**HORROR**

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| **DEFINITION:** Horror fiction is written to frighten the reader, as opposed to "dark fantasy" which is a fantastic or romantic story using vampires or werewolves to add ominous shadows. Supernatural or occult elements distinguish horror from suspense fiction, where a serial killer may be frightening but is all too human. The power of the natural world gone awry and uncontrolled is a common theme. The appeal of horror fiction is an emotional response of terror, fear, and disgust. |

**CHARACTERISTICS:** Populated by monsters of some sort as well as supernatural elements and beings (ghosts, ghouls, vampires), horror novels create a menacing atmosphere that evokes a feeling of fear in the reader. The dark tone and sense of foreboding are intensified by graphic violence, strong language, and explicit sex, as horror explores the dark side of human–and inhuman–impulses. While the disturbing atmosphere is important, the key to horror is the unresolved ending. Although the evil is beaten down, it is never destroyed. It waits, lurking just beneath the surface, to strike again.

**APPEAL:** Whether readers enjoy the horror popularized by Stephen King, with evil invading a normal life, or that exemplified by Clive Barker’s early novels, characterized by explicit violence from the early pages, they expect an atmospheric tale with haunted protagonists stalked by evil monsters and attacked randomly. Horror is appreciated for the level of fear it produces in the reader. In addition, an inescapable feeling of dread throughout heightens emotional reaction to these disturbing stories.

**READERS:** Horror fans span a wide range of readers, male and female, young and old. Horror seems particularly attractive to teen readers, who appreciate these out-of-control worlds and emotions, with monsters of every type. Readers read horror to be surprised and frightened; they expect the unexpected. Many fans come to horror fiction from movies and television shows. Others cross over from dark fantasy and the thriller and suspense genres. Short stories provide a good introduction to popular horror authors, for readers and librarians interested in exploring the genre. While readers are often looking for newer authors, many appreciate the classic tales of established masters as well.

**TRENDS:**One of the most important trends in the horror genre is the lending of traditional themes–ghosts, vampire, were beasts–to other genres, especially romance, mystery, and fantasy. Watch for further crossover with other genres, including western and suspense. Traditionally horror does not lend itself to series, but several–Dean Koontz’s Odd Thomas and F. Paul Wilson’s Repairman Jack–have gained popularity. Vampires, ghost stories, and gothic novels remain popular, although current authors consistently reinvent these traditional themes, pushing the boundaries of the horror genre.  
Humorous horror novels have long been a popular sideline but the trend is growing with Christopher Moore as one of the leading practitioners. Joe Hill, son of Stephen King, is an author to watch. His award-winning collection of short stories was followed this year with his first horror novel, *The Heart-Shaped Box*, a novel for all King’s fans.

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| Classic Authors | Robert Bloch, Charles Grant, Shirley Jackson, H.P. Lovecraft, Richard Matheson, Robert R. McCammon, Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, Whitley Strieber |
| Popular | Kelley Armstrong, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Douglas Clegg, John Farris, Stephen King, Tanith Lee, Bentley Little, Brian Lumley, John Saul, Peter Straub |