



# Getting up to Speed in...Horror

## ***Here's what Horror is:***

Horror tales produce fear in readers. Horror features nightmares come to life, complete with the monsters — human, inhuman and psychological — which inhabit our worst fears. As in nightmares, surprise is a key element. We never know when these monsters will invade our lives, and unease and foreboding drive the story as we await the unexpected. The key to horror is that although the evil may be beaten down, it is never destroyed completely. It lurks just beneath the surface, waiting to emerge again.

## ***Here's what happens in a Horror novel:***

Some Horror tales begin in a fairly normal world, suddenly and disastrously invaded by monsters, and lead to a horrific climax at the end. Others feature graphic violence and disturbing images from the very first pages and the intensity never lags. The action and descriptions create an uneasy atmosphere which permeates the tales. Intensified by graphic violence, strong language, and explicit sex, these novels explore the dark side of human nature.

## ***Here's why people like Horror:***

Fans read Horror for the chill it produces, whether from grisly descriptions, monsters and demons, or psychological terrors. They expect to be scared and are drawn to stories that pull them down dark roads at an amazing clip. Teen readers especially appreciate these stories of monsters in all types in worlds that are out of control. Horror allows readers to face their worst fears in a safe environment.

Readers may enjoy a particular subject — vampires or haunted houses — or have favorite authors. Others read across the genre, searching for the particular atmosphere and chills that satisfy. Readers who prefer to laugh at their fears appreciate the current trend in Comic Horror, which parody classic themes. Christopher Moore's *A Dirty Job* is an excellent example.

## ***Here are key titles to read:***

- *Books of Blood* by Clive Barker established his reputation as a writer of grisly, macabre horror.
- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson combines a haunted house with a psychological ghost story to create a moody and menacing tale of research into the supernatural that places the characters at odds with their subject.
- *The Shining*, Stephen King's classic tale of a dysfunctional family descending into horror, pits a young boy against the powers of evil in a haunted hotel.
- *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice revived the vampire legend in Horror and other genres with this decidedly creepy tale from the vampire's point of view.
- *Lost Souls* by Poppy Z. Brite popularized the Splatterpunk subgenre, graphically violent, disturbing horror, infused with hip hop culture and gore.



### Here are key authors to know:

- **Ramsey Campbell** combines British locations and sensibilities with psychological and graphic, often erotic, images to create an unsettling blend in disturbing urban tales. Start with the award-winning *The Overnight*, a grisly, atmospheric story of horror in a bookstore.
- **Joe Hill** represents a new voice. Like his father Stephen King, he specializes in a comfortable real world invaded by evil. *Heart-Shaped Box* is his first novel.
- **Stephen King** pits sympathetic characters against the powers of the horrific in engaging stories that spiral down from the everyday to the unthinkable. In dozens of novels and short stories beginning with *Carrie* and *The Shining* to the more recent *Bag of Bones* and *Lisey's Story*, King's writing draws on our deepest fears.
- From the graphic *Carrion Comfort*, to the small town horror of *Summer of Night*, to the historical Arctic in *The Terror*, **Dan Simmons** offers a range of backgrounds and levels of violence which underline his strong storytelling skills.
- **Peter Straub's** *Ghost Story* remains a classic but his more recent award-winning *Lost Boy Lost Girl* demonstrates his sure hand at creating a creepily atmospheric tale of growing horror centered on a haunted house where his writer/protagonist battles supernatural serial murderers.

### Here's how to talk with Horror fans:

- Ask readers to describe the scariest sections of books they've enjoyed. This gives us a clue as to the amount of graphic gore and violence they expect. Readers who talk about a slow building of fear are more likely to enjoy Stephen King and his ilk; others who describe graphic scenes early on are looking for something more like Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* or Dan Simmons' *Carrion Comfort*.
- Readers may be more likely to know a television show or movie that contains the elements they enjoy. Match those appeals to Horror novels — or to the books on which the film or show was based.
- For readers less certain of what they might enjoy, suggest short stories as a way to become more familiar with both new and classic authors. A word of warning: short stories may be even more intense than novels because of the constricted length.

### A Few More Tips:

- New is not always best — or what readers are looking for. Horror classics remain remarkably fresh — and chilling.
- A number of traditional Horror themes have found their way into other genres — Romance, Fantasy and Mystery in particular, but even in the apocalyptic novels of Christian fiction where ghosts, vampires, and other supernatural killers now roam freely.



- Other genres and authors that may give that familiar frisson of fear:
  - Mystery Thrillers (John Burdett's haunting *Bangkok 8* series with unflinching descriptions and hints of the supernatural or Michael Gruber's *Jimmy Paz* Series set in Miami)
  - Psychological Suspense has a fast pace and demons in the mind (Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine and Joyce Carol Oates, especially *Zombie*).

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