**Carrie (1976)**
**Production:** Red Bank Films / United Artists
**Certificate:** 18 (1976) 15 (2024)
**Run time:** 98 mins
**If you liked this you might also like:** *The Fury* (1978), *Halloween* (1978); *The Shining* (1980); *Obsession (*1976*); Christine (*1983*); The Shining* (1980*); Class Reunion (1982); Misery* (1990*); Ginger Snaps (*2000*); Let the Right One In* (2008)

*There is a signature to a Brian DePalma film which makes him as much of a conspicuous figure in his movies as the far more publicity- hungry contemporaries Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg are in theirs. No matter which genre he works in, he leaves his fingerprints all over his films because he exerts so much control over every frame.* - John Ashbrook, Brian DePalma (2000) p.7

**Sissy Spacek as Carrie White**
**Piper Laurie as Margaret White**
**Amy Irving as Sue Snell**
**Nancy Allen as Chris Hargensen**
**John Travolta as Billy Nolan**

Carrie was Stephen King's first novel and the first of his works to be adapted to the screen, as such it is in someways atypical of King's work in length and style – while featuring some themes which he explores in other later works (small town life, adolescent cruelty, telekinesis, Christian fundamentalism). Its adaptation however is typical of the early work of Brian DePalma; one of the more prolific 'movie brat' directors that came through the independent sector and into Hollywood in the 1970s, Carrie was already his tenth film, and features many of the hallmark traits of his pre blockbuster career – stylistic visual flourishes such as long shots and split-screen, Hitchcock references, expressionistic colour symbolism, melodrama, voyeurism, obsession and guilt. While many King adaptations steer away from his social themes and violent symbolism – DePalma leant into these emphasising them. Look out for the more obvious references to Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (the shower sequence, the Bates High School, the echoing of Bernard Hermann's staccato score), but also the mirroring of the camera work in Vertigo (1958) for the prom sequence. Similarly the use of white to presage evil, and the use of red to invoke violence, in lighting, props and costume. Optioned by DePalma before the book was a success, the modest rights payment for the film was vital to King, who was living in a trailer

with his wife while working as a high-school teacher and writing for magazines, and allowed him to keep writing; the success of the film then propelling the simultaneous paperback edition of the book to an unprecedented success for a horror novel. The film was a low budget ($1.2m) studio picture – and went on to recoup 20 times its final budget, becoming DePalma's first major box office success, and garnering Oscar nominations for its two female leads Sissy Spacek and Piper Laurie. This success has led to multiple remakes, a sequel and a musical, including a current series adaptation for Amazon/MGM.

Sissy Spacek is known to most people from the role of Carrie although she went on to win an acting Oscar for *The Coalminer's Daughter*. Carrie was not the beginning of her career either; she'd been a photographic model and singer in the '60s. She was not new to acting. Spacek was 27 at the time and had already played other significant roles, including serial killer Kit's (Martin Sheen) girlfriend Holly in Terence Malick's *Badlands (1973)*. She met her husband Jack Fisk, the art director on *Badlands* and worked with him (as set dresser) on De Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise (1974)*.

Carrie's story is simple but devastating. After a humiliating incident in the school locker room, Carrie begins to discover her telekinetic abilities. Sue Snell, remorseful for her part in the bullying, persuades her boyfriend to take Carrie to the prom as an act of kindness. But Chris Hargensen, expelled for tormenting Carrie, plots a cruel revenge. The prom sequence — one of the most famous in cinema — builds from dreamlike sweetness to operatic horror, culminating in Carrie's catastrophic unleashing of her powers.

Roger Ebert wrote:

"De Palma's visual style is so controlled and precise that it builds a sense of dread almost from the first frame."

De Palma's subsequent films illuminate the sensibilities first crystallised here…

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See Also:

Stephen King on Screen — BBC documentary (various editions available on iPlayer)

The Devil's Playground: Brian De Palma — Mark Kermode commentary and analysis

Carrie (1976) audio commentary by De Palma and Laurent Bouzereau

The Prom Scene: An Oral History — cast and crew interviews (widely available online)