The Superhero Media Production Goes Darker: The Dawn of Superhero Horror
© 2026 by Zdenko Mago, Samuel Draxler is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Zdenko Mago, Samuel Draxler

The Superhero Media Production *Goes Darker: The Dawn of* Superhero Horror

Abstract
Media productions inspired by superhero comic books represented a global media megatrend in the first two decades of the 21st century. However, even before reaching its peak, this trend began to encounter audience fatigue with superheroes. In an effort to continue capitalising on this trend and revitalise audience interest, a new approach in production can be observed, commencing with the tendency of incorporating darker superheroes and horror elements and culminating in more graphic and explicit content, which even led to an increase in the age ratings from PG-13 to R for some released titles. The ultimate result is the emergence of media works that are inspired by or based on comic superheroes but presented using the conventions and expressive techniques of the horror genre, possibly representing a new genre in mainstream media production – superhero horror. The study examines this approach in superhero media production to reflect on its scope by analysing examples from recently released films, TV series and digital games, as well as the planned direction of superhero media universes. A partial objective is to define the superhero horror subgenre and its potential influence on the future development of superhero media productions across various media, based on an analysis of the current state of the market and a case study of a representative title of this genre. The study indicates how dark superhero media titles already are today, and how (terrifying) they could become in the future.

Key words
Comic Book. Digital Game. Film. Genre. Horror. Media Production. Superhero. Television.

Introduction

Media productions in the first two decades of the 21st century were driven by the unprecedented success of superhero adaptations, because their success was no longer dependent solely on individual titles, but also on the creation of extensive superhero *transmedia universes* and multiverses, such as the X-Men universe, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), the DC Extended Universe (DCEU), Sony's Spider-Man Universe (SSU), and the recently emerging DC Universe by James Gunn (Gunn's DCU) (see Mago, 2024a; Radošinská, 2018; Radošinská & Mago, 2025). However, as with most media megatrends, audiences gradually began to show signs of fatigue with the theme (Brown, 2016). In such cases, media companies often modify their strategies to sustain the trend for as long as possible, or even to fully revitalise it.

In the context of superhero media productions, the solution seems to be a more comprehensive utilisation of darker superheroes and antiheroes, accompanied by a more explicit presentation of content, which results in higher age restrictions, even within media universes that had previously strictly maintained a PG-13 rating, such as the MCU. Consequently, there can be observed an increased implementation of the horror genre in superhero media production. Characterised by evoking emotional effects on the audience (Carroll, 1990), the horror genre systematically employs audiovisuals and narrative (and mechanical strategies in the case of digital games) to generate states of dread, fear, and unease by the deliberate management of vulnerability and uncertainty (Perron, 2009; Rasmussen, 2006; Rouse III, 2009; Worland, 2025). The versatility of utilising horror narratives and *tropes* in media has a long-standing history, originating long before the advent of film (Worland, 2025). Classic horror artworks continue to significantly influence media production to the present day (Rasmussen, 2006), resulting in countless horror *subgenres* (Vander Kaay & Fernandez-Vander Kaay, 2024). The compatibility of the superhero and horror genres has already been demonstrated in comic books, film, television and digital game productions, partly because of the fact that franchising and building media universes are typical of the horror genre as well (Proctor, 2022). In addition, the intensity of this interconnection is currently demonstrated by the occurrence of a new shared subgenre.

This study examines the relationship between the superhero and horror genres and its development and scope in contemporary media production, while also reflecting on its effect on the planned development of media superhero universes. A secondary objective is to define *superhero horror* as a new media subgenre.

1 Media Trends Towards Darker Superheroes and Antiheroes

An obvious connection and compatibility between the superhero and horror genres represents parallels between superhero comic book characters and so-called Universal Monsters (Jarvis, 2020; Neibaur, 2017; Proctor, 2022; Rasmussen, 2006). Besides crossovers and their own comic book adaptations, it is possible to identify the significant influence of the Universal Monsters' "archetypes" in the attributes and lore of many famous comic book superhero and supervillain characters, for instance, Dracula and Morbius, Frankenstein's monster and Franken-Castle, the Mummy and Moon Knight, the Werewolf and Wolfsbane, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Hulk, among others. According to the film critic Chris Gore, Robert Downey Jr.'s portrayal of the supervillain Doctor Doom in the trailer of the highly anticipated MCU film *Avengers: Doomsday* (Russo & Russo, 2026) has been described as "a classic Universal Monster, like The Phantom of the Opera" (Wilding, 2025, para. 4).

