

In movies, horror makes cheap jackpots. Do the directors behind them keep hitting, and only in horror?

Horror box office since 2000, and what the directors behind its cheap jackpots made next

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Follow horror's jackpot directors: their later horror films hit nearly twice as often as other horror films

Three findings from films released since 2000

- 1 Cheap jackpots* are a horror specialty.**
1 in 10 horror films with reported figures was a cheap jackpot. Other films: 1 in 50.
- 2 Jackpot directors don't repeat their jackpot.**
After a jackpot film, their typical later film earned 3.4× its budget. Their typical jackpot film: 22×.
- 3 But jackpot directors keep hitting in horror.**
Of their later horror films, 7 in 10 earned at least 2.5× their budget. Other horror films: 4 in 10.

* Cheap jackpot: a film made for \$20M or less that earned at least 10× its budget and at least \$20M worldwide, all in 2025 dollars

Evidence: finding 1 on slides 4–6, finding 2 on slide 7, finding 3 on slides 8–11

A few horror films with budgets under \$1M earned hundreds of times their budget

Multiple: worldwide gross ÷ budget

692×

Obsession (2026)

\$600k–\$750k budget, \$519M
worldwide gross (provisional)

1,248×

One Cut of the Dead (2017)

\$25k budget, \$31.2M worldwide
gross

432×

Paranormal Activity (2009)

\$15k–\$450k budget, \$194.2M
worldwide gross

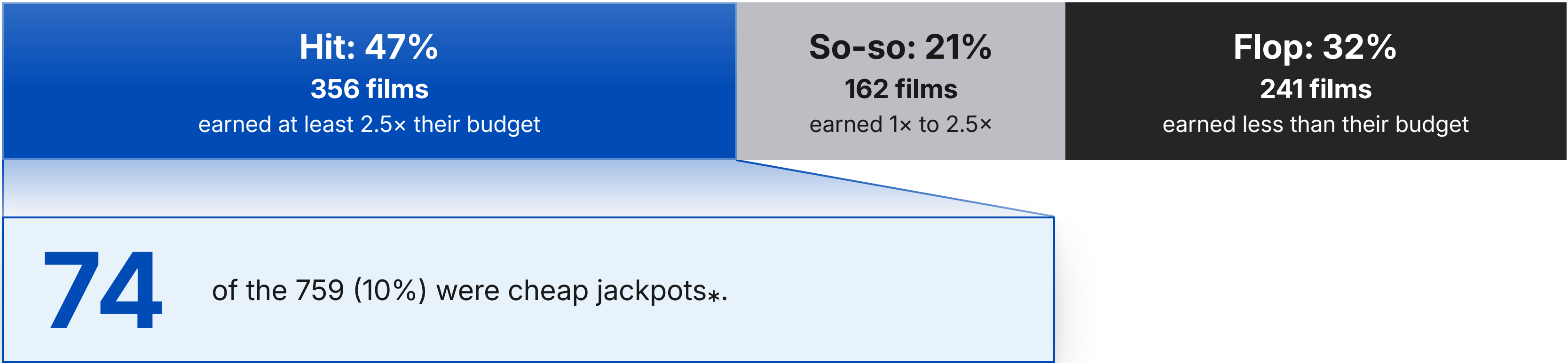
Only 8 of horror's 74 cheap jackpots* since 2000 had budgets under \$1M.

* Cheap jackpot: a film made for \$20M or less that earned at least 10× its budget and at least \$20M worldwide, all in 2025 dollars

Source: English Wikipedia, revision-cited; multiples use the high end of each reported budget

47% of horror films hit, or 39% without the biggest hits

759 theatrical horror films from any country, released January 2000 to September 2026, with reported budget and worldwide gross. A hit earned at least 2.5× its budget: a rough breakeven once marketing is paid.



