

# Aliens, Cowboys, Monsters, Private Eyes - Video Collection Development in Popular Culture

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Beginning in the 1930s academic study of American culture took on a new significance and within that study a focus on popular culture occurred. Popular culture may be defined as those expressions, customs, or objects that gain popularity among masses of people. It generally includes popular literature, sports, religion, movies, music, radio, television, politics, hobbies, and numerous other things that Americans enjoy.

The urbanization and industrialization of the United States in the late nineteenth century created a mass society which in turn fostered a popular culture based on large new ethnic populations, compulsory free education, and new forms of communications. Urbanization continued into the twentieth century and with the development and perfection of phonograph recordings, motion pictures, radio, and television, popular culture in all its aspects became a powerful force in instilling values and shaping American society.

The importance of popular culture as a social force in American society makes it important for academic study. While some scholars reject serious research of such things as detective fiction, westerns, rock music, science fiction or films because their content is superficial or shallow, the fact remains that millions of Americans absorb and enjoy these things. If popular literature, songs, music, film, television programs, and commercials affect such large numbers of Americans, then the study and analysis of those elements and their impact fosters a greater understanding of American society. Such study permits scholars to explore the inside and real working processes of American culture.

In view of the importance of popular culture in explaining American society its inclusion in school and college curricula is

legitimate. The study of popular culture needs to be more than the subject of scholarly research. Indeed, the scholar's efforts need to be transmitted to students and other interested persons. Popular culture may be used in established humanities or social science courses as well as those that deal with business, industrial technology, architecture or other subjects. Some colleges have specific courses in popular culture while others have developed majors or minors in it.

Libraries have a special role in promoting the study of popular culture through collection development. These collections may range across the whole spectrum of popular culture or be limited to one area or one type of material or media. The recent technological development of video tape and disc recorders makes the collection and use of feature films economically feasible, and the availability of material in this medium offers numerous possibilities for the study of American popular culture. The thousands of films that Hollywood has produced provide a storehouse of information on American culture and society. They may be divided into categories or genres and studied for their aesthetic or artistic values. They may be viewed as reflections of American society at the time they were made or as a window through which one can see Hollywood's perception of society. Perhaps they even offer a glimpse into the culture's future.

The following list of video feature films is presented to assist librarians in the development of video collections in the area of popular culture. Four film categories are included—Science Fiction, Western, Horror, and Detective. Hollywood has produced numerous films in each area. An effort has been made to select representative films that show both the genre's development and provide material helpful in understanding American culture. Selections were made on a basis of what authorities in each area believe are good films. On the other hand exclusion of important films in some of the areas occurred because they were not available in video format. *The Video Source Book*, 5th ed. (Syosset, N.Y.: The National Video Clearing House, 1983) was used to determine the availability of films.

Entries in each category include title, selected credits, date of release, studio, a synopsis, video format, and source of purchase information. The code for the video format is:

B—Beta

V—VHS

LV—Laser optical video disc

CED—Capacitance electronic disc

$\frac{3}{4}$ U— $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch U-matic cassette

A list of addresses for the firms that supply video tapes and discs is provided at the end of the article.



## Science Fiction

Science fiction films have been an important Hollywood staple during the past fifty years. While a few such films were made in the silent era Hollywood produced several hundred between 1930 and the 1980s. These films range from space adventures to horror tales. Some are utopian stories about the future while others depict the disastrous effects of humankind's present actions. Most reveal change—often constant, rapid and overwhelming change.

The quality of science fiction films varies almost as much as the subject matter. Some are unbelievably shallow and silly in content and weak in production values. Others, with strong stories, good scripts, acting and editing provide fast-paced and exciting entertainment.

In addition to their entertainment values science fiction films have other uses. They stir imagination, stimulate thinking about the future and prompt consideration of the effects of present action upon that future. In some instances they may predict the future; certainly, they reflect the times in which they were made. Any one or all of these aspects of science fiction films may be considered in their academic study.

The following science fiction films represent a small portion of the several hundred films made between 1930 and 1980. An attempt has been made to select the best of the genre within the limits of what is currently available in the video format. Most of the selection comes from the period following 1950 since that has been the period of greatest production.

*Things to Come* (London Films, 1936, British), 130 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Alexander Korda; director, William Cameron Menzies; screenplay, H. G. Wells and Lajos Biro based on the book *The Shape of Things to Come* by H. G. Wells.

Cast: Raymond Massey, Ralph Richardson, Cedric Hardwicke,

Margaretta Scott.

An epic morality tale of Everytown, from 1936 to 2036. Following a devastating war, the world has been rebuilt into a calm and secure place until its peace is disturbed by radical factions who insist that man is not meant to venture into outer space.

Format: B, V.

Available: Media Home Entertainment; Video Yesteryear; Budget Video; Shiek Video; Cable Films; Video Connections; Discount Video Tapes; Cinema Concepts.

*Rocketship X-M* (Lippert Pictures, Inc., 1950, USA), 77 minutes, B/W.

Producer, director, script, Kurt Newman.

Cast: Lloyd Bridges, Ona Massen, John Emery, Noah Berry, Jr., Hugh O'Brian, Morris Ankrum.

A rocket ship from Earth heads for the moon but lands on Mars by mistake. Before it can return safely the crew encounters Martians who try to destroy the earthlings.

Format: B, V,  $\frac{3}{4}$  U.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant.

*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Fox, 1951, USA), 92 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Julian Blaustein; director, Robert Wise; script, Edmund North from the story "Farewell to Master" by Harry Bates; special effects, Fred Sersen.

