

HORROR

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POPULAR HORROR

Horror fiction intends to provoke an emotional response from the reader, namely one of fear. Horror can encompass everything from ghosts to vampires to zombies to human monsters, but in general, these dark books are highly atmospheric and often delve into the supernatural. They don't always have happy endings and can be very gory but not always. Some horror novels start slowly and methodically build up to their inevitable conclusion while others immerse readers in the horrific elements from the start. The most popular horror writers have been famous for decades and have written bestsellers that have inspired notable film and TV adaptations.

Stephen King

King is, well, the King of Horror and has been since the 1970s, though he also writes in other genres, like dark fantasy, suspense, and science fiction. In King's accessible, compelling, atmospheric, fast-paced horror novels, his engaging, complex protagonists battle horrific evil. His books also tend to feature seemingly ordinary settings, usually in Maine, that gradually build into something awful and disturbing. King also writes more viscerally gruesome horror under the pseudonym Richard Bachman. Start with *The Shining*.

If you like Stephen King:

- Dean R. Koontz
- Joe Hill
- Justin Cronin
- Nick Cutter
- Grady Hendrix
- Josh Malerman
- Sarah Pinborough
- Andrew Pyper
- John Ajvide Lindqvist
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Tananarive Due
- Dan Simmons
- Thomas Harris
- Richard Chizmar

Dean Koontz

Koontz started writing science fiction in the 1960s before pivoting to his more popular horror and suspense work in the 1970s. His work blends multiple genres, particularly suspense and horror, though also fantasy and thriller. His atmospheric, suspenseful, fast-paced novels feature likable characters, often with paranormal abilities, battling evil. Start with his standalone novel *Watchers*.

If you like Dean Koontz:

- F. Paul Wilson
- Stephen Graham Jones
- John Saul
- Stephen King
- Jonathan Maberry
- Joe Hill
- Douglas Preston

Anne Rice

Rice wrote in numerous genres, including even religious fiction, but she remains best known for her haunting, eerie, gothic Vampire Chronicles series. Her detailed, elegant, atmospheric vampire novels often are set in her native New Orleans and blend horror with paranormal romance, historical fiction, and dark fantasy. Her vampires are complex and troubled, and her books often feature erotica elements as well. Start with *Interview with a Vampire*.

If you like Anne Rice:

- J. Sheridan Le Fanu
- Elizabeth Kostova
- Alma Katsu
- Chelsea Quinn Yarbro
- Sarah Perry
- Tananarive Due
- Laurell K. Hamilton
- Charlaine Harris
- Kim Harrison
- Kelley Armstrong

Frank Peretti

Peretti's Christian horror novels generated a lot of buzz in the 1980s and 1990s and remain popular. Usually set in the Pacific Northwest, his dark, tense, compelling, fast-paced books depict battles of good versus evil, wherein protagonists triumph through their Christian faith. Unlike many other horror books, Peretti's work does not feature profanity or sexual content, though they can be quite violent and gory. Start with *This Present Darkness*.

If you like Frank Peretti:

- Tim LaHaye
- Ted Dekker
- Jerry B. Jenkins

Bentley Little

Little's plot-driven, fast-paced horror encompasses everything within the genre from vampires to haunted houses and more. He often presents seemingly mundane and ordinary events and characters, which quickly devolve into something horrific and abnormal. The horror elements in his work, as well as the violence and sexual content, can be graphic and disturbing. His work also usually features isolated, vivid settings, often in the American Southwest. Start with *The Mailman*.

If you like Bentley Little:

- John Saul
- Stephen King

Peter Straub

Staub's highly atmospheric, suspenseful, fast-paced horror about interesting characters in seemingly everyday situations that are anything but have been spooking readers since the 1970s, though he also writes in other genres. His work often involves ghosts and/or the supernatural and can be very disturbing and violent. Start with *Ghost Story*.

If you like Peter Straub:

- John Saul
- Stephen King
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- Dean Koontz
- Clive Barker
- Joe Hill
- Bentley Little

Blast from the Past

John Saul hasn't released new books in years, but his horror novels were especially popular in the 1980s, when he became well-known for his books about evil children and teenagers. His compelling work is fast-paced, plot-driven, and highly atmospheric and often violent and gory. Start with *Faces of Fear*.

Already like Saul's work?

