

## The Most Scary Film of 2012, ‘Sinister’ is Both a Voyeur’s Heaven & Hell

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on October 13, 2012 - 4:16pm

- [Adam Fendelman](#) [2]
- [C. Robert Cargill](#) [3]
- [Christopher Young](#) [4]
- [Clare Foley](#) [5]
- [Ethan Hawke](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Jason Blum](#) [8]
- [Juliet Rylance](#) [9]
- [Michael Hall D'Addario](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Paranormal Activity](#) [12]
- [Scott Derrickson](#) [13]
- [Sinister](#) [14]
- [Summit Entertainment](#) [15]



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – We have forgotten what it’s like to be scared by an actually scary movie. “Sinister” – from producer Jason Blum (“Insidious” and all four “Paranormal Activity” films) – is the first film in 2012 to remind us.

More terrifying than “Insidious” and any of the “Paranormal Activity” films, “Sinister” is beautifully diabolical even without trickery. Instead of attempting to earn your fear by being very loosely based on a true story (like “[The Possession](#) [16]”) and while steering seriously clear of a flop (like “[The Apparition](#) [17]”) that’s as scary as George Bush trying to run our country, “Sinister” remembers what makes hair-raising films actually curdle your blood.



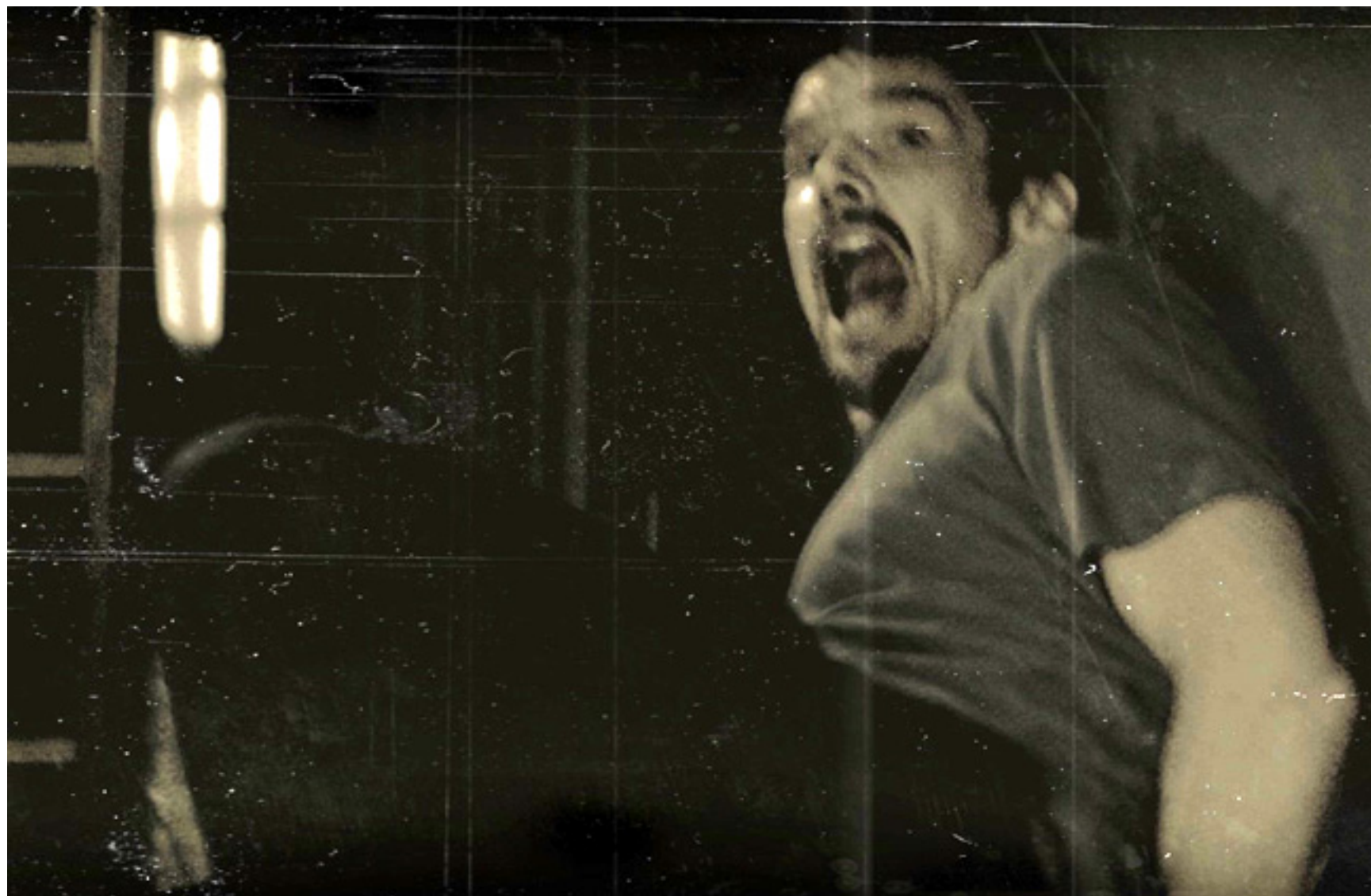
Michael Hall D'Addario stars in “Sinister”.

*Image credit: Summit Entertainment*

Like “The Shining,” “Misery,” “The Exorcist” and “Jaws” played on people’s *mental* fears without fancy effects as patchwork for weak material, the modern-day “Sinister” captures the most scary element of “The Ring” and “The Cabin in the Woods”: voyeurism.