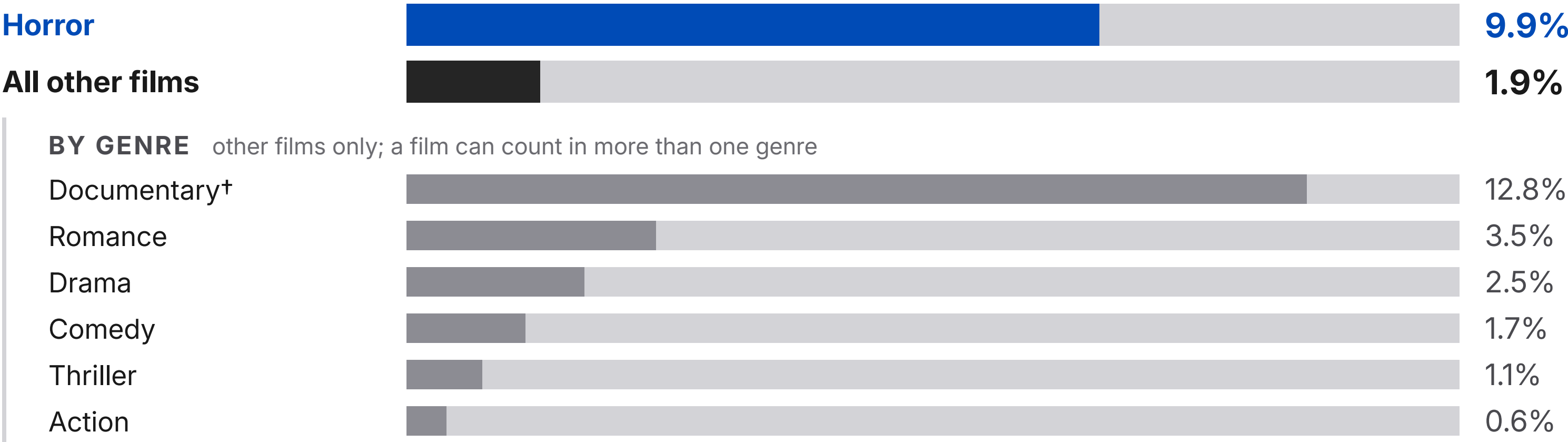
58 jackpot directors: the directors the main slides follow; each one's first film on our list was one of these cheap jackpots

759 horror films – **104** biggest hits = **655** other horror films: **39%** hit, the benchmark for jackpot directors' later films

* Cheap jackpot: a film made for \$20M or less that earned at least 10× its budget and at least \$20M worldwide, all in 2025 dollars

Cheap jackpots are five times as common in horror as in other films

Share of films that were cheap jackpots*, by genre



Horror is **11%** of these films by count (750 of 6,694) but **39%** of the cheap jackpots (74 of 188).

* Cheap jackpot: a film made for \$20M or less that earned at least 10× its budget and at least \$20M worldwide, all in 2025 dollars

Movies here: 6,694 theatrical films of every genre since 2000 (Wikipedia) · [†]117 films, mostly IMAX documentaries

Jackpot directors don't repeat their jackpot: later films earned 3.4×, not 22×, on bigger budgets

The 58 jackpot directors: each one's first film on our list was a cheap jackpot. Figures are medians (the typical film).

JACKPOT FILM

22×

worldwide gross ÷ budget

LATER FILMS

3.4×

worldwide gross ÷ a bigger budget

3.2×

the jackpot film's budget: what their next film cost (median)

30%

of next films cost 5× the jackpot film's budget or more

But jackpot directors keep hitting in horror

The 58 jackpot directors: share of films that hit (earned at least 2.5× their budget), horror's 104 biggest hits excluded



Flops (under 1× budget): **6%** of their later horror films, against **37%** of other horror films.

Three of horror's aces up close: hit after hit, with few misses

Their later horror films, counted from the film we picked them for, including horror's biggest hits, which the previous slide leaves out (hit: earned at least 2.5× its budget; miss: earned less)



James Wan
Saw, Insidious, The Conjuring, Aquaman

4 of 6

later horror films after Saw hit

Best: Insidious, 67× its budget
Misses: Dead Silence, Malignant



Eli Roth
Cabin Fever, Hostel, Thanksgiving

4 of 5

later horror films after Cabin Fever hit

Best: Hostel, 17× its budget
Misses: Ice Cream Man



Jordan Peele
Get Out, Us, Nope

2 of 2

later horror films after Get Out hit

Best: Us, 13× its budget
Misses: none

Budget doesn't explain jackpot directors' edge: their later horror films hit most often at all budgets

Share of films earning at least 2.5× their budget, by budget (the 104 biggest hits excluded)

Budget	Their later horror films	Other horror films	Their later non-horror films
\$20M or less	71%	40%	62%
Over \$20M to \$60M	67%	42%	25%
Over \$60M	2 of 2	14%	44%

Above \$60M, other horror films rarely hit (14%). Jackpot directors made only 2 later horror films that big, and both hit.