Cast: Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, Sam Jaffe, Hugh Marlowe, Billy Gray, Frances Bavier.

A humanoid alien and a robot visit Earth to warn humanity about the folly of atomic war and self-destruction. In the end the earthlings kill the humanoid and the robot carries him back aboard the space ship. An entertaining film.

Format: B, V.

Available: CBS/Fox Video.

*When Worlds Collide* (Paramount, 1951, USA), 93 minutes, color.

Producer: George Pal; director, Rudolf Mate; script, Sidney Boehm from the novel by Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie; special effects, Gordon Jennings and Harry Barndollar.

Cast: Richard Derr, Barbara Rush, Peter Hanson, John Hoyt, Larry Keating, Judith Ames.



An imaginative tale of scientists racing against time to build a rocket ship so that a few human colonists can escape the impending destruction of the Earth. The film won an Oscar for its special effects.

Format: B, V, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video.

*Forbidden Planet* (MGM, 1956; USA), 98 minutes, color.

Producer: Nicholas Nayfack; director, Fred McLeod Wilcox; script, Cyril Hume from a story by Irving Block and Alan Adler; special effects, A. Arnold Gillespie, Warren Newcombe, Irving G. Ries, and Joshua Meador.

Cast: Walter Pidgeon, Anne Francis, Leslie Nielsen, Warren Stevens, Jack Kelly, Earl Holliman.

In 2200, a U.S. Patrol ship lands on Altair-4 where scientist Morbius and his daughter Alta, survivors of an earlier landing party, lead an idyllic life. Morbius' work has been a study of a fascinating race of super beings: the planets' former inhabitants, the Krel. Why were they destroyed mysteriously and violently on the eve of their crowning scientific achievement? Morbius must find the answer before the newcomers meet the same fate. Plot based loosely on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Format: B, V, LV, CED.

Available: MGM/UA Home Video.

*Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (Toho, 1956, Japan), 80 minutes, B/W.

Producer: Tomoyuki Tanaka; director, Ishiro Honda; script, Tadeo Murato and Inoshrio Honda from a story by Shigero Kayama; special effects, Eiji Tsuburaya.

Cast: Raymond Burr, Takashi Shimura, Momoko Kochi, Akira Takarada, Akohito Hiratal, Sachio Sakai.

The first Japanese monster film in which the 400-foot-tall Godzilla takes thirty minutes to destroy Tokyo with his giant claws, tail, and radioactive breath. Special effects are excellent. Originally produced for Japanese audiences in 1954, American scenes and Raymond Burr were added for audiences in the United States.

Format: B, V, LV, CED.

Available: Vestron Video.

*This Island Earth* (Universal, 1955, USA), 86 minutes, color.

Producer, William Alland; director, Joseph Newman; script, Franklin Coen, Edward O'Callaghan based on the novel by Raymond F. Jones.

Cast: Jeff Morrow, Rex Reason, Faith Domergue, Lance Fuller, Russell Johnson.

Aliens kidnap two of Earth's best scientists to help them save their planet Metaluna from destruction in an interplanetary war. The special effects are excellent.

Format: B, V.

Available: MCA Home Video.

*The Time Machine* (MGM, 1960, USA), 103 minutes, color.

Producer, George Pal; director, George Pal; script, David Duncan, based on a novel by H. G. Wells; special effects, Gene Warren, Tim Barr.

Cast: Rod Taylor, Yvette Mimieux, Alan Young, Sebastian Cabot, Tom Helmore, Whit Bissell.

A turn of the century scientist invents a time machine which lands him in the year 802,701. There he discovers the Eloi, a gentle race of people who are terrorized by a civilization of grotesque ape-like creatures, the Morlocks, who live underground. Won an academy award for special effects.

Format: B, V.

Available: MGM/UA Home Video.

*Planet of the Apes* (Fox, 1968, USA), 112 minutes, color.

Producer, Arthur P. Jacobs; director, Franklin J. Schaffner; script, Rod Sterling and Michael Wilson from the novel *Monkey Planet* by Pierre Boulle; special effects, L. B. Abbott, Art Cruickshank and Emil Kosa, Jr.

Cast: Charlton Heston, Roddy McDowell, Kim Hunter, Maurice Evans, James Whitmore, Robert Gunner.

Astronauts crash on planet in which apes rule and humans are slaves. Gradually, the surviving astronaut (Charlton Heston) realizes that the planet is not a new one but Earth in the far future.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: CBS/Fox Video.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* (MGM, 1968, US/British), 160 minutes, color.

Producer/director, Stanley Kubrick; script, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clark; special effects, Stanley Kubrick, Wally Veevers, Douglas Trumbull, Con Pederson, Tom Howard.

Cast: Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood, William Sylvester, Douglas Rain, Dan Richter, Leonard Rossiter.

Mysterious monoliths scattered through the universe lead prehistoric apemen to intelligence and then direct and draw human beings deep into space to rebirth as a "star child."

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: MGM/VA Home Video.

*The Andromeda Strain* (Universal, 1971, USA), 130 minutes, color.

Producer/director, Robert Wise; script, Nelson Gidding from the novel by Michael Crichton; special effects, Douglas Trumbull, James Shourt.

Cast: Arthur Hill, David Wayne, James Olson, Paula Kelly, George Mitchell, Kate Reid.

An American satellite crashes in New Mexico and releases deadly germs from outer space, which kill all but two residents of a small town. They are quarantined while doctors and scientists work to prevent the bacterium's escape and the death of humanity.

Format: B, V.

