

Renata Kell
rntkell@gmail.com
<https://www.renata-kell.com>

About 3000 words

**It Could Happen.
Four Classic Psychological Thrillers That
Will Scare the "What If?" Out of You.**

by Renata Kell

With so many genres and sub-genres of horror available, it is impossible to label one as the scariest. Horror relies on fear, and what scares me may not scare you. Someone terrified of ghosts and demons may find terror in watching, Poltergeist or the Exorcist. Others may find slasher movies, such as Halloween or Nightmare on Elm Street more terrifying. Whether it is a paranormal, gothic, monster, or a straight-up torture movie, many audiences can agree on one thing. The most terrifying films are the ones that get into your psyche and make you believe "it could happen."

Below is a list of movies ordered from, most unlikely to the most believable, based on the films' inspirations.

4 The Shining (1980)

The Shining tells the story of Jack Torrance, an out of work teacher with alcohol and rage issues, who moves his entire family to the secluded Outlook Hotel after being offered the off-season caretaking job. Jack's son possesses the "shining," a psychic ability to connect with the hotel's horrible past.

When Jack meets with the hotel manager, the manager explains that a former caretaker went crazy with 'cabin fever' and killed his wife and daughter.

Jack's family is left alone for the season, completely isolated from the outside world when a snow storm blocks all the roads. The hotel "possesses" Jack and torments Danny, causing Jack to lose his mind and set out to kill his family.

Inspiration: The Stanley Hotel, Estes Park, Colorado.

Built- in 1909, the Stanley Hotel was built for wealthy vacationers and as a health retreat. The hotel's attraction is still a sought-out destination for paranormal investigators, but not because of The Shining. The hotel has a history of haunted sightings, one of which began after an accident in room 217.

In 1911, a lead housekeeper got severely injured in an oil lantern explosion. She did not die, but the rumors of her haunting the halls became a ghost story that people still talk about today.

In 1974, Steven King, the author of the original novel, The Shining, and his wife stayed at the Stanley, right before they closed for the season. They were the only guests at the time. King wandered the halls of the massive hotel and was inspired by the sheer isolation he felt. He stayed in room 217, which later changed to room 237 in the movie. King claims to have seen a little boy on his way to his room. This sighting would have been impossible because King and his wife were the only guests in the hotel.

Reasoning: "Perhaps the strangest thing that can happen to someone in isolation is the experience of a "sensed presence," or the feeling that another person—or a [supernatural](#) being—is with us." McAndrew, Ph. D. (2016).

Would it be such a far-fetched idea that a person who suffered from self-esteem issues, alcoholism, and rage issues, such as Jack Torrance, could get caught up in psychosis due to extreme isolation? It could happen.

3 Amityville Horror (1979)

Amityville Horror is based on the Lutz family experiences' real accounts but did not make the top of my list due to the enormous amount of paranormal activity represented in the movie.

In 1975, in Amityville, Long Island, George Lutz and his family moved into their first home during the honeymoon phase of their recent marriage. What seemed to be a deal of a lifetime, at \$80,000, quickly turned into a personal hell for the Lutz family. In full disclosure, the realtor told the Lutzes of the gruesome murders that happened one year before the Lutzes purchased the home. 28-year-old Ronald DeFoe killed his entire family with a shot-gun while they slept.

The Lutzes proceeded to buy the home, despite the incident. Soon after moving in, George and Kathy Lutz began experiencing odd occurrences in the house. They claim to have seen black ooze coming out of the nail holes in the wall and two red eyes outside the daughter's room. The dog becomes obsessed with a secret room in the basement, and one of the boys suffers from a crushed hand. The daughter befriends an imaginary friend, and the babysitter becomes locked in

a closet with no lock. George Lutz begins showing signs of anger and violence and becomes obsessed with chopping firewood to stoke the fire. The house's madness finally reveals George on the path of repeating the previous murders, forcing the Lutz family to flee their home and leave everything behind.

Inspiration: True accounts and media.

Jay Anson, the author of the original novel, was introduced to the Lutz family shortly after them leaving the house and moving out of state. Jay based his story on newspaper articles and police reports, along with 45 hours of tape-recorded recollections from George and Kathy Lutz. Anson interviewed neighbors and residents from the area as well as friends and family of the Lutz. He found no evidence of malice or any reason for the Lutz's to have fabricated the information. The Lutz's went to their death, maintaining that the book's accounts were mostly accurate, except for a few mistakes and embellishments that Jay Anson made in the book.

Reasoning: When someone's [anxiety disorder](#) is bad enough that they suffer from panic and anxiety attacks, it is possible for them to simultaneously experience symptoms of psychosis. Nowak (2018)

Could the Lutz family have been so unsettled about the previous murders that their fear began to affect their minds? It could happen.

2 Psycho (1960)

The story opens with a simple argument between Marion Crane and her Lover Sam Loomis over getting married. Marion wants to get married, but Sam does not feel he can support her financially, the way he would like. They part ways, and Marion returns to work, frustrated and distant. Marion is suddenly presented with an answer to her problems when her boss Mr. Lowery and his client Cassidy hand her \$40,000 in cash to deposit in the bank. Marion takes the money and runs.

