



fEAture

presents our

Happy Halloween

Issue

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Inside

By Colin Jones

The clock ticks endlessly
It's helpless, in infinity
No breaths emerge, so you can see
There's nothing left inside

Decay surrounds the weathered graves
Something so vile and depraved
A sorry soul that can't be saved
He's breathing, still inside

Locked up within his frigid crypt
Because his mental state had slipped
And off the beaten path he tripped
There's something wrong inside

He didn't mean to cause a mess
For all the crimes he had confessed
But others say he was obsessed
So now he's stuck inside

Alone now with his bleak regret
The darkened candles won't upset
He made his move to first repent
And yet he's still inside

Each year he writhes within his cage
His empty shell is filled with rage
He wants to finish, turn the page
But they kept him inside

But one year something truly strange
Occurred, and it finally changed
The cycle that left him estranged
Someone came inside

From up above, a little boy
Who tripped and fell and dropped his toy
Went down to get his simple joy
And saw who was inside

But in his eyes, there was no fear
Despite the corpse that lingered here
Instead, only a lonely tear
Came from deep inside

The boy could sense the years of pain
The days and months sent down the drain
The life filled up with storms and rain
So he let the man outside

The bones fell out onto the floor
Ribs shattered, clattered, bones galore
But the boy felt his spirits soar
For the man was now outside

With a whoop of joy and a cry of hope
The man rose up the ancient slope
And finally, let go of that rope
That had him trapped inside

The boy then left and headed
home
To find more secrets, he would
roam
For often when you are alone
You see what is inside.



Intelligence

By Ryan Zaff

Drifting through space, faint starlight glinted off Space Station *Herschel*'s white hull plating. Tidally locked to the distant Sun, *Herschel*'s steady orbit kept its primary viewports always facing toward the center of the Solar System. Hurling along at millions of kilometers per hour, the station's electrokinetic reactor allowed it to function on an orbit that took it further from the Sun than Pluto.

Herschel's crew of four was gathered in the Recreation Module, anchored to the deck by artificial gravity. The three astronauts were gathered around the table, enjoying what passed for a meal while the fourth crew member was busy communicating with the station's server.

The Observatory Station Caretaker And Repair unit had one of his manipulatory extremities plugged into the wall-mounted computer port at shoulder level. It was the thirteen-thousand, one-hundred forty-seventh time that he'd made sure the station remained on course since he'd first been brought into service eighteen years ago.

With the navigation computer operating smoothly, the robot ran through the rest of the routine system checks: Taking stock of ration stores, cataloging the oxygen supply, and double-checking the fluctuations of the electrokinetic reactor. When all was finished, he retracted his arm from the computer port and flipped his hand back into position over the wrist-mounted USB link.

"All systems read normal," he informed, turning to face the astronauts.

One of them, a brown-haired woman named Jennefer Bradley, nodded as she stood from her seat. "Thank you, OSCAR. Don't ever stop giving us updates."

"Of course, Captain Bradley," OSCAR replied. Coming from any other human, the remark could have been interpreted as "sarcasm." Over the past ten months, however, OSCAR had come to understand that Bradley had a true respect for units such as himself.

As Bradley ducked through an open hatchway into the culinary module, the second of the three astronauts stood. OSCAR's three optical sensors dilated to narrower radii as he shifted his gaze to the man's feet. "Grant Howard, the laces of your sock appear to have come undone. I must warn you of a probable tripping hazard."

The dark-skinned man frowned as he glanced down at his boots. He appeared confused for a moment, then laughed as he looked back up. "Aw man, you had me there for a moment, OSCAR."

"Merely indulging in some humor, sir," OSCAR assured him.

Howard smirked, then glanced over at the open hatch. "Try one on the Captain next. You really are quite convincing - you don't have to worry about keeping a straight face!"

"I will keep that in mind," OSCAR replied. Howard chuckled and went through the Culinary Module hatch to clean up after his midday meal. He was followed by the third astronaut, a black-haired and bronze-skinned man named Alexander Gage.

