rickman. I’ve not read the books, but they did a TV show of one of them that was really good. We’ll be settling in for Doctor Who and all as that’s something that we can always watch together.

Follow up...

11) You mentioned that you were into the more kid-friendly horror stuff at first, like Scooby Doo, Goosebumps, etc. Was it a slow run up into the more grown-up horror? Did you differentiate between them, or were you just on all the horror you could get regardless of what age range it was pitched at?

I think it was a slow build-up. Much of it was through books at first, then a few bits and pieces of the Goosebumps VHS releases but mainly at sleepovers and stuff so was more communal, I guess when I was a bit older and just because of that desire to scare each other on sleepovers. I also had a friend who was brilliant at telling scary stories (mainly things like the Lover's Lane, hook in the car door type stories), so that was another way of engaging in that fun but safe feeling of being scared. Because so much of my time when I was younger was spent out and about with horses it wasn't until a bit later that it developed into watching the more adult stuff. I remember there were magazines pitched at a younger age (can't remember the name right now), but they had little scary stories and weird cryptozoology things in, so that was another way I looked at stuff. I think it was then being in secondary school that I was wanting to start watching the more adult stuff and testing further limits.

12) You said that you tend to rewatch things over and over if you find them scary, like *The Little Mermaid*. Is it because you were interested in that feeling or trying to get used to it so it wasn't scary any more, or something else do you think? If it's the latter, do you think that might explain some of the interest in true crime? Like, watching these documentaries about horrendous crimes makes it seem less of a scary thing? (I watch a lot of that stuff too – *West of Memphis* was amazing! – but I don't know if I could explain why, so don't worry if this question is a weird one.)

I think that being scared, but knowing that you're actually safe is a really addictive feeling because it's sort of unexplainable - how can you feel scared if you aren't under threat? So I think lots of it was sort of trying to figure out why some things made me feel that way, and why others didn't. When I was younger I think it was more about trying to overcome the fear - but I'm far more settled in enjoying that feeling of safe fear now and would revisit just to get that feeling. The true crime thing I think is based in that I feel that those documentaries are all asking something about the society they happen in.

So *West of Memphis* is fascinating because it tells you a lot about prejudice and the legal system in the States, but also scary because of how wrong it can go and how there's potentially a child killer out there who is free to repeat crimes. I think, while there is an element of fear involved in watching those kind of things, that's not the end goal for me in watching them. So if I put on a fictional film about ghosts then my end goal is that I'd like to be frightened (that safe fear again), whereas if I put on a true crime doc, I might be scared or appalled almost as a secondary element, but I'm mostly looking for why the crime happened, how it was solved, and all those elements.

13) Was the video nasties panic something that helped along your interest in horror? Like the idea of these videos being banned, I mean, since you obviously won't have been around in 1984ish for the full Daily Mail production. Were you old enough to catch onto the mid-90s panic with the Jamie Bulger case? I'm really interested in how the reputations of films like *Cannibal Holocaust*, *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Exorcist* can really appeal to kids. Not in a Daily Mail copycat way, of course. Just in a getting-into-horror, talking-about-it-at-school kind of way. I

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

was fascinated by The Exorcist in the 90s as a kid, partly because I just couldn't get a hold of it.

I was too young even for that panic. I would have been about the same age as Bulger when he was killed, so yeah, didn't really impact on me at all. I think my first kind of exposure to those kind of titles was probably on a pirate list of films brought home from my dad's work when I was probably about 12/13 or so. So that was probably the first exposure to seeing the titles that sounded like they were particularly transgressive and potentially unsuitable.

Now, I have a huge interest in that period of time because it just seems so insane that people could go to prison or have their business threatened because of a film. I think it's socially and culturally very interesting. I think it was in a lot of ways the best marketing those films could ever have asked for because as you say, as soon as you can't actually get something, the mystique around it grows.

14) Just out of interest, as it might not be a thing for you at all, I was wondering what your experience with the original Texas Chainsaw Massacre was like? Or Evil Dead or anything that was off the shelves for a long time before being rereleased? Just curious as, for me, TCM was quite similar to The Exorcist in terms of hearing about how horribly violent it was for years without being able to see it.

