THE DECAY OF MONSTERS: HORROR MOVIES
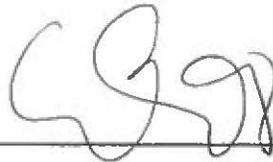
THROUGHOUT HISTORY

by

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A THESIS

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In this thesis, I explore the rich history of horror films through their most popular and well-remembered entries. Using this analysis of why each individual movie is well-remembered, I examine them as products of their own time and as classic media. This thesis discusses the concept of the "other", what the monsters and protagonists represent, and why this was important at the time the film was made. Following this, the thesis examines modern films and series, and the huge gap of quality between the well-rated films and the high-grossing films of the more modern era. Horror seems to have become stagnant, drawing more and more from other film genres and losing less of it's own evolution and style in recent years. Reflecting on the past with this thesis will hopefully allow us to see ways to fix and continue to evolve the horror movie genre.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Horror, in Brief

Horror is a construct of genre that has been around for a very long time due to it being constructed around the real-life experience of fear. Fear is a basic human and animal instinct, which drives us to achieve and thrive; running, fighting, or reaching for new heights. It has its roots firmly grasped into our minds, as at any moment we must be ready for the fight or flight response a scare brings.

Horror movies play off of this instinct to run away from things that can harm us. Death, the unknown, evil, and the afterlife have been themes of horror in classic literature, and with folklore and superstition fueling the flames, our fears are seen clearly in text and film, but presented in a way in which we ourselves identify emotionally. The audience inhabits various roles within film: the victim, the girl running from the serial killer, the detective investigating the bizarre crime spree, the person holding a camera to document the horrors they are presented. It is in this way that the horror genre seems to be unique: they are reflections of deep, primal emotions, pushing further inside the audience's id to their subconscious feelings. Other genres like drama, comedy, and romance appeal to the audiences desires and wants - but horror plays the audience's *needs*.

Why, do we seek out these movies? Why do we wish to subject ourselves to our own fears and hallucinations and worse-case scenarios, when so many other forms of entertainment offer relief and escape from the pressures and fears of modern society, be they running in terror from an impending atomic bomb detonation or paying our taxes. The world of horror is so intrinsically tied to our animal side, why do we not just run

screaming from Norman Bates, shoving a knife into our faces, or a horde of zombies, wishing to possess our every action with everyday drudgery?

These are the themes I wish to explore. A common theory is that societal fears rule our horror franchises, the ones that rise and fall, and the ones that are remembered. To this end I will be investigating and making a list of history's most lucrative and critically acclaimed movies of any given decade in order to discover how they were influenced by societal fears and other movies that came before. As well, I am going to investigate the staying power behind critically acclaimed movies. Why have those movies stood out? Why do we still watch and analyze them today? How did they rise above their competitors to become classics? Why are they still enjoyed by audiences and relevant discussion even 50 or 60 years later? I also wish to investigate current trends in modern horror movies and how that relates to these previous films and why it seems like there's no modern classics within the highly-grossing horror films. The degradation and gap between well-rated horror films and well-funded horror films seems to be growing ever more, and I believe that exploring how films of their own decades relate to each other will present an interesting insight into this idea.

This project is both historical and speculative. I believe that American horror movies have entered a recent state of stagnation, and that there are many factors in this. While some films have achieved a level of critical success, there are many, many more that are panned by critics and audiences alike, leaving us with so many bad horror movies to sift through, it is difficult to see the diamonds in the rough. I believe that modern horror is seen as a checklist, an easy and fast way to make some money reusing tropes that were revolutionary in the 40s, but have since seen so much use in modern

media and parody that they simply are not effective. Modern American audiences are also highly individualized and each individual has their own personal fears and the societal fears of older films have become less and less universal, leaving our independent natures so varied that horror cinema has grown broader and more generalized until horror films are barely recognizable as unique from other genres.

Chapter 1: A Short Introduction to the History of Horror Film

As long as there have been movies, there has been horror film. Although the term "horror" as a genre did not become common until the 1930's, many filmmakers and artists often had interests in the macabre, filming skeletons dancing (*Spook Tale* by the Lumiere Brothers) and an adventure in a haunted castle with ghosts, demons, and other scary monsters (*The Manor of the Devil* by Georges Méliès), displayed a formation of the concept of gothic horror set pieces and narratives to be used in film, emulating real life demons such as serial killers and representing those found in classic literature.

As movies became longer and more elaborate, German Expressionism took hold of the horror genre with force, the release of the classic and often hailed as the "grandfather of horror films" *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* in 1920 displaying revolutionary camerawork and cinematography, with harsh angles and strange perspectives adding to the unease and tension of the story.

In the wake of World War I, however, Germany's economy was not performing nearly as well as its innovation in cinema, leading many of the national film companies such as UFA (Universal Film AG) to near bankruptcy, or in the case of less solvent, independent film companies, disband altogether. The curtailing of importing German entertainment to America caused a drastic decrease in profits, and with the recent boom in popularity of their films, many filmmakers migrated to hollywood, bringing their unique style of film to the forefront of the changing cinema landscape.

The biggest event, however, that changed the landscape of the horror film, was the advent of sound. While Universal Films did not have any theater holdings, they

were moderately successful in bringing horror to the small screen with films such as

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). However,

the usage of sound in their works became the beginning of the gothic horror cycle of

movies, some of the most well known movie monsters and villains coming to life in

sound and motion that audiences had never seen before.

Films like *Dracula* (1930) *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), *The*

Invisible Man (1933), and *The Wolf Man* (1941) were extremely successful adaptations

of gothic horror literature, with sound lending them an extra unearthly and unsettling

quality, via either the smooth seduction of Dracula, the monstrous roars and moans of

Frankenstein, or simply the music used to build tension and suspense within the

audience. However, eventually Universal's pictures fell into formulaic and self-

parodying reproduction of these monsters, with *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940),

Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man (1943), and collaborations of monsters working

together in movies, like *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945).

All of this degrade in quality and formula came to a head in the popular comedy *Abbott*

and Costello Meet Frankenstein (1948), which had the comedy duo interact with the so-

called "big three" of Universal's horror movie monsters lineup, which also marked the

ending of Universal's classic gothic horror cycle.

At the same time, RKO, a less financially successful film company, had begun

their own string of low-budget horror movies, with the studio providing the titles for the

movies, and the story being developed by Val Lewton, a story editor for David O

Selznick. Because of the budget, the films relied more on using dark shadows and

psychological scares to affect the audience, which was wildly successful in the debut of

Cat People (1942). This practically saved the studio and laid the groundwork for many of the later horror movies and concepts.

However, between the post-World War II years and the 50s, horror films went through a period of lessened quality in both acting and writing. While many teens were still thrilled by the concepts and the wild conjecture brought on by suspicions of the era, horror films were pushed to the side as b-movies, as technologies allowed for more gimmick-heavy films to be made: physical interaction with the audience and 3D movies gained popularity and traction with low-budget studios. As well, television was becoming an evermore popular medium, with its reliability and convenience causing many theaters to shut down. This kept Hollywood locked in a war for viewers, saving most of their writing and acting talent for epics such as *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960).

Sci-fi and paranoid horror became the norm in the wake of fear that the Cold War wrought on the US, and movies like *The Thing from Another World* (1951) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) gained a fair amount of popularity. Monsters and creatures from places we had no knowledge of took the screen by storm. However, near the mid-50s this sci-fi excursion began to die down, leaving a sea of mediocre, gimmick-based horror films in its place, with films like *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), which had a skeleton fly about the audience on wires) and *Tingler* (1959), which equipped seats in the audience with joy buzzers), relying on the short-lived curiosities to sell tickets.

In the 60's, while the studio system of Hollywood began to fall due to the cost-effective practice of shooting in other countries, the Motion Picture Production Code, a

rulebook set down as a list of moral censorship guides had become archaic, and along with social changes of the times, began to be abandoned as a boycott by the Production Code creators no longer meant a sales suicide. The 1960s also led to horror films regaining prestige in the public eye, as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) proved that horror could be more than a gimmick, and continued to showcase different looks at horror than the general audience had seen - horrors rooted in the minds of serial killers like Norman Bates, or nature itself, like *The Birds* (1963).

In Britain, horror films were having a big come back and advancing the genre with Hammer Films' resurrection of the Universal gothic horror cycle, recreating films like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Wolf Man*, only in full color, with graphic and shocking depictions of sex, violence, and gore. Mirroring this shock treatment move was Roger Corman, a horror director in the US who moved in a similar fashion - quick and slapdash films that utilized sex and gore as selling points, leading to his most successful movement in the Edgar Allen Poe cycle, recreating classic tales such as *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961) and *The Raven* (1963). In the highest drama with Hitchcock, or the lowest schlock of Corman, horror was being recognized as a versatile and worthy film style and genre.

The Occult and themes involving demons, devils, and the supernatural began to appear at this time too, free from older restrictions. Films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Amityville Horror* (1979) began to take footing as popular genres in the late 60's and 70's. At this point, film schools were present in the United States, bringing a whole new generation of filmmakers to the field who began to inject inspiration from b-movie classics of their generation into mainstream creations. Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*

(1975) showed that monster and creature horror could be highly lucrative, and Brian De Palma's adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie* displayed a resurgence of the "teen horror", starring young characters escaping (or falling to) dangerous situations. Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) also contributed to both monster horror and the renewal of older b-list films as highly profitable summer blockbusters.

Horror, however, was not just for larger studios. It still remained accessible to lower-budget studios and creators, and as the cost of production began to sink, independent directors could imitate highly skilled suspense creators with ease. Bloody affairs such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) inspired an entire legion of slasher films to capitalize on its raw fear potential, and arguably one of the most successful independent movies of all time, *Halloween* (1978), launched John Carpenter's older cult classic status into a legitimate filmmaker, as well as big budget versions of the same concept like *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Horror could be seen as a place for all audiences, all directors to see and tell stories that reflect themselves. It's a place for both creators and consumers to look at a reflection of their fears and their own self-doubts, their monsters and external demons, in a safe environment.

In the 90's, the slasher film was falling into parody, with films like *Scream* deconstructing their inner tropes and workings and attempting to close out the cycle of teen horror (ironically beginning a new cycle of films like *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and *Final Destination* (2000)), psychological and character horror was continuing to remain popular with films like *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Se7en*

(1995). However, there are several new styles of horror that became popular in the 90s and 2000s.

With a focus on body horror and gore, the radically named "torture porn" acts as a spiritual successor to the Hammer horror era, bringing intense, violent deaths, elaborate torture devices, and worse to shock audiences once again. This was epitomized by the *Saw* franchise, which sought to bring back splatter and gore from decades past and movies like *Night of the Living Dead* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to the horror industry with intense deaths and a cerebral mystery.

Found footage movies like *The Blair Witch Project* (1991) have also found success in theaters and with audiences in the United States, and has become another low-budget way for independent directors to show their skill with suspense on a skeleton budget. This is also led to a strange cycle of higher-budget found footage movies like *Cloverfield* (2008) being created inside the big budget blockbuster system of Hollywood.