The computer had stated that all of Space Station *Herschel*'s systems were operating at full functionality, but OSCAR's maintenance programming mandated that he manually inspect all exterior surfaces to confirm the computer's analysis.

He exited through the nearest airlock, clambering onto the station's hull and using magnets in his feet to stay anchored to it. OSCAR double-checked the status of every satellite dish, antenna, and light fixture on *Herschel*'s exterior as he'd done seven-thousand, five-hundred seventy-three times before.

OSCAR's environmental sensors alerted him to an uncataloged heat signature several dozen meters away. His optical sensors narrowed, and he proceeded to head for the heat signature's source.

Clad in his spacesuit, Alexander Gage had tethered himself to the hull and was now sitting on the edge of the station's roof with his calves hung over the precipice. In his gloved hands was a small rectangular object. Magnifying the image as he approached, OSCAR saw that the picture was of a middle-aged human woman, grinning as she stood beside a teenage Gage in front of a lake vista.

Gage did not respond, even when he should have noticed the vibrations of OSCAR's footfalls on the metal plating. "I was unaware that you had joined me out here," OSCAR stated matter-of-factly over the communications channel to Gage's spacesuit.

The astronaut nearly jumped off the station in surprise, turning to face OSCAR as he stopped a meter away. "Oh. Sorry, didn't notice you there. You startled me." He turned away again.

"Your extra-vehicular excursion does not appear to benefit our mission to study the outer reaches of the Solar System, nor does it appear to improve or maintain the operation of Space Station *Herschel*," OSCAR noted. "What is its purpose?"

Now looking slightly irritated, Gage glanced at him again. He sighed. "I'm just trying to get a moment to myself."

OSCAR processed this, accounting for what his databanks contained regarding human behavior. "Does your silence relate to the item in your hands?" he inquired more tentatively.

Gage looked down, gazing at the photograph in its wooden frame. "You could say that."

OSCAR plumbed his databanks for the information on Gage's background before this mission. "I offer my apologies; I did not intend to intrude. I offer my condolences for your mother."

Gage looked back at OSCAR, studying the robot. OSCAR added, "My programming does not allow me to simulate human emotion. But..." His central processor strained to choose the correct words. "Please understand that I will stand by you nonetheless."

Gage seemed taken aback for a moment. "Thank you."

He looked back out into space, and OSCAR followed his gaze as they looked out over the Solar System. "She was always fascinated with the stars. For Dad, all his best memories of her are on Earth. But up here is where I feel closest to her."

OSCAR didn't answer. His logic circuits suggested that he let Gage be alone with his thoughts.

"I know I'm allowed to use some of the surplus oxygen reserves," Gage said after some time. He glanced back up at OSCAR. "But don't tell the Captain I've been coming out here, okay?"

OSCAR considered, and nodded. "You have my promise, Alex."

###

Five day cycles later, using a computer port in the Service Module, OSCAR ran system checks for the thirteen-thousand, one-hundred fifty-seventh time. Navigation, ration stores, oxygen tanks... everything appeared to be in order, even accounting for a negligible decrease in the surplus oxygen supply.

OSCAR double-checked the periodic fluctuations of the electrokinetic reactor's power core. His three optical sensors dilated wide.

Inputting a command into *Herschel's* server, OSCAR unplugged from the system as alarms began to sound in every section of the station. He went through the hatch and began running down the corridor.

"Attention, all crew members of Space Station *Herschel*: Emergency Protocol Two is now in effect," OSCAR warned, patching himself into the station's loudspeaker system. "The reactor has become unstable. Begin evacuation."

The station's crimson emergency lights came on as OSCAR reached the Hub Module at the center of the station, with different corridors branching off to every major section. The astronauts met him there moments later.

"Talk to me, OSCAR," Bradley instructed. "What have we got?"

"The reactor's gyro-collar appears to have become depolarized," OSCAR informed. "Without it, the electrokinetic lodestone at the center of the reactor is spinning out of control. We have eleven minutes at most before tidal-magnetic forces tear the station apart."