The compatibility between the superhero and horror genres created the possibility for the emergence of a new breed of darker comic book heroes and villains, drawing on narrative and expressive techniques more directly associated with the horror genre. While supervillains are usually based on traditional concepts representing the ultimate evil (moral, religious, cultural, etc.), the protagonists either originate from the evil or have been influenced by it, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, and are therefore often depicted as antiheroes rather than classic heroes. A typical example of the representation of evil, commonly used in the superhero genre, is the motif of hell and the devil in various cultural interpretations. To maintain equilibrium, evil is counterbalanced

»

by good, resulting in the creation of many characters, both heroes and villains. For instance, Constantine and Lucifer from the *Hellblazer* (Milligan, 1988–2024) comic books; Hellboy and Satan; the Spawn and Malebolgia; or Ghost Rider and Mephisto. These "darker" characters have appeared in multiple comic books, films, and TV series, either as central characters or in supporting roles, crossovers and cameo appearances in other superhero titles.

The growing popularity of antiheroes with audiences has, logically, led to their increasing presence in the media (Brown, 2024). Examples include the unprecedented success of the *Deadpool* (Miller, 2016; Leitch, 2018; Levy, 2024) film series, as well as the popularity of the TV series *The Boys* (Kripke et al., 2019–2026). Since creative resources are limited, rather than creating new characters, the current trend in media production has been to portray supervillains as antiheroes. This trend is exemplified by Sony Pictures, which has long been working to create a transmedia cinematic universe of antiheroes who are Spider-Man's original archenemies – a universe that, by 2026, includes Venom, Morbius, and Kraven the Hunter.[1] The eventual crossover has a certain possibility of becoming part of the MCU, since the current Spider-Man is already part of it. Nevertheless, the production of this film in future is now debatable due to the low commercial success of several titles from Sony's film universe.

Teaming up represents another media trend in the superhero genre, as antiheroes have begun to form teams alongside superheroes and supervillains. Given that many of the antiheroes are terrifying in their own right, they should face even more terrifying threats, which frequently lead to the horror genre. Among the most popular recent titles are *Suicide Squad* (Ayer, 2016) and *The Suicide Squad* (Gunn, 2021), which introduced several currently popular antiheroes who have reappeared in their own films and TV series, such as Harley Quinn (played by Margot Robbie) and Peacemaker (played by John Cena). Their popularity was also reflected in the production of digital games. In the game *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League* (Rocksteady Studios, 2024), the original team consisted of Harley Quinn, Deadshot, Captain Boomerang, and King Shark – a combination of characters from both films. The game also featured several strong horror elements, ranging from sinister versions of the Justice League (Rocksteady Studios, 2024) heroes to a sequence in which corrupted Batman uses Scarecrow's fear toxin while hunting down 'heroes' in near-total darkness (Mago, 2024b). The MCU's strategic response to this trend was the release of *Thunderbolts* (Schreier, 2025).

The latest observable trend – which again builds on the previous one – is the recurrence of the same popular "evil" characters from the superhero genre across different media and titles within a single period. In the context of the intersection between the superhero and horror genres, this trend can be illustrated by the character Wanda Maximoff, alias Scarlet Witch. In mainstream media, she first appeared in the MCU as a villain who later joined the Avengers. The turning point came after the death of her beloved Vision. The TV series *WandaVision* (Feige et al., 2021) presented a psychologically unsettling, even terrifying, story about just how far a powerful "superheroine" like Wanda Maximoff can go while coping with loss, with Agatha Harkness – a powerful dark witch who later got her own TV series – serving as the true antagonist.

Both characters reappeared in the critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful digital game *Marvel's Midnight Suns* (Firaxis Games, 2022). While Agatha is depicted as a *non-playable character* (an ethereal spirit and mentor), Wanda Maximoff's mind is taken over at the game's beginning by Lilith, the mother of demons. Consequently, she becomes one of her Fallen as Scarlet Witch, alongside other characters – Hulk, Sabretooth, and Venom (Figure 1). After her liberation from Lilith's control, Wanda joins the ranks of playable heroes (alongside the Hulk and Venom), whose team comprises a range of characters, including typical heroes such as Iron Man, Captain America, Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, and Storm, as well as darker ones, such as Doctor Strange, Blade, Ghost Rider, Magik, Nico Minoru, Morbius, Deadpool, and Wolverine. This selection of characters

1 Authors' note: Madame Web is also part of this universe; however, she is not portrayed as an anti-heroine in either the comic books or the film, but rather as a positive character.



