



Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986

Adam Rockoff

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John Carpenter's *Halloween*, released on October 25, 1978, marked the beginning of the horror film's most colorful, controversial, and successful offshoot--the slasher film. Loved by fans and reviled by critics for its iconic psychopaths, gory special effects, brainless teenagers in peril, and more than a bit of soft-core sex, the slasher film secured its legacy as a cultural phenomenon and continues to be popular today. This work traces the evolution of the slasher film from 1978 when it was a fledgling genre, through the early 1980s when it was one of the most profitable and prolific genres in Hollywood, on to its decline in popularity around 1986. An introduction provides a brief history of the Grand Guignol, the pre-cinema forerunner of the slasher film, films such as *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and cinematic trends that gave rise to the slasher film. Also explained are the slasher film's characteristics, conventions, and cinematic devices, such as the "final girl," the omnipotent killer, the relationship between sex and death, the significant date or setting, and the point-of-view of the killer. The chapters that follow are devoted to the years 1978 through 1986 and analyze significant films from each year. *The Toolbox Murders*, *When a Stranger Calls*, the *Friday the 13th* movies, *My Bloody Valentine*, *The Slumber Party Massacre*, *Psycho II*, and *April Fool's Day* are among those analyzed. The late 90s resurrection of slasher films, as seen in *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, is also explored, as well as the future direction of slasher films.

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