

HORROR FILMS

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are unsettling films designed to frighten and panic, cause dread and alarm, and to invoke our hidden worst fears, often in a terrifying, shocking finale, while captivating and entertaining us at the same time in a cathartic experience.

Horror films effectively center on the dark side of life, the forbidden, and strange and alarming events. They deal with our most primal nature and its fears: our nightmares, our vulnerability, our alienation, our revulsions, our terror of the unknown, our fear of death and dismemberment, loss of identity, or fear of sexuality.

Whatever dark, primitive, and revolting traits that simultaneously attract and repel us are featured in the horror genre. Horror films are often combined with *science fiction* when the menace or monster is related to a corruption of technology, or when Earth is threatened by aliens. The *fantasy* and *supernatural* film genres are not synonymous with the horror genre, although *thriller films* may have some relation when they focus on the revolting and horrible acts of the killer/madman. Horror films are also known as chillers, scary movies, spookfests, and the macabre.

In general, horror films are successful if they create fear in the viewer. Usually, it takes already existing fears and expands on those. Horror films are a mixture of fear, supernatural beings/occurrences, and murders or violence that increases the viewer's fear.

Introduction to Horror Films Genre:

Horror films go back as far as the onset of films themselves, over a 100 years ago. From our earliest days, we use our vivid imaginations to see ghosts in shadowy shapes, to be emotionally connected to the unknown and to fear things that are improbable. Watching a horror film gives an opening into that scary world, into an outlet for the essence of fear itself, without actually being in danger. Weird as it sounds, there's a very real thrill and fun factor in being scared or watching disturbing, horrific images.

Horror films, when done well and with less reliance on horrifying special effects, can be extremely potent film forms, tapping into our dream states and the horror of the irrational and unknown, and the horror within man himself. The best horror films only imply or suggest the horror in subtle ways, rather than blatantly displaying it. In horror films, the irrational forces of chaos or horror invariably need to be defeated, and often these films end with a return to normalcy and victory over the monstrous.

Of necessity, the earliest horror films were Gothic in style - meaning that they were usually set in spooky old mansions, castles, or fog-shrouded, dark and shadowy locales. Their main characters have included "unknown," human, supernatural or grotesque creatures, ranging from vampires, demented madmen, devils, unfriendly ghosts, monsters, mad scientists, "Frankensteins," "Jekyll/Hyde" dualities (good against evil),

demons, zombies, evil spirits, arch fiends, Satanic villains, the "possessed," werewolves and freaks to even the unseen, diabolical presence of evil.

Horror films developed out of a number of sources: folktales with devil characters, witchcraft, fables, myths, ghost stories, *Grand Guignol* melodramas, and Gothic or Victorian novels from Europe by way of Mary Shelley, Victor Hugo or Irish writer Bram Stoker, and American writers Robert Louis Stevenson and Edgar Allan Poe. Oscar Wilde's 1890 Faustian tale *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and H.G. Wells' 1896 story of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* were adapted into early film versions. In many ways, the expressionistic German silent cinema led the world in films of horror and the supernatural, and established its cinematic vocabulary and style. Many of the early silent classics would be remade during the talkies era. They are usually set in spooky old mansions, castles, or fog-shrouded, dark and shadowy locales. Their main characters have included "unknown," human, supernatural or grotesque creatures, ranging from vampires, demented madmen, devils, unfriendly ghosts, monsters, mad scientists, "Frankensteins," "Jekyll/Hyde" dualities, demons, zombies, evil spirits, arch fiends, Satanic villains, the "possessed," werewolves and freaks to even the unseen, diabolical presence of evil.

Many of the films in the horror genre from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s were B-grade movies, inferior sequels, or atrocious low-budget gimmick films. In the atomic age of the 1950s, much was made of the modern effects of radioactivity exposure, toxic chemical spills, or other scientific accidents - such as the development of giant mutant monsters or carnivorous insects, including **Gojira (1954, Japan, aka Godzilla)**. During that time, most of the monster horror films were cheaply made, drive-in, teenage-oriented, grade-Z films, such as **I Was a Teenage Werewolf (1957)**.

Horror films branched out in all different directions in the 1960s and after, especially as the Production Code disappeared and film censorship was on the decline. Directors began to frankly portray horror in ordinary circumstances and seemingly-innocent settings.