Figure 1: Lilith and her Fallen in the game Marvel's Midnight Suns. Promotional graphics used as the cover art of the game's Legendary Edition
Source: Mechemik (n.d.)

again suggests that the mainstream media may now be ready for darker superhero media titles – the character Magik has already appeared in the horror film *The New Mutants* (Boone, 2020), and *Blade* (Norrington, 1999). The latter recently appeared in a minor role in the film *Deadpool & Wolverine* (Levy, 2024), portrayed by actor Wesley Snipes, just as in the live-action film trilogy (1998–2006), while his new version is set to take on a significant role in the current MCU's "Multiverse saga" (2021–present), hinted by a voice cameo in the film *Eternals* (Zhao, 2021). In addition to the vampire attributes of this antihero, Blade appears possessed by Khonshu, the Egyptian god of the moon and vengeance, usually associated with the dark superhero Moon Knight in Marvel comics, in the animated TV series *Marvel Zombies* (Winderbaum et al., 2025).

Within the MCU, Wanda Maximoff becomes the sinister villain Scarlet Witch in the film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (Raimi, 2022), in which she pursues the teenager America Chavez to obtain her ability to travel through the multiverse to get back her sons, who disappeared as an illusion she created during the events in the TV series *WandaVision* (Feige et al., 2021). The film features several remarkable horror sequences, such as the classic chase by a killer or monster, performed by the Scarlet Witch, the zombie-like possession of a dead variant of Doctor Strange, and an encounter with the sinister Strange with a third eye on his forehead. Creating a horror atmosphere was intentional, as the film's director was Sam Raimi, who has experience with both superhero and horror films. Finally, the Scarlet Witch recently returned in the TV series *Marvel Zombies* (Winderbaum et al., 2025) as an even more horrific character, Queen of the Dead.

2 Methodology

In order to reflect the scope of the "dark" approach in superhero media production, an analysis of the media market will be conducted with a focus on released media titles. The research material will consist of films (including TV films), TV shows/series and digital games released between 2016 and 2025, as the first indications of *superhero fatigue* were observed as early as 2016 (Brown, 2016). Episodic titles starting in 2025 and extending into 2026 will be accepted. Each title must include both the "superhero" and "horror" tags in its genre description on the IMDb database as the fundamental selection criterion. Within the context of the horror genre, this will encompass either "horror" in general or specific tags representing subgenres (psychological horror, supernatural horror, sci-fi horror, etc.). Given that IMDb does not primarily focus on digital games, the results for this category will be supplemented with titles listed on the Steam platform using the same criteria of selection, i.e., the co-occurrence of the "superhero" and "horror" tags. A qualitative analysis of selected media titles will be conducted to identify the approaches applied to the combination of the superhero and horror genres to determine the characteristics leading to the definition of superhero horror as a subgenre, which will subsequently be illustrated through a case study of a selected title.

3 Superhero Horror

Among the 51 titles released between 2016 and 2025 and categorised as both "horror" and "superhero" in the IMDb database as of June 30, 2026, there were 26 films, 20 TV series, and five digital games. Regarding the Motion Picture Association (MPA) ratings, four films were rated PG-13, four TV series were rated TV-PG, three TV series were rated TV-14, seven TV series and

»

one film were rated TV-MA, five films and one TV series were rated R, and 26 had no rating listed. This indicates that 27.45% of the identified media titles were intended for an audience aged 17 and older. Taking into account factors such as distribution reach (e.g. 13 titles were part of the Japanese *Kamen Rider* and *Garo* franchises with regional distribution) and the extent of production, 15 audiovisual titles were selected for consideration as representative of the issue under study (Table 1).