Finally, the zombie movie has returned to the forefront of modern movies from four or five decades ago, with the release of *28 Days Later* (2002) challenging the moviegoer's perception of what zombies can represent, and how they can still scare us, as they did in George Romero's zombie classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Zombie films have not slowed in their intensity of creation, and are still being produced with regularity, with films like *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and the very recent *World War Z* (2013).

There is no disputing that as a reflection of any given era's cultural norms and concerns, horror is an important history for cinema fans to follow. Horror has heavily

influenced many aspects of contemporary film that we take for granted today. Studying and understanding historic film is sometimes overlooked as unimportant in discussions of contemporary entertainment. But the past is integral to the large body of works comprising the horror genre and recognition of this fact brings depth to not only horror film discussion but to the people of the societies who choose to be entertained by horror.

While they cannot give the story in its entirety, the history presented here focuses on various elements that make specific films popular at certain times. Film in general, and horror specifically, is greatly affected by the world around it: societal norms, current political situations, pop culture, scientific progress all exert their influence. I believe that there is a greater story and reasons as to why certain films are more popular than others, and why certain films are remembered. While luck, history and climate are obviously factors, it is the audience, the people, the viewers of these movies that truly determine any movie's popularity.

Chapter 2: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*: Horror is Born in the 20s

While most of the films on this list are American, and take their cues from American films, it is important to pay respects to the grandfather of all horror films. Commonly referred to as the first horror film ever made, its origin is Germany, from the ashes of the First World War. This ideal is present in all of its trappings, from both the heavy focus on authority controlling those who are weak-willed, and the dark, twisted scenery that draws heavily from German Expressionist cinema.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is a story within a story told by Francis, the protagonist of the film. However, it is revealed at the end of the film that he is, in fact, insane himself and the story is just a delusion in his damaged mind. Symbolism and horror are deeply imbedded in this film from start to finish, discussing the nature of brainwashed conformity and a militarized government hypnotizing its forces to kill, and the conformists to follow these orders blindly, not even resisting the hypnotism and atrocities forced upon them. Alongside these themes, the framing device of the mental insanity that Francis has discusses both the shaky realms of perception and mental state, as well as unreliable storytelling and the duality of human nature, the chance to choose between conformity and revolution.

All of these themes and allusions come in a brilliantly created piece of cinema, and, being one of the first true horror films, it is only obvious that films to follow would take on similar traits of societal metaphors and self-reflection. Indeed, most of the films on this list reflect those ideals of filmmaking to some degree, while those that do not still have some subconscious debt to pay towards *Dr. Caligari*. This symbolism and legacy influenced and led the art of horror filmmaking down a long and crooked road to

reach the films we know today as both horror classics and the sub-par state of existence that is modern horror. Just like the twisted streets of Holstenwall where the story takes place, this pathway may seem exciting, but it leads to a much darker place than it originally seemed.

Obviously, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* takes place before the advent of modernization of classic horror monsters, which would not come to fruition for another decade. This left the monster of the film to be the mind - the insanities and personal pitfalls of both Francis and Dr. Caligari. While Cesare is a monster by the nature of his killing several people, including Francis's friend Alan, he can easily be ruled out as the main monster of the movie - dying partway through and playing as a puppet, rather than his own instrument of destruction. This can be seen throughout movies that are released in the future - the true monster is often represented by intent to perform violent acts, and not the killing itself.

The layers of the movie are thick and mysterious, clouding vision as to who the true villain is - indeed, most of those presented as villains in the story are misunderstood in some way, and - like many of its followers, *Dr. Caligari* contains an intense twist ending, which is led into with a series of less intrinsic twists - faking out the audience into believing the first twist, that Dr. Caligari is a director of a mental institution and not a patient, and then hitting them with the second, more shocking idea that Francis is actually a patient, and as Dr. Caligari was committed to his own institution, he is, in fact, free to commit Francis to the same cell that Caligari suffered in Francis's delusions.

All of the possible villains are caught. All of the potential violence that could have escaped was contained, kept within the tight grasp of Caligari's asylum, both in Francis's delusion and within the real world as well. Unlike horror movies to follow, which often use the twist ending trope to hint that the villain is not really gone or the evil continues to prey outside of the film's bounds, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* uses the endings to make sure that any perceived villain is caught, and on its way to being cured, in both versions of the story. Cesare is dead and gone, and the doctor is caught and imprisoned within Francis's mind, while in the real world Francis and Cesare are both locked up as well - with the Doctor claiming to be well on the way to cure Francis's ill mind.

So why, then, was the twist used in this way? Given both the framing device and the outcomes are extremely positive within the context of the movie, how could this ending be perceived as horrifying? The most obvious one is that it is not meant to be. Coming from the end of World War I, the film could be used as a proponent of unification and defeat over the evils of the mind. The film's writers, Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, both experienced the war firsthand, becoming disillusioned to authority and conformity afterwards and wrote this as a strict defiance of the policies present during the war. The idea of hypnotism and mental domination is directly opposed by the asylum, where the Doctor hopes to cure Francis of his affliction, just like curing Germany from its poor mental health after the war.

On the other hand, the Doctor is very clearly an evil insane man throughout the film - even through Francis's biased eyes, it is clear that he is evil and insane. The ending could be, in fact, implying that the evil has won - Dr. Caligari has completely

dominated Francis, Jane, and Cesare, leaving them helpless and at his beck and call. Francis is the only one actively resisting, and according to the Doctor, he will soon be fixed - to return to normal, just as the Doctor is normal. This is further supported by the idea that each of the inmates are individuals - individual in their madness, to be sure, but individuals nonetheless. Soon, however, that individualism will be washed away in the name of conformity, and they will return to proper society.

The third option to take away from the ending is the most sinister, and it is possibly, easily the way that some of the general public could have taken it. This idea is suggested simply by the nature of the framing device, and can be seen as a very dangerous ideal, especially considering the rise of fascism in Germany after the first World War. This idea is that control and hypnotism of the public is actually a good thing - and that those who resist should be controlled, controlled by someone more benevolent than their own morals, or lack thereof.

Francis is shown to be a radical danger to himself and others at the end of the film, attempting to abuse Dr. Caligari on sight, and is likely to have caused himself harm by doing so. In believing the idea that he is in control of his own destiny, and believing in the idea that control and conformity are both terrible things by viewing Dr. Caligari's , he dooms himself to the asylum, and to be probed and hurt so that he can learn not to hurt others. By conforming willingly, others may avoid this fate.

This ideal is also present in the asylum itself, which is constantly shown as a place of good and help within the movie, from both Francis's and the 'real world's' perspective. In Francis's world, it is the final safe place to send Caligari, as he becomes delusional in his desire to control. The staff are helpful and kind, and there is a promise

14

that everything within the walls is safe. In the real world, the asylum is also a good place, attempting to save the minds of those who would otherwise be lost to society. The walls both contain and heal, and everybody who is 'normal' - everybody who has already conformed - are made safe from the revolutionists within.

    The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is dripping with symbolism, which is why it is important to this list, and to horror films as a whole. Before this film, spooky things were filmed, but the stories didn't mean anything - fear came from the situation, but not the subtext. There was no story, only scares. With *Dr. Caligari*, all of this changed. Horror could be more than just a momentary situation, it could be a message, an ideal, a fright for the intellect. It could be a terrifying reality not only present in the movie, but also reflecting real life and those who are affected by it. Most of all, it could be subtle. Movies have many subtle messages, but horror is drenched, as a genre, in the thick balance of subtlety and overtness, in every way in which the psyche is manipulated to experience the emotion of fear. As both a film, and a message, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*'s message and influence on all films since its creation cannot be overlooked.

Chapter 3: Frankenstein and *Freaks*: Men are Monsters in the 1930s

Frankenstein (1931, Highest Rated)

Near the middle of the film, when Frankenstein's monster first breaks out of imprisonment, it meets a young girl. This girl, in her innocence, invites him to play with her. Her innocence and unassuming nature leads to her death, however, as the monster mistakenly throws her into a lake (thinking it is a part of their game), where she drowns. This scene, originally removed due to its shocking nature, changes the entire feel of the film. While throughout the film we are shown, and it is hinted, that the Monster is simply a simple, somewhat good-natured beast, who doesn't understand the world around him. This scene emphasizes his kindness and his pitfalls, making him appear much more human and much more tragic than many other monsters on this list.

Victor Frankenstein is a scientist in a small European village, working with his hunchbacked assistant Fritz trying to piece together a human from various body parts and bring it to life. Frankenstein has engrossed himself in the work, and his fiancée, Elizabeth, is concerned about him. She and her friend learn that Frankenstein is attempting to create life, and rush to save him - however, they arrive just as his experiment is finished, and the creature rises from the slab, alive. However, due to the insane criminal's brain that Fritz stole, the monster is a simple creature, with very little intelligence. As they chain it into the dungeon and discuss the implications of what has been done, Fritz tortures the monster and forces it to kill him and another of Frankenstein's friends, and escape. Outside, he comes across a girl and accidentally kills her as well, thinking it to be part of a game. When the body is discovered, a mob forms and chases the monster (who has kidnapped Frankenstein) to a windmill, and then

burn it down with the monster inside. Frankenstein survives, and the film ends with the marriage between him and Elizabeth.

Firstly, it is important to discuss the adaptation, and how the changes and modifications to Mary Shelley's original novel are reflected in many of the other modern adaptations of classic literature in this list. These differences reflect that the film is a product of its own time. For instance, in the film, the monster is a brute - a child at heart, while in the original novel, the monster speaks perfect english and is well-read. His violence in the book is a result of his own decisions, while in the movie his rampage is caused by the violence of those around him. Frankenstein also has help in the movie - a hunchbacked assistant named Fritz, who stands as an incompetent assistant to the doctor. In the novel, however, this henchman is absent, leaving the doctor to sow his seeds of science alone. These changes can be seen as a reflection of the century of change between the novel and the movie. They allow the film to adapt the themes of the novel's time, such as the timeless ideal of the pursuit of science, and create their own metaphors and allusions that can be analyzed in a more modern context.

Frankenstein - the scientist, not his monster - is easily a contender for the primary analysis of this film. Given that the monster does not appear within the movie for about half of it, it could easily be said that Victor is the monster, himself. Showing many of the traits that would come of human monsters in decades to come, as well as mirroring many of the traits of his predecessor, Dracula, it can be implied that this was the intent from the beginning. Not only is this theme of man being the real monster being continued from the previous works of horror in the past decade since *The Cabinet*

17

of Dr. Caligari, but it also vilifies the townspeople in a way that is similar to those themes discussed in *Caligari*.

Firstly, there is his strangeness. Victor Frankenstein is certainly weird, as his actions lead him to an extreme isolation in an ancient, gothic tower, which he has retrofitted into a strange and twisted laboratory. Like Dracula before him, it is an easy lair to place a villain, and even includes a dungeon beneath the lab where he can store away his "deranged" creation. Secondly, his acts in the movie are far from good. His theft of body parts and desecration of graves is one thing, and his classification as a mad scientist only comes from his willingness to do anything and hurt anyone to complete his experiences. As he physically cows his assistant Fritz, he emotionally distances himself from his fiancée and anyone else that could care about him. Finally, his dictator-like pull over his own creation is not something to be left off the table. He imprisons it, Fritz harms it, and sows fear through it, wishing to have complete domination over the thing. And if he cannot, he will destroy it.

