Opinion

How horror has taken over the movie industry

By MAXWELL ADAMS
Contributing Writer

Do you remember as a kid going to your local amusement park and seeing that really big rollercoaster? Being terrified to go on it, but once you went on it you wanted to go again and again? I believe that's how modern audiences have begun to look at the horror movie genre.

A genre once looked at as niche has now become one of the most consistently reliable genres to lean on in box office numbers, critical acclaim and streaming services. You can look at a couple different instances where the tides started to turn for horror, but I believe this started with the release of "Hereditary" in 2018. In many ways, this was a perfect horror film, but it also gave us something we see more often now: an established actress or actor diving headfirst into a horror role that transformed everything we once thought about them. Actress Toni Collette defied all expectations in her role as Annie, portraying a trying mother battling unimaginable grief, and then delivering the eventual possession scene at the climax of the film.

Because of who she was and who she had typically played, Collette surprised everyone in this role. Although the academy did not recognize her performance, you could say the widespread outrage over the fact that she didn't win paved the way for her predecessors to be on that main stage a handful of years later. And if you don't believe she had something to do with that, I encourage you to watch or rewatch the film.

Since the making of the film, we've seen more big-name actors find success in the horror movie industry, and big names always appeal to the fans. Actress and producer Demi Moore saw a career resurgence with her Oscar-nominated role in "The Substance," and actress Florence Pugh saw her career take an uprising after "Midsommar." Actor Nicolas Cage redeemed his "Wicker Man" flop in "Longlegs," and actor Michael B. Jordan actually won the Oscar for his role in "Sinners." The list goes on.

All these movies are equally as fun as they are shocking, and that's the rollercoaster effect, and audiences and critics alike are taking notice.

In a time where we were struggling to get people in theatres at one point, the horror genre brought them back. In part because the genre had started doing something audiences haven't seen before. If you want to look outside of actors in the movie, how about instances of the marketing of the "Smile" franchise? The creativity of shocking people in public with actors with menacing smiles was genius and was likely largely responsible for the box office success it saw.

What about the directors? It started with director Jordan Peele, and now we have converted that kind of following to directors Curry Barker and Kane Parsons. Minds that were known for comedy transferred their talents to big screen adaptations in genres they historically had nothing to do with, but it still put audiences in seats because we, as consumers, want to know how these guys could possibly write and direct a movie so shocking yet so the director's voice.

You can take Peele's "Us," for example; you can see little sprinkles of comedy

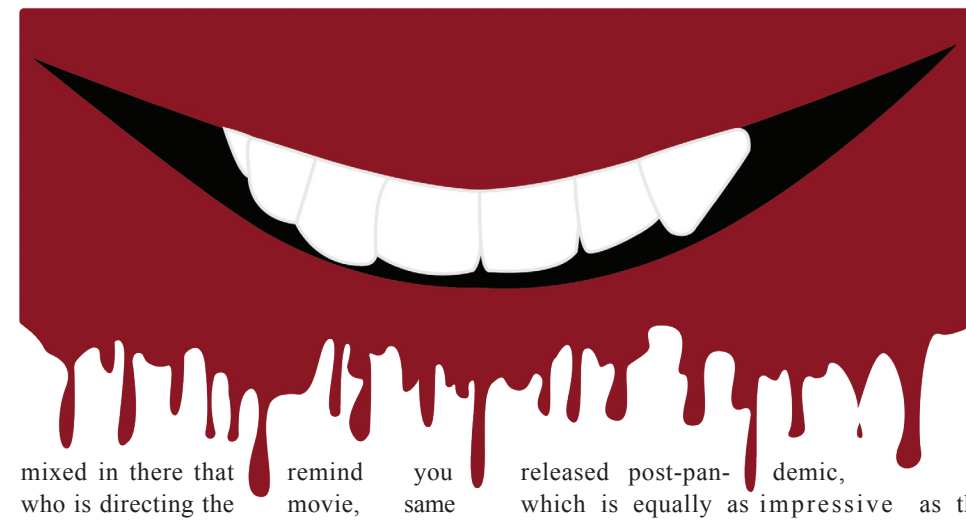


ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEY LEE

mixed in there that remind you who is directing the movie, same with Barker's "Obsession." Barker himself delivers a sequence in the movie where he voices a character that gives you some of that comedy relief. It's not all sick, twisted movies anymore with mediocre acting and no direction; that's the old horror stereotype. Yes, those movies still exist, but the ones that hit aren't just one thing anymore. They add in other genres, other underlying and humanized themes that give you a reason to watch the movie and stay throughout the entirety of the film; it doesn't just rely on gore and jump scares anymore because the genre has gotten much more creative than that.

Then we get to the numbers, as all of this creativity would be quite meaningless without ticket purchases to show for it. Let's start with "Hereditary," which made more than $80 million over its budget. Years later, we see "Smile" profit $200 million over its initial budget while having been released post-pandemic, which is equally as impressive as the numbers themselves. "Sinners" is another example of a film that has grossed $200 million over its initial budget, despite being much more expensive to make than the aforementioned film. Finally, we reach 2026, where both "Obsession" and "Backrooms" blew all the aforementioned out of the water with over $300 million domestically, respectively.