Available: MCA Home Video

*THX 1138* (Warner Brothers, 1971, USA), 88 minutes, color.

Executive producer, Francis Ford Coppola; producer, Lawrence Sturhahn; director, George Lucas; script, George Lucas and Walter Murch from a story by Lucas.

Cast: Robert Duvall, Donald Pleasence, Don Pedro Colley, Maggie McOmie, Ian Wolf, Marshall Efron.

A pessimistic look into a sterile and inhumane future. Set in the 25th century the film revolves around a man and a woman who rebel against their rigidly controlled society.

Format: B, V.

Available: Warner Home Video.

*Logans Run* (MGM, 1976, USA), 118 minutes, color.

Producer: Saul David; director, Michael Anderson; script, David Zelag Goodman from the novel by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson; special effects, L. B. Abbott.

Cast: Michael York, Jenny Agutter, Richard Jordan, Roscoe Lee Browne, Farrah Fawcett-Majors, Peter Ustinov.

This film portrays life in the 23rd century as a hedonistic exercise where no one is allowed to live past age 30. Michael York is Logan, a member of the Death Squad, whose job it is to eliminate anyone trying to escape execution. When Logan himself faces the approach of "Lastday," he seeks refuge outside the doomed city.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: MGM/UA Home Video.

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* - special edition (Columbia/EMI, 1977, USA), 152 minutes, color.

Producers Julia and Michael Phillips; director/script, Stephen Spielberg; special effects, Douglas Trumbull.

Cast: Richard Dreyfuss, Francois Truffaut, Teri Garr, Melinda Dillon, Carey Guffey, Bob Balaban.

Aliens make contact with selected earthlings who become obsessed with a mountain imprinted on their minds. The story tells of one man's search for the mountain and the encounter he and others have with the aliens.

Format: B, V, LV.

Available: RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video.

*Star Wars* (Fox 1977, USA), 121 minutes, color.

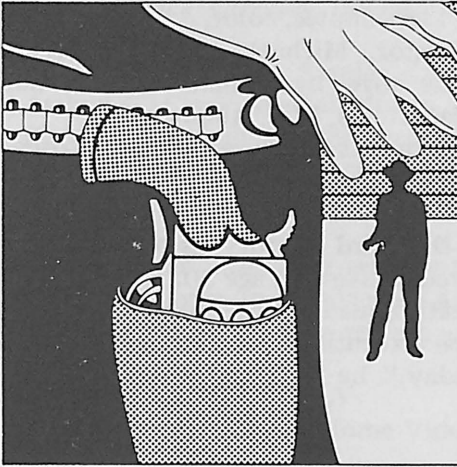
Producer: Gary Kurtz; director/script, George Lucas; special effects supervisor, John Dykstra.

Cast: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, Alec Guinness, Anthony Daniels.

A King Arthur-and-cowboy western formula film both wrapped up together as a space thriller. The film has plenty of action and dazzling special effects. Good and evil are pitted against each other and of course good comes out the winner.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: CBS/Fox Video.



## Western

Hollywood has produced more westerns than any other film genre. In fact, the first one, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), set the pattern for the thousands that followed. These have ranged in plot from the standard action adventures with shootouts, fist fights, and chases to tense psychological dramas. They all in one way or another glorify and romanticize America's frontier past. Likewise, they reflect, perhaps more than any other genre, American society and values. Indeed, they often simplify and distort those values, but in so doing they reveal society to an even greater depth. Evidence of this simplicity and distortion appear in westerns possessing morality play plots that depicted good triumphing over evil. Integral to those plots, of course, was the strong sturdy, Anglo-Saxon hero with a spotless character. This simplicity was standard in most westerns until the 1960s and 1970s when gray began to shade the black and white contrast of values as well as heroes and villains. The following list provides examples of the wide variety of sound westerns made in the period since 1930.

*The Big Show* (Republic, 1936, USA), 60 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Nat Levine; director, Mack V. Wright; script/story, Darrell and Stuart McGowan

Cast: Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette, Kay Hughes, Max Terhune, Sally Payne, William Newill.

Stuntman Gene Autry stands in for temperamental look-alike star when the studio needs the star to appear at the Texas Centennial. The film was actually shot in Dallas at the Centennial fairgrounds. A glossy low budget western with action, music, and comedy. It is a good example of a singing western.

Format: B, V.



Available: Video Connections; Shiek Video.

*Stagecoach* (United Artist, 1939, USA), 96 minutes, B/W.

Producer: Walter Wanger; director, John Ford; script, Dudley Nichols based on the story "Stage to Lordsburg" by Ernest Haycox.

Cast: Claire Trevor, John Wayne, Thomas Mitchell, George Bancroft, Andy Devine, John Carradine.

John Wayne stars as The Ringo Kid in this classic western, the first to introduce moral dilemmas and character studies into an action oriented plot. Eight previously unrelated people find their lives intertwined aboard a west bound stagecoach suddenly attacked by Indians.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: Vestron Video; RCA Video Discs; Cumberland Video.

*Red River* (Monterey/United Artists, 1948, USA), 125 minutes, B/W.

Producer/director, Howard Hawks; script, Borden Chase and Charles Schnee based on the story "The Chisholm Trail" (also titled "Red River") by Borden Chase.

Cast: John Wayne, Montgomery Clift, Joan Dru, Walter Brennan, Coleen Gray, John Ireland.

John Wayne carves a ranch out of desolate and worthless land and simultaneously brings up an orphan whom he adopts. When the son reaches adulthood, father, son, and cowboys drive a herd an impossible distance. Conflict develops between father and son.

Format: CED.

