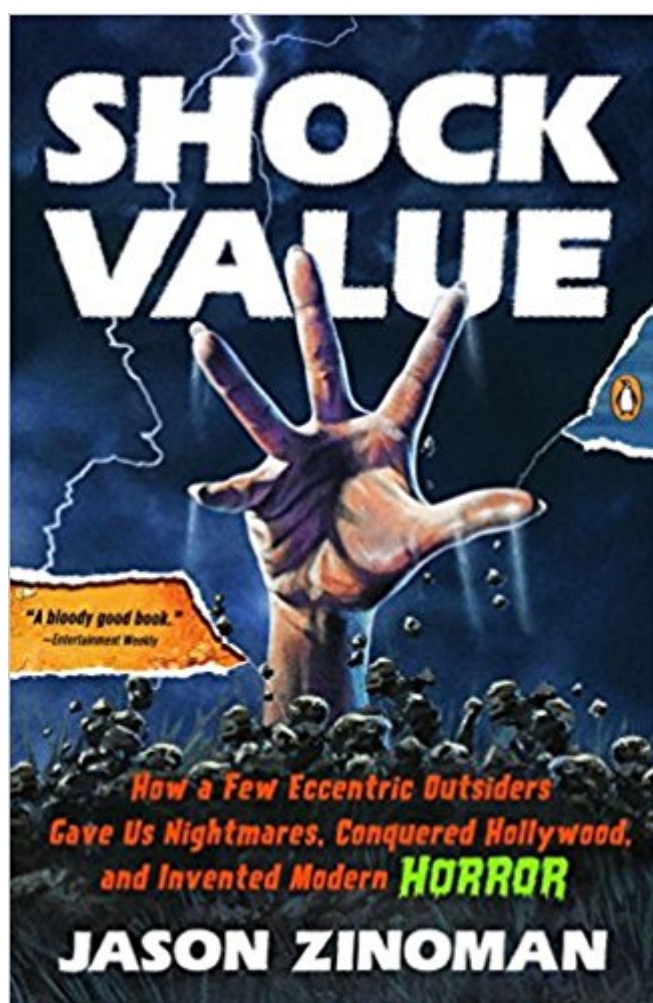


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# Shock Value: How A Few Eccentric Outsiders Gave Us Nightmares, Conquered Hollywood, And Invented Modern Horror



## Synopsis

Much has been written about the storied New Hollywood of the 1970s, but at the same time that Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese were producing their first classic movies, a parallel universe of directors gave birth to the modern horror film. *Shock Value* tells the unlikely story of how directors like Wes Craven, Roman Polanski, and John Carpenter revolutionized the genre in the 1970s, plumbing their deepest anxieties to bring a gritty realism and political edge to their craft. From Rosemary's Baby to Halloween, the films they unleashed on the world created a template for horror that has been relentlessly imitated but rarely matched. Based on unprecedented access to the genre's major players, this is an enormously entertaining account of a hugely influential golden age in American film.

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## Customer Reviews

An enormously entertaining account of the gifted and eccentric directors who gave us the golden age of modern horror in the 1970s, bringing a new brand of politics and gritty realism to the genre. Much has been written about the storied New Hollywood of the 1970s, but at the same time as Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, and Francis Ford Coppola were making their first classic movies, a parallel universe of directors gave birth to the modern horror film—aggressive, raw, and utterly original. Based on unprecedented access to the genre's major players, *The New York Times's* critic Jason Zinoman's *Shock Value* delivers the first definitive account of horror's golden age. By the late 1960s, horror was stuck in the past, confined mostly to drive-in theaters and exploitation houses, and shunned by critics. *Shock Value* tells the unlikely story of how the

much-disparaged horror film became an ambitious art form while also conquering the multiplex. Directors such as Wes Craven, Roman Polanski, John Carpenter, and Brian De Palma—counterculture types operating largely outside the confines of Hollywood—revolutionized the genre, exploding taboos and bringing a gritty aesthetic, confrontational style, and political edge to horror. Zinoman recounts how these directors produced such classics as *Rosemary's Baby*, *Carrie*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Halloween*, creating a template for horror that has been imitated relentlessly but whose originality has rarely been matched. This new kind of film dispensed with the old vampires and werewolves and instead assaulted audiences with portraits of serial killers, the dark side of suburbia, and a brand of nihilistic violence that had never been seen before. *Shock Value* tells the improbable stories behind the making of these movies, which were often directed by obsessive and insecure young men working on shoestring budgets, were funded by sketchy investors, and starred porn stars. But once *The Exorcist* became the highest grossing film in America, Hollywood took notice. The classic horror films of the 1970s have now spawned a billion-dollar industry, but they have also penetrated deep into the American consciousness. Quite literally, Zinoman reveals, these movies have taught us what to be afraid of. Drawing on interviews with hundreds of the most important artists in horror, *Shock Value* is an enthralling and personality-driven account of an overlooked but hugely influential golden age in American film.

