

KITCHEN SINK CREEPS

WEEK 4.

Tony Tenser and Tigon

- Head of publicity of Miracle Films
- Apparently coined the term 'sex kitten'
- Formed the Compton Cinema Club with Michael Klingler – they would show more risqué films for private members
- This led to the formation of Compton Films - where they produced early Polanski features such as *Cul-de-Sac* and *Repulsion*
- He eventually split with Klingler and formed his own production company – Tigon

Context - 1970s

- Lest the uninitiated (those who weren't there) should look back at the 70s as some sort of sparkly glam rock explosion of Marc Bolan and Abba, or as a decade only punctuated by the pulsating beat of the disco machine It should be pointed out that it was mainly a brown and grey dog-shit smeared street of limited hope and growing xenophobia.
- It was a land and people weaned on baked beans and chip pan tea times where most houses smelled not of reed diffusers or potpourri but congealed tomato ketchup and unwashed pit socks.
- No one, with the possible exception of David Bowie, ever really looked to the future in the 70s, even the 'forward thinking' punks tended to wrap themselves in the offensively baroque adornments of World War II and many working-class estates were still bedecked in 50s fashions or furnishings, some still in spitting distance of actual 40s bomb sites.
- By the end of the decade, the IRA, hunger strikes, endless industrial action and the Yorkshire Ripper would prove to be much more lasting lemotifs of that time than flared trousers or repeats of *Starskey and Hutch*.
- And this is where *The Beast in the Cellar* marks its territory, leaving aging sisters Ellie and Joyce Ballantyne played respectively by Beryl Reid and Flora Robson, trying to make sense of all.

The Beast in The Cellar (1971)

- Directed by James Kelly
- Written by James Kelly
- Produced by Graham Harris and Tony Tenser
- Cinematography by Harry Waxman and Desmond Dickson
- Edited by Nicholas Napier Bell
- Music by Tony Macaulay
- Having already established itself as yet another rival to the all-conquering Hammer, with productions like *The Blood Beast Terror* (1968), *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971) Tigon followed up its already impressive roster with *The Beast in the Cellar*.
- But unlike some of its previous films which skulked about in gothic Victoriana or the confines of the Civil War era, this picture remains rigidly immersed in the unspeakably grim world of 1971, which to the younger generation now seems as distant and historic as rationing or black market nylons once seemed
- While both relics from 'simpler times', Ellie and Joyce view yesteryear in different ways. Joyce, at first the more rational of the pair, is fully cognisant of modern problems and the way in which the past can be distorted into nostalgic glory.
- She is the first to offer us any hint of the darkness which dominates their past and present.
- What lies in the cellar, clearly becomes a handy metaphor for the secrets they keep and the memories they would like to extinguish from their minds.

The Beast in The Cellar (1971) CONT...

- Ellie, on the other hand seems forever lost in a world which probably never really existed, one of tea rooms, village greens, church dances and inter-war innocence.
- She tries to keep a false memory of her late father alive, choosing to remember him as a handsome war hero, rather than the battle-torn monster who returned from the trenches, gassed and shell-shocked.
- But, though more pragmatic, Joyce, like Ellie is also haunted by her dead parent.
- When we first meet her she surreptitiously dons his old uniform, wandering the property in Ellie's absence, in an odd reversal of the usual male in female clothing, secret transvestite trope.
- The sisters bicker constantly, with Joyce effortlessly picking away at Ellie's many weaknesses.
- Reid, one of England's finest character players, delivers a brilliantly nervy performance, manic, needy and believably delusional.
- "When I have a shock, I get this fluttering feeling as if my heart's going to stop beating altogether..."
- Robson (*Eye of the Devil*, *The Shuttered Room*, *Fragment of Fear*), as Joyce, by contrast provides a more domineering presence, bringing her decades of experience to bare as she castigates and cruelly pokes fun of her wittering sister's explosion of tedium.
- What makes *The Beast in the Cellar* so strange and noteworthy, other than the fact that many don't even see it as a horror movie, is that it oddly sits outside the more usual trappings of genre filmmaking.
- While the predominate form of horror a decade later was the video nasty slasher and in the 00s this idea would be expanded into the home invasion flick, here the terror is not born out of innocent protagonists finding themselves faced with danger, the tension is built by us watching two sisters ineffectually attempting to keep the monster and all of their secrets safely confined.
- Elderly and guilt ridden, they pathetically try to justify their reasoning for keeping their brother a prisoner in the cellar; and their laughable attempts to prevent him escaping make us wonder whether secretly they want the world to know, so that they can go on living their remaining days without the burden of hidden knowledge.
- Like many films of that era, it all seems so depressingly fatal. From the moment the story begins, there is not a hope of this situation ever becoming right or good. Too many secrets have been stored, too much damage already done. The death knell is here long before we join the action. The sisters live not in a home but a charnel house in waiting
- *The Beast in the Cellar* hits home in ways that many other horror movies don't because James Kelley's excellent script allows for more nuanced questions of morality.
- Like *Frankenstein* (1931), it is essentially a gothic tale of terror where there is no clear villain.
- If anything, it explores the act of war as the real antagonist.
- The reason for Joyce and Ellie's 'madness' is born out of a desire to avoid more insanity, their extreme reaction comes from a place of love, but their supposedly peaceful intentions, manifest into cruel realities. In order to tame a monster, they inadvertently unleash one.
- By looking at the frailty of the family unit, once the heart of it has been devastated by catastrophe, Kelley also examines the nature of loyalty and betrayal and the dynamics of sisterly love when stretched to breaking point.
- Though the killer on the loose angle and the title might suggest one type of film, with many critics picking up on the weakness of this part of the story, its real strengths lie in its abilities to do much more than that.
- Stephen, the monster of this piece may face a sad demise but it is his sisters who suffer the greater tragedy as they are the ones who will have to live with their actions and inactions. It's a story of abuse and abusers, the lasting effects of violence and of the devastation caused by secrets which can be kept no longer.