Available: RCA Video Discs.

*Texas to Bataan* (Monogram, 1942, USA) *Range Busters Series*, 56 minutes, B/W.

Producer, George Weeks; director, Robert Tansey; script, Arthur Hoerl.

Cast: John King, Dave Sharpe, Max Terhune, Marjorie Manners, Budd Buster, Kenne Duncan.

Prior to America's entry into World War II, the Range Busters take horses to the Phillipines for the U.S. Army. Both there and back in the states, they encounter Japanese spies. This film is one of the two dozen or so low budget westerns made that had World War II patriotic themes.

Format: B, V.

Available: Video Yesterday.

*Shane* (Paramount, 1953, USA), 118 minutes, color.

Producer/director, George Stevens; script, A. B. Guthrie, Jr., Jack Sher; story, Jack Shaefer.

Cast: Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin, Brandon DeWilde, Jack Palance, Ben Johnson.

Alan Ladd, a mysterious gunman, arriving out of nowhere, comes to the assistance of a homestead family terrorized by an aging rancher and his hired gun. Steven's direction shows an intellectual understanding of western archetypes, as well as the importance of the myth in American culture.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs.

*High Noon* (United Artists, 1952, USA), 85 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Stanley Kramer; director, Fred Zinnemann; script, Carl Foreman. (Tex Ritter signs the theme song.)

Cast: Gary Cooper, Thomas Mitchell, Lloyd Bridges, Katy Jurado, Grace Kelly, Otto Kruger.

A small town sheriff who, on the day of his marriage and scheduled retirement, learns that a criminal he convicted will be returning on the noon train for revenge. This classic western won four oscars.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: NTA Home Entertainment; RCA Video Discs.

*Johnny Guitar* (Republic, 1954, USA), 110 minutes, color.

Producer, Herbert, J. Yates; director, Nicholas Ray; script, Philip Jordan.

Cast: Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden, Scott Brady, Mercedes McCambridge, Ward Bond, Ben Cooper.

A psychological western and action picture that is also rich in content. *Johnny Guitar*, a notorious gunman, takes a job in a gambling house, hoping to forget his guns and earn a peaceful living playing the guitar. Vienna, the beautiful strong-willed owner, infuriates the ranchers of the area by buying up land along a proposed railroad right-of-way. Emma, a tough rancher, wants to do Vienna in. And it is around this conflict that explosive violence occurs. An unusual film with women playing the strong roles.

Format: B, V.

Available: NTA Home Entertainment; Cumberland Video.

*The Searchers* (C. V. Whitney/Warner Bros., 1956, USA), 119 minutes, color.

Producers, Merian C. Cooper, C. V. Whitney; director, John Ford; script, Frank S. Nugent; story, Alan LeMay.

Cast: John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles, Ward Bond, Natalie Wood, John Qualen.

John Wayne's family is killed by Indians and his niece (Natalie Wood) captured. He sets out, with two companions, to find and kill both her and her Indian captor, who defiled her. He searches for five years, but when he finds Wood he is unable to kill her. Instead he brings her home where she is accepted back into the family. This is a classic Wayne and John Ford film.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: Warner Home Video; RCA Video Discs; Cumberland Video.

*The Alamo* (United Artist, 1960, USA), 190 minutes, color.

Producer/director, John Wayne; script, James Edward Grant

Cast: John Wayne, Richard Widmark, Laurence Harvey, Richard Boone, Carlos Arruza, Frankie Avalon.

The epic story of the famous siege and battle in the Texas Revolution. John Wayne plays Davy Crockett. A lavish historical western.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: CBS/Fox Video; Cumberland Video.

*The Wild Bunch* (Warner Bros., 1969, USA), 140 minutes, color.

Producer, Phil Feldman; director, Sam Peckinpah; script, Walton Green and Sam Peckinpah based on a story by Walton Green and Roy Sickner.

Cast: William Holden, Ernest Borgnine, Robert Ryan, Edmond O'Brien, Warren Oates, Jaime Sanchez.

The story takes place in Mexico in 1913 when the country was engaged in a bloody counter revolution. "The Wild Bunch" are outlaws whose bloody exploits are legendary. The action is tense throughout with a level of violence that surpasses that in most westerns.

Format: B, V. CED.

Available; Warner Video; RCA Video Discs.

*Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (Universal, 1970, USA), 96 minutes, color.

Producer, Philip A. Waxman; director, Abraham Polonsky; script, Abraham Polonsky based on the story "Willie Boy" by Harry Lawton.

Cast: Robert Redford, Katherine Ross, Robert Blake, Susan Clark, Barry Sullivan, John Vernon.

Story of a young Indian whose search for romance leads to murder. Willie Boy returns home in accordance with dictates of his tribe to claim the maiden he had sought to marry months earlier when he was chased off by the girl's father. This time, during a clandestine meeting they are surprised by the father. A melee ensues, the father is fatally shot, and the two flee with a posse in hot pursuit.

Format: B, V.

Available: MCA Home Video.

*The Shootist* (Paramount, 1976, USA), 100 minutes, color.

Producer, M. J. Frankovich; director, Don Siegel; script, Miles Hood Swarthout and Scott Hale based on a story by Glen Swarthout.

Cast: John Wayne, Lauren Bacall, Ron Howard, James Stewart, Richard Boone, Hugh O'Brian.

An aging gunfighter (John Wayne) afflicted with a terminal illness returns to Carson City for medical attention; aware that his days are numbered, the troubled man seeks solace from a widow and her son. This is Wayne's last film.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs; Cumberland Video.