Much the same as above really in terms of the pirate list. I think when I was about 11 there was clearly that change in the BBFC that made more of those titles available legitimately so when I was getting into being 13/14 those names were out there in a way they hadn't been previously. I think then as soon as you have the titles (and they are great titles) you had a starting point for finding more stuff. By the time I was in college (during A Levels), I had all 3 Evil Dead films on one disk that was in pretty regular play so that was fun in terms of having them in one place. TCM was interesting too because I think I saw that later on again. I think that me (and a friend) having a bank account linked to Amazon honestly spurred on that viewing, so obviously there was a delay, but once it was set up, my friend would buy the titles and bring them down for us to watch together and we'd kind of talk about them in line with our expectations from what we'd heard.

15) Your mum mentioned something in her interview, which I thought was a really interesting point. Just wondered if I could get your take on it. She said that when she was growing up, she didn't have as much access to films and everything was about reading. That was her main source of entertainment. And that since you've grown up always having a TV in the house, you've kind of grown up more accustomed to visual stories, so you can deal with the more graphic horror a little better than she can. Do you feel like that's the case? Or do you think it's more because you've gotten into horror early, or something else? How do you think technology might be changing the kinds of things kids are able to accept? If you were growing up now, how do you think your interest in horror would develop differently, if at all?

I'm not too sure of that. I think often with books you can have far more disturbing ideas in a way because you're only limited by your own imagination. So, when I read American Psycho I had to put it down for 2 weeks after the rat scene, which obviously didn't make it into the movie (not sure why, maybe the effects would

have been too tricky), so it was my own vision of that which was probably worse than anything that someone else could have created. I think in many ways it's just personal taste. Gore is so visceral too, so I'm not sure how much it can be thought about in that sense, because something is either gross to you, or it isn't. For example, I have still not seen *Pan's Labyrinth* all the way through because of the scene where someone gets hit with a bottle and because of the use of digital, almost invisible edits, you see that disintegration in real time. The first time I watched it, it was just after seeing *Irreversible*, which has that awful fire extinguisher scene and so the repeated effect just totally repulsed me and so I switched it off. I've probably seen more sustained depictions of violence and injury, yet it was that sudden trigger. It's gone now, and I can watch those kind of scenes without problem now, but for that time there was no reasoning around it - I just couldn't.

I do have a quite funny story about taking my mother to see *The Cabin in the Woods*. We'd both been big fans of *Buffy* and so I was reasonably sure that the film would be suitably subversive of horror tropes, rather than being graphic. At the point where it does start to look like a slasher film I could feel the air change next to me as I noticed my mother looking at the screen less and less. There was a moment where I thought what the hell have I done! because I know she wouldn't go in for that kind of thing. The violence later on is a little more comic, I think and less sustained so she was fine and enjoyed the rest of the film. I think technology and advances in practical effects often allow for filmmakers to do that really sustained, in-depth representation of violence and it's effects, so that things look more 'real'. Same with those digital edits, so you don't have the safety of seeing the edit and seeing the trickery go on. That little pause, or seeing where a fake head is placed in frame feels a lot more safe than anything hidden.

I think the internet has obviously had a huge impact on how kids now discover and even consume horror. Stuff like the urban legends my friend used to tell are now in creepypasta stories, for example. I think that's how stuff like *Slenderman* becomes a bit of a phenomenon/ends up as folklore because it's created by a community, then shared out, so rather than being one person's fear in the way you'd traditionally have an author or filmmaker presenting their fear you now have input from loads of people, so it can scare more people potentially. I think I'd possibly be into that now, but also I think the ability to stream things rather than just having to get physical media probably would have increased the amount of stuff I watched too. It seems far easier now to get hold of stuff.

Brogan

Particulars: Male; 19-25; UK. **Format:** Email.

1) Was this the first time you'd seen *The Exorcist*?

This was my first time seeing *The Exorcist*, which is quite bad considering my love for horror movies. I came to the screening because of this reason, I needed an excuse to watch it with people because I'm always too scared to watch horror alone.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

2) How did the film make you feel? Was it what you were expecting? Or, if you’ve seen it before, was it as you remembered? Was there anything you’d forgotten or remembered differently?

I really enjoyed the film and it was not what I was expecting at all. Before the film started I was relatively apprehensive. Considering my love for the genre, I am easily scared. I was shocked at some parts of the film, mainly when thinking about when the film was released and how I imagined certain scenes would have shocked viewers of the time.

3) Are you a horror fan? Can you describe your history with horror films? Did you watch them as a kid? How did you get into them?

