

Slasher Films

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

The average person typically wants to die in bed, asleep, with no idea of what is transpiring. Even those with a more adventurous idea typically shy away from prolonged suffering or pain. When a person thinks of the way that they wish to die, it typically does not involve knives, terror, or having ones group of friends chased by a homicidal maniac. Yet, these are the ideas of death that fascinate society.



At one time, the slasher film was the most despised genres of film. Critics thought that the slasher mania phase would end quickly and movie goers would never again be exposed to the expected blood, gore, and sometimes nudity of a slasher flim. During the 1980s, slasher films became commercial successes. The best and debatably best known examples of slasher films would include the *Friday the 13th* series (1980-2009), *The Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984-2010) series, and the *Halloween* (1978-2009) franchise. These films take advantage of something which all humans experience: fear (Kendrick, p.17-19).

Slasher films feature a myriad of twisted and frightening plot lines. Some are instant successes while others become cult classics; some are just a mix of corny plot and unrealistic gore.

The award for the best slasher movie of all time is highly coveted, but also highly subjective. Some choose a film which, while not well known, is certainly chilling. *The Prowler* (1981) takes place when a young couple is murdered at a college graduation celebration dance. This film combines just enough of plausibility with terror (Harris, p.1).

No one can forget, however, the most notorious of the slasher films. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1981) is probably the best known slasher movie of all time. It is hard to find a person who does not shudder at the name Freddy Krueger (Harris, p.2).

Halloween (1978) is another film which has proved to be a profitable brand and has produced many sequels and spin offs. This film centers around villain Mike Myers, who sixteen years previously had murdered his sister, but now Myers is out of jail and is back with a vengeance. These and many other films make up the most disturbing yet captivating genre of film.



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Photo Credit: Jaime Lee Curtis played the roll of the Final Girl in *Haloween* (1978).

One aspect of a slasher film is indisputable, a necessity, and that is a killer. Typically this killer must be psychotic. The murderer must not be a psychopath, but must be on an notable killing spree. These films always take place in some terrible setting, whether it's a haunted house or the woods at night. These films never take place in an ideal location. Usually there is not only one mode of death. Instead, the killer uses a multitude of weapons in order to carry out his ghastly deeds.

Typically a film leaves the viewer hanging, not knowing what is going to be the end result is what adds the allure to keep watching the film. When studied, slasher films are quite the opposite. These films almost always follow a clear and predictable pattern known as the Final Girl Theory.

The victims of the killer are always young; typically a group of teenagers. Within the group there is almost always a couple who engage in a lot of sex. They typically die very early in the film. The Final Girl is considered to be the hero of the film. This girl is usually a young teen, very pretty, and a virgin. She either vanquishes the killer herself or reaches help in time (Kendrick, p. 17-19). Studies have deduced that the Final Girl typically adheres to a certain set of society dictated characteristics. She does not engage in provocative or crass behavior, she does not wear revealing clothing, and for being pure and virtuous she is rewarded with her life (Weaver, Menard, Cabrera, and Taylor, p.1)

Understandably, stigma over the Final Girl and the content of slasher films themselves have become hot topics in pop culture. While there are always outliers, slasher films almost always perpetuate violence. If these films were only seen by adults, it is possible that the effects of this content could be contained and only viewed by people who have reached a mature enough state that they are able to handle the scenes shown. But the trailers haunt television almost constantly and slasher films are shown on television. Whether or not the viewer is mature enough to view the content or not, the subliminal messaging of slasher films can always be interpreted.

The Final Girl could be seen as a ray of light in a dark and disturbing film. The idea that at least one person lives helps the viewer to see that there is some resolution to the problem. But, the idea that women have to display the film makers idea of virtue has critics up in arms (Weaver, Menard, Cabrera, and Taylor, p.2).

Slasher films, while not being the most respected genre of film, are an important part of pop culture. Slasher films capitalize on excitement and adrenaline that people feel when terrified. While it was thought that slasher films were only a passing fad, it has been proved that they are here to stay.

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Photo Credit: Jaime Lee Curtis played the roll of the Final Girl in *Haloween* (1978).

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