That is pushing it a bit, however - he never orders Fritz to harm the beast, nor does he desire the beast to kill people throughout the community. In some respects, he could be looked upon as a failed protector. However, in keeping in line with the authoritarian and anti-conformity based themes in *Caligari*, *Frankenstein* pushes a similar envelope of the powers of a totalitarian state without strict rule. While it still pushes against the idea of conformity, it is leaning into the role that horror films soon take on in the wake of World War II.

Fritz is a great example of this. While he is still under Frankenstein's rule, he is still above the lowest of the low (Frankenstein's monster). This, combined with the lack of discipline from Victor, leads to torture and antagonization of the monster, that lowly nonconformist locked up in the dungeon - torturing him with fire. This theme is also explored in the procuring of a brain for the monster - due to his lack of discipline, he mentally handicapped the monster, forcing it into this position in the first place - and then tortures it for being there.

Another good example is the townsfolk. The mobs the villagers form are rash and violent, stemming from a desire to kill and destroy, rather than necessarily bring the monster to appropriate justice. Again, like was implied in *Caligari*, violence upon the mentally ill is portrayed as the easy (and wrong) way to be a better conformist, but while that film ended in a slightly hopeful desire to fix what was wrong, this film looks to a more American form of removing the non-conformist: callously burning them to the ground.

The monster, however, is the most important symbol in all of this. One of the most classic movie monsters, adapting the novel by Mary Shelley to film was certainly an important landmark in horror film history. Just 8 months earlier, *Dracula* was released, kicking off the genre of monster movies within Universal studios. For the purpose of analysis and discussion within this paper, however, it is far more important to look at *Frankenstein*. While *Dracula* is certainly a movie worthy of analysis and discussion, it places the blame with the movie's titular vampire. He's a monster in his own right, but he's not forced into anything. He drinks blood to live, but he takes a

perverse joy in the seduction and brainwashing of others. The monster is very clearly,

the monster of the film.

Frankenstein, on the other hand, is much more open and talkative about analysis

of the monster and the horrors, both overt (drowning a girl, resurrecting a patchwork

corpse) and subliminal (mob mentality and torture of the disabled). These messages

have much more meaning and the film is almost more poetic in nature, discussing the

tragedies and pitfalls of man, machine, and even science within its 70-minute runtime.

The monster, with his disabled mind and his violent stature, with his submissive

personality but nonconformist actions, leads to a discussion that is not often had in

horror films up to this point, and that's why it is innovative and important in the 30s.

Freaks **(1932, Highest Gross)**

Freaks takes *Frankenstein's* original ideal of the mob vs. the monster and

drastically turns it on its head. The heroes of this film, the things that are supposed to be

viewed as the good and the exploited, are the freaks themselves, while "normal"

looking people are viewed as the monsters present with their disdain for and

exploitation of the freaks within the movie. For such an early horror movie, it is

surprising, to say the least, that the conversation about conformity metaphors within

horror films moves so quickly from the monsters needing to conform, and the monsters

forcing others to conform. In the scene above, there is such an explicit line of "We

accept you!" That line perfectly illustrates the monster's ideals and the theoretical

humor of needing to be accepted as a man amongst monsters.

This film is about a woman (Cleopatra) who attempts to marry one of the titular

"freaks", and then kill him for his money - however, when her plan is found out by the

other members of the circus, they attack and turn her and her conspirator (Hercules) into freaks themselves. The film's themes can easily be seen, even by the layman, throughout its runtime. The basic premise is about the exploitation of a little person in order to steal his fortune and then murder him soon after. All of this despicable act is performed only by the two "normal"-looking performers in the circus: an acrobat (Cleopatra) and a strongman (Hercules). Along with their normal looks, even their role in the circus comes as an extremely physically fit contrast to the somewhat less capable outsiders, who take the role of a group of protagonists within the film.

The most interesting aspect of this film is, of course, its controversy. There is little that remains of the negative backlash that the film had on contemporary audiences, the film gaining cult classic status and standing as one of the "freshest" horror films of the year on the aggregate reviewing website RottenTomatoes, but in its original release, it was fraught with criticism and disgust. Originally 90 minutes long, audiences at test screenings found the film to be impossible to watch and incredibly gross in nature, leading the panicked studio to cut out a significant portion of the film, which has since been lost to time.

The final release version was just over an hour long, but it still had audiences complaining in disgust and bombed at the box office. Critics and audiences hated it alike, and unlike the financially successful *Frankenstein*, this film represents the first complete, financial failure on this list. Still, films persevered and found great cult and critical success later on in the decades, with *Freaks* being one of the earliest films made. Its themes of segregation and separation between multiple groups still strikes a chord to this day, and that's why it is on this list and timeless.

The film's beginning and middle are continuously indicative of the theme of conformity and acceptance, as well as the nature of discrimination and exploitation (which is interesting considering the backlash about exploitation that this movie had during its release period). However, the so-called "freaks" in the film are shown to be exceedingly human, with many side-stories and vignettes about their personal lives and how they deal with their various physical impairments. On the other hand, the "regular" humans receive no such redeeming qualities, and are extremely unpleasant people throughout the film.

Despite this, the film carries some big baggage when it comes to the fairly straightforward themes in the end. The extremely violent and tense scene of the circus slowly overtaking Cleopatra and Hercules is incredibly horrifying, leaving much of the movie in flux as to its morals, as well as attempting to find some semblance of rhyme and reason in this stormy, rainy madness. The complexity to the movie that this moment adds is not to be understated, even despite the movie's added epilogue of Hans, (the man that the "normal people" were trying to scam and the "leader" of the circus) showing remorse and regret that he did not want the atrocities that were performed on the two schemers to be carried out.

Still, the movie has an extreme root of realism in it that can easily resonate with many different classes of people. The desire to fit in amongst your own normal group, the ideal of accepting others who might be considered more normal or successful being allowed in, despite their differences to the group, the sense of betrayal from within the group, and the hope of revenge, either violent or simply emotional, can be applied to

many people and situations within the world. This very universal message combined

with the complexity of the righteousness of revenge, the hatred of the conformist, and

the conforming of the nonconformist, make this a worthy evolution of the horror movie,

and a great piece for analysis on this list.

Chapter 4: Cat People and *The Wolf Man*: The Evil is Within us in The 1940s

The Wolf Man (1941, Highest Rated)

The Wolf Man is a continuation of Universal's campaign to bring classic horror monsters to the big screen, and the movie that received the most financial success of the decade. A harrowing tale of evil being passed from person to person, causing each to grow the desire to maim and kill others, the film suggests many things about human nature and promotes messages of nonviolence and self-protection through incredible makeup and a classic story.

The Wolf Man is about Larry Talbot, who gets bitten and then kills a werewolf, swiftly turning into a werewolf himself. After he starts terrorizing the town, he is confronted and killed in his wolf form by his father. There is a significant theme of lack of control in *The Wolf Man*, in both human and werewolf forms. The werewolf itself has the killer instincts of a wolf turned up to maximum, and runs around attempting to kill those he encounters. This is completely unwilling by those who are infected with lycanthropy, and they are forced into these dreadful acts by their wolfen sides taking over their human minds. However, this lack of control, while being a part of the classic "outsider" or "nonconformist" narrative that is present in many horror movies, it is significantly different from many films before it. The lack of control is not brought on from an outward force, like when Frankenstein's Monster is forced to be violent due to his circumstances, or when Cesare is hypnotized and forced to kill by Dr. Caligari. The Wolfman's demons are internal and deep-set, with the only solution in the film being death.

Death can represent a variety of things in this case. In its most obvious form, it could come from the idea that treating the mentally ill, like the Wolf Man, is impossible, and only a waste of resources, but there isn't enough evidence within the film itself to prove that. It could also mean treatment in a less drastic sense, just as some madnesses are not as drastic as running around and killing people. If so, then this treatment is extremely hard to carry out, and somewhat difficult to pull off, as silver bullets are likely rare and expensive, and silver bludgeoning or slashing weapons put the user at a great risk of harm to themselves, as is shown when Larry Talbot kills Bela, but is bitten and infected himself.

It is very reliant on what the werewolf, and by extension the disease, is supposed to represent to determine the metaphors, intended or not, present in the film. It is actually very easy to compare it to the zombification virus that appears in the 60's and all that that implies, both being infections that are spread throughout the town through bites, creating more and more deadly creatures, but obviously, wolfmen have some significant differences to take into account when analyzing them.

First is the lack of control, or the lack of lack of control. While in the first film it is never stated that werewolves only transform under a full moon, it is clear that the werewolf is only deadly when he is transformed, as opposed to a constant threat, like a zombie. The second is that the werewolf is a singular being, despite his propensity to spread his virus. It is often only because one is killed in an attack that another takes his place, as any bite can lead to lycanthropy. The final difference is that werewolves are much, much more dangerous: they are fast, strong, and merciless killers. Unlike the

zombie's slow inevitability, the wolfman is much more of an individual killer, who can only be outran or killed through luck.

All of these differences make the mirror that the wolfman is a much different shape than the zombies' societal reflection. A werewolf is the internal evil that rests in all men, just waiting to be brought out. The disease is simply the catalyst that creates the tension within him. In this case, the violence is, in fact, violence, albeit a subtler, more nuanced violence. It represents any sort of emotional or physical attack, the evil that bursts from man and demands subjugation. Even a good man can be turned into an unholy monster if the situation is right, and the propensity for evil can come from anywhere.

This comparison is most prominent within the poem, which is repeated many times throughout the film, and all of the metaphors present there can easily be applied to a werewolf (since the poem is about werewolves):

> *Even a man who is pure in heart*
>
> *and says his prayers by night*
>
> *may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms*
>
> *and the autumn moon is bright.*

It is clear that no matter how religious, good, and peaceful a man is, everyone is susceptible to this evil entering their body and running rampant. This new symbolism is very worthwhile and can be used in a variety of situations, the timelessness of it makes it a worthy entry on this list.

Cat People **(1942, Highest Gross)**

The 40's introduced the beginning of new subgenres and subtext within horror films - though there are many experimental and violent films around this time, *Cat People* introduces a technique that directly counters many of those that were being created. While Universal was creating special effects masterpieces with their *Wolfman* film, and continuing with their goal of bringing classic horror creatures to the silver screen, *Cat People* marked a less direct approach to showing fear, with techniques that would live on long past its creation.

Cat People thrives on mystery, with the plot being simple yet suspenseful. Irena is married to Oliver and despite their love for each other, does not wish to be physically close to him because she believes that she is cursed to become a vicious panther when she becomes passionate. He soon begins seeing someone else, Alice, who Irena stalks and eventually tries to kill in cat form, before killing herself out of guilt for murdering her own psychiatrist. The imagination and the mind are the things on full display in this picture, with very little of the main monster being shown within the context of the film. The director skillfully uses lighting, shadows, sound effects, camera angles, and even acting and props to successfully sow seeds of terror and fear within both the audience, and the characters within the film. While other movies take much of this technique of not showing the monster for long periods of time, and only hinting at its involvement in the plot, few do it as skillfully, or integrate it as fully as the brilliant *Cat People*.