I am a definite horror fan, for someone who can not watch most horrors alone. My love for horror started when I was studying A-Level film. I realised during my studying that horror films fascinated me the most. As I have continued my education, horror is always my go to reference for projects, as I feel they provide the most interesting source of comment on society, more so in recent years. I never watched horror as a child. It’s a bit of a labour having a love for horror when I always need someone to accompany me when watching a horror film. Some of my favourites, because I have seen them so many times I can watch alone, but that is usually because some of my favourite horror cross over so slightly into the comedy genre too, like *Scream* and *The Evil Dead* (both the 2013 and the 1982).

4) Can you talk about what you like and dislike about horror films generally?

I think the one thing I dislike about horror is when you get films that completely depend on a jump scare and nothing else. I love a horror that is self aware, a film that is intelligent that doesn’t depend on having a man in a mask pop out repeatedly to get you going.

5) Do you enjoy films that scare you? Which films have scared you the most, and how do they compare to *The Exorcist*?

I wouldn’t say I enjoy being scared, I enjoy horror due to the subject matter, being scared is just something I have to deal with. I’d say being scared is more of an entertaining experience when watching a movie with a friend than something I explicitly go in search of.

6) Are there things in films which work better than others in scaring you? Are there films which try to be scary but they just don’t have any effect on you?

Films where you don’t see the ridiculous looking demons/creature, etc are the best at creating the feeling of suspense and fear. A number of films ruin this completely when the demons/monster is revealed.

7) Has what scares you in films changed at all over the years?

I’m 24 and still scared of everything, so I would say no.

8) How did your family feel about *The Exorcist* or horror films in general? Did they have a lot of say in the kinds of films you watched as a child? Would you watch films much as a family?

We wouldn't really watch scary movies when I was a child because I would have such a severe reaction. I had to hide in the hallway and cover my ears when the X-files theme tune came on. I was however a massive Buffy the Vampire Slayer fan, so go figure.

9) Do the religious elements of The Exorcist matter to you all? Do they make it more/less interesting/scary? Did you have a religious upbringing at all or do you think your religious beliefs (or non-belief) changes how you look at a film like The Exorcist?

As someone who is not religious, I have beliefs but none go down the route of God-loving, it didn't matter in the sense of causing offence, etc. However, I find horror with a religious undertone more interesting. I think religious belief has two routes, and I enjoy the side explored by horror with demons and spirits etc.

10) The setting for the screening was a bit unusual. Did that make a difference in how much you enjoyed the film or how you approached it? How would the experience have been different at home or at the cinema? And which is your preferred way to watch scary movies?

I really enjoyed the Quillam Bros as a setting. I liked sitting around on the floor with bean bags and what not, although my friend fell asleep at least twice so maybe it might have been too cosy for some! The cinema is my favourite place to go, however, I love quirky settings even more. I watch a lot of films in the house, but I prefer the encouragement of a group setting where there are less distractions so I can be fully immersed in the experience.

Focus Group Indexes

Focus Group 1

Robbie (young): Male; 19-25; UK.

Kieran (Irish): Male; 19-25; UK

Nick (older): Male; 26-35; UK.

1m: Nick saw The Fear of God and knows it was banned as a horror-obsessed 13yo. Became obsessed. Dad bought him the VHS and said "You should see this". Dad loved the book.

Takes its time and it's of the 70s. His friends didn't think it was scary.

4min: Interpretation (Nick). Comparison to the Shining documentary.

541: Robbie. Not what you expect. Perfect film. Not a scare film.

645: Kieran. Watched at 12. Asked parents for scariest film, they said Exorcist. Catholic family. Relates to it. Mum would never watch it (interjected by Robbie).

8min: Talk about content with mum, etc. Friedkin as a master. Blatty as overseer of Director's Cut. Nick talking about things that aren't explained in the film.

1030: Scariest film of all time? In the 70s, yes. In cinema, definitely. Watched it with ex while she was getting ready.

1130: Kieran's grandad said Psycho was scariest and explanation.

1220: Robbie. Watching family with The Exorcist. Trying to explain to them what a lovely film it is down to ending.

13min: Nick. It gets under your skin. Dating of effects. 70s religious othering slightly. Kieran's mum just doesn't like horror films. She lasted 10 mins and quit.