- Peter Straub
- Dean R. Koontz
- Bentley Little
- V. C. Andrews
- Stephen King
- Douglas Preston
- Joe Hill

Branching out from Popular Horror

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- 21st century horror (Grady Hendrix, Stephen Graham Jones, Joe Hill)
- Gothic horror (Shirley Jackson)
- Historical horror (Dan Simmons)
- Weird fiction (H. P. Lovecraft)
- Mythical fantasy (Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Seanan McGuire)
- Paranormal romance (Laurell K. Hamilton, Christine Feehan, Kelley Armstrong, Charlaine Harris, J. R. Ward, Sherrilyn Kenyon, Jeaniene Frost)
- Urban fantasy (Patricia Briggs, Jim Butcher)
- Supernatural thrillers (John Connolly, F. Paul Wilson, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Childs)
- Gothic historical fiction (Elizabeth Kostova)
- Suspense (Riley Sager)

21ST CENTURY HORROR

A newer generation of horror writers first became famous in the 21st century. They follow many of the same conventions of the genre that their predecessors did, but they also often include homages to earlier works and showcase diverse perspectives.

Grady Hendrix

Hendrix's darkly funny books blend horror and satire and often feature clever throwbacks to classic horror films and books from the 1970s and 1980s. His atmospheric, nostalgic work also features strong female protagonists and a heavy dose of suspense and menace in seemingly normal situations. Start with *How to Sell a Haunted House*.

If you like Grady Hendrix:

- Stephen King
- Riley Sager
- Rachel Harrison
- Paul Tremblay
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Joe Hill
- T. Kingfisher
- Catriona Ward
- Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- Nat Cassidy
- Adam Cesare
- Simone St. James

Stephen Graham Jones

Jones's atmospheric, experimental, disturbing, gruesome, darkly funny, fast-paced, character-driven work is primarily horror, though he also often dabbles in other genres, including thrillers, crime fiction, and speculative fiction. A member of the Blackfeet tribe, Jones often incorporates Native American characters and storylines into his novels. He also often includes standard horror figures, like vampires and werewolves and slashers, but in highly unique ways. Start with *The Buffalo Hunter Hunter* for vampires, *Mongrels* for werewolves, and *I Was A Teenage Slasher* for slashers.

If you like Stephen Graham Jones:

- Dan Simmons
- Catriona Ward
- Silvia Moreno Garcia
- Victor LaValle
- Stephen King
- Joe Hill
- Dean R. Koontz
- Clive Barker
- Peter Straub
- Nat Cassidy
- Paul Tremblay
- Grady Hendrix
- T. Kingfisher
- Gabino Iglesias

T. Kingfisher

Kingfisher writes both dark fantasy and horror, often with a strong Southern gothic flavor. Her gritty, atmospheric, haunting, creepy work is descriptive and darkly funny and often has an ecological component. Start with *A House with Good Bones*.

If you like T. Kingfisher:

- Jeff VanderMeer
- Kelly Link
- Alix E. Harrow
- Seanan McGuire
- Edgar Allan Poe
- Grady Hendrix
- Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Joe Hill

Hill's chilling work features likeably flawed characters battling supernatural evil in seemingly ordinary situations that rapidly become anything but normal. Comparisons to his father, Stephen King, are perhaps inevitable, but Hill is very much his own writer. His tense, atmospheric, gruesome work usually features contemporary settings and can incorporate other genres, particularly fantasy. Start with *Heart-Shaped Box*.

If you like Joe Hill:

- Stephen King
- Victor LaValle
- Peter Abrahams
- Tom Piccirilli
- Ania Ahlborn

Paul Tremblay

Tremblay's atmospheric, character-driven novels blend supernatural horror with intense psychological suspense. His complex work, as is true of many horror novels, introduces a seemingly normal situation that is actually filled with menace and dread. He is also known for his witty, sophisticated prose. Start with *The Cabin at the End of the World*.

If you like Paul Tremblay:

- Grady Hendrix
- Stephen King
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Joe Hill
- Catriona Ward
- Jennifer McMahon
- Josh Malerman
- Nat Cassidy
- Nick Cutter
- Alma Katsu
- Sarah Pinborough

Jennifer McMahon

McMahon's novels blend the genres of crime thriller and supernatural horror. Her suspenseful, atmospheric work is often set in rural Vermont and frequently focuses on complex female protagonists with dark pasts. The past itself often looms large over the stories in these books. Start with *The Winter People*.