After being approached by a suspicious patrolman, Marion decides that she must trade in her car. Marion continues her trip from Phenix to Fairvale until the night-time rainstorm's visibility makes it hard to drive. She stumbles across the Bates Motel and decides to check-in for the night. Norman Bates dashed down a path from the house behind the motel and explained to Marion that he lives in the house with his mother.

Flash forward, we see Norman peeking through a hole at Marion while she undresses. Marion gets into the shower, and a figure appears behind the shower curtain, wielding a butcher knife. Later we hear Norman yelling, "Mother! God! Blood! Blood!" He rushes down the hill and covers up the crime, wrapping Marion in the shower curtain and sinking her and her car in the swamp.

Eventually, Marion's sister Lila Crane and Sam follow tips from a private investigator to the Bates Motel and check into the motel as man and wife to snoop around. After near-death from Norman, the two escape and have Norman arrested. Marion and Sam reveal that Norman Bates dug up his deceased mother's body and had been speaking for her as though she was alive.

A psychiatrist interviews Norman and discovers that Norman's mother had been killed ten years earlier by Norman. He has been living with a split personality caused by an overly dominant mother and a mental disorder that had existed for some time. The psychiatrist reveals

Norman and his mother isolated themselves from the rest of the world after his father's death, and Norman became infatuated with his mother. The doctor concluded that Norman's final break came when his mother started dating and Norman felt passed over by the new man in his mother's life. After Norman killed his mother and her boyfriend, his guilt caused an alternate world inside Norman's mind, where his mother was still alive.

Inspiration: Ed Gein - Serial Killer and Grave Robber.

In 1957, in Wisconsin, Bernice Worden went missing from her hardware store in Plainfield. Her son Frank, a deputy sheriff, already suspicious of the reclusive Gein, had him apprehended as a primary suspect.

Later that night, Gein's true gruesomeness would be discovered at his home when the authorities searched it. They found Worden's body hanging from the ceiling, decapitated and gutted. They also noted organs in jars and skulls as bowls. Gein confessed to the murder as well as to the Hogan murder three years earlier. He also admitted to digging up graves and cutting off body parts and fashioning skin into bodysuits to wear around the house. The police tried to link other missing persons to Gein but were unable to gather enough proof.

In 1958, Gein was found guilty by reason of insanity and sentenced to remain in Central State Hospital. Gein returned to court in 1968 after it had been determined that he was fit to stand trial but was found to be insane at the time of the murder and recommitted to Central State Hospital.

Reasoning: Gein's childhood trauma was rooted in his mother's perception of women, other than her, as vessels of sin. Since he took his mother's teachings at face value, he never

realized the extent of her control and depraved influence over him, eventually leading to his outburst of violent behavior. Unknown (2020)

Psychologists have studied serial killers for years and have determined that abuse, mental or physical, plays a large role in creating serial killers.

Have you ever met a mild-mannered recluse that made you wonder? It could happen.

1 Misery (1990)

I find Misery to be the most terrifying and realistic psychological thriller of all the films. The "what if" and "it could happen" is amplified by the inspiration and the unspoken backstory of Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates).

Paul Sheldon (James Caan), an author of a renowned series and a trademark character, Misery Chastaine, has decided that he wants to branch out and move away from the series. He discusses his decision with his publicist before heading to a secluded lodge in Silver Creek, Colorado.

Upon finishing his new book, Paul celebrates his victory and heads down the snow-covered mountain to return to New York. Paul loses control of his car and has a horrific crash. An unknown rescuer pulls Paul out of the car.

Paul wakes up to Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates), caring for his debilitating injuries. Annie reveals to Paul that she is a nurse and, subsequently, his "number one fan." She nurtures Paul and offers him a pill for pain. She alludes to Paul that she will get in touch with his publicist on her next trip to town.

In the meantime, Annie notices Paul's new work and asks to read it. She fawns over Paul as any super-fan would, and everything seems to be okay. Annie goes to town and comes back,

dotting that she has gotten his newest book. Over the next several days, she cares for Paul and announces with pure excitement how many pages she has read. Annie repeatedly asks Paul questions about how the book will turn out, then tells him not to tell her.

Things take a deadly turn when Annie discovers that Paul has killed off Misery Chastaine. Enraged and dissatisfied, Annie tells Paul she must leave. The next day Annie takes another full turn around with her attitude and forces Paul to burn the manuscript. Annie purchases a typewriter and paper and insists that Paul writes a new book to bring Misery Chastaine back to life.

Paul's publicist reaches out to the lodge and discovers that he has left and contacts the local sheriff to investigate, but with the storm covered roads he cannot find the car. He continues to investigate throughout the movie.

Back at the house, Paul prepares to work on the manuscript that Annie wants. Paul sees a means to escape when he discovers a hairpin on the floor and convinces Annie that he can't work with the paper she has gotten him. Although Annie becomes angry at Paul's request, she goes back into town to buy the paper he wants.