The first element that raises *Cat People* above its competitors is the uncertainty laced throughout the entire movie, creating tension through doubt and fear. The unknown and unseen are things to be feared, and it shows in every tense frame. The

doubt of Irena's actual status as a transforming monster is kept at the forefront, and as a main centerpiece of the movie. Her actual status as villain is not present in the film until the end, and this allows the movie to have a dual status as both a psychological horror, and a monster horror film.

For much of the film, there is little proof beyond the main premise that Irena is actually a cat person - it is, of course, heavily hinted at, through dialogues, interactions with animals and other supposed cat people, but all of this is just speculation. Sometimes animals don't like people - some people look catlike - some people tell stories to their children to entertain them. There's no real evidence of her status as a cat person. There's never even been an instance, that she knows of, that a transformation has actually occurred - her transformation is related specifically to sexual arousal.

This unknown may not be as unknown to us, the audience, but it is enough to cause some doubt, and the film takes that and runs with it, its famous "stalk" scene being a testament to the director and the actors' ability to portray and project a sense of dread out into the audience simply by presenting them with an unknown - the unknown of what the noises are, the unknown of what is actively behind Alice, the unknown of if there even is anything there. There is simply no physical evidence until they find dead sheep the next day, and even that is circumstantial at best. Shadows, Jacques Tourneur proves, are just as effective as frightening makeup in producing fear. The doubt theme continues in the movie through the end, even when around the midpoint Irena discovers that she can transform into a panther. She never explicitly says so, and there are more convincing cat people, like the woman who asks Irena if she is her sister, who could be the stalking cat person. Still, as Irena follows Alice through central park and finds ways

28

to disappear, it is still questionable if she has truly turned into a panther, or if it is simply another red herring for whoever the evil cat person is.

Another theme in this movie that is worth exploring is sexuality. Entering the cusp of the age of exploitation, *Cat People* is provocative in its portrayal of sexually charged women, relationships, and infidelity - but despite this, it seems to be encouraging a more completely monogamous nature. When Oliver meets Irena, she warns him that she might be a cat person, but he laughs it off - it's easy to not think about in this situation, even in a life where the threat of sexual stimulation is constant. However, it is not until he begins falling for Alice that the issues begin. While he never actually seems to be romantic with Alice, the ultimate fate is that Irena does threaten both of them, and all because he, after marrying her, could not accept her fears and begins to divorce her.

This thought of unnatural love is continued when Irena's therapist, Judd, kisses her and transforms her, again, into a dangerous beast. Despite her desire to be in a monogamous relationship, these desires lead her to a place of death and destruction. Still, that is a lesser interpretation of the film. There are also moments where the love between Oliver and Alice are seen as more pure than that of Irena, with Irena's lack of desire to be physically close to Oliver leading her to lose him, and then get wounded, then killing herself.

Cat People deserves to be on this list because it challenges the contemporary traditional way of showing a monster - by not showing it at all. Instead, it uses psychological torment of the audience and the characters to create an atmosphere of dread and mystery. It uses the traditional methods of suspense building as a clay,

building around and with it more and more to bring greater scares and greater suspense into the film. It is a masterpiece of suspenseful filmmaking.

Chapter 5: *The War of the Worlds* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*:

The Monsters Are Not Us in the 50's

***The War of the Worlds* (1953, Highest Rated)**

War of the Worlds, and the 50s in general, represent a marked change in the nature of popular movie monsters and their origin stories. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *The War of the Worlds*, the adaptation of the H.G. Wells classic book of the same name. The success of this film is related to its tense story, fascinating effects, and generous use of color. In fact, it is the first film with color that appears on this list. The colorization has the effect of allowing the aliens and atmosphere of an otherworldly nature to ooze from the screen much more easily than from a black and white film delivering a similar style. This is probably the film that is closest to not being horror, but due to the closeness of science fiction to horror during the 50's, and the intense, unstoppable, and unseen nature of the monsters of the film, it seems reasonable to discuss - simply imagine that the invading army is a single killer, and the whole world is the babysitter who is home alone.

The War of the Worlds is a story about alien invaders coming down to earth and exterminating mankind - however, after it seems like all hope is lost and it is impossible to kill the aliens, it is revealed that they have a substantial weakness. This weakness is something that all humans can overcome, but the aliens cannot - the air and microbes of our planet. Once the aliens breath our air, we are able to strike back, defeat them, and flourish. Given the leaning of popular horror films to lean away from domestic horror during this decade, it's no wonder that this story was brought to the silver screen. This terror came from the stars, a distant land of mystery and the unknown, giving way to a

popular new sub-genre of film that has its roots in science fiction. Despite the campy nature of the film (which is entirely a product of its time), it is extremely important to analyze this movie, given its introduction of a much grander scale than had ever been seen before - it's not just a lone group of friends, of a single town that is being threatened; it's the entire world.

Much of this film's iconicism and influence can be gathered from the ending, in which it is discovered that the aliens cannot actually handle earth's bacteria - coming from a different world, it makes sense that this would happen. It's a reverse of the invasive and killing European germ infections in the Americas on the indigent people's Obviously, the reason for this is due to the wake of World War II, and *The War of the Worlds* allowed Americans to see and fantasize about their own victory.

In this film, the aliens are easily used as a metaphor for another invading source, such as the Japanese or the Nazis. Despite humanity's initial difficulty in dealing with these new and high-tech foes, they stand strong against the invaders, attempting to fight back and dying with a patriotic spirit. Of course, this isn't an action movie - horror is still steadily built due to the point of view, and the horrific sights that the protagonist experiences throughout his journey through the war zone that is the earth. The horrors of this seemingly un-winnable war reflect the nature of the war just past - the symbolism and metaphors present in this film allow people to face the fears of the time, with the Cold War's steadily rising current at bay.

However, with the film's ending, it is revealed that the aliens have one tenable weakness that is incredibly easy to exploit - all you need to do is breath on them for a while. This represents the bounce-back, and despite the nation of the Earth's initial

32

puny struggles, they come back fighting, much stronger than their enemies, weakening those enemies with their own natural hardiness and stamina, and taking back the world. They know the aliens' weaknesses, they know the way to beat them, and they do it to the tune of total decimation.

But it's not only their wits that save them, such as the Doctor's ability to fight back against the seemingly unstoppable tide of aliens at the farmhouse - this movie is about boosting self-esteem, and despite its undeniably horrific doomsday potential, it ends happily - the smallest creature, that God in his divine wisdom put on earth, was enough to save the humans. It's not just our natural toughness, our stamina, or our will that allows us to beat the aliens - it's our divine right to stop them, and it's God's will that they lose.

Despite this, the effects, the scale, and the subject matter are extremely different from many other horror pieces before. The film discusses war, atomic bombs, civilian life and death, dehumanization of enemies, and a relatively closed-book and happy ending. With everything new that this film brought to the table, and the mash up between science fiction and horror in a terrifyingly futuristic film topic marriage, this movie is a giant step forward to the development of horror.

Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954, Highest Gross)

Creature from the Black Lagoon follows a similar narrative structure to *The War of the Worlds*, albeit from a closer distance to the action and the players involved - the scaled-down version of aliens invading earth, with a single strange creature playing the antagonist. However, it could be stated that man, in this context, is the invading creature - they have a greater technology than the creature, better intelligence, and are moving in

33

on his territory, as opposed to the creature invading theirs. Still, discovery of a previous unknown, followed by violent reaction from that unknown, followed by our eventual defeat of that unknown through our wits and our enhanced intelligence after having fought the creature - the similarity if themes is striking.

Creature from the Black Lagoon takes place primarily in the titular lagoon, where no one has ever returned alive. While seeking for proof of the missing link from fish to humans, a part-fish, part-human hybrid appears and attacks the researchers. Many die, but eventually the crew is able to get their guns and kill the creature and escape. Given that this was still the age of post-World War II/Cold War fear, this monster was alien in nature, but still a native of earth - he's a missing link between humans and beast, an unfamiliar something falling in between the instincts of a man and instincts of an animal. However, despite the creature's human-like nature, it is important to note that, within the symbology of this film, the creature was never actually a human, and was always viewed as something subhuman and deadly. It's not even really considered a sad death when he is finally killed, but instead a triumph of humans over nature and a happy ending for all.

Because of the context clues of the movie, it seems like the idea of the creature's death not being a tragedy is correct. Like *King Kong*, the creature is subhuman, deadly and destructive to mankind even though its motivation may be interpreted as only defending his native lands. However, the human's motivation for going there is so drastically different from *King Kong*, that it is fair to say that the message is warped in the translation. It is also worth noting that *King Kong* does not fit as neatly into a horror movie classification even though some still classify it as horror. Undoubtedly, King

Kong was an incredibly important movie as a whole, but to horror specifically, it didn't bring innovative new contributions to horror on film. *Creature From the Black Lagoon* takes many ideals and cues from Kong and warps them to its own twisted vision, allowing the same themes to be used as an actual horror film.

The first theme is that of invasion. In this particular plot, the invading creature is not the monster, but the humans. But again, following in the wake of World War II, the symbology is clear - the humans only go after the thing after it initiated contact with them on the surface. Clawing and killing several human researchers, it forces more violent humans to follow and capture or kill the beast. While some humans are more bloodthirsty or monetarily motivated than others, they are all there to defeat a beast that has threatened their sphere of influence, and their quality of life.

The second theme is that of humanity - while this theme is very dulled in the film, it is still present - the idea that something is less than man but more than beast permeates much of our culture, and the scientific nature of the beast (scientifically, it's something that is created by nature) means that it was not created by humans, but is a stranger in our lands - unaware of our customs or our ways, it finds itself with a dilemma of killing us before we kill it, which is what the humans want, albeit inverted.

Comparing this film to something like *Frankenstein* is pertinent, given the monster's human-esque form and attachment to the human species. However, whereas Frankenstein's Monster is created from humans, by humans, this creature is the creator, in a way, of humans and humans are intangibly linked to it through evolution. It's less of creation killing its creator, however, than a brother killing his brother - we are linked to this animal, through violence, growth, evolution, and blood, but we refuse to see it in

35

that way. In killing the creature, we are killing that part of ourselves, the part that we fear and respect, the part of us that we choose not to admit is there.

The creature and humans are inexplicably linked, and the movie shows how subtle the evolution of the genre, and the stories it tells, can be, from the creation of the monster, to the way it is an amalgamation of various other themes and metaphors from other recent films. It deserves to be on this list because of its ability to mix together the link between man and monster, and the separation of monster and man, the uncontrollable powers of nature, and the inexplicable powers of violence that only men can drive other men to. It is, in and of itself, a missing link that combines many different horror movies past.

Chapter 6: *Psycho* and *Night of the Living Dead*: The Monster Inside the 60s

Psycho (1960, Highest Rated)

When Marion Crane takes a policeman's advice to find someplace that's not her car to sleep, her fate in *Psycho* is sealed. While fleeing from the law with a wad of stolen cash, Marion Crane finds herself at the Bate's Motel, sharing dinner with her future killer. There's no way the Policeman knew what was going to happen, but his orders and Marion's decision to follow them directly leads to her death. The year is 1960, and *Psycho* is released. This movie changed things for horror. Of course, Hitchcock had already proven himself as the master of suspense, with dramatic thrillers like *Vertigo* and *Rear Window* being met with critical acclaim. But *Psycho* is different. *Psycho* is a movie with a killer, a monster in human skin, and a protagonist killed off in the first 15 minutes of the movie.