Horror doesn't need superhero-level lore; the fear is the lore, but that's also what makes it fun. The genre has found a formula that is connecting with modern audiences more than ever. We have actors we recognize, filmmakers with distinctive voices, stories about real human issues, unconventional marketing, genre blending and financial success in this genre like never before. Judging by lines continuing to form outside the door to see these movies, audiences aren't ready to get off this ride anytime soon.

Being illiterate isn't cool

By RYLEY LEE
Creative Director

We've all heard that one person in school say, "I haven't read a book since third grade," like it's something to be proud of. News flash, it isn't. Being able to read and actually comprehend (big word, I know) text is the coolest thing you can do.

According to the National Literacy Institute, as of 2024, 21% of American adults were illiterate. That's higher than it has been in over 150 years. Even in the 1870s, literacy rates among American adults were higher than they are now. Frankly, that's embarrassing.

How is someone supposed to perform, and ideally succeed, at their job if they don't know how to read? The answer for a lot of people is to rely on artificial intelligence (AI) to do their jobs for them, just like they rely on it for their education.

According to the HEPI-Kortext research center, 92% of undergraduates use AI in some way, which means in a class of 20 people, about two aren't using AI at all. Illiteracy rates have increased since the introduction of AI.

Even if you're using AI to help understand a text, which I'll admit to doing, you aren't allowing your brain to actually comprehend what you're reading. This leads to more AI usage, which then leads to less comprehension. It's a circle of declining literacy.

Additionally, less than 50% of American adults have reported reading at least one book within the last year. ONE SINGULAR book. As someone who reads 20-30 books every year, this is insane. Yes, social media has taken over my life too, causing me to read less, but I'm still able to read more than one book in 365 days.

You might be asking, "What does reading fiction actually do for me?" Reading in any form, even reading a "silly" rom-com, can change the way we engage with ideas and cultures by allowing us to learn about perspectives and cultures we don't know about. This is important because it allows us to have empathy for others, even if we can't relate to them.

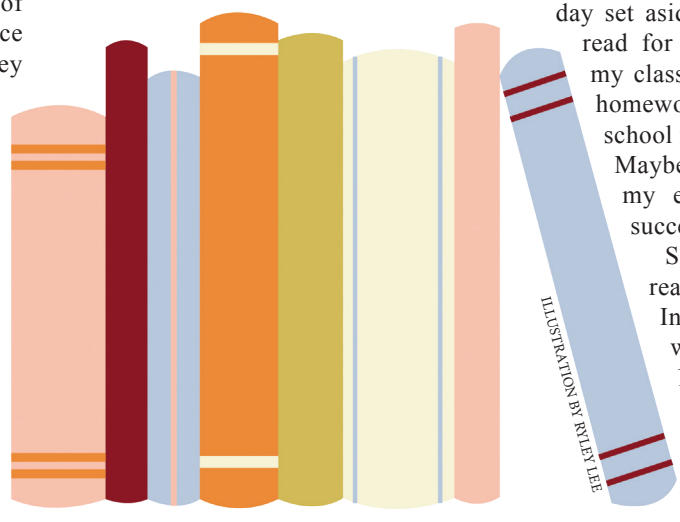


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Reading also grows our vocabulary. I can't tell you how many times I've said a word like "blasphemous" and someone has said, "Wow, that's such a big word" and expands knowledge as a whole.

Since the decline in reading for pleasure, reading scores have also decreased. You don't have to read historical nonfiction to get smarter. You can get smarter by reading "Heated Rivalry." It doesn't matter what you're reading, as long as you're reading.

And by the way, if you think reading is boring, you're probably just reading the wrong books.

Maybe it's because I went to a charter school, but when I was in elementary school, we had around 20-30 minutes every day set aside to just read. We also had to read for homework. And yes, a lot of my classmates might have lied on their homework, but being watched reading in school meant we were actually reading. Maybe that's why everyone from my elementary and middle school succeeded in high school.

Schools need to start incorporating reading into their curriculum more. In almost every class I had, we would read out loud or in groups. Not only does reading out loud help with comprehension and reading skills, but it can also improve memory. Popcorn reading as a class or small group can help students remember the information more than if they were to read it on their own.

Reading can also decrease stress levels. Whenever I get stressed out with school, I open my book and read for even just 30 minutes and feel better. Reading allows us to escape to another world. When we read, we can forget about the essay that's due tomorrow or the exam that we haven't started studying for.

Reading forces you to focus on one thing: the book. When watching TV or TikToks, we don't have to use our brains, so we continue to think about our stress. When reading, our minds need to interpret and imagine the words on the page, which causes us to think about only that. It slows our minds and helps us relax, which is why so many people read before going to sleep.

As a book lover, I am always trying to convince my friends and family to read more. Not only is it a great way to escape reality for a little bit, but it is also a way to improve literacy rates, which is something we should be prioritizing as a country.

Reading is cool. It allows us to think for ourselves, which is more important now than ever. Anyone who says otherwise is probably already relying on AI to do their thinking for them.