*Tom Horn* (Warner Bros., 1980, USA), 98 minutes, color.

Producers, Steve McQueen and Fred Weintraub; director, William Wiard; script, Thomas McGuane and Bud Shrake based on a story by Tom Horn.

Cast: Steve McQueen, Linda Evans, Richard Farnsworth, Billy Greenbush, Slim Pickens.

The true story of an old west gunman, Tom Horn, who at the age of 40 has already been a western railroad worker, stagecoach driver, U. S. Cavalry scout, silver miner, Teddy Roosevelt Rough Rider, and Pinkerton detective. Now he is invited by Wyoming ranchers to stop the cattle rustlers. He does that job well and at the same time finds romance.

Format: B, V.

Available: Warner Home Video.

*Urban Cowboy* (Paramount, 1980, USA), 135 minutes, color.

Producers: Robert Evans and Irving Azoff; director, James Bridges; script, James Bridges and Aaron Latham based on a story by Latham.

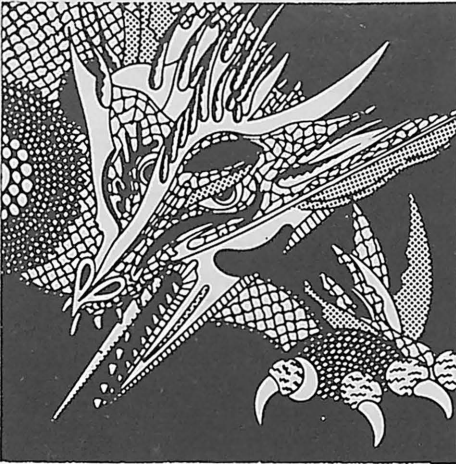
Cast: John Travolta, Debra Winger, Scott Glenn, Madolyn Smith, Barry Corbin, Brooke Alderson.

A young Texas farm boy goes to Houston to work in a refinery and learns about life by hanging out in Gilley's, a country-western bar. Here, he and his friends dress in cowboy gear, drink, fight, and prove their manhood by riding a mechanical bull. John Travolta transports the most compelling figure in American history—the cowboy—to a contemporary world of action, romance, dance, and music.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs.





## Horror

Americans have always enjoyed being frightened by film monsters, ghosts, psychopathic murders, or creatures from outer space. In the past seventy years Hollywood has produced hundreds of films to meet this public demand to be scared. While the fear factor of the audience has remained the same, the nature of the horror film has changed. Early horror movies were "spine-tingling" fantasies that used such characters as Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, werewolves, and mummies to deal with such philosophical questions of man's right to create life, the finality of death, scientific experimentation, or the choice between good and evil. The more recent horror films depict a realism set in graphic violence with the monsters often being psychopathic murderers. Indeed, some films are based on actual stories of mass murder and mayhem. Some authorities maintain that the emphasis on violence in recent horror films is an attempt to nullify the effect of violence in the real world.

Do these film reflect or depict American life? While there is no single answer to that question, the films do have something to say about the period in which they were made. The horror movies of the 1930s were simple fantasies that often dealt with the forces of good and evil just as the western shoot-em-ups of the same period. They provided good escapist entertainment for audiences facing the Great Depression and later World War II. The horror films of recent years seem to contain less fantasy and more social commentary. Of course, just like the earlier films they entertain and provide the audience with an opportunity to escape.

The following list provides a sample of the horror films Hollywood produced during the past fifty years. In viewing them one will see not only how they reflect American society but also the development of an important film genre.

*Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931, USA), 71 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Carl Laemmle, Jr.; director, James Whale; script, Garrett Fort, F. E. Faragoh, Robert Florey after the play by Peggy Webling based on the novel by Mary Shelly.

Cast: Colin Clive, Boris Karloff, Mae Clark, John Boles, Edward Van Sloan.

Dr. Henry Frankenstein, a brilliant scientist creates a terrifying but strangely sympathetic monster. The plot focuses on the creation of the monster and the effect it has on the local superstitious society. The movie is exciting and physical even though the audience knows that a scientist cannot create life in this form. The film does raise questions about the morality of such actions. It made Boris Karloff, as the monster, a cult figure.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: MCA Home Video; RCA Video Discs.

*King Kong* (RKO, 1933, USA), 105 minutes, B/W.

Producers/directors, Ernest B. Schoedsack, Merian C. Cooper; script, James Creelman and Ruth Rose based on a story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace; special effects, Willis O'Brien.

Cast: Fay Wray, Robert Armstrong, Bruce Cabot, Frank Reicher.

The original film classic which tells the story of Kong, a giant ape in Africa that was brought to New York as a sideshow attraction. He escapes his captors and rampages through the city ending up on top of the newly built Empire State Building. Some parts of the film are truly eerie and exciting.

Format: B, V, ¾U, CED.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant; VidAmerica; King of Video; RCA Video Discs.

*The Black Cat* (Universal, 1934, USA), 65 minutes, B/W.

Producer, E. M. Asher; director, Edgar G. Ulmer; script, Peter Ruric from a story by Edgar Allan Poe.

Cast: Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, David Manners, Jacqueline Wells.

While the plot in this film bears no resemblance to Poe's story, the mood of doom and air of sadism is there. The story features an architect who preserves corpses of young girls and a doctor who plays chess in an attempt to keep a new bride from becoming a sacrifice to Satan. *The Black Cat* has stylish sets and good dialogue.

Format: B, V.

Available: MCA Home Video.

*The Cat People* (RKO, 1942, USA), 73 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Val Lewton; director, Jacques Tourneur; script, DeWitt Bodeen.