Psycho begins just as Marion decides to steal a large amount of money from a wealthy client at the bank where she works as a secretary. This is so that she can afford to get married and live a good life with her fiancée, Sam. She then packs and drives off to get to her boyfriend in California to give him the money, but is stopped by a sudden rainstorm, driving her to the Bates Motel. There, she meets Norman Bates and learns about him and his mother. Norman's lust causes anger in his mother, who comes and kills Marion in the shower. A week later, Marion's sister, Lila, attempts to investigate where her sibling has disappeared to, and hires a private detective who investigates Norman Bates, but then quickly dies at his hand after informing Lila and Sam of his suspicions. Lila and Sam go to investigate themselves, and Lila finds that Norman's

mother had been dead the whole time, and together the pair manage to subdue him, dressed in his mother's clothes. The film ends with Norman trapped in his mother personality and locked in an asylum.

Psycho is a film with many twists and turns, with a woman stealing a bunch of money from a rich bank customer, and staying at the Bates' Motel during her escape. There, Norman Bates becomes infatuated with her, but she is killed by an unknown assailant. Over the course of the film, the real killer and villain is revealed to be Norman Bates' mind, where he has a second, violent personality. Eventually, he is caught and put into a mental asylum. A vast gulf of difference separates this film from the horror and Hitchcock films before it. It returns the monster to the human, the nature of man itself, rather than creatures from out of space or man-made horrors. Norman Bates represents the fear within our own nation and within our world as a whole. Considering this decade gave way to much of the internalized doubts of the USA's strength and beliefs of superiority among the nations of the world, along with the movie's unprecedented skill with suspense and horror, it's no doubt that this is one of the the most critically acclaimed movies of the period.

Analyzing *Psycho* as a product of its time would be doing a bit of a disservice to the entire decade, of course, as it still came out on the cusp of the Vietnam War, with little less than a hint of what was to come. Still, it is easy to discuss the monster's change of face to one more human. The narrative of the "outsider" is still present, as it always has been, but returns to the very near outside, rather than the very distant. Gone are the aliens from *War of the Worlds*, as their influence is random chance, an unknown attack upon us that was ended simply by our own strength of will. Gone is *The Creature*

from the Black Lagoon, a mystical superman of evolution, hidden in a faraway land, that was easily dispatched with our military might. Now all there is is Norman Bates and his mother, two perfectly normal people, who, at a glance and a short conversation, could easily go years without being found out, hiding the monster underneath.

Norman Bates' form of horror stems entirely from that unassuming facade, his creepy, yet pleasant smile hiding whatever wickedness lies within him. Even his mother, his other personality and the true metaphor for internal desire to do evil, puts on those masks. With her last line, she simply states, "Let them see what kind of a person I am. I'm not even going to swat that fly. I hope they are watching... they'll see. They'll see and they'll know, and they'll say, 'Why, she wouldn't even harm a fly…'". This line is, like many "last lines", truly meaningful, and speaks to what a lot of the intent behind the film seems to be. She knows that she's evil, and does terrible things. Her wholesome, family son is just a victim and a puppet in all of this, forced to do unspeakable things by an external force of evil outside of his control.

However, the difference between this force and the forces in movies past relates back to the "near outsider". She is (or was) a human. One of us, as it were - whatever force she held over her son is still there, past her death, and her influence is clear in the desire to kill those that she doesn't deem worthy. It's easy to see her as a Nazi allegory in that sense, the idea that even though the seed of evil is gone, its roots can remain implanted in the ground, or the fruits that it grew during its lifetime. However, given the characteristic of her reign of terror, in that it was completely domestic in nature, it seems more likely that the evil was a return to the same sort of horror that is related

more to the *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari,* which uses a similar sort of hidden monster-among-us madness as its twist.

The most important thing to note about *Psycho*, however, is that it resurrected the sort of incurable illness of monsterism as a horror trope from the 30's and 40's. At times, Norman Bates is a bit of a sympathetic monster, to be sure. He brings to mind a twisted, modern Frankenstein's Monster sort of narrative. Like Frankenstein's Monster, he's cursed by the very nature of his birth to be feared by others. However, this fear lies under the surface and can only be mongered and cultivated through the gradual peeling back of the layers of both his past, and the madness that lives there. Frankenstein's Monster was immediately seen and feared for what was readily apparent on the outside (a frightful looking monster with very bad hair, easily capable of killing that must be destroyed), and due to this idea implanted in the civilians, they feel threatened,he is demonized and driven to be a monster - forced to kill by external forces, rather than his own innate cruelty. Norman Bates' exterior, on the other hand, brings nothing but at most, an unsettling calm to those who meet with him, while his capability of murder is brought from a place deep within him (literally, due to his psychotic madness).

This internal horror brings across one of the biggest renewals of this decade - the monster within men. As mentioned before, the monster in this movie is not Norman Bates per se, but his internal propensity to kill. He goes about his business like anyone else would, and doing quite well at it. But that killing risk is always there, lurking beneath the surface. From the first time we see him pick up a knife, to the last scene where he is sitting silently in his cell, his deepest, even subliminal thoughts turn to murder and death - the thoughts of killing,the subtle tinges of throwing away his other

40

personality so that the "mother" personality is not convicted, implies so much, about his own personal desires to wield the cold hand of death again.

The mother becomes a metaphor for that desire to kill, and the internal anger of anyone who is, like the movie suggests, a psycho. Human beings are innately capable of death-dealing and knife-wielding. It is the nature of our violent evolutionary path. For the majority of us, those killing instincts are suppressed- by society, the law, religious rules or even just self-control through the superego, as it were. In Norman's case he displays a gentle soul, and at even the thought of violence, he shrieks with terror - "Oh, God, Mother! Blood! Blood!" But, he allows it to subsist - deep beneath the skin, he hides it, but cannot or does not rid himself of it, cleaning up after his mother's killings, but keeping her body close by. He is trapped by his mother in his hotel, her house, but he, in turn, does not allow her out to the general public.

This sort of beautiful symbiosis is a theme that runs to the core of the movie, and is one of the two reasons it could be found truly terrifying, as well as its place in horror movie legend. Things are not as they seem and the loss of trust we have in appearances frightens us. We fear that invisible evil lurking within which we cannot escape from in ourselves - the anger, rage, and the capability of destruction; or, we fear that which we cannot see in others - the unassuming friends we know so very well and we wonder if any one of them is capable of subversive evil. Shocking us with a surprise attack of previously unrecognized horror and threatening everything that we, as humans, hold dear: whether bringing the close, personal horror of murder as the movie portrays, or something even more large-scale atrocious and world-shattering

Night of the Living Dead **(1968, Highest Gross)**

As *Psycho* implied that everyone had a killer inside, *Night of the Living Dead* begs for you not to associate with them. While zombies had been present within cinema for a long time in name, the modern zombie owes most of its existence to George Romero's freshman film. *Night of the Living Dead*, and most of its sequels, are already entrenched in the politics and influences of its time. With dozens of analytical papers and videos created about the film, along with its innovative monsters, cultural commentary, and enormous setting, it's no wonder that *Living Dead* has remained a highly-rated film.

The film is about a small group of survivors hiding out from a zombie apocalypse in a house. Slowly they find out more about the zombies, but are picked off one by one. Eventually, only one man is left, Ben. When he hears people coming to investigate the house, he is hopeful, but they end up mistaking him for a zombie and tragically killing him. Zombies are, by their very nature, a blank canvas. A husk of something that used to be human that allows filmmakers to place whatever views or ideologies that they have on society. It's easy to do, with their blank expressions, mob-like behavior, and varying degrees of intelligence allowing for metaphors ranging from simply the effects of mob mentality and mindless consumerism (*Dawn of the Dead*), to the dangers innate to blindly following a single goal and religious extremism (*28 Days Later*). In the zombie sub genre of horror, Zombie movies have evolved horror into a platform that is a figurative gold mine of social commentary.

Given their status as pack animal, zombies could easily and quickly be seen as an outside force. Indeed, many zombie movies could easily be swapped for war movies

that heavily feature guerrilla tactics - *Red Dawn* could easily be made into a zombie movie if the invading Russians had been changed into flesh-eating monsters. However, *Night of the Living Dead* and the zombies that they spawn hit several other, much more personal notes that make comparisons to the decade's earlier horror success very apparent. They both discuss internal war, domination of the human body and spirit, insanity, and control over one's own emotions. The film could almost measure a reaction to *Psycho* - the lack of trust in others, and the escape and protection against anyone who might be capable of death and destruction is necessary - any interaction with those violent people could lead to either your violent death, or even an awakening inside yourself to become violent and murderous, following the "infection" by another monster. However, the deepness to zombies, cannot be understated. They are easier to project ideas onto than probably any other monster in this thesis, so exploring what those ideas might be and what, at their core, the zombies represent, can be a harrowing task.

First, the most important thing to consider is their attributes - every monster and villain has specific characteristics that are exclusive to them, and in this respect, zombies could almost be considered boring. They have no strength, no grace, no intelligence, no ability to plan. The unfortunate zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*, display A fear of fire and of course their lack of intelligence, which ultimately leads to their downfall. So where does their fear come from? Romero effortlessly answers this question within the movie: they're relatable. Like *Psycho*, but perhaps to a more extreme degree, the killers are entirely human. The only thing that separates them from us is a small bite, and a few boards on the door. And according to the movie's storyline,

for people surrounded by hordes of them, it's nearly impossible to avoid that small bite and become one of the horde.

Perfection. When it comes down to it, the zombies and the movie, (at least, without any political or social commentary put onto them) are about perfection and imperfection. The zombies are easy to escape from, but they don't stop. They are easy to kill, but there are always more of them. It is possible to never come in contact with them - but you are doomed to from the moment you see them. To survive, one must be perfect, never allowing yourself to be touched or grabbed, never overreacting, but never letting your guard down. Vigilant. Keeping emotions in check while staying cognizant of others, in case they might turn. This delicate, perfect balance is the most important thing in *Night of the Living Dead*, but as the movie portrays, maintaining this balance without being punished for it is nearly impossible, it is next to impossible.

This punishment, as mentioned above, can be delivered in two ways - conformity or death. As conformity is the true power behind the zombie's metaphorical might, this is the much more dangerous and painful option - at least with death, you don't have to live with yourself and what you've done. Conformity turns those who are infected against their previous friends and allies, along with forcing the conformist to commit similar atrocities to their dominators, creating a vicious cycle of violence and misdeeds. Committing atrocities against humans who, once upon a time, were friends and family. The movie, it seems, discusses this briefly with the apocalyptic narrative, while still being primarily about the mistakes and imperfections that cause these conformist/deadly punishments in the first place.