Straight on Till Morning (1972)

Directed by Peter Collinson

Written by John Peacock

Produced by Michael Carreras

Cinematography by Brian Probyn

Edited by Alan Patillo

Music by Roland Shaw

- Brenda (Tushingam) leaves her mother's home in order to find a father for her as yet unborn child
- She also writes children's stories, and to some degree exists within her own world
- The title, itself a Peter Pan reference, underscores how the film becomes a very dark fairy tale
- The dinginess and 'kitchen sink' elements blur the lines between extreme horror and reality
- The fairy tale theme is explored constantly with the 'girl' leaving her home to enter into a dark adventure
- The story hints at the nastier elements of stories like Little Red Riding Hood and of course Peter Pan
- In some ways, the film is about fracturing 'realities' both on behalf of Brenda and Peter
- Unlike many traditional Hammer horror movies, it denies us any sense of justice, the ending is bleak and cruel

Nicholas Roeg

- Scenes and images arranged in disarranged fashion
- Often not presented in chronological order
- Challenging the audience to 'work out' or 'comprehend' the storyline

"[His films seem] to shatter reality into a thousand pieces" [and are] ...unpredictable, fascinating, cryptic and liable to leave you wondering what the hell just happened..."

Steve Rose (The Guardian)

Roeg's Rationale

- Roeg believed in a 'paradise lost', where people were not ruled by their conscious thoughts and moral assumptions.

Don't Look Now (1973)**Themes and Motifs****Time is Fluid**

- Fragmented editing
- A patchwork narrative – where past, present and future can be seen to occur simultaneously
- The couple have sex but shots of them getting dressed afterwards are intercut with the love making
- The narrative acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy – the events set in place by John's premonition of his death – lead to his actual death

Falling

- The threat of death from falling is used again and again
- Laura goes to hospital after falling in a restaurant
- Their son is injured after a fall at boarding school
- The bishop informs us that his father was killed in a fall
- John is almost killed by a fall during the church restoration

Don't Look Now (1973) CONT...

Glass or Breaking Glass

- Glass is used as an 'omen' or to foreshadow tragic events or when something bad is about to happen
- Stained glass windows
- Glass broken by the bicycle wheel
- A glass being knocked over
- A plank of wood shattering a pane of glass
- John asks the sisters for a glass of water

Misinterpretation or Mistaken Identity

- John mistakes his 'premonition' for the present
- John is mistaken for a Peeping Tom
- The mysterious figure in a red coat is mistaken for the dead daughter

The Concept of the Doppelganger

- Duplicates or mirror images are used throughout the film
- Reflections
- Photographic images
- Slides
- Police sketches

Communication

- Heather the blind psychic 'communicates' with the dead
- Subtitles are deliberately left out, so that our frustration as audience members is the same as John's
- Women are presented as much better communicators than men