Cast: Simone Simon; Kent Smith, Tom Conway, Jane Randolph, Jack Holt.

Val Lewton, a literate and intelligent producer, made a classic horror picture with this film. The plot focuses on a young woman who changes into a deadly panther that stalks its victims. The innovative approach in this film was suggesting the horrors rather than revealing them. Shadows and menacing sounds are used to increase the eeriness—anything really horrible is never shown.

Format: B, V, ¾U.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant; King of Video.

*I Walked with a Zombie* (RKO, 1943, USA), 69 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Val Lewton; director, Jacques Tourneur; script, Cart Siodmak and Ardel Wray based on a story by Inez Wallace.

Cast: James Ellison, Frances Dee, Tom Conway.

Produced and directed by the pair who made *The Cat People*. This film is a landmark horror picture. Rather than using monsters or vampires to create terror and fear, the film uses subtle sounds, movements, shadows, and camera angles. It scares the audience with everyday fears. The film tells the story of a Canadian nurse who goes to a Caribbean plantation to care for the insane wife of the plantation owner. In this strange and exotic world she becomes obsessed with the natives' religion, voodoo, and attempts to use it to cure the wife's mental illness.

Format: B, V,  $\frac{3}{4}$ U.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant.

*The Body Snatcher* (RKO, 1945, USA), 77 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Val Lewton; director, Robert Wise; script, Philip MacDonald and Carlos Keith based on a story by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Cast: Boris Karloff, Henry Daniell, Bela Lugosi, Russell Wade, Edith A. H. Water.

A grave robber (Boris Karloff) supplies fresh bodies to a doctor doing research. The doctor worries about his illicit deal with the body snatcher. Karloff provides a strong performance and the production values are excellent in this period acting piece.

Format: B, V,  $\frac{3}{4}$ U.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant.

*The Thing* (Winchester/RKO, 1951, USA), 86 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Howard Hawks; directors Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks (uncredited); script, Charles Lederer from the story "Who Goes There?" by John W. Campbell; special effects, Donald Stewart.

Cast: Margaret Sheridan, Kenneth Toby, Robert Cornthwaite, Douglas Spencer, Dewey Martin, James Arness.

One of the most exciting films of the 1950s, *The Thing* meshes horror and science fiction. It is a film of ideas. The story revolves around an alien who terrorizes a group of Arctic scientists and military men. The military want to destroy the monster while the scientists want to capture or communicate with it. The vegetable monster feeds on human blood and has no feelings for human kind. With its emphasis on fear of the unknown and the need for military defensiveness, *The Thing* states cold war/McCarthyism attitudes. James Arness plays the alien monster.

Format: B, V, ¾U, CED.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant; VidAmerica; King of Video; RCA Video Discs.

*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Allied Artists, 1956, USA), 80 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Walter Wanger; director, Don Siegel; script, Daniel Mainwaring based on *Collier's* magazine serial by Jack Finney.

Cast: Kevin McCarthy, Dana Wynter, Larry Gates, King Donovan, Carolyn Jones, Jean Willes.

This classic, intelligent, and well-made science horror film focuses on the invasion of Southern California by seeds of giant plant pods. The pods exude blank human forms that drain the emotional life of people and threaten to destroy the world. While plenty of visual eeriness exists, an emphasis is placed on the intellectual aspects of the film.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: NTA Home Entertainment; RCA Video Discs.

*Psycho* (Paramount, 1960, USA), 109 minutes, B/W.

Producer/director, Alfred Hitchcock; script, Joseph Stefano based on a novel by Robert Bloch.

Cast: Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, Vera Miles, Martin Balsam, John Gavin.

Some authorities claim *Psycho* is the best horror film ever made. Hitchcock brilliantly manipulates the audience to increase the suspense and terror.

A young woman at the behest of her lover steals money and then in a small town encounters a peculiar young man and his mysterious mother. This film laid the foundation for many of the psychological thrillers made since 1960.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: MCA Home Video; RCA Video Discs.



*The Fall of the House of Usher* (American International 1960, USA), 85 minutes, color.

Producer/director, Roger Corman; script, Richard Matheson based on a story by Edgar Allen Poe.

Cast: Vincent Price, Mark Damon, Myrna Fahey, Harry Ellerbe.

This cheaply but well-made film is the best feature-length adoption of Poe's story. The last of the Usher line is buried alive by her brother and returns to wreak vengeance.

Format: B, V.

Available: Warner Home Video.

*Rosemary's Baby* (Paramount, 1968, USA), 137 minutes, color.

Producer, William Castle; director, Roman Polanski; script, Roman Polanski based on the novel by Ira Levin.

Cast: Mia Farrow, John Cassavetes, Ruth Gordon, Sidney Blackmer, Maurice Evans, Ralph Bellamy.

This psychological thriller emphasizes the real fears of a pregnant young woman who has been impregnated by the devil. Gradually Rosemary realizes something unnatural is happening to her and finds herself trapped in a web of conspiracy.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs.

*Night of the Living Dead* (Continental, 1968, USA), 90 minutes, B/W.

Producers, Russell Streiner and Karl Hardman; director, George A. Romero; script, John A. Russo.

Cast: Judith O'Dea, Russell Streiner, Duane Jones, Karl Hardman, Keith Wayne, Judith Ridley.

Space experiments set off high levels of radiation that make newly dead return to life. These zombies prey upon living humans by random killings and the devouring of their flesh. Nothing can stop the dead who have no respect for families (the dead eat their own relatives) or any human convention. A low, low budget film that has become a classic.