Of course, the film thrives on the fact that it is not just about the apocalypse by itself. Given the shoestring budget that it was created with, the ability to make it feel like an enormous plague is truly an achievement. However, it does end up focusing the narrative on the characters - their reactions to each other, and their reactions to danger. Some, like Ben, take it on with a focused calm, while others like Barbara are completely in shock, and lose control of themselves. The zombies' behaviors extend to the lucid characters, and each of them must abandon a part of themselves to prevent losing all of themselves.

Ben, the closest thing to a protagonist that the film has, Barbara, the character who has the second longest lifespan in the movie, Tom and Judy, and the Coopers make up the sort of main group of *Night of the Living Dead*. In this case, even with the incredibly iconic creatures being introduced, the characters, and the interactions between them are very important to the movies. While they exist in the same space as characters from slasher movies and all other films on this list - things to be fed to the monster - they are important when it comes to understanding the creatures. The zombie film tropes often involve the comparison of men to monsters - the zombies are just doing it because they have to, but the humans choose to do it - despite the narrative of conversion and perfection that is ever present beneath the monster's existence. However, few seem to compare directly to the monsters, allowing the audience to understand the killers through these mirrors of the monster's personality.

Each of them seem to have aspects of the zombies that attribute to their deaths. Barbara is a follower - lost in shock at Johnny's death, represents the zombie's mindlessness. She stays silent for most of the movie after Johnny perishes at the hands

of the first zombie seen, then shows up near the end, having been conformed - this is part of the reason Barbara dies, choosing to follow her brother into death and conformity, rather than separating from the pack and choosing to stay with Ben. The Coopers represent the zombies' tenacity and violence, with an extreme will to get their own way, and the desire to hurt those that disagree - despite Mr. Cooper's cowardice, when he is berated for his fears by Ben, he turns violent against him, ignoring all rational just as a flesh-eater looking for its next meal.

Tom and Judy, the young teen couple, are similar in nature to the Coopers' irrationality but their irrationality manifests itself differently. However, the manner of their death - instantly killed in a car explosion due to clumsiness - seems contrary to the other killings in the film, which are very deliberately gory in nature. It is possible that they represent the hopelessness of a life with a lack of any possible escape in life and the fact that escaping zombification and conformity is only possible through death - their haphazard plan immediately backfires as they attempt to drive away. However, in their instant and painless-yet-spectacular death, they have instantly found release from the most terrifying situation in their life - one that was likely to end much more painfully than a car explosion. Ben is a very non-stereotypical black leading man during a time where that role was very rare, offering the narrative of his non-conformity being the reason he survives so long through the film. Indeed, it is not because of any non-perfection that he doesn't survive, but because of this non-conformity, and because of his senseless death that ties the entire narrative of the human group being aspects of the zombies' traits and conformity together. He is killed by humans who believe him to be a zombie. Ben is the zombies' humanity and their recognizability, allowing them to get

close to those that are still on the "human" side of the "other" their most deadly weapon. The thing that killed Barbara, the thing that caused the Coopers to get eaten by their own dead daughter, and the thing that allows the zombies to offset your perfection and conform you - they look just like us albeit dirtier and in rags He is the arbiter of perfection, and if you fail the test that he and the zombies pose, you die.

Chapter 7: *Jaws* and *Alien*: Horror Returns from the Beyond in the 70's

***Jaws* (1975, Highest Gross)**

With *Jaws*, a new precedent is set within the horror film genre. Following in the familiar footsteps of films like *Psycho* and *Frankenstein,* adapting a classic horror book into a suspenseful and frightening horror film, *Jaws* steps away from working specifically with symbolism and monsters in films to create fear, and into the ideal of flawless technique; its power comes not from the monster, but from the fear. Its themes break away from those that were temporarily renowned in the 60s as character studies, and returns to the classics of the 30s and 50s, with unthinking, unfeeling monsters becoming a surge of death and horror from the underworld, the places that humans dare not and should not tread.

Jaws begins, like many horror films, with a comfortable beach party with many sun-tanning, swimsuit-clad tourists and their children. Soon after it begins, however, the party is broken up by a monster (in this case, a shark). The next day, a coroner determines that the person killed was, in fact, killed by a shark, but changes his mind at the suggestion that it was actually a boating accident. The sheriff doesn't entirely agree, and his suspicions are confirmed when the next day, another shark attack kills another visitor to the beach resort. Quint, a professional shark hunter, and Hooper, an oceanographer, team up with Brody to go out and find the shark that's been attacking people. After several false starts, they find the shark, but Quint refuses to go back or call for help despite the shark being far bigger than first imagined. The shark keeps attacking the boat and kills Quint, with Hooper unable to help. Brody manages to shoot

an air tank that the shark has swallowed, blowing up the shark and killing it for good, as he and Hooper slowly begin to paddle back to shore on the wreckage of the ship.

Jaws is a film that draws from many other classic "stalking" horror films. It begins with an attack from a monster (the shark), and a group of people investigating and hunting the shark, all the while trying to avoid giving the shark the advantage to kill them. Some of them die and the boat sinks, but in the end, the sheriff and the marine biologist manage to kill the shark and escape back to the beach with their lives. However, unlike the films that it draws from, it introduces a technique that, while not unfounded in the horror movie archives, is rare to see when the design and execution of a specific, horrific monster is still kept mostly to the shadows and to the mystery. While this is primarily due to a glitch within making the movie, the result is truly extraordinary, and offers a new perspective when creating horror films that was not used as often before this film: building tension through the use of perspective. Specifically, the perspective of the monster itself, and how the choices of the protagonists are the things that get them into trouble.

This technique works for many reasons, and while the act of not showing the monster relates back to the classic *Cat People*, that film does not utilize the first person view in order to create tension and imply intent through its filmmaking. This is a huge change in the monster stalking scenes that permeated films before, and a reason why the film morphed into a behemoth hit in its time. The secondary factor was the basic premise and execution of the film's themes. As was mentioned before, the themes of the film are much more simplistic than other films before it, but they still have an active role to play in both the decade and the fear that the movie brings.

Like *Psycho* before it, the fear in the movie is also partially a part of the normality of the situation that it portrays - taking place at a summer resort, a place anybody would go to vacation or relax, killings taking place in the ocean where anyone could be going at any time, by a creature that is far more familiar and stealthy than anything else people could imagine, but deadly enough to kill in an instant, with no possible chance of defense and but the smallest chance of retribution.

This fear is something that defines the film. While most of the other films on this list lean on the improbability of the creature's existence, *Jaws* brings the reality to the forefront. In this way, it emphasizes the realness of the probability of death, the risks that humans take by being alive, and the capability of nature herself taking a specific interest in removing you from the planet. If necessary, it will do it by force. However, nature demands respect and there is no stopping this deadly swimming force of nature - at least, in the beginning.

A very strange aspect of this film's setting is the idea of the hunt - an important symbol in the film, emphasized by both the large amount of time in the movie spent hunting the shark, and the many references to other hunters and predators, both human and non, throughout the film. Unlike a more traditional horror film, the plot is actually to kill the monster. This has been explored in previous films, but rarely in the close-up, one-on-one fight that take place throughout the second half - it is simply the hunter's wits vs. the predator's brawn. It is even implied that the shark possesses some strategic acumen, though this idea is very dim and not incredibly forward when relating the shark to the men.

As a theme of the movie, the hunters and the act of hunting is very apparent. Of course, there are the obvious notes of comparing hunting scars, and the actual act of, well, being a conquering hunter. But, there are subtler interjections within the film and the hunt that seem to portray some deeper notes about hunters and their personalities. The noblest of the trio that hunt the shark is Brody, due to his motivation for protection and peace. Quinn, on the other hand, is made to be more psychotic and proud in nature, being motivated by money and chest thumping, egotistical acclaim. This ends up causing his downfall in several scenes, given his refusal to use tools other than his own ("We're gonna need a bigger boat."), his refusal for outside help by destroying the radio, and his eventual death.

For its revolutionary re-introduction of the stalking method into horror, and its use of incredible scare and survival tactics that evolved from and redefined previous movies from other decades, *Jaws* certainly belongs on the list. Its influence has been long and varied, with multiple references and success stories following it -not to mention it's near universally recognized theme song. For two years after its release (until *Star Wars* premiered in theaters), it even held the title of highest grossing movie of all time, an unprecedented success for the horror movie film genre. All of this was due to its fantastic direction, score, and storytelling.

***Alien* (1979, Highest Rated)**

Aliens is a film of fantastic and masterful direction, bringing in elements of science fiction, Lovecraftian horror, and survival horror films to create an intense and nail biting film. This film, like *Jaws*, brings a deep and well-crafted atmosphere to the screen, while taking a step back from deeper messages and symbols within the horror

51

film industry, focusing on well-crafted props, makeup, editing, and sound design. While this is not to say that it completely removes itself from a message, the message is not as important as the genuine fear and admiration of human courage that *Alien* brings.

Alien is a movie about so-called "space truckers", who find a strange planet with a strange alien that attaches itself to one of the crewman's face, hatches, and then goes about killing the crew members one by one. Eventually, there is only one survivor, Ripley, who actually manages to defeat the alien and escape through luck and perseverance. The first thing to note about the film is the titular "alien" itself. Called a Xenomorph outside of the film, it represents a vastly different direction that the monster in *Jaws* takes, while operating within a similar sort of space. It is vastly different from the shark in terms of both its MO and its looks. It is otherworldly, like nothing we would find on earth. Its design was so important to its fear, that it was kept a secret from the general public, with original trailers and posters containing no hint to what the monster looked or acted like. The tagline, "In Space, No One Can Hear You Scream" being the only hint as to the plot of the film.

This reveal is so important to the film's scares and technique, and is a big piece of innovation for the pre-Internet time - the alien, in its mystery of identity, allows it to be the driving factor of the film until it appears - unlike *Jaws*, with the shark being on prominent display from the poster, and imaginable to anyone who had a picture of a shark, the unknown in *Alien* presents much more fear and tension than other films of the time. It comes across as a true outsider within the film, being impossible to define or describe without images, preventing even people who have seen the movie from spoiling the true fear of the reveal.

This unknown "other" keeps its tension building, even in ways that as a re-watching audience might not expect - not knowing what the alien looks like, people could assume that the facehugger form is the alien - a bit boring, but who knows what it's going to do? Then, at the dinner scene, when the alien grub explodes from Kane's chest, it is possible that this is the big reveal of the alien - scary yet a bit underwhelming, but it adds to the building tension. But after escaping, in the scene with the chains and water, when the alien finally reveals its true form, the tension has built to such a high level that it all comes crashing down upon the crew and the audience feels their apprehension.

This is where the style similarities to *Jaws* comes in - with the alien playing the role of the shark in a domain that it can freely move about in, while the protagonists cannot. Under equipped (though not by choice) and outmatched, all the crew can hope for is a miracle, of the alien not being able to eat all of them before someone can make it out. Of course, with the enormous casualty count and terrifying speed and strength of the alien, this seems impossible.

This is another difference between the alien and the shark - the alien is completely unknown. Its capabilities are strange and odd, and the crew is unable to discern its strengths, or weaknesses. They have no idea what they are going up against or how to kill it. While this is similar to the situation in *Jaws*, in that they have no true idea about what the shark is, its massive size and strength, the plan does not change, and they don't need to gather more information about it to form a new idea on how to defeat the beast, and their goal is always to kill or beat the shark.