**What's Inside *Shock Value*** Hitchcock is not the Godfather of the horror film: Moreover, the greatest horror directors of this era were actually reacting against him, as much as paying homage to him. This is particularly true of the end of *Psycho*, which horror makers hated as much as they loved the shower scene. This is a new argument that is at odds with most everything written about the genre. The origins of horror tropes: Zinoman does a masterful job of tracing the origins of those now familiar horror standbys: the masked serial killer, the point of view shot in slasher films, the use of the chainsaw, the introduction of Giger's aesthetic (H.R. Giger was a painter and sculptor; the now-seminal design for the alien in *Alien* was inspired by his painting *Necronom IV* and earned him an Oscar in 1980); and the roots of the unmotivated serial killer.

**Solving the "Monster Problem":** This is a term Zinoman coins, which essentially means how do you retain the sense of the unknown (the "unknown" being the scariest thing in the world according to the intellectual Godfather of the genre, H.P. Lovecraft) while showing the monster? Every great horror movie of this period provides a good answer to this problem, and Zinoman shows exactly how the directors did it. The slow embrace of the mainstream press to horror: In the 70s, the media's coverage of horror radically evolved. Roger Ebert's pan of *Night of the Living Dead* in

Reader's Digest helped launch a new kind of alternative horror press which took horror very seriously at least a decade before the major critics. Now of course almost everyone, from A.O. Scott to Anthony Lane, does. Tracing the origins of the two greatest monster movies of the era--*Alien* and *Halloween*: Zinoman explores in detail the influential friendship at USC in the late sixties between John Carpenter and Dan O'Bannon. Zinoman is the first journalist to really reconstruct the USC scene (and almost the entire class), back before film school was really that popular. *Wes Craven*: Zinoman explores how a fundamentalist upbringing and an early career in porn inspired Craven to be a master of horror. *Brian De Palma*: The common wisdom about this director has been completely wrong. Despite his reputation as a coolly stylish director who emphasizes form over content, Zinoman shows how De Palma's movies are actually very personal, even autobiographical. To take one example, his greatest theme--voyeurism, which shows up in everything from *Carrie* to *Scarface* to *Blow Out*--did not originate as an homage to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, as everyone including him says, but rather in the story of De Palma, as a child, spying and catching his father cheating (De Palma videotaped his father meeting-up with his mistress so that his mother could win in a divorce). The making of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*: Much has been written about the insanity of making this film, but Zinoman colorfully reports on the unlikely role of the New York mob and the Governor of Texas had in producing perhaps the most original exploitation movie of all time. Zinoman captures a Wild West period at the birth of the Texas film industry, when a classic horror movie could be made because a rich businessman wanted to sleep with the leading lady. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

In *Shock Value*, New York Times scribe Zinoman attempts to give these directors the same treatment Peter Biskind gave Spielberg, Scorsese, and Coppola in his magnificent *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. In other words, he explains the filmmakers' importance while never letting his cultural theorizing get in the way of a good production yarn or intriguing biographical nugget. Zinoman succeeds monstrously well in this mission--there is plenty here to make the most knowledgeable of horror fans' head explode. "Entertainment Weekly" "Not only is *Shock Value* enormously well-researched--the book is based on the author's interviews with almost all of the movement's principals--it's also an unbelievable amount of fun. Zinoman writes with a strong narrative drive and a contagious charisma." NPR.org "[Shock Value] fuses biography (in this case, of such masters of horror as Wes Craven, John Carpenter and Tobe

Hooper), production history, movie criticism and social commentary into a unified and irresistible story...You should finish a great movie book with your dander up and your Netflix queue swelled by at least a dozen titles. And on that count, Shock Value more than delivers.â Laura Miller, Salon.com

"Zinoman...concentrates on a handful of films and filmmakers that brought the corpse back to life during the late 1960s and early '70s, and he convincingly conveys what made movies like 'Night of the Living Dead' and 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre' different from anything that had come before: more unsettling, purer in their sense of dread...where Shock Value excels is in its primary research, the stories of how the seminal shockers of this era came to be.â The New York Times

"Impassioned, articulate proseâ Zinoman is such a literate, intelligent defender of the cause that his arguments are well worth reading. Even better, he has a knack for finding the characters in behind-the-scenes theatrics.â The Onion

"Though in-depth character bios and discussion of the changing movie business are fascinating, Zinoman's shot-by-shot descriptions of groundbreaking films and championing of understated gems are even more impressive. This volume reveals just enough to satiate horror aficionados, while offering plenty for curious fright-seekers who want to explore the formative years of what's become a billion-dollar industry.â Publishers Weekly

starred reviewâ Insightful, revealing, and thoroughly engrossingâ [Thoroughly researched, Shock Value is chock full of nuggets of insider details that even the most hardcore horror fan might not know.â About.com