"Gage, Howard, get to the shuttlecraft dock and prep for launch," Bradley instructed. "I'll join you shortly." As the two astronauts hurried down another corridor, she looked back up at OSCAR. "Is there any way to salvage the reactor?"

"No," the robot informed simply. "You would be electrocuted upon entering the reactor chamber, and even my computers would be irreparably damaged by the unstable magnetic field."

"All right," Bradley said. "Come on, we have to help the others."

At the shuttlecraft dock, Howard was running hurried preflight checks at a console next to the airlock. Gage appeared from inside the docked shuttlecraft. "Good, you're here," he said. "The engines are still coming online, but once they're hot enough we can blast to safety."

Howard frowned as he looked up. "Wait a second, we're forgetting the datacore! There's six months' worth of research that we haven't sent back to Earth yet, and it'll all be lost if we don't retrieve it."

"That's not our first priority," Bradley reminded sternly.

OSCAR plugged into the computer port next to Howard's console. "The reactor's lodestone is still spinning at less than seven thousand rotations per second," he informed. "There is time to retrieve the data." He unplugged from the computer port and straightened. "The station's server is linked to the shuttlecraft's databanks. I will download the files from the datacore, upload them to the mainframe, and return so that we can launch."

Bradley nodded. "Fine, I trust your judgment. Just hurry back."

OSCAR sprinted through corridors, his servomotors whining as they propelled him along at top speed. He unlocked the hatch into the Research Module and moved to the console. Plugging into another computer port, he waited for six precious minutes as the data transfer commenced.

When all of the files had been uploaded to the station's server, OSCAR unplugged again and sprinted back down through the corridors to the shuttle. According to his central processor, the reactor lodestone would now be approaching ten thousand rotations per second. At thirteen thousand, Space Station *Herschel* would be torn asunder by the sheer magnetic G-force the lodestone was generating.

The deck was already beginning to vibrate as he reached the shuttlecraft dock's airlock.

"Good, you're back," Bradley said. "Anything else we need?"

"Doesn't look like it," Howard replied, shutting off the console.

Gage nodded, then frowned. His eyes went wide, and he looked straight at OSCAR. "The photograph. I left it in my quarters."

Bradley and Howard both stared at them. OSCAR nodded at Gage.

"There's no time," Bradley stated. "One trip was already pushing it. I'm sorry, Alex, but we can't afford for anyone to double back again."

OSCAR shook his head. The photograph held great value for Gage - greater than Howard or Bradley seemed to realize. The irony of this was not lost on OSCAR. "I have the best chance of successfully recovering Gage's property," he pointed out. "I will attempt to accomplish this."

Gage looked hopeful. "No!" Howard insisted. "OSCAR, you might not make it back this time!"

The station rumbled. The emergency lights flickered, and OSCAR detected a slight increase in G-force as the station broke its tidal lock with the distant Sun and began a tortured spin.

"My mission is to assist and protect the livelihoods of each crew member so as to operate this space station, to the best of my ability," OSCAR stated. "I believe that this is how I can best fulfill that directive."

Howard gulped. Gage pursed his lips, but he said nothing.

Bradley gave OSCAR a long look. She understood. After a moment, she saluted the robot. "Good luck."

The three astronauts headed through the airlock into the shuttlecraft as OSCAR turned around again. With the lodestone spinning at eleven thousand rotations per second, he sprinted through the corridors as the station quaked and shifted around him.

He reached the hatch into Gage's quarters in the Habitation Module. The hatch's lock was jammed. OSCAR extended a welding torch from his right forearm and began burning through the locking mechanism, sending sparks flying until the hatch slid open and he was able to enter.

The deck jolted beneath him. OSCAR magnetized just in time, maintaining his footing as the rest of the room shifted around him. Gage's photograph fell from its shelf, the glass shattering and the frame cracking as it hit the metal floor.

OSCAR gingerly removed the photograph paper from the broken frame, grasping it in one hand as he barreled back down the corridor.

