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Monsters and Demons: A Short History of the Horror Film

By Astrid Bullen

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Going to the movies may not seem like a novel way for little kids to spend an afternoon. But have you ever brought your child to see a Disney flick and ended up viewing trailers for Jeepers Creepers 2 or Freddie vs. Jason? When this happened in a Birmingham, Alabama cinema last year, parents became concerned about what the main attraction would be. But before the managers at the cinema could turn off the previews, the main attraction came on, and it wasn't Piglet. Instead they were presented with the gruesome opening of Wrong Turn, an 18-rated slasher flick in much the same vein as the previews.

Is there a more genre more criticized than the horror film? Not bloody likely. There's the argument that horror films are socially and morally irresponsible, even influencing some people to imitate the brutal methods of the killers portrayed on screen. Horror films actually have the opposite effect on normal people - sick minds will commit atrocities anyway. Watching horror films lets us encounter our secret fears, share them with other viewers, and eliminate the terror by meeting it head-on.

The genre is almost as old as cinema itself - the silent short film *Le Manoir du Diable* directed by Georges Mèliès in 1896 was the first horror movie and the first vampire flick. The movie only lasted two minutes, but audiences loved it, and Mèliès took pleasure in giving them even more devils and skeletons.

In the early 1900's German filmmakers created the first horror-themed feature films, and director Paul Wegener enjoyed great success with his version of the old Jewish folk tale *Der Golem* in 1913 (which he remade - to even greater success - in 1920). This fable about an enormous clay figure, which is brought to life by an antiquarian and then fights against its forced servitude, was a clear precursor to the many monster movies that flourished in Hollywood during the Thirties.

The most enduring early German horror film is probably F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), the first feature-length vampire movie. But one movie paved the way for the "serious" horror film - and art cinema in general - Robert Wiene's work of genius *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, still held up as an

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model of the potent creativity of cinema even to this day.

Early Hollywood drama dabbles in horror themes including versions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) starring Lon Chaney, the first American horror-film movie star.

It was in the early 1930's that Universal Studios, created the modern horror film genre, bringing to the screen a series of successful gothic-steeped features including *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* (both 1931) and *The Mummy* (1932) - all of which spawned numerous sequels. No other studio had as much success with the genre (even if some of the films made at Paramount and MGM were better).

In the nuclear-charged atmosphere of the 1950's the tone of horror films shifted away from the gothic and towards the modern. Aliens took over the local cinema, if not the world, and they were not at all interested in extending the tentacle of friendship. Humanity had to overcome endless threats from

Outside: alien invasions, and deadly mutations to people, plants, and insects. Two of the most popular films of the period were *The Thing From Another World* (1951) and *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1956).

Horror movies became a lot more lurid - and gorier - in the late Fifties as the technical side of cinematography became easier and cheaper. This era saw the rise of studios centered exclusively on horror, particularly British production company Hammer Films, which focused on bloody remakes of traditional horror stories, often starring Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, and American International Pictures (AIP), which made a series of Edgar Allan Poe themed films starring Vincent Price.

The early 1960's saw the release of two films that sought to close the gap between the subject matter and the viewer, and involve the latter in the reprehensible deeds shown on screen. One was Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, the other was a very low-budget film called *Psycho*, both using all-too-human monsters rather than supernatural ones to scare the audience.

When *Rosemary's Baby* began ringing tills in the late Sixties, horror film budgets rose significantly, and many top names jumped at the chance to show off their theatrical skills in a horror pic. By that time, a public fascination with the occult led to a series of serious, supernatural-themed, often explicitly gruesome horror movies. *The Exorcist* (1973) broke all records for a horror film, and led to the commercial success of *The Omen*.

In 1975 *Jaws*, directed by a young Steven Spielberg, became the highest grossing film ever. The genre fractured somewhat in the late 1970's, with mainstream Hollywood focusing on disaster movies such as *The Towering Inferno* while independent filmmakers came up with disturbing and explicit gore-fests such as Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

John Carpenter's *Halloween* introduced the teens-threatened-by-superhuman-evil theme that would be copied in dozens of increasingly violent movies throughout the 1980's including the long running *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series. Horror movies turned to self-mocking irony and downright parody in the 1990's - the teenagers in *Scream* often made reference to the history of horror movies. Only 1999's surprise independent hit *The Blair Witch Project* attempted regular scares.

So go ahead, take a stroll through these favourite horror movies of all time. But pick your way very carefully, this walk is not for the faint of heart. And if you happen to hear what sounds like some subdued whispering or soft creepy grating sounds, just pay no attention to it. It's probably only the wind.

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Digital Film Processing is Really the Only Option for Truly Quality Prints

By Dave Gonzalez

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Digital photography has taken off like wildfire these days, primarily due to its ease and quality in its digital film processing. With a good digital camera, it's as though you're using the very best Kodak film for every single one of your digital photos. Moreover, digital film processing can be done from the comfort of your own home with the right digital film processing software or with digital photo developing online.

The most standard form of digital film processing is digital photos of 4x5 film processing. By using this size, you can make sure to get the very best in cost and quality, as many digital cameras are designed to function their very best at that level. Moreover, if cost is your primary concern, then you'll enjoy the advantage that comes with bulk digital photo developing for all of your parties and other important occasions where many people will be wanting copies.

Just like a standard camera with film, digital cameras use a lens and a shutter, except instead recording your image on film, it is captured electronically by way of a sensor, which converts it into a digital file. This file is saved on a memory device, which is frequently removable. This way, you can choose where you'd like to keep your pictures, and specifically what sort of digital film processing is best for you.

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