Jackpot directors' edge comes mostly from horror franchise films: 84% hit; their horror originals, 47%

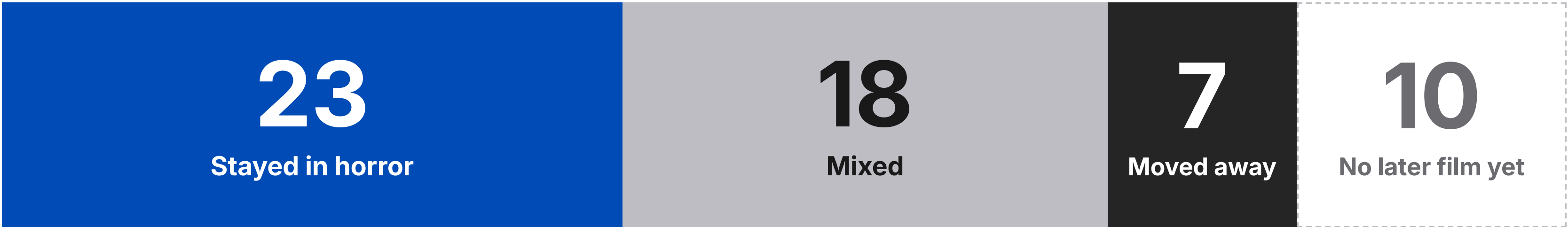
Share of later films earning at least 2.5× their budget (the 104 biggest hits excluded)

GENRE	FRANCHISE FILM	ORIGINAL FILM
Horror	84% 27 of 32 films	47% 9 of 19 films
Non-horror	25% 3 of 12 films	62% 8 of 13 films

Their horror originals (47%) still beat other horror films (39%).

Back jackpot directors in horror: only 7 of the 58 moved away from it

Where the 58 jackpot directors went after their first film on our list (number of directors)



Watch the four latest jackpot directors: three have a horror franchise film lined up

Each made a cheap jackpot in 2026, so none has a second film out yet; this is what each has lined up next

Director	2026 cheap jackpot	Budget → worldwide gross	Next
Curry Barker	Obsession	\$600k–\$750k → \$519M	Anything but Ghosts (in post-production); attached to a Texas Chain Saw Massacre reboot
Kane Parsons	Backrooms	\$10M → \$401M	Backrooms 2 (no date yet); a project written by Osgood Perkins
Ian Tuason	Undertone	\$500k → \$21.6M	Paranormal Activity 8 , dated 21 May 2027
Mark Fischbach ("Markiplier")	Iron Lung	\$3M → \$51.2M	No film announced; says he aims to make something in 2027

Jackpot directors' later horror franchise films hit **84%** of the time; their later original horror films, **47%**.

Back a director at their debut: it was the cheapest step, and Comcast took part in every step after it

One cheap jackpot, step by step: Curry Barker's Obsession, from a sub-\$1M debut to an eight-figure deal

BACK THE DEBUT

MONEY OUT

Capstone

\$600–750K

Capstone paid to make the whole film

BUY THE FILM

MONEY OUT

Focus Features

\$14–15M

Focus (Comcast) paid Capstone for worldwide rights (reported): 19–20× the budget

RELEASE IT

MONEY IN

Focus Features

\$519M

worldwide gross, Focus's highest-grossing film ever; cinemas keep part

SIGN THE NEXT FILMS

MONEY OUT

Universal (Comcast) + Blumhouse Atomic Monster

Eight figures

a deal of \$10M or more for his third film; exact amount not disclosed

STREAM IT

MONEY IN

Peacock

Not disclosed

Obsession streaming on Comcast's service from 17 July 2026

Comcast owns Focus, Universal and Peacock: money out to buy the film and sign the next one, money in from the box office and streaming.