Sparks flew from the light fixtures as they flickered on and off, the metal of the station creaking and groaning as the stress on it increased. Suddenly, the entire corridor shifted as the station spun more violently. The stress was too much; the interconnected passageways would wrench themselves free of the Hub Module at any moment.

OSCAR entered the Recreation Module. The main room was dark. He hurried to the computer port and plugged in.

He couldn't connect to the server. The Recreation Module's power lines must've been severed.

But OSCAR had given Gage his word. He would not let the human down.

Prying open a panel in the wall, OSCAR identified the circuitry that would run power to the computer port. He disconnected a wire using his free hand, opened another panel on his torso, and routed his own power supply into the computer.

"OSCAR! Where are you?" Howard demanded over the communications channel.

“I am fulfilling my programming directive,” OSCAR replied. “I regret to inform you that I will not be able to board the shuttlecraft. Detach from the station and depart as soon as you receive the file I am transmitting.”

Routing his own energy directly into the computer terminal had been reckless, something that OSCAR’s programming wasn’t supposed to allow. His comparatively small power supply was now being diluted all over the Recreation Module so as to power this one computer port. But OSCAR’s central processor had overridden his fail-safes; and with time running out, this was the only way to make good on his promise.

He held the photograph in his other hand, scanning it with his optical sensors. He then uploaded the file to *Herschel*’s server and remotely transmitted it to the shuttlecraft’s databanks. “Mission complete,” OSCAR affirmed.

He felt the deck shift again as the shuttlecraft disengaged from its docking clamps and blasted away. His sensory readouts went black one by one as his central processor began to lag.

Then the corridor outside wrenched itself free under the force of the station’s spin. The hatch was torn from its frame, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the Recreation Module. OSCAR lost his grip on the photograph, and even his magnetic feet couldn’t keep him anchored amidst the sudden rush of air. The Recreation Module depressurized, dragging the robot into the vacuum.

####

NEURAL MATRIX ONLINE. REBOOTING...

OSCAR’s sensory readouts activated, and his central processor scrambled to parse the sudden flood of data. After several moments, he determined that he was lying horizontally, staring up at the ceiling of a shuttlecraft’s maintenance compartment.

He sat up, noting that a thick cable was plugged into the recharge socket on the back of his neck. Three others were in the room with him: Jennifer Bradley and Grant Howard stood grinning a short distance from the workbench OSCAR was sitting on, while Alexander Gage had his arms folded across his chest as he leaned against the far wall.

“How’re you feeling?” Howard asked.

OSCAR ran a quick systems diagnostic. “I appear to be fully functional. My power cells are recharging, currently at thirty-four percent.”

The final image that OSCAR’s optical sensors had recorded before shutting off was of *Herschel*’s exterior. The various modules and connecting corridors had been coming apart at the seams, creating a debris field of shredded metal and insulation surrounding the disintegrating Reactor Module.

The astronauts must’ve doubled back and extracted his body from the wreckage. They’d flown right back into danger, for the sole purpose of rescuing him.

“You came back for me,” OSCAR realized. “For your own safety, you were supposed to depart as soon as my mission was complete.”

Bradley smiled. “You put yourself on the line when not many others would have. It was the least we could do.” She glanced back at Gage, then looked at OSCAR again. “We should be arriving at the outpost orbiting Neptune in a few hours. I think Alex wants a word, so we’ll be up front.” She turned and followed Howard to the shuttlecraft’s cockpit.

OSCAR turned his head to look at Gage, who moved from the wall to stand at the foot of the workbench. "Thank you, for what you did back there," he said. "I'm not sure I could ever make it up to you."

"No restitution is necessary," OSCAR replied. "I succeeded in carrying out my programming directive. That in and of itself is enough."

Gage bit his lip. "I shouldn't have sent you back out there. I was selfish, and I nearly got you deactivated."

"That is correct," OSCAR affirmed. "But even if you did not require it, I would have gone back anyway. I comprehend what the photograph means to you."