1430: Kieran pushing against parental censorship. Gets friends parents to get videos out. Mum would watch most of them first and say if it's ok. She was more concerned about sex.

1545: Robbie. Dad curated my film taste. How he got into horrors. Dad only liked uplifting films. Watched Saw with neighbours first.

1730: Nick had no restrictions, but would've if they knew what he was watching. Dad "demanded" he watch The Exorcist. Horror Express first one. He recorded it on the same VHS as The Fog. Created his own media. Ghost trains etc too. As a kid there were monster books. Always been an interest.

1940: Are you drawn to controversial films? Robbie yes. Likes event films. Kieran lost touch with horror.

2130: Robbie watching Mandy next to an old lady.

2230 Robbie audience reactions annoying. Nick: people freaking out in the cinema is more American. He doesn't see it as a crowd movie. "If you're profoundly religious" othering. Kieran would rather watch it himself.

24: Nick saw The Room at the all-nighter. Different vibe.

2445: Human Centipede/Serbian Film? Kieran: they're crude for the sake of it to make money. Nick: The Exorcist became a controversial. They didn't make it to be controversial. SF is controversial by design. Robbie not interested. His friend threw up. Hereditary mention.

2840: Do you find slow horror more effective. Top 3 scary movies? What makes you scared? Robbie: Ghost Stories. Nick: Jump scares only work once. Texas Chainsaw. Kieran: Candyman. Massive mirrors in his room. Crept into reality. Robbie: Mulholland Drive. Nick: Lost Highway.

3220: Prior knowledge of Exorcist. Robbie: Everyone knows bits. Kieran: kids in primary school bragging about seeing it. (Tie into Paul.)

35: What do you think made it a hit? Kieran: firsts. Robbie: good film. Iconography part of culture. Nick: Post-Vietnam nihilism. Nick loves the 1970s and Friedkin.

40min: Kermode introductions: "This film will scare the shit out of you."

4030: Censorship? Against it? Robbie: Up to a point. He likes critics who talk about content. Censorship can ruin creativity. Kieran: Likes that it lets him watch films later when he can appreciate it a lot more (Godfather). Nick: Opposed. Democracy. Even Human Centipede 2. Objects to animal slaughter. Can't ban things, though. Robbie: BBFC have a tough job. Nick: It's subjective. Where do you draw the line? Effects.

4639: Where would you draw the line, age-wise, for horror films? Robbie: if they understand. Not under 9 or 10. It'll upset them. Kieran: glad he wasn't allowed to watch horrors til 11 or 12. Self censored on Silence of the Lambs. Robbie: Terminator 2 mental hospital. Nick: Language more than violence. Robbie: Fast-forwarded through sex.

50mins: Martyrs. 14 when first saw Exorcist. I don't know 11yos would be scared. There's too much they wouldn't understand. Friend watched it at 12 and thought it shit and never saw it again.

Focus Group 2

Henna: Female; 18-25; UK.

Holly A: Female; 19-25; UK.

1:12 massive horror fans

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

3:05 what they like about horror (technical over cheap shit)

3:30 Holly at 11 saw Exorcist on a countdown show, snippet. At 18, Holly’s mum had recorded it on telly for her and said she should watch.

Holly: The first time I came into contact with it, it was like a snippet. I think I was about 11.

Henna: Oh my God.

Holly: It was one of those countdown shows. It was like the best films, and my mum had told me to watch it because I was film obsessed my whole life. And it started with like Chicken Run, so I was like, “Right, OK. We’ll watch this countdown show.” And The Exorcist was the number after that. And I was very young and I was just shocked. But, then, I tried to like- that imagery actually quite frightened me at that age. But as I grew up I started to develop an interest for horror films and stuff. And I think I was about 18 and my mam had recorded it and said “It’s a cult classic and since you’re a self-proclaimed cult classic fan you have to watch this.”

Henna: (Laughs.) Yes!

Interviewer: (Laughs.) Right.

Holly: And so she left me to it but she kept popping her head in the room to see like what my reviews were and stuff.

Henna: Ah, that’s amazing.

Interviewer: Was she keeping an eye in case it got too scary or...?

Holly: No, not at all. She never worried about that.

Interviewer: Ah, you’d got past that stage?

Holly: I’d definitely got out of that phase. That was just because of like an age thing.