Joss Whedon's "Cabin" terrified audiences by allowing us to watch another audience within the movie that's watching yet another audience within their own reality TV-like movie. And Gore Verbinski's psychologically taut "The Ring" mastered sound and real-life imagery to ultimately make us afraid of a simple phone call or a television's white noise.

"Sinister" even does what J.J. Abrams' "Super 8" couldn't come remotely close to: using the celluloid format of Super 8-millimeter film so moviegoers can see star Ethan Hawke's nightmare evolve into full throttle. By watching him watch the past and attempt to solve the true crime of a possible serial killer, it's easy to fear, get engrossed in and believe.



Ethan Hawke stars in "Sinister".

*Image credit: Summit Entertainment*

Even when the film crosses over into the paranormal, which it doesn't need to do and would have felt more real if it didn't (a cult theme only?), we don't mind. We've seen that so often lately, and while "Mr. Boogie" (AKA the antagonist Bughuul, played by Nicholas King) isn't what makes this film unique, how we start to fear this mysterious creature is. Hawke plays Ellison Oswalt, who's married to Tracy (Juliet Rylance, a British newcomer we've never seen before) with kids Ashley (Clare Foley, from "Win Win") and Trevor (Michael Hall D'Addario).

They're a relatively normal family. Admittedly, they're too fixated on Ellison's past book successes. ("Kentucky Blood" was his big hit a decade ago.) It's like Tracy doesn't have her own life (except to be his wife and a mom) and the children are just there to help creepy-kid scare you. This is forgiven since what's happening to this family, which is a direct result of Ellison's obsessive fixation and greed, is truly compelling movie material that has zero barrier to mental entry.

Any of us could do the same thing. Horror movies often frustrate moviegoers because it's so simple to scream at the screen *"Don't open that door!"* or *"Seriously? Just run away!"* instead of watching people plummet to their ridiculous deaths. Sure, "Sinister" has a few of those. Don't walk up that eerie ladder to an attic that's making probably-not-a-nice-summer's-day noises, man.





Clare Foley stars in "Sinister".

*Image credit: Summit Entertainment*

But surprisingly and to our refreshing delight, both Ellison and Tracy have a relatively realistic brain and they're actually responding to their own normal fears. Menacing box of home movies causes familial torment? Burn it. Haunted house where a family hangs themselves – yes, the home movie "Hanging Out" is cleverly worded – exacerbates the night terrors of your kid, Trevor? Just move.

"Sinister" is a gritty, celluloid-feeling horror lover's delight with some of the most realistic and actually horrifying moments in recent scary movie memory. But this time, the overextended kid's back bend that we've seen in so many exorcism movies before is actually paralyzing to real audiences. That's because the actor's having a believable dream. And this time, even the simple movement of a still image on a Macbook's screen – movement that shouldn't happen because the video is paused – effectively drops your heart.

And I haven't even yet mentioned one of the film's most stunning stars: Christopher Young. Don't recognize his name? You need to. Wonder what movie you've seen him in? Don't worry about what he looks like. This composer – from 110 films like "Spider-Man 3," "Drag Me to Hell," "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" and "A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge" – upgrades an already stupefying movie into 2012's most terrorizing. If there's a 2012 Oscar just for original horror music, it's game over with Young's "Sinister" score.



Ethan Hawke stars in "Sinister".

*Image credit: Phil Caruso, Summit Entertainment*

Even if we overanalyze this film and point out some of its flaws, you still unquestionably have a must-watch horror film. After its main plot ascension, yes, Ellison receives an iPhone call from the hilariously named character "Officer So and So". You might notice that his phone has "no signal" and the call couldn't have completed, but the snafu is just funny to laugh about later.

A horror movie's ending is often what critics crucify most. This one surprised me because it didn't try too hard. First-time writer C. Robert Cargill and "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" writer Scott Derrickson (who will be remaking "Poltergeist") bravely avoided the pressure of a bait and switch. This story arc climaxes in a way you'd believe – there is one twist thrown in for enjoyable shock factor – and ends with a primary reveal you actually *do* see coming the whole time.



Ethan Hawke stars in "Sinister".



Image credit: Phil Caruso, Summit Entertainment

That’s fine this time. Plot predictability often leads to mark downs by critics, but here, we can appreciate that we haven’t been manipulated. Instead, we’ve been granted storyline completion that oddly gives us a breath of fresh air. These filmmakers don’t insult our intelligence or try to decoy our minds. “Sinister” doesn’t need slashing and gashing and blood and gore.

This film just needs your willing brain. With that alone, you’ll be treated to a new film that captures some of the scariest cinematic qualities of classic horror films in a truly original, trend-defying way.

*“Sinister,” which opened on Oct. 12, 2012 and is rated “R,” stars Ethan Hawke, Juliet Rylance, James Ransone, Fred Dalton Thompson, Michael Hall D’Addario, Clare Foley, Tavis Smiley, Janet Zappala, Victoria Leigh, Cameron Ocasio, Ethan Haberfield, Danielle Kotch and Nicholas King from writer and director Scott Derrickson, writer C. Robert Cargill, “Insidious” producer Brian Kavanaugh-Jones and Jason Blum (producer of “Insidious” and all four “Paranormal Activity” films).*



[18]

By [ADAM FENDELMAN](#) [19]  
Publisher  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[adam@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:adam@hollywoodchicago.com) [18]

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