If you like Jennifer McMahon:

- Paul Tremblay
- Ruth Ware
- Riley Sager
- Mary Kubica
- Simone St. James
- Chevy Stevens
- David Bell
- Amy Engel
- Miranda Beverly Whitemore

Max Brooks

Brooks, the son of acting legends Mel Brooks and Anne Bancroft, writes well-researched zombie apocalypse stories for both adults and teens. His thoughtful, perceptive work blends imaginative horror with a plausible sense of reality. Start with *World War Z*.

If you like Max Brooks:

- Daniel H. Wilson
- Stephen King
- Joe Hill
- Jonathan Maberry
- Richard Matheson
- Seanan McGuire

Nick Cutter

Horror meets science fiction in books by Cutter, the pen name of author Craig Davidson. His dark work often explores global biological threats and blends bloody, gruesome horror with psychological suspense, usually focusing on a potentially exciting adventure that goes horribly wrong. Start with *The Troop*.

If you like Nick Cutter:

- Stephen King
- Andrew Pyper
- Mira Grant
- Ania Ahlborn
- Scott Sigler

Josh Malerman

Malerman's unique, offbeat work blends horror with influences as varied as weird fiction (more on that at the end of the booklet), science fiction, and thrillers. His surreal, atmospheric, unsettling novels often feature complex female protagonists and experimental nonlinear plots. Start with *Bird Box*.

If you like Josh Malerman:

- Stephen King
- H. P. Lovecraft
- Paul Tremblay
- Joe Hill
- Grady Hendrix
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Catriona Ward
- Nick Cutter
- Chuck Wendig
- Alma Katsu
- Zoje Stage

Blast from the Past

Justin Cronin started writing in the early 1990s, initially focusing on well-regarded literary fiction, before pivoting to horror in the 2010s. His dark, bleak horror novels apply a literary sensibility to the genre—his leisurely paced, character-driven work often features complex narrative structures and elegant prose—while also offering vivid, atmospheric worldbuilding and disturbing violence. Start with *The Passage*, the first book in a trilogy about virus-infected vampires.

Already like Cronin's work?

- Stephen King
- Joe Hill
- Hugh Howey
- Blake Crouch
- Chuck Wendig
- Emily St. John Mandel
- George R. R. Martin
- Margaret Atwood

Branching out from 21st Century Horror

Like newer horror but interested in trying other genres?

- Popular horror (Stephen King, Anne Rice)
- Gothic horror (Shirley Jackson, Joan Lindsay)
- Historical horror (Victor LaValle, Tananarive Due, Alma Katsu)
- Weird fiction (Jeff VanderMeer)
- Mythical fantasy (Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Seanan McGuire)
- Paranormal romance (Laurell K. Hamilton, Christine Feehan, Kelley Armstrong, Charlaine Harris, J. R. Ward, Sherrilyn Kenyon, Jeaniene Frost)
- Urban fantasy (Patricia Briggs, Jim Butcher)
- Supernatural thrillers (John Connolly, F. Paul Wilson, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Childs)
- Gothic historical fiction (Elizabeth Kostova)
- Suspense (Riley Sager)
- Science fiction (Adrian Tchaikovsky, Greg Bear)

GOTHIC HORROR

Gothic horror developed in the 1700s and 1800s and emphasizes an aesthetic of dread and fear. Gothic novels often have distinctive, eerie settings—haunted houses, abandoned castles, etc.—and brooding characters. The supernatural is often a part of gothic horror, but it also has a heavy emphasis on psychological horror and, as a result, tends to be much less gory and violent than more conventional horror fiction. Many classic gothic novels are now also considered classic literature.

Edgar Allan Poe

Poe didn't have a particularly long career as a writer, but his pioneering influence on a range of genres, including horror, has continued long after his mysterious death. Poe's dark, highly atmospheric, intense, fast-paced gothic short stories and poems explore the psyches of deranged and unhinged protagonists firsthand in elegant, descriptive prose. Start with *Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*.

If you like Edgar Allan Poe:

- Mary Shelley
- Bram Stoker
- J. Sheridan Le Fanu
- Henry James
- T. Kingfisher
- Justin C. Key
- Carmen Maria Machado

Mary Shelley

Like many classic gothic authors listed here, Shelley is best known for a single work, but her masterpiece *Frankenstein* helped cement the then-maligned genre of gothic horror as being more than just cheap thrills. The highly atmospheric book tells a tragically horrific tale while also thoughtfully exploring deeper themes about belonging and personal responsibility. Start with *Frankenstein*.