Format: B, V.

Available: Media Home Entertainment; Budget Video; Video Yesteryear; Nostalgia Merchant; Video Dimensions; Sheik Video; Cable Films; King of Video; Video Connection; Discount Video Tapes; Video Magic.

*Halloween* (Compass International Pictures, 1978, USA), 85 minutes, color.

Producer, Debra Hill; director, John Carpenter, script, Debra Hill and John Carpenter.

Cast: Donald Pleasence, Jamie Lee Curtis, Nancy Loomis, P. J. Soles, Charles Cyphers, Brian Andrews.

John Carpenter's horror tale classic has been acclaimed the most successful independent picture of all time. A homicidal maniac escapes from a mental hospital and returns to his hometown and seeks out and stalks teenage girls on Halloween night.

Format: B, V, LV.

Available: Media Home Entertainment.

*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Bryanston Pictures, 1974, USA), 86 minutes, color.

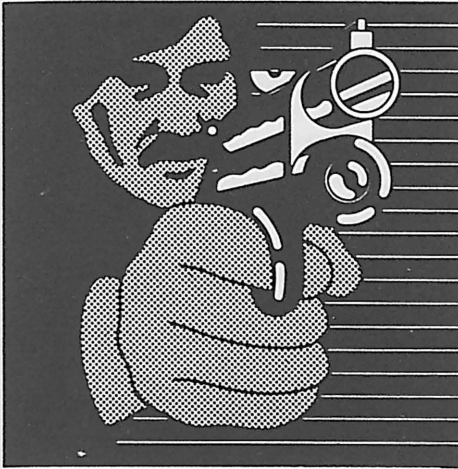
Producer/director, Tobbe Hooper; script, Kim Kenkel.

Cast: Marilyn Burns, Paul A. Partain, Gunar Hansen, Allen Danziger, Terri McMinn, William Vail.

A landmark among horror films, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is a slasher film that has innocent teenagers encountering a demented family that looks upon them as meat. One family member wears a leather mask and is handy with a chainsaw. This is probably one of the goriest horror movies ever made, as the family cuts its victims to pieces.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Wizard Video; Vestron Video.



## Detective

The detective hero in American film is almost as popular as the cowboy hero. Since the 1930s Hollywood has produced dozens of films with the private eye as the central character. Indeed an avalanche of mystery films featuring such personalities as Charlie Chan, Mr. Moto, Boston Blackie, Bulldog Drummond, Philo Vance, the Falcon, Sam Spade, the Saint and others showed up in movie houses throughout the country.

The attraction of the private eye solving a mysterious puzzle was already established with the American public through mystery novels and pulp magazines. The transfer to celluloid merely expanded that audience. The heyday of detective films was in the 1930s and 1940s when Hollywood produced no less than seventeen different mystery-detective series. In the decades that followed the private eye story maintained its popularity in both film and television.

While Hollywood produced these films mainly for entertainment and profit, they do reveal something about America's changing society, especially its urban development with accompanying social and crime problems. The movie detective became the urban hero who sought to solve these problems, much in the same way that the movie cowboy solved the problems of law and order on the frontier.

The following list of films represents only a fraction of the detective films produced in the sound era. They provide an overview of the genre's development as well as an opportunity to relate their content to society's development.

*The Kennel Murder Case* (Warner Brothers, 1933, USA), 77 minutes, B/W.

Director, Michael Curtiz; script, Robert N. Lee and Peter Milne based on the novel by S. S. Van Dine.

Cast: William Powell, Mary Astor, Eugene Palette, Ralph Morgan, Helen Vinson, Jack LaRue.

The film has the classic "locked-room" murder puzzle with debonair and cool Philo Vance sorting through a host of suspects. The plot follows the novel exactly.

Format: B, V.

Available: Video Dimensions; Shiek Video; Budget Video; Discount Video Tapes; Cable Films; Video Connection, Nostalgia Merchant.

*Mr. Wong, Detective* (Monogram, 1938, USA), 67 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Scott R. Dunlap; director, William Nigh; script, Houston Branch.

Cast: Boris Karloff, Grant Withers, Maxine Jennings, Evelyn Brent, Lucien Prival, John St. Polis.

This is the first in a series of five Mr. Wong films starring Boris Karloff as the Chinese detective. The plot has Mr. Wong trying to determine if a formula for an odorless invisible gas was stolen and who committed three murders surrounding the theft.

Format: B, V.

Available: Budget Video.

*Hound of the Baskervilles* (20th Century Fox, 1939, USA), 78 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Gene Markey; director, Sidney Lanfield; script, Ernest Pascal from a story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Cast: Richard Greene, Basil Rathbone, Wendy Barrie, Nigel Bruce, Lionel Atwill, John Carradine.

This famous mystery-chiller has Sherlock Holmes investigating the threatened death of the heir to an English estate. Suspense, thrills, and surprises keep the plot moving as Holmes discovers the master of a ferocious hound trained to stalk its prey in the fog-swept moors of the estate.

Format: B, V,  $\frac{3}{4}$ U.

Available: Learning Corporation of America.

*Mr. Moto's Last Warning* (20th Century Fox, 1939, USA), 70 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, Norman Foster; script, Philip MacDonald and Norman Foster.

Cast: Peter Lorre, Ricardo Cortez, Virginia Field, John Carradine, George Sanders, Joan Carol.

This film, also called *Mr. Moto in Egypt*, has enemy agents trying to blow up the French fleet as it passes through the Suez Canal. The villains mistakenly assume that Moto is killed in a diving accident, but he survives and rounds them up.