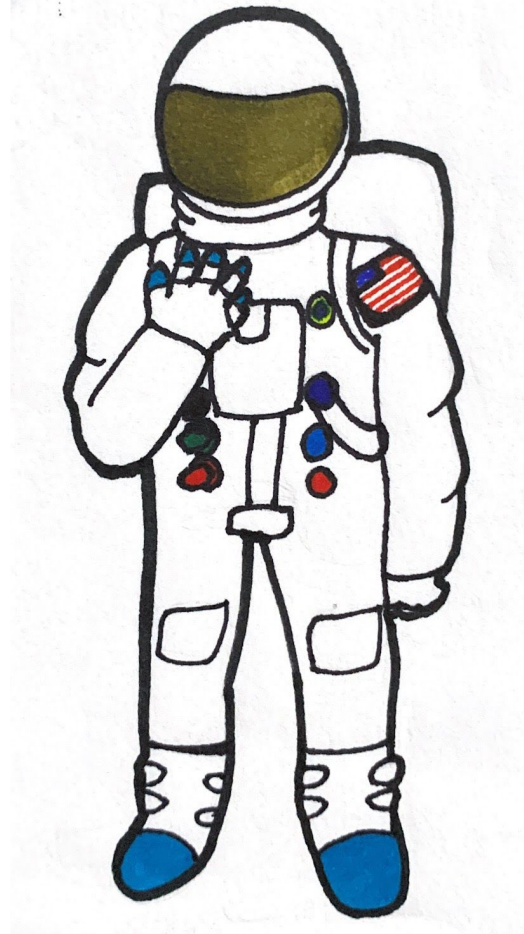
Gage considered. He nodded.

After a moment, Gage smirked. "You know, you're more human than you seem to realize, OSCAR."

OSCAR processed this, his logic circuits trying and failing to make sense of the comment. "I do not understand, Gage. I am a robot."

This drew laughter from Gage for some reason.

OSCAR stared at him. "What, did I say something humorous?"



The Empty

By Colin Jones

What dread converges from the ether
Left us all alone and waiting
No time left to take a breather
Feel your eyesight begin fading

Manic and diseased, they writhe
Contorted by their burning hearts
Twisted and deformed, they lie
Their world's been torn apart

The lightless world, the empty air
The ties that bind, the chains that hold
Their hands would wish to rip and tear but
still entombed in cold

The manacles, the pentacles
Keep them sealed within
The punishment they're forced to face
For leading lives of sin

When footsteps ring out from above
They moan and congregate
With broken hearts devoid of love
They're locked into their fate

Count your blessings that your life
Shall be free from the damned
But careful lives you'll surely lead
Or become one of them.



Good Luck Falling Asleep After This

By Ryan Zaff

"Mom, you forgot to check for monsters."
The girl's mother gave an unconvincing smile. "I'm sure there are no monsters under your bed, dear."

"You promise?"

Her mother nodded. "I promise. Have a good night." She'd then turned out the lights, and left the doorway.

The girl huddled under her covers, unsure. Surely, the monster was there. It *had* to be. Why else would she be so afraid of it? But her mother had assured her that there was no monster.

Her trust in her mother clashed with her instincts; and so the girl huddled under the covers, unwilling to fall asleep but not daring to confirm her suspicions.

But her mind would not let her remain in such a state. The girl had to make a choice, one way or the other.

She chose to jump out of bed and run to the wall, turn on the lights, and then press her head to the floor to look underneath the bed's wooden frame.

There was nothing there but the dust bunnies.

###

30 Years Later

"Mom, you forgot to check for monsters."

Veronica Peregrin smiled sadly. "Don't worry, Felicity. I've already seen for myself; there are no monsters under your bed. Have a good night."

This seemed to reassure her daughter, and so Veronica turned out the light and left the doorway.

###

The next evening, Veronica was sitting on the couch reading the most recent issue of the literary magazine at Felicity's school. Felicity had written a charming, if ineloquent, poem about a bluejay.

Veronica's husband had already gone to bed, and Felicity ought to have been preparing to do the same. Veronica frowned slightly when she heard her daughter's voice calling.