If you like Mary Shelley:

- Edgar Allan Poe
- Robert Louis Stevenson
- Bram Stoker
- H. G. Wells
- Ursula K. Le Guin
- Victor LaValle
- Ahmad Sa'dawi
- Cassandra Khaw

V. C. Andrews

In the 1980s, Andrews became famous for her fiction, which blends gothic horror with family sagas. They remain popular enough for ghostwriters to have continued her work long after her death. Andrews' suspenseful, compelling, fast-paced novels focus on teenaged protagonists trapped in disturbing family situations that they seek to escape. There can be supernatural elements, and other times, the threats are all-too-human. The books often focus on sexual situations and abuse. Start with *Flowers in the Attic*.

If you like V. C. Andrews:

- Kay Hooper
- John Saul
- Kate Morton
- Shirley Jackson
- Stephen King
- Joe Hill

Bram Stoker

Stoker didn't write the first vampire novel, but he certainly wrote the most iconic one when he penned *Dracula*, the best-known of his work. It differs substantially from its many popular adaptations and remains haunting, atmospheric, and eerie. Start with *Dracula*.

If you like Mary Shelley:

- Edgar Allan Poe
- J. Sheridan Le Fanu
- Anne Rice

Shirley Jackson

Jackson's psychologically intense gothic horror stories are rarely explicitly violent, but they are disturbing and deeply probe the human psyche. Her atmospheric, eerie work focuses on well-drawn female characters and relate intricate stories in sophisticated prose, often through unreliable narrators. She is also known for her vividly depicted settings, often isolated communities or mansions. Start with *The Haunting of Hill House*.

If you like Shirley Jackson:

- Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- Ray Bradbury
- Catriona Ward
- Alma Katsu
- Joan Lindsay
- Richard Matheson
- Paul Tremblay
- Sarah Langan
- Monica Ojeda
- Carmen Maria Machado

Blast from the Past

Like many of the other gothic horror writers in this booklet, Joan Lindsay's claim to fame largely rests on one novel, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The haunting, atmospheric, ambiguous gothic historical horror depicts the mysterious disappearance of several Australian schoolgirls on a school outing during the Edwardian period and explores the devastating aftermath in elegant, ethereal prose. The book also features a strong sense of place, well-researched historical details, and thought-provoking themes. Start with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Already like Lindsay's work?

- Shirley Jackson
- Elizabeth Kostova
- Peter Carey

Branching out from Gothic Horror?

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Popular horror (Anne Rice)
- 21st century horror (T. Kingfisher)
- Historical horror (Alma Katsu)
- Weird fiction (H. P. Lovecraft)
- Gothic historical fiction (Kate Morton, Sarah Perry, Sarah Penner, Elizabeth Kostova)
- Gothic classics (Daphne du Maurier, the Brontë sisters)
- Mythical fantasy with gothic elements (Silvia Moreno-Garcia)

HISTORICAL HORROR

Historical horror blends horror with historical fiction. These novels often feature well-researched, accurate period details and can be based on real events as well but combined with imaginative supernatural elements. They can range tonally from gory, gruesome slasher fiction to more subtle and psychological gothic horror. Many other writers in this booklet have written horror with historical settings, including Stephen King and Anne Rice, but the authors featured here are especially well-known for their vivid historical settings and their thematic examinations of them through a horror lens.

Victor LaValle

LaValle doesn't always write historical horror, but some of his best-known work has historical settings, ranging from 1910s Montana to the Harlem Renaissance. LaValle's unusual work often features offbeat characters and tonally combines the ridiculous and surreal with the horrific. His atmospheric historical horror frequently explores African American history and has a wry sense of humor and elegant prose. Start with *The Ballad of Black Tom*, a dark magical tale set in 1920s Harlem, or *Lone Woman*, a horror Western that follows a Black woman as she makes a homesteading claim in Montana and tries to escape her past.

If you like Victor LaValle:

- Stephen King
- Paul Tremblay
- Tananarive Due
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- Mary Shelley
- Joe Hill
- P. Djèlí Clark
- Nnedi Okorafor
- N. K. Jemisin

Tananarive Due

Due's work often blends contemporary storylines with historic ones. Her atmospheric, fast-paced, suspenseful work blends African American history with supernatural horror. Her books feature vivid historical settings, complex characters, a distinct sense of menace, and a strong social consciousness. Start with *The Reformatory*, set in a Jim Crow-era reform school.