Format: B, V.

Available: Discount Video Tapes; Cable Films; Video Connection; Video Yesteryear; Budget Video.

*The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Brothers, 1941, USA), 100 minutes, B/W.

Executive Producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Henry Blanke; director, John Huston; script, John Huston based on a story by Dashiell Hammett.

Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Gladys George, Peter Lorre, Barton MacLane, Sydney Greenstreet.

After the death of his partner detective Sam Spade finds himself in search of a priceless statuette. Humphrey Bogart plays the tough private eye, well supported with Mary Astor as the cool and calculating female lead and Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre as the villainous baddies.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: CBS/Fox-Video; RCA Video Discs.

*The Falcon's Brother* (RKO, 1942, USA), 63 minutes, B/W.

Producer, Maurice Geraghty; director, Stanley Logan; script, Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice.

Cast: George Sanders, Tom Conway, Jane Randolph, Don Barclay, Amanda Varela, George Lewis.

The Falcon (George Sanders) and his brother (Tom Conway) become embroiled in a scheme of Nazi saboteurs. The Falcon is killed trying to protect a South American diplomat, but Tom



rounds up the baddies and pledges to continue his brother's efforts to fight crime. In the following movies in this series Conway assumes the role of the Falcon.

Format: B, V.

Available: Nostalgia Merchant.

*Laura* (20th Century Fox, 1944, USA), 88 minutes B/W.

Producer/director, Otto Preminger; script, Jay Dratler, Samuel Hoffenstein, Betty Reinhardt based on a novel by Vera Caspary.

Cast: Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Clifton Webb, Vincent Price, Judith Anderson, Dorothy Adams.

A beautiful female art executive (Gene Tierney) has been brutally murdered in her New York Apartment. A police lieutenant (Dana Andrews) assigned to the case encounters several suspects but finds himself falling in love with the victim's painted portrait.

Format: B, V, CED.

Available: CBS/Fox Video.

*Murder My Sweet* (RKO, 1944, USA), 95 minutes, B/W.

Executive Producer, Sid Rogel; director Edward Dmytryk; script, John Paxon based on a novel by Raymond Chandler.

Cast: Dick Powell, Claire Trevor, Anne Shirley, Otto Kruger, Mike Mazurki, Miles Mander.

The complex and fast-moving plot centers on a private detective enmeshed with a gang of blackmailers. Philip Marlowe (Dick Powell) searches for an ex-convict's missing girl friend and along the way encounters murder, drugs, and other aspects of Hollywood's underworld.

Format: B, V, ¾U

Available: Nostalgia Merchant; King of Video; Blackhawk Films.

*The Big Sleep* (Warner Brothers, 1946, USA), 113 minutes, B/W.

Producer/director, Howard Hawks; script, William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett, and Jules Furthman based on a novel by Raymond Chandler.

Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, John Ridgely, Martha Vickers, Dorothy Malone, Peggy Knudsen.

Bogart plays the tough private eye Philip Marlowe who investigates the activities of the peculiar Sternwood family. The detective deals with murderers, blackmailers, gamblers, and pornography dealers. He also becomes romantically involved with one of the Sternwood women (Lauren Bacall).

Format: CED

Available: RCA Video Discs.

*The Third Man* (British Lion, 1949, British), 93 minutes, B/W.

Producers, Alexander Korda and David O. Selznick; director, Carol Reed; script and original story, Graham Greene.

Cast: Joseph Cotten, Valli, Orson Wells, Trevor Howard, Bernard Lee, Paul Hoerbiger.

An American writer (Joseph Cotten) arrives in post-World War II Vienna to take a job with an old friend only to learn that he is dead. The friend turns out to be very much alive and involved in the black market. Cotten sets out to track down his friend and in the end shoots him.

Format: B, V.

Available: Media Home Video; Budget Video; Video Yesteryear; Video Dimensions; Shiek Video; Ampro Video Productions; Video Connection; Discount Video Tapes; Cable Films; Video Magic; Cinema Concepts.

*Harper* (Warner Brothers, 1966, USA), 121 minutes, color.

Producers, Jerry Gershwin, Elliott Kastner; director, Jack Smight; script, William Goldman based on a novel by Ross McDonald.

Cast: Paul Newman, Lauren Bacall, Julie Harris, Arthur Hill, Janet Leigh, Pamela Tiffin.

The contemporary mystery comedy has private eye Harper (Paul Newman) involved in a missing person track down as he looks for Lauren Bacall's husband.

Format: B, V.

Available: Warner Home Video.

*Chinatown* (Paramount, 1974, USA), 130 minutes, color.

Producer, Robert Evans; director, Roman Polanski; script, Robert Towne.

Cast: Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston, Perry Lopez, John Hillerman, Darryll Zwerlind.

Detective Jack Nicholson goes on a manhunt in Los Angeles in this complex and tangled mystery. The plot focuses on corruption and murder of a city official, but its many angles eventually converge in Chinatown for a climatic shootout.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs.

*Murder on the Orient Express* (Paramount, 1974, USA), 127 minutes, color.

Producer, John Brabourne; director, Sidney Lumet; script, Paul Dehn based on an Agatha Christie novel.

Cast: Albert Finney, Lauren Bacall, Martin Balsam, Ingrid Bergman, Jacqueline Bisset, Jean Pierre Casset.

Agatha Christie's classic whodunit with Albert Finney as Belgian master sleuth Hercule Poirot who solves a murder puzzle on board the famed Orient Express.

Format: B, V, CED, LV.

Available: Paramount Home Video; RCA Video Discs

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