Table 1: A list of selected films and TV series tagged both "superhero" and "horror" on IMDb in the period 2016–2025

Title	Release year	Media type	MPA rating	IMDb rating
Marvel Zombies	2025	TV series	TV-MA	7
Venom: The Last Dance	2024	Film	PG-13	6
Hellboy: The Crooked Man	2024	Film	R	4.5
Creature Commandos	2024	TV series	TV-MA	7.8
The Crow	2024	Film	R	4.7
Morbius	2022	Film	PG-13	5.1
Venom: Let There Be Carnage	2021	Film	PG-13	5.9
The New Mutants	2020	Film	PG-13	5.3
Brightburn	2019	Film	R	6.1
Hellboy	2019	Film	R	5.3
Glass	2019	Film	N/A	6.6
Swamp Thing	2019	TV series	TV-MA	7.3
Constantine: City of Demons	2018	Film	R	7.3
Constantine: City of Demons	2018	TV series	R	7.5
Van Helsing	2016	TV series	TV-14	6.3

Source: own processing, 2026, based on the IMDb data as of June 30, 2026

IMDb has a total of five digital games in this genre setting listed, of which only *Marvel's Spider-Man 2* (Insomniac Games, 2023) is based on classic superhero comic books. The Steam database, using the same genre search, has 18 game titles listed, though three of these were demo versions (thus counted twice), and one was a compilation that also included older titles of the series. Paradoxically, the list did not include any of the games from the IMDb list. The only games inspired by classic superhero comic books were those from the *Batman: Arkham Series* (Rocksteady Studios et al., 2009–2024), featuring a very dark atmosphere and plenty of horror elements. Worth mentioning is *Werewolf: The Apocalypse – Earthblood* (Cyanide, 2021), in which the player assumes the role of a soldier with lycanthropic (super) powers. It is evident that the genre hybrid examined has not yet gained widespread recognition in the field of digital games and is not standardised or uniformly understood, as indicated by the limited number of listed instances, including the absence of titles such as *Marvel's Midnight Suns* (Firaxis Games, 2022), whose connection to the horror genre we have already declared. This is consistent with the tendency of the digital games sector to adopt trends from the audiovisual sector with a delay, as has been observed in adopting monetisation strategies (Pravdová et al., 2023).

From an audiovisual perspective, the MCU was represented only in the recently released first season of the animated TV series *Marvel Zombies* (Winderbaum et al., 2025), in which the surviving heroes of the zombie apocalypse face not only supervillains but also superheroes who have been turned into zombies as they strive to save the world. As expected, the majority of the remaining titles feature dark superheroes and antiheroes who share thematic affinities with the Universal Monsters, including Morbius, Swamp Thing, Van Helsing, and Creature Commandos, or represent a more extensive integration of horror into the superhero genre, such as Hellboy, Constantine, and Venom. It is evident that the Spider-Man universe character Venom is currently one of the most frequently utilised horror elements in superhero media. Nevertheless, portrayed as an antihero in the eponymous film trilogy released by Sony Pictures, the digital game *Marvel's Spider-Man 2* (Insomniac Games, 2023) was tagged as "horror" on IMDb, mostly due to the inclusion of this character. Additionally, Venom appears in the aforementioned

game *Marvel's Midnight Suns* (Firaxis Games, 2022), where he even adopts a demonic form as a villain before subsequently joining the side of good.

The films *The Crow* (Sanders, 2024) and *Glass* (Shyamalan, 2019) are specific examples that are relatively close to the concept of superhero horror. *The Crow* is a film adaptation of a comic book, but rather in the supernatural than superhero horror genre; and *Glass*, by the acclaimed director of supernatural mystery thrillers and horror films, M. Night Shyamalan, simply builds on the superhero premise of balancing good and evil.

In the context of superhero horror, three titles require particular attention: *Hellboy* (Marshall, 2019), *The New Mutants* (Boone, 2020), and *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019). *Hellboy* is an R-rated film adaptation, in contrast to Guillermo del Toro's PG-13 film series, that represents traditional monster horror (see Rasmussen, 2006), characterised by a high degree of explicitness and gore. Despite its PG-13 rating, *The New Mutants* is a worthy example of psychological horror that emphasises the fundamental elements of the genre – a location far from civilisation, a former hospital, the atmosphere of a psychiatric facility, and a dome-shaped energy field that deliberately cuts off the location from the rest of the world (as in a Stephen King novel). Furthermore, the atmosphere of fear is intensified by the combination of the teenage mutant patients' deep emotional traumas, mostly associated with loss and grief (for a broader media context of this topic, see Novanská Škripcová, 2025), and the abilities of the main protagonist, Danielle "Dani" Moonstar (known as Psyche in the X-Men universe comic books), who can uncontrollably materialise people's greatest fears (including her own). Both films can be considered superhero films made as horrors, and, given their broader potential for use and compatibility even with PG-13-rated superhero series, this concept will likely be more commonly associated with the superhero horror subgenre. This term is already beginning to be used in Wikipedia entries, although the words in the phrase are hyperlinked to individual genre characteristics (see, e.g., Wikipedia, n.d.). The last example, the film *Brightburn*, differs in its approach – it is not a superhero film presented as a horror film, but rather a horror film inspired by the superhero genre. In other words, the central horror element is a character inspired by comic-book superheroes. Representing a narrower, more literal interpretation of the superhero horror subgenre, *Brightburn* was selected as a case study subject to illustrate and determine its defining features.

