

Horror



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The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

Dread and terror have overcome all of your senses and you start to make decisions that are unbecoming. These are the feelings that are invoked when you delve into the genre of horror. Horror exists in many forms but each time its goal is the same, to scare the audience and invoke the feelings of fear.

Throughout history, humans have used horror as a way to teach morals and values to humanity. Horror can trace its roots to the Inquisition of the 14th century where tales of witch burnings and God's wrath ran rampant. Also during the 14th century, Dante Alighieri's epic *The Inferno* told a tale of a man going through hell and the horrors that he faced. Even fairy tales were originally presented with a horror element. With a large library of horror literature, it was only the natural progression that when film became a new medium, horror would be one of the earliest and most prominent genres.

The first era of horror films is known as the silent era (1896-1928). During the silent era, film makers had to focus on location and facial reactions to tell their stories. In 1886, French filmmaker Georges Méliès' made a short film called *Le manoir du diable* [The Devil's Castle] which would come to be known as the first horror film. Though it was only a short film, it began a history that would continue until this day.

During the 1920s, Germany would create a number of expressionist pieces such as *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* [The Golem] (1915), *Nosferatu* (1922), and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligairi* (1920). The silent era of horror focused more on creepy shots and imagery through facial make up then jump scares and cheap gimmicks. They would often have twisted shapes and lines to form the backgrounds while focusing on heavy shadows.

Many other great works came in the silent era such as Thomas Edison's take on *Frankenstein* (1910) and with Lon Chaney in the role of the *Phantom of the Opera* (1925). These Silent masterpieces would set the roots for what was to come.

With the dawn of the "talkie," a new era of horror was born. This era was commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Horror (1931-1948).

Once films began having sound, Universal and RKO went into full production on making horror classics. Films like *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Wolfman* (1941), *King Kong* (1933), *Cat People* (1942) and many others helped put horror films on the map. Normally, these pictures were played during Saturday Matinee's and were considered the B work of Hollywood. Cheap, low budget westerns and horror films were shown during this time when young school boys were out to see movies, while romantic films were shown in the evening hoping to attract a more adult crowd. These business practices would try to keep the general public from falling for the monster movie, but stars like Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff would have them coming back for more and more.

When Universal acquired the rights to *Dracula* for \$40,000 (\$621,823.68 modern inflation), they knew they needed to make back the cost by any means necessary. Therefore, the studio decided to shoot two versions of the film at the same time. During the day, Universal studios filmed an English language version of *Dracula* and at night they filmed the a Spanish language version of the film using same script and sets. While Bela Lugosi's portrayal of the character may be the most iconic, many critics and horror fans (myself included) tend to think the Spanish version of *Dracula* is a much better version. In my opinion, the Spanish version has superior acting and, in general, just feels like a much more well put together film.

After World War II, the audience for horror films had changed. The classic monsters who skulk the night were not considered scary by a population who had seen the horrors of war first hand. This led to a generation of horror that leaned more on the horror of nuclear threats. Giant monsters as tall as buildings became the new threat. While B-movies had existed for years, before this period, B-horror really hit its stride in these years. Instead of using your everyday working man as a hero of the film, the films often focused on younger heroes in their late teens to early twenties or heroes with military backgrounds. This period, which lasted from 1950-1959 is known as the Atomic Era. Films from this period include *Gojira* [Godzilla] (1954), *THEM!* (1954), and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959).

During the late 1950s, a British studio known as Hammer Films created what would be known as the Birth of Modern Horror (1960-1979). Hammer realized the novels for *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897) had become public domain and decided to make its own versions of the films. Not as restricted as U.S. films of the time, Hammer could get away with making much darker films than its predecessors. Blood, guts, cleavage, and rape became elements of these films. Films made during this period include *Horror of Dracula* (1958), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Blacula* (1972), and *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971).

Because of this early treatment of horror, it was always pushed to the back as a lesser genre of film. Throughout the 1940s, horror would become a rising star and a falling meteor. In a decade that started out strong with Universal creating high budget films starring their most famous monsters, it seemed as though nothing could go wrong. Though in the mid 1940s, the general public's interest during WWII started to falter. This led to Universal taking a more light-hearted approach mixing classic horror with comedy in the film *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).

After the fall of horror, science fiction mixed with horror elements took center stage. Movies like *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *THEM!* (1954), and *Gojira* [Godzilla] (1954) became the new mainstays. Character actor Vincent Price became a horror mainstay during this time period. Price would take roles that others saw as simply B pictures and create some of horrors most interesting and well-acted characters.

In the 1960s, American film makers such as Alfred Hitchcock and George A. Romero pushed the boundaries of what was allowed in films while creating masterpieces such as *Psycho* (1960) and *Night of The Living Dead* (1968). These films helped pave the way for the modern rating system we see today.

With a darker tone in place, everyone tried to get in on the horror craze. In 1974, an important first for the genre took place. *The Exorcist* (1973) became the first horror film to be honored with a nomination for best picture at the Academy Awards.

With the 1970s pushing the boundaries of what could be seen on screen, a new genre of horror was born; the Slasher Film (1940-present). Often, the slasher, is a misogynistic blood bath with a killer who has a body count higher than the stoned teens they slay. Normally the films are aimed

at a high school to college demographic which is why Roger Ebert called the genre "DTM or Dead Teenager Movie." While many have critiqued the genre for its sex, language, and over the top gore, some of the most iconic horror movies come from this genre. These films include *Black Christmas* (1974), *Child's Play* (1988-2013), and *My Bloody Valentine* (1981).

The *Halloween* series (1978-2009), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series (1984-2010), *Silent Night, Deadly Night* series (1984-1991), and the *Scream* series (1996-2011) were made during this period.

So why is it that these "bad movies" are so memorable? Once you examine the film in the right mind set, it can become a lot of fun. More often than not, you find yourself rooting for the killer and not for the teens that they kill. Take, for example, the *Friday The 13th* series (1980-2009). Jason Vorhees, the killer, is killed off at the end of the fourth movie. The fifth movie follows a copycat killer and is wildly considered the worst in the series by both fans and critics. By the sixth movie, the studio decided it was time to bring Jason back so they resurrected the character and made him a far more ridiculous killer. Now a supernatural monster, Jason kills in the most insane ways and the audience is more and more thrilled each time.

Modern horror has built off of all of these previous genres and we have many of the great films today. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many quality and cult films such as *The Shining* (1980), *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990), *Braindead (Dead-Alive)* (1992), and *Shaun of The Dead* (2004) are examples of films produced during this era.

In 1991, the Horror genre was blessed with the highest honor a film can receive. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) was the first horror film to win best picture at the Academy Awards; an honor that the Sci-Fi genre has never achieved.

So next time you hear a bump in the night, don't ignore it. You never know what could be lurking in the shadows.

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