The Earliest Horror Films:

Many religions, myths, folk-tales and cults espoused the idea of obtaining the life-essence from blood – in its extreme was the practice of cannibalism. Vampires began to emerge in popular fiction of the 18th and 19th centuries, during which time Anglo-Irish writer Bram Stoker's 1897 vampire novel *Dracula* was written. It has become the most popular, influential and preeminent source material for many vampire films.

The first horror movie, only about two minutes long, was made by imaginative French filmmaker Georges Melies, titled **Le Manoir Du Diable (1896, Fr.) (aka The Devil's Castle/The Haunted Castle)** - containing familiar elements of later horror and vampire films: a flying bat, a medieval castle, a cauldron, a demon figure (Mephistopheles), and skeletons, ghosts, and witches - and a crucifix to dispatch with evil. It appeared that Quasimodo, from Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* 1831 novel, became the first horror figure in the 10-minute short by female director Alice Guy titled **Esmeralda (1905, Fr.)**, and soon after was seen in the full-length horror film **Notre-Dame De Paris (1911, Fr.) (aka The Hunchback of Notre Dame)**.

The Advent of Classic Horror Films of the 30s: The End of Silent Horror Films, The Rise of Universal Studios:

By the early 1930s, horror entered into its classic phase in Hollywood-the true-*Dracula* and *Frankenstein* Eras, with films that borrowed from their German expressionism roots. The studios took morbid tales of European vampires and undead aristocrats, mad scientists, and invisible men and created some of the most archetypal creatures and monsters ever known for the screen. Universal Studios, with many groundbreaking *silent* horror films, continued its tradition by providing *talkie* horror films derived from literature and other mythic-legendary sources. It was best-known for its pure horror films in the 30s and 40s, horror-dom's characters (Frankenstein, Dracula, The Mummy, the Invisible Man, and the Wolf Man). Other classic horror films of the 1930s and early 1940s included one of the best adventure/horror films of all time - it was the "beauty and the beast" classic **King Kong (1933)**.

Alfred Hitchcock's 60s Masterpieces:

Another suspense/thriller director Alfred Hitchcock, whose early silent film **The Lodger (1926)** explored horror's themes, brought out his most horrific film over 30 years later at the start of the decade. His film changed the face of all horror films ever since. Pure archetypal horror was now to be found in the dark shadows of the human soul itself - in a psychopathic, cross-dressing Bates Motel operator and taxidermist (Anthony Perkins). The low-budget, television-influenced, B & W **Psycho (1960)** could be considered the 'Citizen Kane' of horror films, with its complex Oedipal themes and schizophrenia. Its most famous scene was the classic shower murder in which the heroine (Janet Leigh) was savagely stabbed, with Bernard Herrmann's violin-tinged memorable score. The scene still invokes sheer terror, and the film itself would come to influence all subsequent Hollywood horror films - especially the 'slasher' horror film subgenre. Hitchcock's next horror masterpiece was Universal Studios' apocalyptic **The Birds (1963)** about the invasion of coastal town Bodega Bay by avian flocks. A spoiled heiress (Tippi Hedren), her potential boyfriend (Rod Taylor), his mother (Jessica Tandy), and a schoolteacher (Suzanne Pleshette) all suffered from the many bird attacks. The theme of Man vs. Nature running amok remained unresolved by the film's end.

Roman Polanski's Horror Films in the 60s:

Polish director Roman Polanski's first film in English, the potent and scary British production titled **Repulsion (1965)**, depicted a young, sexually-disturbed beautician's (Catherine Deneuve) unstable descent into hallucinatory madness in a London apartment. After his public acceptance for the film, Polanski directed the offbeat ghoulish comedy **The Fearless Vampire Killers (1966)** starring his wife Sharon Tate (a victim of the gruesome Manson 'family' murders).