Felicity appeared at the top of the stairwell wearing her pajamas as Veronica walked over to the bottom step. "What is it, sweetheart?" Veronica asked.

"There's a monster under my bed," Felicity stated. "I'm scared."

"I told you," Veronica said in her reassuring voice. "There aren't any monsters under your bed. When I was your age, I looked under the bed with my own eyes, and there was nothing there."

Felicity pursed her lips and shook her head. "There's a monster under my bed, Mom. I can't go in there."

Veronica exhaled and began walking up the stairs, then followed Felicity to her bedroom. "It's in there," her daughter said, pointing at the mostly-closed door. "Can you get rid of it?"

"I'll see," Veronica replied calmly. "Wait here, and I'll open the door again after the monster is gone. Okay?"

Felicity nodded. "Okay."

Veronica opened the door, noting that her daughter took several steps backward. She closed the door behind her as she entered the bedroom.

The room looked perfectly normal with the lights on. Veronica supposed that she'd wait for a minute or so and then inform Felicity that it was safe to go to sleep.

Something chittered from out of sight.

Veronica blinked, looking around again. What had made - ”

There it was again. What sounded like air being exhaled, overlaid with the sound of two rocks being rapidly hammered together.

It was coming from under the bed.

Veronica lowered her gaze to the floor, her feet planted, and her hands unmoving by her sides. Her lips parted slightly as she heard the noise again. Not taking her eyes away, she moved to Felicity’s closet and removed a metal-tipped arrow from her daughter’s archery set.

There it was again. After a moment’s hesitation, Veronica began bending her knees, stooping down to look beneath the wooden frame.

An appendage emerged from the shadows; a shell studded with knobs and bumps, mottled with various shades of brown and green, coming to a sharp point at the end. It was followed by another just like it. Then another, and another.

The creature emerged from beneath Felicity’s bed: It was a crab, a spider, and a snake all at once, large enough to just barely fit under the bed. Eight claw-tipped legs stemmed from an exoskeleton-encased head and abdomen, with slit-pupiled eyes set into the armor above toothy mouthparts and a fur-covered pair of fanged mandibles. It clattered its mandibles together, producing the chittering sound.

Veronica stared, half in shock.

It was real.

The monster’s pupils focused on her.

It spoke then, its mandibles twitching as its mouthparts produced impossible syllables. “I know you.”

Veronica held the arrow out in front of her, its metal tip facing the monster. She said nothing.

“I remember,” the monster said. “I never forget a face. You were the one who looked under the bed.” It chittered. “The only one.”

Veronica remembered, too. “There was nothing there,” she replied, her voice scarcely a whisper.

The monster’s eyes glittered. “So there was. I had lurked for eons, under every bed, waiting for my chance to strike. None dared leave their bed. But you - *you* surprised me, Human.”

Veronica quavered, trying to wrap her mind around what she was seeing and hearing. She saw fungi growing in between gaps between the monster’s armor plates, ready to release spores when it chose to move on to new prey. “I was the only one who looked under the bed,” she realized, though the monster had already said it.

“In ten millennia!” the monster affirmed. “But I would not be seen, and so I abandoned that body and began anew. What luck, after all these years, that we should meet again.”

“You were under my bed,” Veronica murmured, her mind racing. “And now you’re under my daughter’s.”

“I am under *every* bed!” the monster declared, drawing itself up to its full height. “Every child knows me - every child *fears* me, and rightfully so!” It bared the fangs on its mandibles, growling now. “For millennia I have waited for my chosen prey, seething in the dark. For millennia my hunger has been left unsated.” It chittered furiously. “Perhaps it never shall be. But in that case, you will suffice.”

Then, with a hideous screech, it lunged. Veronica, guided by some instinct that she had long since forgotten, swung her arm up and drove the tip of the arrow into the beast’s open maw.

