

Cultural Daily

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Next Generation Slasher: The Final Girl

Brody Garcia · Wednesday, January 30th, 2019

Water laps against the lake shore as a kayak lies in wait, with the sharp blade of a machete, they separate flesh from bone and cause a head to tumble into the coarse dirt. Stump jammed in a chainsaw, they force spinning teeth to tear flesh apart and onto the forest floor. Having finally escaped the nightmare, burning house in the distance, they hold onto the bloody knife.

The horror genre has a constant mainstay, the Final Girl; A term coined for the final survivor of a horror movie who is often a girl. She is our lead protagonist that can push past the relentless slaughter of those around her and emerge out the other side, usually having slain the monstrous antagonist for his deeds. If you thought the descriptors above were of a Slasher eviscerating their victim, you'd be wrong, it describes the acts of Final Girls Alice, Mia, and Allison as, and after, they've defeated the killer. Our once sweet and innocent protagonist getting her hands dirty. I never put much thought into the triumphant heroine at the end of each slasher until the recent *Halloween* (2018), wherein at the end of the film Laurie Strode's granddaughter, Allison, is the one holding the knife. The image made me realize a recent trend in the horror genre that says things are about to get a lot worse for unsuspecting victims, the female slasher is coming.

However, that's not to say that there'll be a sudden shift from male Slashers to female. Jason will not become Janet in the next *Friday the 13th* reboot. Instead, Final Girls will begin to *inherit* the title of Slasher, picking up the mask and weapon of choice to continue the franchise. This theory is built off author Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1992), in which she eludes that both Slasher and Final Girl are two sides of the same coin. In her work, Clover describes the Final Girl as "boyish" with names like "Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, [and] Max" cementing this (40). The Final Girl is a cross roads between man and woman, "in which the categories Masculine and feminine, traditionally embodied in male and female, are collapsed into one and the same character – a character who is anatomically female and one whose point of view the spectator is unambiguously invited{,} to share" (Clover, 61). Clover's term "boyish" also applies to her description of Slashers, describing the iconic *Leatherface* as "[jiggling] in baby fat behind his butcher's apron" and "Norman Bates, whose bedroom still displays childhood toys" as "permanently locked in childhood" (27-28).

Thus, Clover goes on to say that "just as the killer is not fully masculine, she [the Final Girl] is not fully feminine", to say that their final confrontation is a battle to decide their identification (40). The killer is trying to rid himself of his childlike femininity, and the Final Girl is confronting her own Masculinity. If the Slasher slays the Final Girl, then he achieves manhood and the Final Girl can rest in femininity. Of course, the Final Girl is destined to win this fight, making it the "male

killer's tragedy that his incipient femininity is not reversed but completed (castration) and the Final Girl's victory that her incipient masculinity is not thwarted but realized (phallicization) (Clover, 50).

Clover ends her hypothesis there, just like a movie where the character's arc has been completed, it ends with our lead standing on the edge with the sun blazing behind them, equipped with a bloody knife and new identification; the so-called masculine identity, the very thing our Slasher couldn't achieve.

But what's next for our Final Girl? Like most film franchises, we can cut out our current lead, substitute them for a new Final Girl, resetting the clock for our Slasher and allowing them another chance at redemption... or we can continue her story. In which case, if we follow Clover's logic to the next step, she then becomes the Slasher. One I believe would be far deadlier than any before.

Clover argues that by holding the knife and disposing the Slasher, the Final Girl achieves manhood and crosses the line that separates them from their antagonist. The Final Girl effectively becomes what the Slasher was trying to be, achieving the manhood the Slasher desired, and I believe inadvertently turning themselves into the Slasher.

The conceited being, the Final Girl must kill the Slasher, because it's the only act that allows them to discard the label: *Final Girl*. We know this thanks to three examples from the *Halloween* franchise. In the original *Halloween* (1978), Laurie Strode does not defeat Michael Myers, only holding him off with household items long enough for Dr. Loomis to save her. This was in accordance with early Slasher rules that the Final Girl had to be saved and could not save herself. Meaning that in *Halloween II* (1981) when Michael returns and tries to kill a bed ridden Laurie, she must be saved by Dr. Loomis again because she hasn't killed the Slasher and is still labeled as a Final Girl.

In *Halloween: H20* (1998), Laurie Strode progresses to modern conventions. As a Final Girl she can save herself, and does, eventually killing Michael via decapitation to finally rid herself of the Final Girl mantle.