Paul manages to reach the hairpin from his wheelchair and unlock the door. He reaches the phone only to realize it doesn't work. Paul finds a scrapbook full of newspaper articles detailing Annie's involvement in several murders, including suspicious hospital deaths under her watch. Paul hears Annie coming and manages to return to the room. Paul makes several more trips outside before being discovered.

Annie is thrilled with Paul's new manuscript. He works day and night on the manuscript chapter by chapter awaiting Annie's approval before moving on. Paul stops taking the medication that Annie is giving him and saves the powder for a special occasion. He finishes his book and

asks Annie to join him in a celebration dinner and slips the powder in her drink, but before she has a chance to drink it, she knocks the glass over, foiling his plan.

The next day Paul wakes up to find himself tied to the bed. Annie reveals that she knows he has been out of the room and crushes his ankles by putting a block between his feet and hitting them with a sledgehammer.

The sheriff sees Annie have an outburst in town sometime later. After Annie leaves, he questions the store clerk about Annie. His suspicion heightened by her sudden interest in typewriting paper, he visits her home.

Annie invites the sheriff in, offers him some tea, and then shoots him when she realizes he has discovered Paul stashed in the basement.

Eventually, there is one last battle between Paul and Annie when he requests his three ritual items, a cigarette, matches, and Dom Perignon. As one of his number one fans, Annie does not question it. When he sends her for a second glass, he pours the alcohol on the manuscript and catches it on fire, sending Annie into a rage. The battle ends with Annie dead.

Inspiration: Genevieve Anne Jones - Serial Killer

Genevieve Anne Jones, in my opinion, was one of the most gruesome serial killers ever. A pediatric nurse from Texas, Genevieve Anne Jones, is suspected of having killed up to sixty infants between 1977- 1982 by injecting lethal doses of digoxin, heparin, or succinylcholine into infants in her care. It wasn't until 1985 when Jones was sentenced to 99 years in prison for killing 15-month-old Chelsea McClellan with succinylcholine. Later that year, Jones was sentenced to a concurrent term of 60 years for nearly killing Rolando Jones with heparin. Jones continued her killing spree, even after being under suspicion.

During the trial, prosecutors presented evidence of Jones having a "hero complex" or the need to bring children to the edge of death and then bring them back so that she could claim credit for saving their lives. She deliberately chose infants because they could not tell on her. Statistical reports presented during the trial suggested that the children in Jones' care were 25% more likely to suffer cardiac arrest and 10% more likely to die.

Histrionic Personality Disorder is one of a group of conditions called "Cluster B" or "dramatic" personality disorders. People with these disorders have intense, unstable emotions and distorted self-images. For people with histrionic personality disorder, their self-esteem depends on the approval of others and does not arise from a true feeling of self-worth. They have an overwhelming desire to be noticed, and often behave dramatically or inappropriately to get attention. Unknown WebMD (2020)

So, for the sake of this paper, let's say Annie Wilks suffered from one of the many suspected illnesses of Genene Jones. The hero complex, the savior complex, or the technical Histrionic Personality Disorder. We will then add to that the social isolation and the disillusionments that she lived through Misery Chastaine. Could it happen?

References

- Ager, r. (2008). The Shining. In *Collative Learning*. Retrieved from <https://www.collativelearning.com/the%20shining.html>
- Cormier, R. (2015, November 30). 17 Facts About Misery On its 25th Anniversary. In *Mental Floss*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/71739/17-facts-about-misery-its-25th-anniversary>
- Ed Gein (2019, October 21). In *Biography*. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/crime-figure/ed-gein>
- Goad, J. (2020, May 20). Genene Jones: The Nurse With A Savior Complex Who May Have Killed Up To 60 Infants. In *Thought Catalog*. Retrieved from <https://thoughtcatalog.com/jim-goad/2018/09/genene-jones-the-nurse-with-a-savior-complex-who-may-have-killed-up-to-60-infants/>
- Hedash, K. (2019, September 29). The Shining: The True Story & Real-Life Hotel Behind The Movie. In *Scene Rant*. Retrieved from <https://screenrant.com/shining-movie-true-story-stanley-overlook-hotel/>
- Histrionic Personality Disorder (n.d.). In *WebMD*. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/histrionic-personality-disorder#1>
- McAndrew, F. Ph. D. (2016, November 16). The Perils of Social Isolation. In *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-ooze/201611/the-perils-social-isolation>
- Nowak, L. (2018, August 22). Can Anxiety Lead to Psychosis? Treating Psychotic Disorders vs Anxiety with Psychotic Features. In *Bright Quest Treatment Centers*. Retrieved from <https://www.brightquest.com/blog/can-anxiety-lead-to-psychosis-treating-psychotic-disorders-vs-anxiety-with-psychotic-features/>
- Psychological Analysis of Ed Gein (2020, February 8). In *UKessays*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/psychology/psychological-analysis-of-ed-gein.php>
- The Amityville Horror (n.d.). In *IMDb*. Retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078767/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stryp_l#synopsis