3.1 Case Study: *Brightburn*

The horror film *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019) adapts Superman lore without any direct references to this superhero, following a style of free inspiration. The film presents an alternative narrative about Superman and provides an answer to the question: What might happen if an extraterrestrial being with almost unlimited power did not possess such unwavering moral principles and a perception of goodness? The fundamental elements of the mythology remain unaltered – a spaceship crashes on a



Figure 2: Promotional graphics and covers for the film Brightburn
Source: IMDb (n.d.a, n.d.b)

farm in a fictional Kansas town, and aboard it, a young couple unable to have children of their own find a child, whom they take in and raise as their own. Subsequently, the course of the following events takes a dramatic and terrifying turn. After his 12th birthday, Brandon realises that he is changing and gaining new abilities – such as super strength, speed, a laser gaze and the ability to fly – which he begins to use to fulfil his desires and "overcome" obstacles, including stalking, intimidation, mutilation and murder. His dark alter ego wears a red cape and a terrifying red mask tied at the front with a white shoelace resembling a mouth with teeth (Figure 2), and his acts of violence are sadistic, serving to proclaim his power and dominance, and are presented explicitly and graphically. Finally, he uses his childlike innocence to avoid arousing suspicion.

In contrast to the films *Hellboy* (Marshall, 2019) and *The New Mutants* (Boone, 2020), in which evil and threats are faced by characters with superpowers (superheroes or antiheroes), thus not entirely helpless individuals, Brandon embodies classic horror evil, which ordinary people without supernatural abilities face, with limited options to stand up to or defend themselves at all. This amplifies the level of fear through the protagonists' defencelessness. Furthermore, the credit scenes depict reports of a mysterious flying creature sighted during the destruction of a building in *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019) and wildfires in Kansas, as well as the appearance of strange symbols burned into fields in Nebraska, emphasising the spread of fear from the local to the global scale.

Although *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019) can be considered a representative example of the superhero horror subgenre, the film had relatively minor commercial and pop-cultural impact. This might be attributed to audience attention being diverted towards the conclusion of the MCU's Infinity Saga, *Avengers: Endgame* (Russo & Russo, 2019), which was released only a month later. Furthermore, the superhero fatigue effect was more prevalent in relation to media products inspired by DC comic superheroes (Mago, 2024a). However, potential impact can be seen in the film ratings. While critics' ratings on Metacritic and Rotten Tomatoes ranged from 44 to 57 out of 100, percentile audience reception was higher and more consistent at 62 to 67 out of 100, generally regarded as above average within the horror genre (see Doyle, 2020).

A similar atmosphere of fear to that in *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019) can be experienced in the more commercially successful and critically acclaimed TV series *The Boys* (Kripke et al., 2019–2026), in which Homelander – a variation on Superman with the same basic abilities – gradually evolved from an antihero into a tyrant and a global threat (see Radošinská & Magalová, 2022). In general, the idea of Superman as a global threat is a relatively common horror element in superhero media. In the film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Snyder, 2016), this is Batman's primary motivation for destroying Superman, thereby eliminating a potential threat. Throughout the film, this possibility is supported by visions, with loss serving as the central motif. This concept is also depicted in the comic-book-inspired game series *Injustice* (NetherRealm Studios, 2013–2018), in which Superman turns to the dark side after losing his beloved Lois Lane, with some other heroes joining him. Finally, in the game *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League* (Rocksteady Studios, 2024), the Justice League heroes have been corrupted by Brainiac, with Superman posing the ultimate threat.

Brightburn's (Yarovesky, 2019) screenplay was written by Brian Gunn and Mark Gunn, the brother and cousin of this film's producer, James Gunn, who has extensive experience directing superhero films, including R-rated ones (e.g., *The Suicide Squad*), and is currently the co-chairman and co-CEO of DC Studios with creative oversight over the development of the new DC cinematic universe. Gunn's preference for this darker interpretation of Superman's mythology can also be seen in his own adaptation from 2025, which explored the thesis that, according to his parents' instructions, Superman was meant to subjugate Earth, raising public concerns after its release.