However, we don't get to see the aftermath of that film due to *Halloween* (2018), which disregards everything after the original *Halloween* (1978), resetting our beloved Final Girl. Laurie is once again pitched as a Final Girl alongside, her daughter and her grand-daughter Allison. Having faced Michael once, just as in *Halloween: H20*, she is ready for him and can predict some of his signature tricks (something we'll touch on later) but can't defeat him without help. Laurie, her daughter and grand-daughter Allison, having all become Final Girls, defeat Michael together. A victory that comes as a relief to Laurie and her daughter, but as stated earlier, her grand-daughter Allison holds Michael's classic knife at the end of the movie to seemingly elude to her earning of Slasher status. Something Laurie could never achieve because she never disposed of Michael.



So, killing the Slasher is a must for the Final Girl to take over the mantle, if you don't, you still hold the title of Final Girl and must run the gauntlet until you do. Of course, the Slasher is defeated at the end of seemingly every modern Slasher, but the Final Girl rarely returns, making it hard to find textual evidence for them becoming Slashers. One of the exceptions being Sidney Prescott from the *Scream* franchise. She returned in three sequels and never put on the mask, but I think that she proves one of the most powerful weapons a returning Final Girl possess: knowledge.

The *Scream* franchise prided itself on being self-aware of the genre that it lived in, making references to and subverting what had become tropes. It lived in a more firmly rooted reality, and due to this, perhaps Sidney may not have been able to progress as I'm proposing. Except she was just as knowledgeable as if she had, because unlike most Final Girls, horror movies do exist in her world and she applied those rules to the scenarios she found herself in. Sidney, standing over the killer with a gun in *Scream* (1997), was aware of the 'Killer returns for one last scare' cliché, and fired another round into the killer's head just as he performed it. By knowing the tropes of horror movies, she was able to be one step ahead of her foe.

And though she may not have been a slasher in sequels, she was able turn the tables on her attacker even in the first film. Having done the staple run and hide, our Slasher searched for Sidney. Passing a closet, it dawned on him. Back stepping, he threw open the door to be greeted by coats. Then, out popped Sidney in full Ghostface attire (the staple slasher of the franchise), mask and robes adorned, and thrust an umbrella into her foe's chest.

If a normal in-genre Final Girl were to become a Slasher, they would be just as well versed in the horror genre as those that watch horror movies, like Sydney, because they lived it. As a Slasher they would understand the beats that each scene usually hits, like where the prey is hiding, and would prove extremely lethal, just as Sidney did in the closet scene. Their knowledge would give them a predictive edge greater than their predecessor.

While Sidney may have not become a Slasher in the traditional sense, by the time she reached *Scream 4* (2007) she was just as unkillable, appearing in more features than any Final Girl before her, racking up a few kills and acquiring some Slasher attributes.

Now my argument would lose all merit if there wasn't a case of a Final Girl having become the Slasher. So, for a returning Final Girl that literally fully becomes the Slasher, we look to Nica from *Curse of Chuck* (2013) and *Cult of Chucky* (2017). After checking the box for surviving the first movie and disposing of the Slasher, she is institutionalized and seemingly sees Chucky everywhere. Multiple dolls are roaming the halls, eventually revealing that Chucky has split his soul into multiple dolls to continue carrying out his hijinks. By the films end, Chucky has Nica pinned to the wall and finally achieves his goal, transferring his soul into her body, allowing him to take full control. Truly the actualization of both Clover's theory and my own: a female body with masculine tendencies, and the Final Girl now become the Slasher.

While at the time of writing there has not been a follow up film, we can theorize that the lethality would be off the charts. Able to be deceitful, posing as one of the victims, but able to turn the tables and be the deadly Slasher among them. Only equipped with the knowledge of a Slasher and a Final Girl.

As well, this hypothetical Slasher would be far deadlier than any of its predecessors. As Carol says, where as the male Slasher is boyish, meaning they are very playful with their victims in a twisted way. A progressed Final Girl would be relentless, excreting a cold ruthlessness that comes with their new-found masculinity.

What I'm proposing is not a slasher that happens to be a woman, but the continuation of a character arc. If Clover's collection of essays proves anything, it's that Horror movies, especially *Slashers*, have their own formulas. Our lead character is the female that is the least sexually active, and by the films end will face off against a man child with possible gender dysphoria. She will

unleash her sexual frustration on him by taking his symbolic weapon and brutalizing him with it. What is a formula is also a character arc.

Our lead goes through a transformation, starting out as a confused tomboy, and only through their horrific experience being able to confront their very being. Like Nancy Thompson standing on her porch at the end of *A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)*, able to look out at a new morning, the nightmare's over. However, if we are to continue that arc, based on Clover's theory that through the Final Girl defeating the Slasher they achieve the very thing the Slasher was after, it's only logical to say that they will become the Slasher. Not only due to the trauma warping their mind, but having crossed the line and committed the very act they'd witnessed. They are now masculine, with symbolic weapon in hand, the only thing that's left is to put on the mask and step into the next generation.

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