END OF THE MAIN DECK

Appendix

How horror's 104 biggest hits were picked · Slide 16

How the 58 jackpot directors' later films were scored · Slide 17

Whether genre labels change the numbers · Slide 18

What the numbers can't tell · Slide 19

Sources and definitions · Slide 20

Bibliography · Slides 21–25

Rankings of horror films by 2025 dollars and by share of the year disagree, so we used both

Top 5 horror films since 2000, by worldwide gross in 2025 dollars (adjusted for inflation) and by share of the year

Worldwide gross in 2025 dollars			Share of the year's US and Canada box office		
#	Film	Gross	#	Film	Share
1	It (2017)	\$945M	1	Beetlejuice Beetlejuice (2024)	3.4%
2	I Am Legend (2007)	\$908M	2	Sinners (2025)	3.2%
3	Signs (2002)*	\$731M	3	Obsession (2026)†	3.0%
4	Hannibal (2001)*	\$639M	4	It (2017)	3.0%
5	It Chapter Two (2019)	\$596M	5	I Am Legend (2007)	2.7%

Worldwide gross in 2025 dollars favors older films, made when cinemas sold far more tickets; share of the year adjusts for today's smaller market, so it favors recent ones. The top 25 on either list make **36 top-grossing hits**; 30 of them are not cheap jackpots, and with the 74 cheap jackpots they make horror's 104 biggest hits.

We compared the 58 jackpot directors' later films with other horror films, not with their cheap jackpots

Jackpot directors: the 58 whose first film among horror's 104 biggest hits was a cheap jackpot

58

directors or directing teams,
each tracked from their cheap
jackpot

210

later films, released through
29 September 2026

105

of them with reported figures
(budget and worldwide gross),
so they can be scored

76

scored films behind slide 8's
71% and 44%: 51 horror, 25
non-horror

Left out of the 105: 18 among the 104 biggest hits, and 11 near horror (thriller, mystery or sci-fi).

Hit: earned at least 2.5× its budget. Directors picked for a cheap jackpot usually do worse in later films, so the benchmark is the other horror films since 2000: 655 with reported figures, after removing the 104 biggest hits.

19 other directors entered the list with a top-grossing hit that was not a cheap jackpot, so they are left out.

Genre labels move some numbers, not the findings

IMDb's genre tags (used on the main slides) against Wikipedia first-sentence labels (the genre named in the first sentence of each film's Wikipedia article)

Measure (the 58 jackpot directors)	IMDb's genre tags	Wikipedia first-sentence labels
Later horror films that hit	71%	71%
Later non-horror films that hit	44%	53%
Horror franchise films that hit	84%	81%
Original horror films that hit	47%	53%
Non-horror franchise films that hit	25%	56%
Original non-horror films that hit	62%	50%
Jackpot directors who stayed in horror / moved away	23 / 7	22 / 6

Why they differ: Wikipedia first-sentence labels mark slashers such as Halloween Kills and Thanksgiving as non-horror; IMDb's genre tags don't.

Read the findings as a pattern, not as cause, profit or exact figures

Top row: what the numbers mean. Bottom row: the data behind them.

Cause The findings are comparisons between groups of films, not an experiment.	Profit 2.5× budget leaves out marketing costs. It is a rough breakeven line, not profit.	Genre labels Numbers use IMDb's genre tags. Slide 18 shows the numbers with Wikipedia first-sentence labels. Six borderline films are under review.
Unscored films Half of the jackpot directors' 210 later films (105) were streaming-first or have no reported figures.	Small releases They often report no budget, so every rate leans toward better-documented films.	2026 films All 2026 figures are provisional. Several films are still in cinemas.

Every source is published, and genre-label decisions are still open

Data as of 29 September 2026

Sources

Horror films: English Wikipedia's horror categories by year and its highest-grossing horror list; other genres from its yearly film categories.

Inflation (2025 dollars): US CPI-U (BLS). Hits and multiples are not adjusted for inflation. Share of the year: US and Canada box office totals from MPA and Cinema Foundation reports and trade press (Comscore data).

Directors: filmographies, budgets and worldwide gross from Wikipedia and trade press; genre tags from IMDb's public datasets.

Information courtesy of IMDb (<https://www.imdb.com>). Used with permission.

Method and open items

Film: one feature-length release, counted once; theatrical (opened in cinemas) or streaming-first. Movies: all films of every genre together.

Hit: earned at least 2.5× its budget. So-so: 1× to 2.5×. Flop: under 1×. Earned = worldwide gross, not profit; budget = production budget, before marketing. Streaming-first films can't be scored.

Other horror films: theatrical horror films since 2000 with reported figures (budget and worldwide gross), except horror's biggest hits.

Genre labels: IMDb's genre tags. Near horror: thriller, mystery or sci-fi, counted as neither horror nor non-horror. Slide 18 repeats the study with Wikipedia first-sentence labels.

Still open: which genre labels the final numbers use, and six borderline films (Hannibal, Signs, Red Dragon, Scary Movie 3, Van Helsing, The Boy Next Door).

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