(4:34 – controversial at the time – they’re both desensitised now to graphic content and language. At the time, it was banned, people used to walk out. Religious controversy. People back then very conservative. People now would disregard it.)

6m – It pushed boundaries so much that it got a bad reception.

6:41 praising make-up and effects

7m – part of classic horror is they actually tell a story. Now it’s all jump scares.

8: 30 – reputations of great horror and things being open to interpretation – the shining, the babadook.

8:57 – Exorcist tells you a story instead of just scaring you. Music is a huge part.

9:18 – does CGI not scare you in the same way? No! Halloween talk. Everything’s just been done and overdone. Oldies scare you in different ways. Long bit about Rosemary’s Baby old fashioned tense build up.

12min the music of the exorcist as powerful (short bit)

12:30 any modern horrors compare? Lots about older films.

22m American Psycho

23: 07 – Watched first time sucks, watched again later scared? Scared of Exorcist still. There's always something you forget.

25 spotting new things – scariest bit now is Regan giggling after killing priest.

25: 19 What was the bit they showed on the gameshow? Was it a gameshow?

The countdown? She was in bed, with her face, shouting, gungeing.

Hen: you must've been really scared.

Hol: But I was so young, even just seeing a scary face when you're ten is horrific. And I just didn't sleep. I just did not sleep.

25: 40 Religious stuff. Not religious. Sense of safety with religious people in horror films.

Paranormal Activity – Blair Witch. Moment of anxiety and then it's all OK. The on-off structure.

27m Does it not matter if you don't believe in the thing? Nah. Level of unease if you're on your own.

2827 – serial killers are still scary because it could happened. Ted Bundy tangent.

3150 – Parental censorship. Used to record. Parental pin on Sky. Sleepovers different rules. From Asia, censors were more concerned about sexual stuff, violence didn't matter.

When you were growing up were you allowed to watch whatever you fancied or were your parents kind of...

Henna: Laughs.

M: Because one of the things we're interested in with the Exorcist is one of the things we hear a lot is that their mum banned it from the house, like you can watch whatever you want but not the exorcist.

Ho: We had Sky, so I used to record quite a lot, but my mum had the parental protection pin so she used to read the bio and look at the certificate and stuff and be like, "OK, you can watch this one." Laughs.

He: No, I feel my parents were a bit casual.

Ho: But we used to do it behind closed doors all the time. We used to have access to these DVDs and watch things that we really shouldn't have (laughs)

He: Yeah. I think horror's not more... Because I'm from Asia, I think they're more after sexual taboo things. Like, they're more reserved to it. But with horror films they don't really give a shit.

Me: So violence is OK, but as long as there's not watching sex scenes...

He: Sexual scenes. Like making out. They're really, really scared about it, like... I don't know (laughs.)

Me: My mum was the same. She'd fast forward through all the sex scenes and then let me watch Bruce Willis shoot like 50 guys in the head.

He: Yeah. That's my mom.

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Hol: (Laughs) Yeah.

He: Yeah. It’s more into that.

3306: Hol’s mum had a [passion for films.

3350 – Holly’s mum had a big influence on what she watched. She’d share her fave films, Rosemary, Exo and classic horror. And non horror. James Dean.

35min: much family viewings? Yeah. Families and sleepovers. Friends with more lenient parents.

36: Henna watches old films more. They share films.

37: Horror fans. Weird films.

3825: Don’t get desensitised to stuff. American Horror Story.

3940: No, no, not Human Centipede. Challenging themselves sometimes. Holly hates it.

41mins: Holly can’t believe someone was allowed to make A Serbian Film. Censorship. Holly: Certification isn’t enough sometimes. Unspeakable. It didn’t have value. Struggling for words for ASF. There’s a limit, Holly says. Henna agrees.

44: What age would you let kids watch it? 16/17? Henna maybe 18. Imagery is scary. The voices. Censors doing a decent job. Lots of disclaimers.

4630: Scariest film of all time? Back then, yes. Scenes stick with Holly more than whole films. IT as scariest. Phobias?

49: Rewatching. Lots. Watches horror on her own as boyfriend not into it. Henna, Shining got scarier with age. Boring when you’re a kid. Re-watching for valuing construction.

52mins: TV shows and films stealing from The Exorcist. Prior knowledge of the film came from Scary Movie. Good as a tool after, spoofs, for conquering fear. Only other knowledge was music and scariness.

