

ANYONE UP FOR A HORROR FILM?

A Tale of Horror

My skin was covered with goosebumps. I was really beginning to feel as if I shouldn't have shaved and had a strong wish to be far hairier than I currently was. At least with the goosebumps, my hair would have stood out, making me look bigger.

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I walked into the living room, turned on the set, and used the dimmer switch on the lights. It was horror film night. I have no idea why I watch these things, it's a compulsion as far as I can tell. The need to feel the blood pumping through your veins, the chill crawling up your spine. Or maybe just the chance to laugh at some cheesy special effects. It took a minute for the set to warm up, or maybe it was the film's first effect. A light expanding from the center, taking a few minutes to reach the far edges. LCD TV screen doesn't do those kinds of things anymore, do they?

I rarely watch a horror film alone, but tonight was an exception. The film was starting. The lion had finished roaring, you know the one. The screen had faded into a picture of the moors on a dark Saturday night. It was one of those classic scenes where it seems one of the techs had put too much dry ice in the bathwater. This is when I first saw it. I'm sure you had the feeling yourself. A shape, maybe only a shadow, a sound with no distinct source. It can't be coming from the television, can it? The inescapable feeling you saw something combined with the realization the doors are locked and nothing could possibly be there. Without preamble or warning, she walked into the room from behind me. I turned to check. The door was still closed and locked, the security chain firmly in place.

But what sat down beside me was no figment of my overtaxed imagination. I felt the couch shift when she sat down next to me. Illusions don't do move furniture, right? She was extraordinarily hard to ignore. Long, lustrous, and straight dark hair. An outfit which made someone wearing the Vampirella costume seem overdressed. Her boots covered more of her body than her outfit. I could swear I could hear the squeaks of bats in the distance.

Strange as it may seem, her practically non-existent outfit wasn't the first thing I noticed, nor the full-figured form underneath. No, the first thing which caught my eyes was the impressively long fangs that appeared practically dripping along with her smile. Her smile, by the way, was as beautiful as the rest of her, only more terrifying.

I tried to beam back but it ended up being a shutter as she coolly looked me in the eye. She ran her fingers slowly down the side of my upper arm. Her body temperature was icy cold. Which didn't make me feel any better. Some part of me was hoping the fangs were a kinky prosthetic, but the icy fingertips were beyond a simple jump-scare horror house device. I pointed at the locked door then to her and once again back to the locked door. The technical impossibility was only beginning to penetrate my addled brain.

"There you are," she remarked in a blatantly seductive, but pleased tone. She was glancing at the floor. I followed her eyes and saw it move. The furry shape crossed right in front of us. At first, I thought it was a dog ... an amazingly big dog. Even if it had been a small dog, it would still have been a problem. Because I don't have a dog. My adrenalin started flowing madly when the thing rose on two legs and took a seat in the Barcalounger. "It couldn't miss this movie," he said in a clear and unmistakable tone. It was hard to imagine such a smooth voice coming from so long and wolf-like a snout as this beast possessed.

The next creature who literally stumbled in from the kitchen was wrapped up in bandages from neck to toe. Some of them were even trailing off into the distance behind him. The woman patted the couch on the other side of her. "Imhotep, come, sit right here beside me. I'm sure our host won't mind." Personally, I couldn't see the attraction. I mean the man's face had more wrinkles than a bad spy novel.

And he didn't look at all like either the debonair Boris Karloff or handsome Arnold Vosloo. I mean Arnold I could understand, even if he had less hair than me.

I got completely freaked out when the Chucky doll sauntered across the floor and sat down in front of me. I almost lost my lunch when the doll's head turned 180 degrees and remarked, "Hi, I'm Chucky, and I'm your friend till the end." The entrance of the Pennywise clown crawling out from under the couch didn't help calm my nerves either. He pulled out a folding chair from his sleeve and set it up on the far side of the couch. I pulled my legs up into fetal position and tried to stay very still.

It might have worked until Jennifer Check walked in and sat at my feet. She was wearing the extremely short cheerleader's outfit right out of *Jennifer's Body* too. She pulled my legs down and started rubbing her hands on them. They were by far warmer than the vampire girl's, but then I suppose a succubus wouldn't be very successful with cold hands. Her attention only seemed to intensify the attentiveness I was getting from the girl with the more serious dental work.

Freddy Kruger's head and arms appeared over the right side of the couch, frighteningly close to me. "Don't get too excited," he remarked with a wry grin, while at the same time flicking his fingers like a pair of pinking shears. "Or I'll have to cut it off." He snickered with a tone deep enough to reverberate off the very gates of Hell itself. I went immediately from a state of utter panic to pointless teeth chattering. I mean the whole point of a horror movie is to test one's primordial danger awareness instincts, to see if they were still functioning. Like you test if the airbags in your car still work. Testing is one thing, but this was ridiculous. I mean you don't want to ever see your airbags go off while you're driving around, am I right?