George A. Romero the Master of the 'zombie film':

George A. Romero ushered in the modern era of graphically violent and gory zombie pics in the waning years of the 60s decade. Stephen King praised him for taking the horror "out of Transylvania" and bringing it to modern-day America. Romero's first *Dead* film appeared at the same time as civil unrest, Black Power and student protests, the Vietnam War, fear of nuclear annihilation, the gruesome assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the breakdown of the family - all coupled with the idealistic innocence of the previous year's Summer of Love. Romero realized that his archetypal zombie narratives, with extreme blood, violence and gore, could also provide worthwhile sub-textual commentary on societal themes. He recognized that the ultimate in horror was humanity itself ("I also have always liked the monster-within idea. I like the zombies being us"), allegorically presented during turbulent times as mobs of mindless reanimated 'living dead' creatures.

Romero's debut horror feature, the first of a canon of zombie classics, was the low-budget, intensely-claustrophobic, unrelenting B&W cult classic **Night of the Living Dead (1968)**. It was a milestone 'splatter' film about newly dead, stumbling corpses/zombies (not produced by voodoo rites, or outer space mutants), that returned to life with indiscriminate, ravenous hunger for human flesh. Romero himself defined them as average-Joe "blue-collar monsters," who lumbered stiffly out of their graves (due to the effects of *rigor mortis*) and toward a barricaded farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania. Reportedly, it was thought that the zombies were raised from the dead after exposure to radiation from a returning Venus space probe. The amateurish, allegorical film made in just one month showed rotten human corpses walking with outstretched arms and threatening a few trapped survivors who sought refuge.

After the late 60's, Romero's *first* zombie film, the revolutionary **Night of the Living Dead (1968)** proved to be hugely influential on future zombie films and many were imaginative derivatives or mutated examples.

Blaxploitation Horror Films:

The first of the so-called exploitative 'blaxploitation' films (with predominantly African-American casts, music and themes) was Melvin Van Peebles' controversial independent film **Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (1971)**. It jump-started a whole series of similar films about black private detectives and gritty urban life. As the movement progressed, it merged with the *horror film* genre (and others too, such as the *sci-fi* genre), and produced re-hashed hybrid films with blaxploitation content, often spoofing the titles of famous horror films from the past:

- William Crain's **Blacula (1972)** - with William Marshall as the accursed African prince title character terrorizing LA as a vampire; and its sequel **Scream, Blacula, Scream! (1973)**
- **The Thing with Two Heads (1972)**, a campy horror/comedy cult classic about a racist white mad scientist (Ray Milland) whose head has to be grafted onto the body of a huge black man (Rosie Grier)
- the sci-fi crime fantasy **Top of the Heap (1972)** - about a crazy young DC black cop fantasizing about being the first black man on the moon
- William Levey's notoriously trashy *Frankenstein* imitator **Blackenstein (1973)**
- Bill Gunn's **Vampires of Harlem (1973)**, aka **Ganja & Hess**
- **Voodoo Black Exorcist (1973, Sp.)** aka **Vudu sangriento**
- William Girdler's **Abby (1974)** (a blaxploitation version of *The Exorcist (1973)*)
- the kung-fu action film **Black Belt Jones (1974)**
- **Black Werewolf/The Beast Must Die (1974)**
- the zombie flick **The House on Skull Mountain (1974)**
- Ralph Bakshi's controversial animated film **Coonskin (1975)**
- **Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde (1976)**
- **Abar, the First Black Superman (1977)**

Horror Films in the 70s:

In 1968, the MPAA created a new rating system with G, M, R, and X ratings, in part as a response to the subversive, violent themes of horror films. In the 1970s, nightmarish horror and terror lurked everywhere. One of the top box-office hits in the early 70s was **Willard (1971)** about a wimpish 27 year old loner (and

Mama's boy) who trained his bloodthirsty pet rodent friends to vengefully attack his co-worker enemies - it launched an equally awful sequel **Ben (1972)** (with an Oscar nomination for Best Song for its title song - performed by Michael Jackson. Master filmmaker Stanley Kubrick's controversial **A Clockwork Orange (1971)** was a brilliant adaptation of Anthony Burgess' novel about rape, murder, and behaviorist experiments to eradicate aberrant sex and violence. And in the kitschy **The Abominable Dr. Phibes (1971)**, madman Dr. Anton Phibes (Vincent Price) let loose Biblical plagues against his victims - physicians who failed to save the life of his wife (Caroline Munro).