5440: They don’t see it as a religious film, but a film about characters.

5530: Ending. Good but with some questions.

Focus Group 3

Callum: Male; 19-25; UK.

Jack: Male; 19-25; UK.

Intro to project.

0130: Both filmmakers. Callum made horror films. Jack started watching the classics when he decided he wanted to make films.

444: First time with the film. Jack: young, during a big research phase of watching the classics. Talks about different audiences. Tyneside funny. “I hate that.” Immature audience. Tries to make sense of it.

- 7mins: Callum. First saw at 15. Watched this morning. Very slow build up.
- 8mins: Criticising recent Netflix horrors. Practical effects big up. Bigging up influence of Exorcist and religious horror.
- 10min: scariness of the real life stuff in it, with disease etc, before the supernatural bits.
- 1143: Are you religious? No. Used to be. Religion is real in this film.
- 1219: What did you think of the fuss in the 1970s? Callum had heard about set blessings and cinema paramedics.
- 13mins: Prior knowledge. Jack had none of production stuff. His first experience of Exorcist was the maze prank scare.
- 1430: Scariest movie of all time? Jack doesn't like self-promotion. Callum was shit scared of everything as a kid.
- 1530: What scares you more? Callum: Ghosts more than serial killers. Jack: Ghosts. Rules are more vague. Exorcist has that.
- 1820: Freakiest bit. Head turn. From spider-walk discussion. Callum loves the demon voice. Jack has brought notes.
- 20mins: Karras as inciting character. Nothing good happens after he says he's lost his faith. All down until the "Is she gonna die?" "No."
- 21mins: How many times you seen it? Noticed new things? Sometimes. Not much.
- 23mins: Jack talks about content. Praises stuff. Lack of doctor knowledge. Callum and Jack scared by medical stuff.
- 2448: How did you get into horror? Callum was into real life possession stuff.
- 26mins: Movies that scared you as kids. Callum Harry Potter, 5 or 6yo. Jack Mars Attacks. Zathura.
- 2830: Allowed to watch whatever? Callum stopped watching 18s. Jack allowed to watch whatever, but didn't until he was 15 and watched his first 18 (Shaun of the Dead). Fear of censor action.
- 30mins: Callum enjoys films with someone else. Jack doesn't like watching too weird stuff with his family. Jack scared after Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and set off fire alarms by mistake.
- 33mins: Films you'd rather watch with other people. They've started a horror film club. Like talking during or after. Sharing films much? Yes, if it's good.

FILE 3B

Jack likes banned stuff for interesting stories. Hostel is about arseholes. The story is an excuse for violence. It won't give you nightmares. It's gotta have a story.

4mins: Censorship. Callum doesn't pay any attention to certificates. Nor Jack. Classifications used to be useful. Jack saw the certificates more as genres into themselves as a kid. Callum understands why some films are censored (Paths of Glory in France, Ghostbusters in China).

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

8mins: Human Centipede 2 and cuts. Deliberately shocking. Gross and stupid. Cannibal Holocaust and real animal death: drawing the line. Figures of the audience from Jack at 1050.

12min: giving kids the experience of scary films.

1320: Quitting on films. If it's boring for Jack.

1430: Rewatching? Callum sci fi. Lots to them. More to find. Jack: Clerks. Comfortable movies.

16mins: What made you rewatch The Exorcist? Finding things. Having that experience again.

17mins: Picking up new things on second viewings. Trying to figure bits out as they talk.

19mins: Anything else you wanna talk about? Sequels? Mostly me talking. TV show OK. The Conjuring closest modern day equivalent.

Focus Group 4

Ana: Female; 19-25; Spain.

Stu: Male; 25-35; UK.

1min: First time with the film. Ana was 10. Was a sensitive kid so she wanted to train it out of her. Asked her dad to rent Exorcist after watching lots of horrors. Pazuzu came back to her when she fell asleep. The Spanish version is ridiculous. Saw in Spanish first.

3mins: Closet sliding across the room. Scary because of realism.

350: Project worked. She loves horror now. Started with Jurassic Park, then Resident Evil, Ringu. Signs was especially scary.

550: Saw the movie again in English and it was scary. In Spanish Exorcist is funny. Much better in English and more aware of what was going on – when your kid becomes someone completely different.