If you like Tananarive Due:

- Octavia Butler
- Victor LaValle
- Clive Barker
- Stephen King
- Neena Viel
- Anne Rice

Alma Katsu

Katsu started her career writing spy thrillers, after a career working in intelligence, before pivoting to writing historical horror. Her work features real-life historical events, ranging from the *Titanic* to WWII-era internment camps, with a supernatural twist. Her books feature lyrical, vivid prose and a strong sense of time and place and include a strong psychological element of horror alongside the supernatural. Start with *The Hunger*, which presents a supernatural twist on the notoriously ill-fated Donner Party.

If you like Alma Katsu:

- Shirley Jackson
- Cassandra Khaw
- Anne Rice
- Paul Tremblay
- Catriona Ward
- T. Kingfisher
- Grady Hendrix
- Stephen Graham Jones

Blast from the Past

Dan Simmons started his career as a well-regarded science fiction writer before shifting to writing historical horror, which is what he became best known for. His fast-paced but detailed work features compelling storylines, engaging characters, gory horror, and a strong sense of place and time. He often blends gritty horror with real-life historical events, which are well-researched. Start with *The Terror*, which presents a supernatural twist to the ill-fated 19th century Arctic Franklin expedition.

Already like Simmons's work?

- Stephen King
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Cassandra Khaw

Branching out from Historical Horror

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Popular horror with historical settings (Stephen King, Anne Rice)
- 21st century horror with historical settings (Stephen Graham Jones)
- Gothic horror (Joan Lindsay, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker)
- Historical gothic fiction (Elizabeth Kostova, Sarah Perry, Sarah Penner, Kate Morton)
- Mythical fantasy with historical settings (Silvia Moreno-Garcia)
- Weird fiction (H. P. Lovecraft)

WEIRD FICTION

Weird fiction blends horror with mythical fantasy and science fiction and often strives to be disorienting as well as horrific. The term weird fiction was popularized by H. P. Lovecraft. He remains a strong influence on modern weird fiction writers, whom are often called New Weird writers, though Lovecraft himself credited Edgar Allan Poe as the true pioneer of the genre. Weird fiction frequently avoids more conventional horror genre monsters like ghosts, vampires, and werewolves in favor of more bizarre, primordial figures. It often features experimental narrative techniques, which can heighten the disorienting affect weird fiction writers are cultivating.

Jeff VanderMeer

VanderMeer's highly original weird fiction work blends dark fantasy with horror and science fiction. His bleak, complex novels feature grotesque, elaborate worldbuilding full of strange characters. VanderMeer's novels often rely on experimental narrative forms and unreliable narrators as he relates his tales in elegant, sophisticated prose. Start with *Annihilation*, the first book in his Southern Reach trilogy.

If you like Jeff VanderMeer:

- China Mieville
- Gene Wolfe
- T. Kingfisher
- Catherynne M. Valente
- Jorge Luis Borges
- N. K. Jemisin
- Ann Leckie

H. P. Lovecraft

H. P. Lovecraft wrote his classic work in the early 20th century, but his atmospheric, leisurely paced, unusual fiction still is frightening readers today. His fiction frequently depicts ancient, mythical cosmic horrors and human characters who struggle to grapple psychologically with what they're experiencing, all slowly building into a horrific finale. Lovecraft is not a particularly gory writer, especially compared to other horror writers, but his vivid, detailed work still has a markedly disturbing, uneasy sense of menace. Start with *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, an anthology collecting select short stories and novels.

If you like H. P. Lovecraft:

- Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- Josh Malerman
- Robert W. Chambers

Blast from the Past

China Mieville writes weird fiction that incorporates both magic and science into horror in unusual, inventive ways. His dark, atmospheric, disturbing work features dense, lyrical prose; thoughtful themes; and complex narrative structures. His well-realized settings also often involve elaborate cities. Start with *Kraken*.

Already like Mieville's work?

- José Saramago
- Jeff VanderMeer
- Ann Leckie
- Christopher Priest
- Frank Herbert
- John Crowley
- Neal Stephenson
- Catherynne M. Valente

Branching out from Weird Fiction

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- 21st century horror (Josh Malerman, T. Kingfisher, Joe Hill)
- Mythical fantasy with weird fiction elements (Silvia Moreno-Garcia)

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207 S. Springfield Street
Berryville, AR 72616
870-423-2323