Future director Steven Spielberg's first notable film (originally made-for-TV) was the paranoid **Duel (1972)** about a monstrous and malevolent gas-tank truck without a driver. Director Nicolas Roeg's psychological thriller **Don't Look Now (1973)** duplicated Hitchcockian terror in a tale of disaster in Venice for Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland. Although it was a musical/comedy, the cult-campish Frankenstein classic **The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)** was set in a haunted castle with a group of transsexual aliens, and starred a young Susan Sarandon, Barry Bostwick, and Tim Curry. The weird and bawdy film soon became a cultural institution and phenomenon as it played for many years in packed midnight showings, with costumed audience members participating in the screenings. Jack Starrett's fast-paced horror chase film, **Race With the Devil (1975)** starred Peter Fonda and Warren Oates as innocent vacationers - with their wives (Loretta Swit and Lara Parker) - who are pursued by Satanists after inadvertently watching them perform a human sacrifice.

As the decade of the seventies progressed, the horror genre was subjected to violence, sadism, brutality, slasher films, victims of possession, and graphic blood-and-gore tales. Two of the most effective, box-office successes of the 70s included the camp classic **It's Alive! (1974)** about a murderous baby, and Tobe Hooper's exploitative, low-budget, hand-made cult film - **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)**. The notorious first film about a terrorized group of teenagers was loosely based on the true crimes of grisly, notorious Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein, as was Hitchcock's **Psycho (1960)**, **Three on a Meathook (1972)**, **Deranged (1974)**, and Jonathan Demme's **The Silence of the Lambs (1991)**. The lead horror character Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) was both repulsive and muscular, in his Grand Guignol pursuit of victims to butcher. [There were four sequels to the TCM film: **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (1986)** also directed by Hooper, **Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3 (1990)** directed by Jeff Burr, **Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation (1995)** directed by Kim Henkel and featuring future stars Matthew McConaughey and Renee Zellweger, and producer Michael Bay's **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003)** with Jessica Biel as one of the terrorized teenagers.

John Carpenter's influential, and acclaimed independent-sleeper horror classic **Halloween (1978)** with a creepy soundtrack, featured Michael Myers as the deranged, knife-wielding killer of teenage babysitters (notably Jamie Lee Curtis, the daughter of Janet Leigh who had earlier starred as the 'scream queen' in Hitchcock's *Psycho*) who had returned to his old neighborhood of Haddonfield, Illinois after an escape from a mental institution. His spooky doctor (British horror actor Donald Pleasance) pursued the mad slasher as he wreaked havoc. This popular slasher, serial killer film inspired numerous, mostly inferior sequels - seven more by the year 2002. Steven Spielberg's second horror film **Jaws (1975)** - was a terrific summer blockbuster about a threatening great white shark off an Eastern beach community - Amity Island. Horrible conflicts could occur with supernatural, *Jaws*-like monsters in space, such as in director Ridley Scott's **Alien (1979)**, with the tagline: "In space, no one can hear you scream.". An adapted Stephen King tale provided the basis for Stanley Kubrick's masterfully-directed gothic film **The Shining (1980)** about a

crazed husband (Jack Nicholson) with personal demons in the Overlook Hotel, closed and snowbound for the winter in Colorado, with his emotionally-abused wife (Shelley Duvall) and psychic young son.

Evil spirits possessed the body of a young 12 year-old girl (Linda Blair) in director William Friedkin's manipulative critical and box-office success **The Exorcist (1973)** from William Peter Blatty's best-selling novel, with extravagant, ground-breaking special effects and startling makeup. Its twisting head, pea-soup vomit spewing, crotch-stabbing with a crucifix, and other horrific visuals terrified audiences.

Some of the better devil-possession sequels in the late 70s and early 80s were **The Amityville Horror (1979)** about a devilish haunted house, Tobe Hooper's **Poltergeist (1982)** - a supreme ghost story about menacing spirits that kidnap a young child (in a film produced, co-written and 'co-directed' by Steven Spielberg) by sucking her into a TV set ("They're heeere!") and taking her into a parallel dimension.

Poltergeist encouraged two sequels in 1986 and 1988. **The Omen (1976)**, with a memorable score by Jerry Goldsmith, about a young adopted son (of parents Gregory Peck and Lee Remick) named Damien - Satan's son, also inspired two sequels to compose a trilogy: **Damien: Omen II (1978)**, and **The Final Conflict (1981)**). There was also a made-for-cable TV sequel titled *Omen IV: The Awakening* in 1991.