710: Stu first time. 15/16, 1998 cinema. Just him and his dad. Dad's friend gave him loads of bootlegs, including Suspiria at 12. Suspiria traumatised him so he didn't watch the others.

815: Never been as scary as in the cinema. More immersed. Maybe because of my ADHD. His idea, not his dad's. He watched the Kermode documentary. He'd seen the effects being made. Didn't affect his viewing of it.

11mins: Wasn't as good for Ana first time because it was dated. This doesn't apply to Stu. Ana didn't understand the film first time.

12mins: Ana's mum saw it when she was 13 and couldn't sleep. Rumours of people dying during the film. Bit about that. Doesn't happen any more. Blair Witch Project.

1350: Found footage really affects and panics Stu. Films stay with him a lot. He can replay the film in his head and does so whenever he's reminded of them.

1530: Stu quotes Exorcist and Ana gets goosebumps.

16mins: Films don't affect Ana much now. She does a lot of research. She got the books on exorcism. Her mum, a journalist, covered a horrific real-life exorcism. Even got same ouija board Regan uses.

Discussion of prequels and real cases and sequels. Exorcist 3 terrifying.

1933: Ana's mum not superstitious but just didn't want to be reminded of the real case. Didn't want to see it. Lots of cases of exorcism in Spain.

25mins: believability

26mins: Getting into horror. Stu into classics. More of a collection thing.

28mins: Kids watching horror. Allowed? Stu anything he wanted. Parents said he was old before his time. Ana was on her own a lot so she watched what she wanted. "Don't come crying to me later." Didn't watch films with family.

31m Stu's mum hated American films. Watched with dad on weekends (divorced).

32mins: children watching horror. Regular movies with more violence are worse for Ana.

38mins: Something different from it every time. Stu, more invested in priest's story than before. Different films for different reasons.

43mins: Ana and neighbour watching movies together. Sleepovers. Stu didn't have them.

50mins: Seeing documentaries made Stu appreciate film more.

55mins: late starter going to the cinema. Batman Returns is a life forming experience. Reliving it. Ana's was Lion King or Goofy movie.

60 mins: Slating modern horrors. Hereditary.

70mins: Suspiria is brilliant.

75mins: Exorcist curse is nonsense.

Codebook

Name	Sources	Instances
Affect	22	280
Becoming desensitised	1	6
Being hard as nails	2	5
Being quietly scared	3	6
Being tickled	3	8
being traumatised	2	7
Buzzing	1	2
Captain Howdying	2	9
Cherry picking	2	22
Contrasting experiences	12	45
Crying	3	19
Defining Scary	16	55
Discussing Real Violence	7	8
Demonstrating heroism	1	3
Enjoying	1	11
Expressing medical discomfort	2	6
Fears for or of Children	2	2
Forcing oneself	2	6
Freezing	1	5
Linda-sympathising	2	3
Objectifying film as fear	4	15
Projecting	2	6
Putting on a brave face	2	7
Rarely Scared	1	1
Resisting	1	14
Taking precautions	3	17
Daytime viewing	3	13
Delaying completion	2	8
Quitting	3	17
Self-censoring	6	8
Age	3	116
10	1	19
11	1	11
12	2	24
13	2	16
14	1	9
15	1	1
3	1	2

4	1	1
5	1	3
6	1	2
7	1	5
8	1	7
9	1	6
Very young	2	5
Young teenager	1	5
Family	20	392
Begging	2	8
being told memory	1	1
earliest cinema memory	3	3
family disapproving	1	1
Family enabling	10	74
Family hyping	8	94
family preferences	1	1
family tying	1	1
Family viewing	16	127
Parental censoring	14	82
Home Video	1	385
Identity Work	23	185
Autobiographing	16	51
Contrasting selves	13	53
defining horror fandom	6	8
Describing horror fandom origins	9	17
Discussing horror interests	2	2
Establishing credentials	11	32
Establishing difference	1	1
Gendering differences	1	1
Inheriting horror interests	3	3
Personalising the film	4	14
Questioning self	3	3
Personal	23	376
Being specific	1	2
Contrasting times	13	49
Contrasting viewing settings	12	15
Early teen viewing	2	29
Family Friending Films	5	6
Half-arsing	1	1
Mapping	3	9
Mementos	1	1
Milestoning	4	28
Pre-teen viewing	3	88
Scene setting	11	37
Trying out tech	1	1
Tying film to memory	3	4
Ventriloquizing	1	3
Viewing alone	2	103
Post-textual	24	306
Appreciation growing	6	24

