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## Horror Movie Heroines, Thank You for the Lessons You've Taught Me

By Nicole Wills  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Sigourney Weaver in 'Alien.' (Photo courtesy of 20th Century Fox)

Although horror films are inherently gruesome or disturbing, I've found them to be a consistent source of my role models: strong heroines who have shaped who I am as well as who I want to be. The lessons I've learned from some of the genre's most iconic heroines have stayed with me through the years, from the power that lies in perseverance to the understated strength of resilience.

Take *Halloween* (1978), for example. Widely heralded as the movie to usher in the era of slasher films, *Halloween* is about Laurie Strode's (Jamie Lee Curtis) struggle for survival as she is stalked by masked Michael Myers, who returns to his hometown to wreak some havoc.

But Strode isn't willing to go down without a fight. She's sharp and resourceful, and she manages to outwit her stalker at his own game. In the end, she wins her battle despite the odds stacked against her. Her resourcefulness and perseverance are traits that I try to keep in mind when facing any challenge, no matter the scope.

Another iconic woman of the horror genre is Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien* (1979). The film takes place in the year 2122 and focuses on the crew of a commercial spaceship, *Nostromo*, as they attempt to defend themselves from a seemingly invincible alien that has corrosive blood, two mouths and bursts out of people's chests. What's a space-trucking crew to do?

Enter Ripley. Spoiler alert, if you haven't seen the movie:

As third in command aboard the *Nostromo*, she is the only member of the crew to eventually survive the alien's assault. Similar to Strode, Ripley is able to defeat her monster with ingenuity and perseverance. She devises a plan to self-destruct the *Nostromo* with the alien on board, but it manages to stow away on her escape shuttle. When the alien reveals itself, Ripley thinks on her feet and uses the shuttle to launch the alien into outer space. I came away from the film with awe and admiration for Ripley, and I suspect I'm not the only one to feel that way. She faced her problems with logic and ingenuity, and even when everything seemed to go wrong, she drew on her inner resilience to pull through.

The demand for strong women in popular media is stronger than ever.

The demand for strong women in popular media is stronger than ever, and the horror genre seems poised to continue placing them front and center. This month's addition to the *Halloween* franchise returns the story to Strode and focuses on how she copes with the trauma of her experience alongside her daughter and granddaughter. The *Alien* spinoff films still feature strong women in the leading roles, and newer films such as *Happy Death Day* (2017) and the upcoming sequel *Happy Death Day 2U* also feature a complex and compelling woman in the leading role.

With the rise of the #MeToo movement and the increasing presence of women in leadership roles, it's more important than ever to feature the stories of strong women in film and other media.

I often find myself thinking of my horror-movie role models when I'm faced with a challenge. When it seems like I'm out of my league, I tell myself to be as resourceful as Strode, and if everything goes awry, I think about Ripley and her resilience in the face of almost-certain doom.

If you find yourself in a similar situation and in need of some inspiration, take my advice and turn on a horror flick. You just might find your newest role model is waiting for you on the silver screen.

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