This all culminates in the movie as a lack of control. While obviously a heavily used theme in horror movies past, the amount of control lost in this film is greater than most of its predecessors. The film begins with them losing control of the ship - forced to land somewhere that they have no desire to. The alien forcibly latches onto Kane, and refuses to release itself. Then, it forces its way out of him, with no ability from the crew to stop it, at a random time and place.

After this, the crew struggles to do anything, with the corporation that has essentially enslaved them preventing them from fighting back for the first part of the film, and the alien attacking from the other side at random, stalking and killing them one by one in the dark. Feelings of confusion and helplessness permeates the movie and is a major theme in both killing the monster and how the monster acts. Even in her most intense moment of defiance, Ripley cannot escape the ship and self destruct the alien inside - it continues to force herself onto her and the only plan that finally works in disposing of it is forcibly removing it from her increasingly shrinking bubble of protection.

This film deserves to be on this list because it has gone where no other movie on this list has gone before - space. While other films like *The War of the Worlds* brought space to earth to torture its humans, *Alien* brought humans to space, to achieve a level of isolation that has never been seen before in horror films - lightyears away from any possible help, there is never any hope of rescue or survival in this movie. Beyond this new and fresh location, it used space as a strong foundation to place block after block of terror onto the concept, until it finally created a truly horrifying experience.

Chapter 8: *Friday the 13th* and *The Shining*: Our Monsters are Reused in the 80s

***Friday the 13th* (1980, Highest Gross)**

    Friday the 13th, despite its lukewarm reception from critics, is a film that represents a lot about the horror stylings of the modern age. While the slasher film had existed for a long period of time before this film, Friday the 13th changed the formula to a more recognizable and predictable piece that we know today, with multiple characters of similar ages but wildly varying and stereotypical character traits being slowly but violently killed as the killer goes about his rampage. While this movie was made in the reaction to *Halloween*, it did not contain as many of these elements that are so popular today, and the popularity of *Friday the 13th* quickly led to a string of slasher franchises, with *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday*, and even *Halloween* receiving a lengthy list of sequels.

    Friday the 13th involves teens returning to Camp Crystal Lake several decades after it closed down due to multiple deaths. The teens are councilors, there early to get the camp set up, but suddenly, they start to get picked off in gruesome ways by a mysterious killer. Eventually, only one of the councilors (Alice) is left, and with some luck, they manage to escape and kill the killer, Mrs. Voorhees. Unfortunately, her son Jason (who drowned in an accident) is shown to still be alive in a twist at the end of the movie, still out in the lake and waiting for another batch of victims. Similar to the Grindhouse movies of years past, *Friday the 13th* was awash with blood, violence, and nudity. Often these would take place within the same scene of each other, and the shocking nature of the violence can easily be seen being taken from movies like *Psycho*.

This film is much more of a roller coaster ride than previous films on this list, which makes it a bit dubious as to the nature of its inclusion. It was picked to be the most financially successful film of the 80's, and later generations have been kind to the film, and it is popular for its pulpy horror, but in making its themes and metaphors more subtle and less apparent, and its influence much more of a direct appropriation rather than an inspiration and evolution, it's hard to place it here.

Its awards seem to come from its formulaic approach to the horror and slasher genre, and while it is an appropriation, its iconic imagery and its high body count puts it ahead in the running. As well, with it mostly borrowing from *Halloween* before it, which was beat out due to the many other fantastic horror films in the 70s, it represents a marked change in the formula of the slasher, stalker, horror film.

This is not an alien spaceship, or even a beach resort. While *Jaws* had relatability due to the beach location of the killings, even the monster had its limits - the water was the only place of fear that could be found in the film. There was no risk of being attacked on land. *Halloween* was clear that killings could happen in suburbia, or anywhere that people lived. Like *Psycho* before it, it found fear in the normality of everyday life. *Friday the 13th* took this idea and ran in a bit of a different direction. It focuses much more on the isolation and dread that can come from being out on the open ocean, or trapped on a spaceship, but put it in an even more relatable place - in a summer camp, in the woods. More than that, it takes place in an innocuous, unassuming area - camping is an activity that can be performed by anyone, but it is even harder to leave, to escape, than *Jaws* was.

Friday the 13th, in the end, is on this list because it shows us the direction that films have been going, especially according to the hypothesis of this paper - appropriation of popular elements blended together to create a franchise-worthy film capable of many different sequels and prequels - and the franchise is representative of this idea than the film ever could be, with its steadily declining ratings and direct-to-video sequels, *Friday the 13th* is the truest example of the decline and lack of creativity present in horror films as they were being produced.

With ridiculous situations and locations being one-upped each time that Jason and his mother took to the screen, there seems to be a fond memory for the first film in the series. It takes a concept and simply changes its location, adds a few more children into it for a rehash of even more creative murders, but is still well directed. It is exciting and tense, and always horrifying at times. Even while its ending is becoming trite, with the implication that the story isn't over (with over 10 movies in the franchise, this was proven correct), the first lives on as a sort of monolith, a representation of some effort put into the creation and execution of the film. There is creativity underlying the film, with the revenge plot, which wasn't present in *Halloween*, and the location being a hotbed of different murder tools and creepy places to hide, there is effort being put into this movie. Still, as we continue down the pathway that this film left behind, it becomes more and more apparent that this film is the start of a decline of representation of quality and effort placed into the horror movie genre.

***The Shining* (1980, Highest Rating)**

Two weeks later, the counterpoint to the above idea was released. *The Shining*, a dramatic horror film from a masterful director (Stanley Kubrick) brings unsettling and horrific psychological terror to the screen. Like so many classic horror films, this was adapted from a novel, although the differences between the film and the novel are extremely varied - it draws just what it needs to and little more from each chapter, adding in its own twists and turns to make the film its own, more original work, while playing homage to the original novel in some of the base ideas and the imagery.

This film is almost a series of spooky vignettes, with Jack, his wife, and their son looking after a hotel during its off-season. Each of them experience strange occurrences in the hotel, and eventually Jack goes insane and begins trying to kill his family (though he only manages to kill one of the other workers at the hotel), before he freezes to death chasing after his son. In a position that could almost be called an anti-slasher, with only one murder (that is performed by the antagonist, Jack) and intense psychological torture put upon the extremely small cast of characters being the real horror core of this film. As well, the use of a mundane environment in a psychologically scary way is a more modern recollection of movies like *Jaws* or *Psycho*. It serves to illustrate the fear of a location that is ordinary, but strange. Like many films before it, the other is a mysterious and imperceivable entity, but still takes a physical toll on the main characters of the film.

Throughout the movie we can see the effects of the entity of the hotel on the characters slowly grow, using Jack as some kind of avatar to further their agenda, and familiar themes begin to play across the film. The themes we have seen so many times

58

on this list take on new shades and tones within the context of this lonely, yet full, hotel. It takes advantage of dozens of tropes played out all within the same body, combining and recombining them from decades of cinema to again, create something new.

It pulls the insane main character from *Dr. Caligari* and places them into a serial killer position like *Psycho*. The uncontrollable nature of monsters from *Frankenstein*, the strange entity that slowly takes over and destroys human souls and lives in a lonely environment from countless films. It elevates these themes through powerful and spooky imagery, without resorting to outright jump scares, building an atmosphere of dread, decay, and possession with the resources brought forth in horror films past. It is an example of how modern cinema can still pull interesting and horrorful ideas and twist them into new ways - rather than rehashing them and coming closer to directly copying them like *Friday the 13th* did earlier this decade. It gives them their own agency and character, rather than being based on sales.

While this film is based on a book, many of the events are excluded or changed for the movie, with the end result being mostly unrecognizable except for the location and a few of the characters. This is an important note as it echoes many of the elements of previous films drawn from literature, from *Frankenstein* to *Psycho*. While many of these have varying amounts of changes, it is important to note that often the ones that drastically diverge from the source have an easier time of creating a horror atmosphere within the medium of film.

Many of these films make these changes because of the boundaries set by movies, and looking back on them from a modern perspective reveals that often the films are better remembered than the books they were based off of. Despite being a fan

of horror films for years, I personally did not know of novels that these films were adapted from until much time had passed since I first watched the films.

  The Shining is an important note on these adaptations, as it is arguably the film on this list that takes the most liberties from the book on which it is based. This allows several things to work in its favor, in the interest of making money and becoming iconic. While it is not the highest grossing horror film this decade, it is still successful with both audiences and critics. It allows the director, Stanley Kubrick, to work with the material in a much freer manner, as well as letting the audiences who read the book and watched the movie to experience the unsettling nature of the overlook hotel in different ways. It also allows the film to deliver on haunting imagery and dialogue-lite segments, while also letting the talented main actors to deliver performances through interesting and creepy monologues, more akin to dialogue in a book.

  The film really does act as a counterpoint to *Friday the 13th* in this decade. While the former is made entirely as a film, the latter adapts an already spooky and interesting story with big twists and sweeping changes to utilize the best parts of both novel and screen. *Friday* was successful because it mimicked an already-successful movie, but *The Shining* was successful because it took on the characteristics of successful franchises and mixed them into something new, interesting, and horrifying.

Chapter 9: The 90s and Onward: Horror in the Modern Age

  While I have done research towards defining movies later on this list, it is difficult to look back on them and analyze them with more of an objective approach, due to them all being released while I was alive and watching. The films that would take the place of the 90s are *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. While both are serviceable movies, *Blair* is a polarizing film due to its new style of camera work and storytelling method (While technically not the first in the "found footage genre", it was the film that caught everyone's attention), and *Lambs* barely scrapes into the horror genre with a few creepy moments with the serial killer in his lair - it is certainly not as much of a horror movie in the traditional sense, but more of a detective thriller. The closest film I could compare it to would be psycho, but the sense of isolation and fear is interwoven throughout the entire film in that movie's case, rather than simply being one element of the whole.

  The 90s did prove to be an interesting time for horror cinema, with many of the top-remembered and grossing films not being based off of any preexisting works - while most of the films on this list are based on books, films that came out in the 90s like *Scream*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Se7en*, or *Army of Darkness* were sequels, subversions and criticisms of classic horror tropes, more realistic crime films, or mostly comedies with horror elements. It seemed as though filmmakers sought to escape the fantastical and otherworldly nature of the past decade's horror, in favor of more local and present attacks on the general populace - in the rare occasions that serious horror did escape the bounds of the earthly, non-magical plane, they had to have some sort of gimmick or interest-grabbing tagline to justify their existence, like the

Blair Witch Project's "this is a real found-footage tape" or *Event Horizon*'s appeal to be a scary movie in space with religious elements (despite it falling flat at the box office).

Looking back at these films after examining the history of the genre reveals quite a bit of the trend of recent years, with films that are similar to *Alien* (and even *Alien 3* coming out this same year) doing poorly in the box office, and films that are closer to *Psycho*, but with even more gritty realness or films that subvert classic tropes doing very well. *Scream* is a big example, despite it not being directly added to the list, because it was a slasher film meant to stop slasher films - it pointed out all of the cliches associated with the film and then played them out within the movie, with a somewhat interesting twist at the end. However, it seemed as though this revitalized the sub-genre, with multiple sequels to *Halloween*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, and even *Scream* itself coming out that decade.

