

# Film review: The Babadook (Jennifer Kent, 2014)



Horror sets its roots in East Asian concepts with American execution. Anything outwith these countries is seen as abnormal, and yet on almost every occasion, these productions are the ones with the greatest critical success. From the sun scorched shores of Australia comes Jennifer Kent's festival breakout – '**The Babadook**', a startling addition to the haunted house subgenre.

*It has been almost seven years since the car crash that killed Amelia's husband and following this, the birth of their only son Samuel. Still stricken with grief, the pair live a normal, if rather sullen life together. Things take a turn for the worst when the pair discover a twisted picture book, and are stalked by the creature it depicts.*

What sets The Babadook apart from its peers is Kent's understanding of what makes horror effective: build up and establishment. Instead of catapulting you in to the formulaic 'scare-a-second' film, it chooses to find its footing before delivering the real terror. It faintly echoes the structure of Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist; forming a coherent, believable story around something truly sinister.

This strong development, rare in horror films, allows for sprawling questions to be asked behind the closed doors of the haunted house. The character of the Babadook itself has the potential to become one of the most petrifying entities of modern cinema. Seldom seen, its presence is felt through the ominous sound production, courtesy of Frank Lipson and his team. The croaks and groans are some of the most chilling examples of sound production you'll hear.

It sticks to this idea even when it slightly loses its footing in the final act, when it adopts the effective, if slightly cliched path that most horror films take. Two magnetic central performances from Essie Davis and Noah Wiseman as mother and son keep it together, with Wiseman in particular delivering a caustic, enchanting performance.

The Babadook stalks you; it follows you home. Its terrifying moments will be there when you close your eyes at night. It is a lingering homage to the horror classics of yesteryear and although not as scarring, competently stands alongside them. Even with its minor flaws, it still manages to outshine most of the shoddy horror films that have arrived recently. In a few years, The Babadook will be remembered as a cult horror classic of the modern age.

**The Babadook is released in UK cinemas on October 24th**