

children of the corn short story

children of the corn short story is a chilling tale originally penned by Stephen King that explores themes of isolation, fanaticism, and rural horror. First published in the 1977 issue of Penthouse magazine and later included in King's 1978 collection *Night Shift*, the story has captivated readers with its eerie atmosphere and unsettling narrative. Set in a desolate Nebraska town, it tells the story of a couple who stumble upon a community ruled by a group of sinister children devoted to a malevolent deity. The blend of supernatural elements with psychological tension has made *children of the corn short story* a significant work in the horror genre. This article delves into the plot, characters, themes, adaptations, and the lasting influence of the story, providing a comprehensive understanding of its place in literary and popular culture. The following sections will guide readers through the essential aspects of the *children of the corn short story*.

- Plot Summary of Children of the Corn Short Story
- Main Characters and Their Roles
- Themes and Symbolism in Children of the Corn
- Adaptations and Cultural Impact
- Legacy and Influence in Horror Literature

Plot Summary of Children of the Corn Short Story

The *children of the corn short story* unfolds with a couple, Burt and Vicky, who are traveling through rural Nebraska. They accidentally hit a young boy with their car on a deserted highway. Upon seeking help in the nearby town of Gatlin, they discover that the town is deserted except for a group of children. These children worship a mysterious entity known as "He Who Walks Behind the Rows," a sinister god residing in the cornfields. The children have killed all the adults in the town as part of a cult-like ritual to maintain favor with their deity. As the story progresses, Burt and Vicky become entangled in the children's violent and fanatical world, struggling to survive against overwhelming odds. The narrative combines suspense, horror, and supernatural elements to create a compelling and terrifying experience.

Setting and Atmosphere

The story's setting in the isolated town of Gatlin contributes significantly to the eerie and claustrophobic atmosphere. The endless cornfields surrounding the town symbolize both confinement and the

omnipresent influence of the cult. The rural backdrop accentuates themes of desolation and abandonment, establishing a perfect environment for the horror to unfold.

Key Plot Events

- Burt and Vicky's encounter with the boy on the highway
- Discovery of the children's cult and their violent rituals
- The revelation of "He Who Walks Behind the Rows" as the children's deity
- Struggle for survival against the murderous children
- The climactic confrontation and its aftermath

Main Characters and Their Roles

The children of the corn short story features a small but memorable cast of characters, each playing a critical role in conveying the story's themes and advancing the plot. The characters embody various aspects of innocence corrupted and the dark consequences of fanaticism.

Burt and Vicky

Burt and Vicky are the adult protagonists who inadvertently become trapped in the terrifying world of Gatlin. Their outsider status allows readers to discover the horrors of the town through their eyes. Burt is portrayed as practical and resourceful, while Vicky is more vulnerable, highlighting contrasting responses to the unfolding terror.

The Children of Gatlin

The children serve as the antagonists, representing a collective force driven by religious zealotry. Led by Isaac Chroner, they enforce strict adherence to their beliefs and ruthlessly eliminate any dissent. The children's eerie behavior and unwavering loyalty to their deity enhance the story's unsettling mood.

Isaac Chroner

Isaac is the charismatic and fanatical leader of the children's cult. His manipulative and authoritarian nature drives the cult's actions and solidifies the children's control over Gatlin. Isaac's character embodies the dangers of blind faith and the corrupting influence of power.

Themes and Symbolism in Children of the Corn

The children of the corn short story is rich with themes and symbolism that deepen its impact and contribute to its status as a classic horror narrative. These elements explore societal fears, religious extremism, and the loss of innocence.

Religious Fanaticism and Cultism

A central theme is the destructive power of religious fanaticism. The children's blind devotion to "He Who Walks Behind the Rows" leads to violence and the eradication of adult influence. This theme critiques how unquestioning faith can result in moral corruption and societal breakdown.

Loss of Innocence

The story subverts the traditional association of children with innocence by portraying them as the perpetrators of horror. This inversion creates a disturbing contrast that heightens the story's tension and challenges readers' expectations.

Isolation and Abandonment

The setting in a remote, abandoned town symbolizes isolation both physical and psychological. The absence of adults and the dominance of the children's cult create a world cut off from normal society, reflecting fears of abandonment and alienation.

Symbolism of Cornfields

The cornfields represent multiple symbolic meanings: they are a source of life and sustenance, a place of entrapment, and the physical manifestation of the deity's power. The rustling corn becomes an ominous presence throughout the story, underscoring the pervasive control of the cult.

Adaptations and Cultural Impact

The children of the corn short story has inspired numerous adaptations and has had a significant cultural impact, especially within the horror genre. Its adaptation into film and other media has expanded its reach beyond the literary audience.

Film Adaptations

The most notable adaptation is the 1984 film *Children of the Corn*, directed by Fritz Kiersch. While the film takes liberties with the original story, it retains the core themes and has become a cult classic in its own right. Several sequels and remakes have followed, cementing the story's place in horror cinema.

Other Media and References

The story has influenced various other media, including comic books, television episodes, and video games. Its iconic imagery and themes are frequently referenced in popular culture, demonstrating its enduring relevance.