Friday the 13th (1980), the first of the horror genre's most recognizable horror series - with an astonishing number of sequels, ripped off more original films of the 70s (such as director Mario Bava's definitive slasher/gore film **A Bay of Blood (1971, It.)** - R-rated) with tales of terrorized teen camp counselors. It also inspired a TV series and several spoofs. Jason Voorhees, like the psychopathic Freddy Krueger after him in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, became a landmark name

Child's Play (1988) was the first of a series of films about a bright, redheaded two foot-tall "Buddy" doll that was possessed by the soul and voice of evil and angry serial killer Charles Lee Ray (Brad Dourif) - it terrorized a young boy and his family. It was followed by two generic horror sequels in 1990 and 1991, and then **Bride of Chucky (1998)** that introduced a female serial killer doll Tiffany (voice of Jennifer Tilly) to infuse an element of black comedy. The fifth film in the series, **Seed of Chucky (2004)**, directed by series screenwriter Don Mancini, was even more of a self-referencing horror/black comedy parody similar to **Scream (1996)**.

Tim Burton:

Tim Burton contributed his unique and original vision to the horror genre with a number of imaginative films including the horror/comedy **Beetlejuice (1988)**, two Batman films (the blockbuster original **Batman (1989)** and a sequel **Batman Returns (1992)**), the fantasy/horror film **Edward Scissorhands (1990)** about a boy/creature with blades for fingers, and the musical and macabre **The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993)** - with superb stop-motion animation in a tale about the saving of Christmas by Jack Skellington. Burton's biographical horror film **Ed Wood (1994)** included scenes with an aging Bela Lugosi (played by Oscar-winning Martin Landau), and his light-hearted, campy, escapist satire about Martian invaders titled **Mars Attacks! (1996)** spoofed disaster, science fiction, and monster films all at once. The famed director also retold and updated the famous Washington Irving legendary fable of The Headless Horseman in his **Sleepy Hollow (1999)** with Johnny Depp as Ichabod Crane.

Notable Horror Films in the 80s and 90s:

- producer Steven Spielberg's comedy/horror film **Gremlins (1984)** about cute little "mogwai" hand puppets that turn nasty; a sequel, Joe Dante's **Gremlins 2: The New Batch (1990)** provided both

black comedy and a parody/satire with lots of in-jokes and cameos, a Donald Trump-like character, and a Busby Berkeley musical homage ("New York, New York") performed by the gremlins

- the summer blockbuster comedy spoof **Ghostbusters (1984)** about paranormal investigators in the Big Apple
- director George Miller's excessively decadent **The Witches of Eastwick (1987)** about the sexual liberation of three small-town New England women (Cher, Susan Sarandon, and Michelle Pfeiffer) through Jack Nicholson's Mephisto (Daryl Van Horne)
- director Arthur Penn's gothic horror thriller/film noir **Dead of Winter (1987)** with Mary Steenburgen in a multiple role as a victimized woman in a remote cabin during a blizzard
- Adrian Lyne's **Fatal Attraction (1987)** with the merging of horror and suspense/thriller genres with a manipulative film about a spurned, deadly woman
- Nicolas Roeg's **The Witches (1990)** with Anjelica Huston as the chief witch
- Director Jonathan Demme's shocking horror/thriller **The Silence of the Lambs (1991)**, starring Anthony Hopkins as the murderous 'Hannibal the Cannibal' and Jodie Foster as a vulnerable FBI agent. It walked away with five major Academy Awards - a clean sweep. Respectability was awarded to the horror film genre in this rare instance
- **Cape Fear (1991)**, a Martin Scorsese remake of the early 60's classic with Robert Mitchum as a psychopathic stalker, starred Oscar-nominated Robert DeNiro as a creepy, Freddy Krueger-like paroled convict.
- The disturbing David Fincher's thriller-horror film **Se7en (1995)** followed two NY homicide cops (Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt) as they tracked down a serial killer (Kevin Spacey) known for displaying the 'seven deadly sins' at his murder scenes.