Discussion and Conclusion

The extent and intensity of the interconnection between the superhero and horror genres – for example, the relationship between Universal Monsters and comic book characters – suggests that the increasing presence of horror elements in superhero media titles can be viewed as one of the current approaches media companies are taking to address the phenomenon of superhero fatigue. In addition to the natural emergence and evolution of darker superheroes and antiheroes due to the compatibility of the superhero and horror genres, this approach has been reinforced by several media trends: portraying comic book supervillains as antiheroes; teaming up antiheroes; the recurrence of the same popular "evil" characters (supervillains, antiheroes) across different media and titles within a single period, such as Venom, Scarlet Witch and Blade. In general, the current more widespread and frequent integration of witches, black magic, vampires, demons, etc., into mainstream superhero media – whether through heroes or antiheroes – opens the door for more horror-inspired characters and stories existing in the superhero comic book world, even into the MCU. In the superhero genre, the logic is that the darker the "hero" on the side of good, the darker and more sinister the evil they must face.

An analysis of the current state indicates that the media market reflects the weight of the horror genre in superhero media titles, but in terms of genre terminology – partly due to the limited diversity of language – it tends to apply a broader, more flexible definition to superhero horror, i.e., superhero themes set in a horror setting or processed within the conventions of the horror genre. Simply put, using the film industry as an example, a superhero film made as a horror film. However, in this case, the term "horror superhero" media title would be a more appropriate designation, since the protagonists who face evil have superpowers.

A narrower yet more precise definition of the superhero horror subgenre can be proposed as follows: a horror inspired by superhero themes. This definition posits that the protagonists (without superpowers) face individuals with superpowers, while being subjected to continuous, intense fear arising from their powerlessness and helplessness to hopelessness, since they often have only limited means to stand up to evil, as illustrated by the case study of the film *Brightburn* (Yarovesky, 2019). Despite the rarity of true superhero horror in the current media market, trends in the superhero market suggest the potential for the increased appearance of such titles in the future.

Nevertheless, the present implementation of this hybrid genre seems to be challenging, even in its broader interpretation. The 2018 film *Venom* (Fleischer, 2018) shares the same characteristics as its sequels and should therefore be included in the analysis results, yet it does not have the "horror" genre tag on the IMDb database. Similarly, several titles mentioned within the theoretical framework released between 2016 and 2025, including the TV series *WandaVision* (Feige et al., 2021), the film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (Raimi, 2022), and the games *Marvel's Midnight Suns* (Firaxis Games, 2022) and *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League* (Rocksteady Studios, 2024), were also absent from the list of the analysis, even though they feature a relatively notable level of horror elements. This finding suggests that establishing a connection between the superhero and horror genres can be problematic due to the presence of conflicting characteristics, e.g., a horror with a PG-13 rating (see Platts & Clasen, 2017). Consequently, the results of the analysis are more indicative, offering insights into market trends in this issue.

Acknowledgement
This paper was elaborated within the research project supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV) No. APVV-21-0115, titled "Hypermodern Media Culture – Film and Television Production as Mirror of Sociocultural Phenomena of the 21st Century".

References

Ayer, D. (Director). (2016). *Suicide Squad* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures; DC Films; RatPac-Dune Entertainment; Atlas Entertainment.
Boone, J. (Director). (2020). *The New Mutants* [Film]. 20th Century Studios; Marvel Entertainment; Kinberg Genre; Sunswept Entertainment.
Brown, C. (2024, October 11). *The rise of the anti-hero in comics: A deep dive into their popularity and evolution*. https://rippaverse.com/the-rise-of-the-anti-hero-in-comics/
Brown, J. A. (2016). *The modern superhero in film and television: Popular genre and American culture*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315708980
Carroll, N. (1990). *The philosophy of horror, or paradoxes of the heart*. Routledge.
Cyanide. (2021). *Werewolf: The Apocalypse – Earthblood* [Digital game]. Nacon.

»

Doyle, J. (2020, August 7). *Behind the jumpscare: The spooky statistics in horror movie rankings*. https://www.viget.com/articles/behind-the-jumpscare-the-spooky-statistics-in-horror-movie-rankings

Feige, K., D'Esposito, L., Alonso, V., Shakman, M., & Schaeffer, J. (Executive producers). (2021). *WandaVision* [TV drama]. Marvel Studios.