"Between 1968 and 1976, all the films that redefined the horror movie were made: Night of the Living Dead, Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist, Dark Star, The Last House on the Left, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, and Carrie. In fluent reporter's prose lent urgency by personal fascination, Zinoman tells how their creators made those paradigm-shiftersâ [There are many good-bad and downright bad books about horror movies. Zinoman gives us the rare all-good book about them.â Roy Olson, Booklist

"May well prove to be the most indispensable overview of modern horror.â Rue Morgue Magazine

"Brisk, accessible and incisive...walks a tonal tightrope of entertaining prose and sobering deliberation.â Fangoria Magazine

"Five Stars. The most effortlessly enchanting treatise on the American horror film since Stephen King's Danse Macabre.... die-hard horror fans will worship it.â BloodyDisgusting.com

First of all, I will say if you like horror films, I wholeheartedly recommend this book. There is too little written on the subject, and given that, I was delighted to find this book, and overall it did not disappoint. Mr. Zinoman is a good writer, and within the areas that he chooses to focus, he has done a good deal of research and provides the reader with interesting insights. My main complaint would

be that there was not enough. The book covers the initial films of Craven, Carpenter, De Palma, Friedkin, Polanski, Romero and Hooper to a good deal of depth. But he ignores much, if not all, of the later works of these artists. I would have liked to have heard much more about how these directors evolved. In some cases, like Hooper or Romero, where their careers sort of flamed out (I know Romero fans won't agree, but how many zombie moves can one man make?), but many of them remained vital for many years. I was especially disappointed that there was not more coverage of *Body Double* and *The Thing*. These are two of the finest thriller/horror movies ever made IMO, and were fairly solidly within the time period covered by the book, yet were basically left out for some reason (I'm guessing time limitations, as the whole book though well done does feel a bit rushed). Maybe part two. That aside, I did thoroughly enjoy reading this. Hopefully there will be more like it!

An overview of horror movies from "*Night of the Living Dead*" (1968) and covering most of the main horror movies from the 1960s and 70s. He discusses "*Rosemary's Baby*", "*Carrie*", "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*", "*Last House on the Left*", "*Halloween*" and the directors and writers behind them. This is well-written, VERY entertaining and (at 238 pages) short. Some of the stories I knew but Zinoman tells them in such an entertaining fashion I didn't mind reading them again. What's very interesting is how it chronicles the directors' early lives to see what influenced them. It also gets into their fights and accusations against each other. I LOVED reading this. HOWEVER I do have a few minor complaints. He complains about the end of the movie "*Psycho*" saying we didn't need an explanation. I disagree. He also complains about Hitchcock keeping it in. Hitchcock didn't write "*Psycho*"--Robert Bloch did. Blame him. I also disagree with his views on "*Carrie*". While I don't disagree that it's an important movie calling it operatic is a little bit ridiculous. I think that chapter was a little weak. And also, Stephen King DOESN'T like the character of Carrie and it comes through loud and clear in the book. Zinoman seems to think he does. Still, these are small complaints. The rest of the book is just great! One last complaint--it was too short! I wanted it to keep going. I'd love to see what Zinoman thinks of the "*Scream*" films (which he mentions only in passing) and the "*Friday the 13th*" series (which he doesn't mention at all!). Basically this is a must-read for all horror fans--and all NON-horror fans!

A great read about the history of horror movies! Reading this book, I also saw the original "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*" movie (mentioned in this book). I will never sleep again.

This is a well written, "behind-the-scenes" history of the rise of horror cinema. I'll admit that I never really "got" slasher flicks, or even enjoyed them much, until this book provided additional perspective. I'd always been more interested in plot-heavy, suspenseful style horror - but learning the history behind the rise of the genre, and its creators, changed that. If you're a fan of horror films of any time, are a film buff, or enjoy the history of pop-culture/film, I'd recommend the book.

Jason Zinoman's *Shock Value*: (tedious explanatory subtitle) is a fun and illuminating read for those interested in independent or cult film of the 1970's, but moreover is required reading for fans of the horror genre. If you're like me, a film fanatic with a thing for late-twentieth century horror, fantasy, and sci-fi, who tries to temper his obsession with a pragmatic bias towards watching the "best" and leaving the "rest", then you will find *Shock Value* an indispensable help. Not only is it a film guide for that pivotal point in horror film history, but it clocks all the various indices you would expect from a well-written history; from the funny insider anecdotes, to the ever-changing American psychological landscape, to the collateral social and political unrest of the Vietnam era followed by the neo-50's of the Reagan era. It retraces the genre's steps from the drive-in monster movies Hollywood churned out in the 1950's all the way to the ultra-brutal "New Horror" of today, illustrating how certain key auteurs connected those dots one film at a time... and how we as the film-going public played both cat and mouse in shaping those supply and demand impulses. This is a cool book. I hope Mr. Zinoman is a permanent fixture in the worlds of both film studies and film fanaticism - he seems equally comfortable in both.

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