A few other horror films in the mid-1990s surprised the industry with their phenomenal success and return to slasher themes. Each of them provided an attractive and hip young cast: **The Craft (1996)** about schoolgirls dabbling in witchcraft and black magic, Wes Craven's horror/thriller **Scream (1996)** and **I Know What You Did Last Summer (1997)**, about teens covering up a fatal hit-and-run accident - with expected horrific results.

The end of the century's low-budget mockumentary-horror film **The Blair Witch Project (1999)** was created as an expressionistic, hand-held video by amateur filmmakers and captured the public's attention with its suggestive and understated horror. It was arguably the most successful independent production in film (and horror) history, although afterwards, many felt conned by its trick-gimmicks. Similarly, M. Night Shyamalan's ghost story **The Sixth Sense (1999)** created suspense without the typical formulaic and explicit elements of most slasher films. Director Mark Pellington's *X-Files* like **The Mothman Prophecies (2002)**, starring Richard Gere and Laura Linney, was a psychological thriller/horror film based on a legendary 'true' creature with mothlike features and red eyes in Point Pleasant, WV.

M. Night Shyamalan's effective **The Sixth Sense (1999)**, about a young boy (Haley Joel Osment) who sees "dead people" - this was Shyamalan's signature film with clever clues sprinkled throughout the film; also Shyamalan's spooky **Signs (2002)**, about a disillusioned minister (Mel Gibson) who encounters gigantic, eerie crop circles on his farm.

Lucrative Horror Film Retreads in the New Century:

One of the trends in the popular genre of horror films was to remake Japanese horror films, culminating in retreads of successful foreign classics. The most effective, intelligent and stylish horror film of the new

decade was Gore Verbinski's **The Ring (2002)** - a modern-day, gothic horror classic, a remake of the Japanese horror flick **Ringu (1998)**. Other horror films were retreads of successful foreign classics (i.e., **The Grudge (2004)** (with two sequels in 2006 and 2009) and **Dark Water (2005)**).

In the new century, film audiences' threshold for sadistic and excessive gore, body mutilation, torture, and sickening violence had already been numbed by years of 'slasher' films, and this new crop of low-budget "trash" horror scarefest films was often tolerated and embraced by horror fans. The so-called "pseudo-snuff films" (dubbed "horror-porn," "torture-chic," "gore-nography," and "claustrophobic cruelty") were accused of being like a "sicko video game" - containing visceral violence and unheard-of human suffering - that severely tested the limits of R ratings.

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Thriller and Suspense Films:

These are types of films known to promote intense excitement, suspense, a high level of anticipation, ultra-heightened expectation, uncertainty, anxiety, and nerve-wracking tension. Thriller and suspense films are virtually synonymous and interchangeable categorizations, with similar characteristics and features. If the genre is to be defined strictly, a genuine thriller is a film that relentlessly pursues a single-minded goal - to provide thrills and keep the audience cliff-hanging at the 'edge of their seats' as the plot builds towards a climax. The tension usually arises when the main character(s) is placed in a menacing situation or mystery, or an escape or dangerous mission from which escape seems impossible. Life itself is threatened, usually because the principal character is unsuspecting or unknowingly involved in a dangerous or potentially deadly situation. Plots of thrillers involve characters which come into conflict with each other or with outside forces - the menace is sometimes abstract or shadowy.

Thrillers are often hybrids - there are lots of varieties of suspense-thrillers:

- *action-* or *adventure-* thrillers
- *sci-fi* thrillers (such as **Alien (1979)**)
- *crime-caper* thrillers (such as **The French Connection (1971)**)
- *western-*thrillers (such as **High Noon (1952)**)
- *film-noir* thrillers (such as **Double Indemnity (1944)**)
- even romantic comedy-thrillers (such as **Safety Last (1923)**)

Characters in thrillers include convicts, criminals, stalkers, assassins, down-on-their-luck losers, innocent victims (often on the run), prison inmates, menaced women, characters with dark pasts, psychotic individuals, terrorists, cops and escaped cons, fugitives, private eyes, drifters, duplicitous individuals, people involved in twisted relationships, world-weary men and women, psycho-fiends, and more. The themes of thrillers frequently include terrorism, political conspiracy, pursuit, or romantic triangles leading to murder.