Firaxis Games. (2022). *Marvel's Midnight Suns* [Digital game]. 2K.

Fleischer, R. (Director). (2018). *Venom* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Marvel Entertainment; Tencent Pictures; Avi Arad Productions; Matt Tolmach Productions; Pascal Pictures.

Gunn, J. (Director). (2021). *The Suicide Squad* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures; DC Films; Atlas Entertainment; The Safran Company.

IMDb. (n.d.a). *Syn temnoty (2019)*. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7752126/mediaviewer/rm4105201408

IMDb. (n.d.b). *Syn temnoty (2019)*. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7752126/mediaviewer/rm428433408/

Insomniac Games. (2023). *Marvel's Spider-Man 2* [Digital game]. Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Jarvis, B. (2020). Universal horror. In C. Bloom (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary gothic* (pp. 679–694). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33136-8_40

Kripke, E., Rogen, S., Goldberg, E., Weaver, J., Moritz, N. H., Shetty, P., Marmur, O., Trachtenberg, D., Levin, K. F., Netter, J., Rosenberg, C., Sgriccia, P., Sonnenshine, R., Grellong, P., Reed, D., Glynn, M., Ennis, G., Robertson, D., Starr, M., … Garcia, G. (Executive producers). (2019–2026). *The Boys* [TV drama]. Kripke Enterprises; Point Grey Pictures; Original Film; Kickstart Entertainment; KFL Nightsky Productions; Amazon MGM Studios; Sony Pictures Television.

Leitch, D. (Director). (2018). *Deadpool 2* [Film]. 20th Century Fox; Marvel Entertainment; Kinberg Genre; Maximum Effort; The Donners' Company.

Levy, S. (Director). (2024). *Deadpool & Wolverine* [Film]. Marvel Studios; Maximum Effort; 21 Laps Entertainment.

Mago, Z. (2024a). Determinants of the reception of recent superhero digital game adaptations in an era of "superhero fatigue". *Dot.comm*, *12*(1), 23–34. https://www.eammm.eu/dot-comm-pdf/2024_01.pdf

Mago, Z. (2024b). Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League [Review of the game *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League*, created by Rocksteady Studios, 2024]. *Acta Ludologica*, *7*(1), 163–166. https://actaludologica.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AL_2024-7-1_Review-3_Mago.pdf

Marshall, N. (Director). (2019). *Hellboy* [Film]. Summit Entertainment; Millennium Media; Lawrence Gordon/Lloyd Levin Productions; Dark Horse Entertainment; Nu Boyana; Campbell Grobman Films.

Mechemik. (n.d.). *Lilith and enemies*. https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/marvels-midnight-suns/images/5/52/Lilith_and_enemies.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1000?cb=20220615221829

Miller, T. (Director). (2016). *Deadpool* [Film]. 20th Century Fox; Marvel Entertainment; Kinberg Genre; The Donners' Company.

Milligan, P. (Writer). (1988–2024). *Hellblazer* (G. Camuncoli, & S. Landini, Illus.). DC Comics; Vertigo; Titan Books; DC Black Label.

Neibaur, J. L. (2017). *The monster movies of Universal Studios*. Rowman & Littlefield.

NetherRealm Studios. (2013–2018). *Injustice* (series) [Digital game]. Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Novanská Škripcová, L. (2025). Coping with loss and grief in games: A case study of Clair Obscur: Expedition 33. *Acta Ludologica*, *8*(2), 112–125. https://actaludologica.com/coping-with-loss-and-grief-in-games-a-case-study-of-clair-obscur-expedition-33/

Perron, B. (2009). Introduction: Gaming after dark. In B. Perron (Ed.), *Horror video games: Essays on the fusion of fear and play* (pp. 3–13). McFarland & Company.

Platts, T. K., & Clasen, M. (2017). Scary business: Horror at the North American box office, 2006–2016. *Frames Cinema Journal*, *11*. https://framescinemajournal.com/article/scary-business-horror-at-the-north-american-box-office-2006-2016/

Pravdová, H., Radošinská, J., & Mago, Z. (2023). *Monetization in creative industries: Culture, media, digital games*. Wolters Kluwer.