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Being Topical	2	2
Committing to rewatches	2	3
Contrasting First with Later Viewings	2	2
Creeping into reality	12	86
Discovering new things	5	6
Discussing later	3	8
Forgetting detail	4	5
Getting scarier with age	1	5
Growing sympathy	1	11
In-joking	3	9
Instigating horror interest	2	13
Judging re-cuts	5	7
Knowing verbatim	1	1
Losing power	4	4
Moderate rewatching	2	2
Mystery solving	1	6
Not rewatching	4	4
Partial re-watching	1	1
Preserving the impact	3	4
Producing	2	14
Quick rewatching	3	5
Re-confronting fears	3	5
remaining scary	2	2
Rewatching obsessively	7	8
rewatching purposively	3	3
Sharing	6	43
Shifting sympathies	3	6
Shock lessening	2	3
Two-timing	7	9
Unchanging views	2	5
Pre-textual	15	320
Carrying over book meaning	1	1
doubting hype	1	1
Doubting preparedness	3	11
Expecting different	6	16
Expecting little	1	2
Expecting scariness	8	21
Expressing excitement	6	21
Flying blind	4	64
Getting Swept Up in Hype	2	4
Going out of his or her way	1	7
Knowing the score	5	62
Knowing too much	1	5
Managing expectations	1	2
Novel hyping	1	2
Paratextual pre-scaring	2	16
Pre-sequeling	3	18
Schoolyard gossiping	6	31
Seeing Exo Despite Horror	1	1
Testing oneself	2	2

Testing the hype	5	32
True Story hyping	1	1
Quality Judgements	19	196
Admiring technicals	12	32
Assessing the era	2	2
Criticizing technique	2	9
Expressing confusion	3	8
Expressing disappointment	3	18
Expressing fandom	4	42
Expressing fascination	4	9
Hating	2	3
Judging age	4	24
Making big claims	1	8
Setting apart	12	41
Religion	23	226
agnostic	2	2
Believing	7	31
Changing beliefs	5	13
Disbelieving	7	15
Establishing atheism	10	21
questioning faith	1	1
Rejecting Religious Overtones	4	5
Rejecting Religious Threat	1	2
Religious Contextualising	1	1
Religious disinterest	1	1
Religious interest	18	66
Religious othering	6	18
Religious upbringing	12	38
Slating religion	7	11
Taking religious precautions	1	1
Research Context	16	65
Acknowledging Nostalgia	4	4
Expressing gratitude for research	2	3
Joking	1	5
Participating further in research	1	1
Participating skeptically	1	2
remembering clearly	1	1
Remembering wrong	2	3
Stating the obvious	1	6
Struggling to remember	14	40
Social	22	360
Being More Affected at Cinema	1	1
Being protected	4	19
Being unwilling	1	3
Downplaying viewing practicalities	5	27
Drinking	1	3
drive-in	3	6
Halloweening	5	23
Adventuring	1	1
Mind being elsewhere	4	6

REMEMBERING “THE SCARIEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME”

Placing disturbance elsewhere	3	4
Pranking	6	19
Rebelling	14	77
Illicit viewing	13	69
Routining	6	19
Schadenfreuding	4	7
sharing	1	1
Sleeping over	4	23
Social viewing	6	122
Textual	22	441
Addressing censorship	7	15
Admiring Merrin	1	1
Befriending the film	1	1
Comparing or contrasting media	20	72
Grouping The Exorcist	5	6
Criticising the hype	4	5
Crushing	1	1
Discussing Americanness	2	4
Discussing Memory of the Film	1	1
Double-billing	2	13
Establishing reputation	8	68
Expressing embarrassment	1	1
Expressing regret	1	12
Expressing Scientific Interest	1	1
Expressing sympathy for first time	2	3
Hero worshipping	2	7
Horror researching	6	26
Info-dumping	3	9
Intellectualising	6	18
Judging intent	2	6
Mythologizing	7	57
Noting cultural impact	5	10
Partial viewing or understanding	5	46
Perfect conditioning	2	5
prompting thoughts	1	1
Rejecting genre label	2	5
Researching Exorcist	8	18
Slating genre	5	8
Slow warming up	2	4
Sound triggering	6	20
Summarising plot	1	3