These films are all accompanied by mixed or negative reviews, and in my attempt to add films to the list that are not sequels or prequels, I found that many of the films I would have had to choose from are much further down the critical ladder than I would have hoped. While films like *The Shining* and *Alien* are placed in the 90% ladder of the aggregate review site Rotten Tomatoes, the films on this decade all fall below the mid-80s (with the exception of *The Silence of the Lambs*, which just barely qualifies to be on this list as it is). While it is not as drastic of a fall as I would have expected going into this thesis, it is a present element of the decay taking place in the horror genre.

The 2000s present even more of a problem with making this list - while I tried to keep this list primarily American-made films (with the exception of *Dr. Caligari*), many of the higher-grossing and higher-reviewed movies of this decade are imports from

other countries. *The Grudge*, *Rec*, and *28 Days Later* are all very iconic films for this decade - but in terms of American-made movies, there seems to be very little to choose from in terms of critical acclaim. The films that would take the spots at this point on the list are *The Ring* and *Paranormal Activity*. *The Ring* is an American remake of the Japanese film *Ring*, and *Paranormal Activity* is, again, a somewhat mixed bag in terms of reaction (though it does garner an 83% on *Rotten Tomatoes*).

The 2000s also seem to begin the rise of a genre of films in America that has been colloquially named "Torture Porn", though the genre itself does not really exist within classical classifications. The film series' of *Saw*, *Hostel*, and *Final Destination* both launched and had sequels in this decade, bringing an unprecedented amount of gore to the screen. While they were extremely panned by critics, they had decent box-office grosses of around 60 million (according to the Box Office Mojo site), and the sequels each garnered even more money and more gore.

The current decade of movies has, however, created the largest gap between the highest rated and the highest grossing film yet, however - while the decade is only half over, it is still quantifiably interesting - many of the higher-rated films this decade on Rotten Tomatoes are not american made, with the exception of *It Follows*, which has an aggregate score of 96% - extremely high for the decade, but only garnering a gross of about 17 million. World War Z, on the other hand, is both the highest grossing horror film this decade, and possibly of all time, with a gross of 202 million domestic, but only a 67% on Rotten Tomatoes. This is a huge difference, not seen since the difference between the films *Cat People* and *The Wolf Man* in the 40s, and it is definitely worth discussing in relation to where horror is headed for the rest of the decade.

Ironically, *World War Z* is the first film on this list since the 80s that is based on a book - many of the previous films were based on books and make drastic changes to the story and characters to serve the medium of film - however, the changes made with *World War Z* seems to have missed the point of the book in the first place. *The Shining*, while drastically changed from the book, was still about the main character's descent into madness - Jack's alcoholism and violent natures expressed through the supernatural and the unsettling nature of a once-populated but now isolated and lonely place. These themes are present in both book and film, but presented in different ways because of the requirements of the medium.

World War Z on the other hand, seems to just be focused on the action of shooting zombies - even to the point of being closer to an action film than a horror film. The book is methodical and journalistic in nature, discussing the natures of man and their reactions to the zombie apocalypse in a semi-realistic way, transferring the story from character to character to best serve the narrative. While the film also uses a similar technique, following a single character around the world to see different reactions to the zombies, it focuses on hyper-adrenaline action, from the very first beats of the story. While the monsters in the novel are slow and methodical, in the movie they are speedy and reckless. These monsters, in a way, create a relevant and ironic contrast between the two pieces of media - while one is slow and interested in telling a story, the other is fast and interested in getting to the action as soon as possible - and the thing is, it worked out (money-wise)

It Follows is an extremely methodical movie, and takes place in that area of constant tension because of it - like a zombie, the entity in the film slowly follows the

protagonist, and while she can easily avoid it, she is always in danger of being killed if

she makes one mistake. It's a haunting and spooky tale, but due to its limited marketing,

lack of a name-recognition, and other factors, it made only a small fraction of *World

War Z*'s money - just the same as the *Saw* franchise, which saw more income with

bigger and better set pieces, the trend of money moving towards those who have more

visually appealing films is truly apparent the more these films are examined.

Chapter 10: Where we Are Now - Discussion

As I have discussed, the films of the past are no stranger to big, explosive pieces of story. *Alien*, *Jaws*, *The Wolf Man*, *War of the Worlds*, *Frankenstein* - all have big shows of creatures and aliens, settings, action scenes, and suspense. But they draw from this well rarely, often at the close of the films, when it feels deserved and earned through the survivor's actions and reactions to the monsters - the catharsis at the end of the long and dark tunnel. These pieces of story absolutely have their place in horror media, providing much-needed resolution to the stories that we need resolution to. Despite many of these having sequels and reboots, however, the catharsis still remains a vital part of the first movie in the series. Bates is ALWAYS locked up. The Alien is *always* dead. The shark has been thoroughly killed.

This complete catharsis, however, seems to have stopped in recent films, particularly with *Friday the 13th* having an ending that hints at a sequel and allowing the unsettling feeling to follow the viewer out of the movie, and with the moment of catharsis stolen back from the audience and the film's survivors, the film doesn't seem exactly complete - but it makes it an easy and open target for a sequel. This takes place in most of the slasher films of the time, like *Nightmare on Elm Street*'s inability to defeat Freddy, or *Halloween's* Michael Myers being continually reincarnated for multiple sequels. For some reason, the catharsis was removed in favor of constant suspicion. Even in highly rated modern films this happens, albeit occasionally subtle - at the end of *It Follows*, for example, it seems as if they might have defeated the entity, but something is following them in the background of the final shot - which very well could be the entity again. However, it is unclear and not something I personally noticed

on the first time I watched the film. While I do not disagree with this practice for horror films, it does seem odd that many of the films that do not include the full cathartic release are also some of the lower-rated but higher-grossing films.

This disconnect becomes more apparent while looking at the evolution of the high-grossing film, vs the evolution of the well-rated films. The high grossing films become more violent and explosive - the higher rated films, in comparison, stay relatively low-key, and search for closer to home ways of relating to the audience. *War of the Worlds* is a huge affair, with battling spaceships and running for cover, while *Creature from the Black Lagoon* is slow and stalking from the shadows throughout. *Jaws* is suspenseful and builds off of its lonely atmosphere, but the shark attacks are violent and long. *Alien* is similarly slow to build, but uses long cuts and short, violent attacks to kill off members of the crew - many of these deaths are not even seen on screen. And of course, *World War Z* is full of running and gunning, while *It Follows* is full of stalking and slow death.

We can also see the trends of the movie monsters becoming more explosive overall throughout the years - Early on with *Frankenstein* and *Freaks*, the villains are misunderstood, with depth and character to their actions. As we grow through the ages, however, the monsters become less understandable. *Night of the Living Dead*, *Jaws, Alien*, and *The Shining* all have creatures with very little reasonability or character - they may have a small reason for killing, or some outside influence, but they cannot be reasoned with or stopped short of killing them. They are mysteries that are never explained.

The final comparison that is important from modern to classic horror is the presence of well known actors and directors - specifically, directors from other genres. *The Shining* has Jack Nicholson and Stanley Kubrick working together off of well-received works, *Alien* and *Jaws* both have big-name directors attached (Ridley Scott and Steven Spielberg, respectively), and *World War Z* has Brad Pitt, arguably one of the biggest male stars around these days. While many of the movies on this list, even the modern ones, still have relatively unknown actors and directors, I think that the anonymity of the creators has become less and less of a feature in recent years, and as more people who work on movies solely for money begin to realize that horror can net quite a bit of money, it seems that big names become attached to these projects solely for that purpose. The same goes for the multitude of sequels to horror movies, such as *Friday the 13th*'s 10+ or *Saw*'s 7 sequels all having rising and falling profits.

It seems as though these big names or frequent sequels, in recent years at least, have a supremely detrimental effect on the quality and rating of the films - often sequels are rated lower than their primary films, even as they garner more money at the box office. This links back to the feeling of catharsis that was discussed previously, as the catharsis has ceased to be to make room for the seemingly endless amounts of sequels and remakes in recent years. And while there have certainly been bad sequels and horror films in the past, most of the higher grossing films had at least some semblance of a good rating (at least in the upper 80s, with the exception of Cat People). It also was not entirely difficult to find a new franchise piece in the top grossing spots, unlike recent years (since the 80s) where I had to dig through several sequels and remakes to find an original movie.

I think that this comparison is important to understanding the declining of horror films and the amount of films that get made specifically with money in mind - while they are always about making money in the end, there was a craft and symbolism to earlier movies on the list that I am struggling to find in my analysis of later movies. Whether it be the sequel and copy driven movies or the movies that try to make a big name for themselves by picking a big-name story, but changing it to appeal to the general public, rather than to fit the medium of film better, it seems as though horror has degraded immensely. over just the past few years.

Even more so, it seems as though classic horror films are escaping their roots and fleeing to a more potentially profitable location, showing the effort that is being put into making new movies with the same monsters but a more relatable style - these twists on classic monsters result in movies like *I Frankenstein*, *Van Helsing*, or *Twilight,* which are often financially successful, but again, critically panned. They seek to escape the genres of horror for whatever reason, and it is causing the genre to deteriorate in form. The highest-budget movies are sequels and leaning outside of the horror genre, and the focus is being pulled away from these classic horror stories, and simply leaning on the characters in another genre for profit.

This thesis is meant to be a list of horror films for the purpose of exploring and expanding upon how American horror movies have evolved throughout the years, and while I went into it with a small sense of negativity, I am primarily pleased with the way they have evolved. While as of now, horror movies rely on explosive jump scares and shooting action, there are many films that borrow more from much older ancestors than from newer box office blockbusters. Smaller films like *It Follows* seem to hit the

69

mark regularly, despite their low income, and it is likely due to their independent nature.

In essence, it seems as though while the big budget horror films do tend to lean towards the lowest common denominator (and are right in doing so, money-wise), films that have true quality come from independent or less controlled sources. Films like *The Shining* where the director is in full creative control, or films created when the R rating wasn't something horror films could avoid and they could lean on the line between ratings without crossing it, allowed a kind of creative freedom that is rare, but not extinct.

With more modern films, the bigger budget creations seem to focus more on effects and popularity, big-budget affairs that lack the depth of character the monsters in earlier films has had. Ironically, despite its "torture porn" way of doing things, the early *Saw* films actually did have a unique monster, with motivations lined up with the idea of avoiding decay and living life to the fullest, striking a cord against the idea that millennials are wasting their youth, and their lives. This theme is present, but it doesn't flourish, with the villain's story dying out in later films and being replaced with thinly-veiled excuses to kill more people - even the new villain specifically makes traps with which there is no escape - only death. I think that dilution rings true throughout modern, big-budget horror film. With every new thing that becomes popular, new movies try to make it as much of the popular thing as possible, removing character and finesse for the lowest common denominator.

Suspense is still hiding, for sure, in other films. Less popular or lower-budgeted films, but they have such a distance between the higher rated films and the highest-

grossing films of the past decade, it seems as though the two are repulsed away from each other - but the glimmer of hope for that gap to close is there. I don't think that the art of suspense is dead - it is just hiding, waiting for the right time to spring out again into a bigger picture.

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