Proctor, W. (2022). Building imaginary horror worlds: Transfictional storytelling and the Universal Monster franchise cycle. In M. McKenna, & W. Proctor (Eds.), *Horror franchise cinema* (pp. 29–50). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429060830-1

Radošinská, J. (2018). *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius.

Radošinská, J., & Magalová, L. (2022). Supes, Inc.: Episodic television drama The Boys, antiheroism and society of performance. *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, *5*(1), 28–52. https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2_Jana-Radosinska-Lucia-Magalova.pdf

Radošinská, J., & Mago, Z. (2025). Fandom and participation in the spotlight: Expressions of fan culture related to superhero movie universes. In J. Radošinská, & Z. Hudíková (Eds.), *Stories on our screens: Media reflections of hypermodern society, culture, and everyday life* (pp. 33–54). Wolters Kluwer.

Raimi, S. (Director). (2022). *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Rasmussen, R. (2006). *Children of the night: The six archetypal characters of classic horror films*. McFarland & Company.

Rocksteady Studios, WB Games Montréal, Splash Damage, Human Head Studios, NetherRealm Studios, Armature Studio, Turbine, Turn Me Up, & Camouflaj. (2009–2024). *Batman: Arkham* (series) [Digital game]. Eidos Interactive; Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment; Warner Bros. Games; Oculus Studios.

Rocksteady Studios. (2024). *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League* [Digital game]. Warner Bros. Games.

Rouse III, R. (2009). Match made in hell: The inevitable success of the horror genre in video games. In B. Perron (Ed.), *Horror video games: Essays on the fusion of fear and play* (pp. 15–25). McFarland & Company.

Russo, A., & Russo, J. (Directors). (2019). *Avengers: Endgame* [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Russo, A., & Russo, J. (Directors). (2026). *Avengers: Doomsday* [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Sanders, R. (Director). (2024). *The Crow* [Film]. FilmNation Entertainment; Hassell Free Productions; Electric Shadow Company; Davis Films; Pressman Film; 30WEST; Ashland Hill Media Finance; Maze Pictures; Occupant Entertainment.

Schreier, J. (Director). (2025). *Thunderbolts** [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Shyamalan, M. N. (Director). (2019). *Glass* [Film]. Perfect World Pictures; Blinding Edge Pictures; Blumhouse Productions.

Snyder, Z. (Director). (2016). *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures; RatPac-Dune Entertainment; DC Entertainment; Atlas Entertainment; Cruel and Unusual Films.

Vander Kaay, C., & Fernandez-Vander Kaay, K. (2024). *Horror films by subgenre: A viewer's guide*. McFarland & Company.

Wikipedia. (n.d.). *The New Mutants* (film). Retrieved July 7, 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Mutants_(film)

Wilding, J. (2025, November 1). *AVENGERS: DOOMSDAY trailer description reveals a big Doctor Doom twist: "[Downey] went full Universal Monster"*. https://comicbookmovie.com/avengers/avengers-doomsday/avengers-doomsday-trailer-description-reveals-a-big-doctor-doom-twist-downey-went-full-universal-monster-a224586

Winderbaum, B., Feige, K., D'Esposito, L., Vasquez-Eberhardt, D., Wells, Z., & Andrews, B. (Executive producers). (2025). *Marvel Zombies* [TV drama]. Marvel Studios Animation.

Worland, R. (2025). *The horror film: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Yarovesky, D. (Director). (2019). *Brightburn* [Film]. Screen Gems; Stage 6 Films; The H Collective; Troll Court Entertainment.

Zhao, C. (Director). (2021). *Eternals* [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Authors

Assoc. Prof. Mgr. Zdenko Mago, PhD.
zdenko.mago@ucm.sk
ORCID-ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5182-4016

Mgr. Samuel Draxler
draxler1@ucm.sk
ORCID-ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7053-6131

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Faculty of Mass Media Communication
Nám. J. Herdu 2
Trnava, 917 01, Slovak Republic

Profile of the Authors

Zdenko Mago is an associate professor in the Department of Digital Games at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. His research focuses on the interconnections between game studies and marketing communication, exploring this discourse also within the broader context of visual and audiovisual popular culture. Since 2018, he has been the editor-in-chief of the scientific journal *Acta Ludologica*.

Samuel Draxler is a PhD student in the Department of Digital Games at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. In his dissertation, he focuses on the horror genre and its relation to digital games, classifying horror subgenres and examining the communication strategies employed by horror games. In his leisure time, he also develops digital games.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.34135/ejmap-26-02-04