Besides if this was a test, it had to be the worst failure on the historical record. Similar to getting a -790/-800 on your SATs. Assuming the letters SAT stood for Scared And Terrified. Everyone's attention soon turned to the screen, much to my relief. Michael Myers had made his appearance on screen, white Halloween mask and everything. His arrival was met with a rousing set of applause from my uninvited guests. A scantily clad girl came running across the screen. Freddy gave chase. The audience in my living room gave up a rousing cheer. "You get her tiger," The vampire girl remarked, practically drooling. "That's my boy," Freddy Kruger howled.

I nervously glanced at the locked door again. How did they all get in? Were they all inside before I locked the door? I have a small apartment, you'd think I would have noticed this many ... well, intruders.

Scream's Billy Loomis' head popped up on the screen, like a Mystery Science Theater 3000 commentator. He seemed to be looking directly at us. "What's his motivation? Do we ever find out why Hannibal Lecter likes to eat people? I DON'T THINK SO! See, it's a lot scarier when there's no motive. We're doing this girl a favor. The woman is a slut-bag, an underdressed whore who flashed her shit all over the screen like she was Sharon Stone or somethin'." A second cheer when up in the room. It was like the Buffalo Bills were winning the Super Bowl.

My heart went out to the young girl who was running across the screen. I was the only one, however, in the girl's corner. I tried to scream on her behalf, but nothing came out. She turned the corner and ran straight into Jason Voorhees, his hockey mask a gleaming white. Before she could react, he plunged the knife deep into her belly. Jason subsequently pulled it out. Blood and gore splatted all over the screen. I

could almost smell the sickly-sweet scent of death. More cheers erupted. “Yes,” cried Chucky, “the Masked Crusaders strike again.”

“Don’t you mean the Caped Crusaders?” The wolfman barked.

“Not in this case,” Chucky retorted. “But they can slice up Batman and Robin too for all I care. Those two deserve it.” Everyone in the room snickered. Well, except for the mummy guy. He remained ominously quiet. I got the feeling he was waiting for the right moment to respond. My guess was he’d had a lot of practice patiently waiting.

The scene descended into Michael swinging the machete and Jason fighting him with the kitchen knife. The crowd commenced to catcalls and booing. Jennifer Check screamed out, “kill the humans.” Chuck couldn’t wait to agree. “There’s plenty of bimbos and sluts to carve up out there.”

“How do you prefer to gut someone?” Freddy enquired.

Chuck did another 180-degree turn with his head. “You take a wicked-looking knife and you slit ‘em from groin to sternum.”

Freddy practically belly laughed, “That’s my favorite way too.” He turned to gaze directly at me. “How about you, kid?”

Was this what it was all about? Was horror simply a mental release of all the childish revenge fantasies one had as a kid? All made manifest in 90 minutes of celluloid film? Were they simply tapping into the reptilian parts of the brain? I don’t know what scared me more, the realization my thought might be true or the fact it reminded me of the *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. I was terrified it might walk into the room next. After all, perhaps my thinking about the horror film might have allowed all my guests to arrive in the first place. It occurred to me *Swamp Thing* might be better. For one thing, it didn’t have a taste for innocent blood and we already had a creature who was keeping his thoughts to himself. The last thing we needed was another laconic mummy.

My palms got sweaty, my pulse accelerated. I started squirming in my seat. There were the nervous glances I made to various parts of the room. But this response had nothing to do with the images being shown on the screen but rather involved my current companions. The mummy was truly starting to trouble me. It wasn’t only the silence, although his soundless behavior was disturbing enough. I had the distinct impression he wanted to eat me. You could see it in his eyes. He had a hungry look similar to the gaze of your average film zombie. But with all the rotting flesh and the dirt there was also the threat of pathogens. He probably carried more diseases on him than I’d be willing to count. So, not only was there the eating threat, but there was the contagion threat as well.

My skin was covered with goosebumps. I was really beginning to feel as if I shouldn’t have shaved and had a strong wish to be far hairier than I currently was. At least with the goosebumps, my hair would have stood out, making me look bigger. I then had the uncomfortable association of bigger being, unfortunately, more attractive to the young lady on my left ... you know, bigger meaning more blood and all. Maybe there was an advantage to being 98 pounds soaking wet.

Freddy Kruger gave me a glance. “Creative movie isn’t it? The big breasted girl runs around in a skimpy outfit and gets brutally stabbed.” He used his fingers to demonstrate the action. “Come to think of it, I think I’ve seen this picture before.”

Without realizing it, I was unintentionally responding. “Well, they do say violence in Hollywood is a problem.”

This got Freddy way too over-excited. “Don’t say that! Movies don’t create killers, you know. Movies make killers more creative!” Everyone in the room laughed, even me. But mine was a nervous laugh. Before I realized it, the credits were rolling. I glanced around and the room was empty. It was all an illusion. Can they do mind control kinds of things in movies now? Subliminally hypnotize while you are watching the film? Make you see people who aren’t there? This must have been part of the film’s effects. I was so pleased I had figured it out. I slapped my hand down on the couch, I was so delighted with myself.

The spot on the couch as cold, ice cold. As if the cushion had been in the freezer for the last hour. I noticed something shiny between the pillows. Picking it up I realized it was one of the earrings the vampire girl was wearing. I stumbled backward in sheer terror and fell right over Pennywise’s folding chair.

“That’s it!” I shouted, scrambling to my feet. “I’m never watching a horror film alone again!”