Impact on the Horror Genre

Children of the corn short story contributed to the development of rural horror, a subgenre focusing on fear arising from isolated countryside settings. It also helped popularize themes involving sinister children and cults, which remain staples in horror storytelling.

Legacy and Influence in Horror Literature

The children of the corn short story remains a significant work in Stephen King's oeuvre and in horror literature more broadly. Its innovative exploration of childhood, religion, and rural terror continues to inspire writers and filmmakers.

Stephen King's Contribution

As part of King's *Night Shift* collection, the story showcases his skill in blending supernatural horror with psychological depth. It exemplifies his ability to create suspenseful narratives that explore complex human fears.

Influence on Subsequent Works

The story's themes and motifs have influenced numerous authors and filmmakers who explore the darker aspects of innocence and community. It serves as a template for narratives involving cults, isolated communities, and the corruption of youth.

Continued Popularity

Decades after its publication, children of the corn short story continues to be studied and enjoyed for its compelling storytelling and thematic richness. Its place in horror history is secured by its unique premise and lasting impact on audiences.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who wrote the short story 'Children of the Corn'?

The short story 'Children of the Corn' was written by Stephen King.

What is the main plot of 'Children of the Corn'?

The story follows a couple who encounter a rural town inhabited and controlled by a cult of children who worship a demonic entity called 'He Who Walks Behind the Rows.'

When was 'Children of the Corn' first published?

'Children of the Corn' was first published in 1977 in the magazine Penthouse and later included in Stephen King's 1978 collection 'Night Shift.'

What is the significance of the cornfield in the story?

The cornfield serves as a symbolic and literal place of power for the children's cult, hiding their dark rituals and representing their control over the town.

Are the children in 'Children of the Corn' portrayed as innocent or sinister?

The children are portrayed as sinister, having formed a violent cult that sacrifices adults to maintain their power and appease their deity.

Has 'Children of the Corn' been adapted into other media?

Yes, 'Children of the Corn' has been adapted into several films, starting with the 1984 movie of the same name, as well as comic books and other media.

What themes are explored in 'Children of the Corn'?

The story explores themes of religious fanaticism, the loss of innocence, the dangers of blind faith, and the conflict between adults and children.

Additional Resources

1. *Children of the Corn* by Stephen King

This is the original short story that inspired the horror franchise. It tells the chilling tale of a couple who stumble upon a rural town inhabited by a cult of murderous children who worship a sinister entity in the cornfields. The narrative explores themes of fanaticism, isolation, and the loss of innocence. King's masterful storytelling creates an atmosphere of suspense and dread that has captivated readers for decades.

2. *Harvest of Shadows: Tales Inspired by Children of the Corn* by Various Authors

A collection of horror stories inspired by the eerie world of "Children of the Corn." Each tale delves into the dark corners of rural horror, cults, and supernatural phenomena related to cornfields and isolated communities. This anthology expands on the unsettling themes of the original story, offering fresh perspectives and terrifying new legends.

3. *Cult of the Corn: The Legacy Continues* by Michael G. Johnson

Set years after the events of the original story, this novel follows a group of teenagers who uncover a hidden cult operating in the cornfields of Nebraska. As they investigate, they face psychological terror and the supernatural forces that protect the cult's secrets. The book combines suspense, folklore, and horror to explore the persistence of evil in small-town America.

4. *Fields of Fear: A Children of the Corn Novel* by Lisa M. Harper

This novel expands on the mythos of the original story by focusing on a journalist who returns to her hometown to investigate the mysterious disappearances linked to the cornfields. She uncovers dark rituals and a community gripped by fear and fanaticism. The book blends mystery and horror, emphasizing the impact of trauma and the power of confronting one's past.

5. *The Cornfield Murders* by Robert K. Ellis

A detective thriller with supernatural elements, this book centers on a series of grisly murders in a farming town surrounded by endless cornfields. The investigator soon realizes that the victims are connected to an ancient cult reminiscent of the Children of the Corn. The novel explores themes of belief, madness, and the thin line between reality and nightmare.

6. *Whispers in the Corn* by Emily R. Stone

In this eerie tale, a young girl with a mysterious past returns to her family farm only to find the cornfields whispering secrets and warnings. As she uncovers the truth about her lineage and the dark history of the land, she must confront supernatural forces tied to the Children of the Corn legend. The story is a haunting blend of gothic horror and family drama.

7. *Blood Harvest* by Daniel K. Wells

This horror novel revolves around a group of friends who accidentally awaken an ancient evil buried beneath a cornfield. As the malevolent force grows stronger, they are forced to fight for their lives against possessed children and sinister rituals. The book emphasizes survival horror and the consequences of disturbing dark traditions.

8. *Seed of Darkness* by Karen L. Matthews

Following a young woman who inherits her grandfather's farm, this novel explores the resurgence of a cult that worships a dark entity in the cornfields. As strange occurrences escalate, she must unravel the mystery behind the cult's origins and her own connection to it. The story blends psychological horror with supernatural suspense.

9. *Echoes from the Cornfield* by Thomas H. Greene

This psychological horror novel tells the story of a man haunted by memories of a terrifying childhood spent near cursed cornfields. When he returns to confront his past, he encounters the malevolent cult and the dark forces that shaped his life. The book delves into themes of memory, trauma, and the enduring nature of evil.

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