It froze; its foremost pair of legs hovering in midair and its eyes boring into Veronica's. After several long moments, the eyes lost focus. The exoskeleton sagged, collapsing in on itself as the flesh within seemed to deflate. Veronica released her grip on the arrow shaft and the beast collapsed on the floor, the fletchings still sticking out from its mouth. The fungi between its armor plates wilted, releasing no new spores, and the body began to crumble until nothing but dust bunnies and the arrow were left. After a few moments, even these were no more.

The room was as Veronica had found it.

She opened the door to find Felicity standing there expectantly. "Is it gone?" her daughter asked.

Veronica nodded. She began to smile "Yes, sweetheart. It is."

Felicity grinned, giving her mother a quick hug before hurrying past into the bedroom. She eagerly hopped into bed.

Veronica turned around and placed her hand on the light switch. "Good night, sweetheart."

"Good night, Mom."

Veronica turned out the light.

Runnin' From Someone

by Renee Carlson

(A parody based on *Walkin' On Sunshine* by Katrina and the Waves...
feel free to play the song on YouTube and sing along!)

I used to think maybe I was safe in the back of these woods
But now I'm kinda scared of that guy in the hood
Now I see that chainsaw blade and I gotta run
This camping trip with my friends isn't very fun

Now I'm running from someone, aah
I'm running from someone, aah
I'm running from someone, aah
And, gosh, I'm real scared
Help not alrighty now
And, gosh, I feel scared
Help now

I used to think maybe my friends were a little more smart
But now they're just crazy running around in the dark
Don't they realize that we're easy to find
Where's Mary, the smart one, no, now she just died!
No, Keith died
And where's Hood guy?
Oh no

Now I'm running from someone, aahhh

I'm running from someone, ahhh
I'm running from someone, ahh
And, gosh, I feel scared
Please help me now
And, gosh, I feel scared
Please help me now
And, gosh, I feel scared

Running from someone
Running from someone

I feel scared, maybe I'll die, maybe he'll find me, that's real bad
I feel scared, maybe I'll die, maybe he'll find me, that's real bad
I'm running now, help
Oh, help, I'm running now, please help



The Nightmare Before Christmas

-

The Gold Standard of Halloween Movies

By Owen Boersch

The horror movie industry has been falling in the past few years. People only watch the classics now like *Saw* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. And there are few “not scary” Halloween movies that are worth watching. A few of them being *Hocus Pocus*, and *Beetlejuice*. But there is one movie that I watch every year at some point and love, Tim Burton’s, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. It’s funny, when I think of stop motion animation, I think about Mr. Fantastic Fox, *Coraline*, or *Wallace and Gromit*. I feel like people forget about this movie. Part of that is probably because it’s a holiday movie, and at that, a Halloween movie. And there are better stop motion movies out there, take those that I already named. But *Nightmare Before Christmas* is not bad by any stretch. I’m also going to keep this spoiler-free.

Story

The story starts with the people of Halloween-Town celebrating another successful year of Halloween. After the festivities, we meet our protagonist, Jack Skellington, the King of Halloween. Which it turns out that he has become bored with the holidays and hopes for more in life than just the Halloween holiday. Through some exploration through the forest, he finds himself in Christmas-Town. Enamored by the spectacle of lights and colors, he goes back to Halloween-Town and begins experimenting with Christmas magic, and tells the people of Halloween-Town the true meaning of the holidays. This story actually works well, and Jack's arc is very believable.

Animation

What can I say, most stop motion animation is beautiful, and this movie is no different. In Halloween Town, water is turned into slime, and the grass is turned black. I almost make comparisons to Super Mario Odyssey's Cap Kingdom. Both are for the most part at night, have black colors in grass and decor, and use lanterns to light up paths and gates. Animators used their non-dominant hands to draw objects to give them a rigid look. Another thing that I love about this movie is the character design. Every character has their own scars and quirks that reference their original myth because most of them are based on urban legends like vampires and mad scientists.

Dialogue

There are a few great bits here. I really like the dialogue between Jack and Sally. Sally is always trying to convince Jack that more does not necessarily mean more. It almost feels like a beta version of The Founder. (Does anyone actually know and like this movie?) Other dialogue like the with the Boogie Man is hauntingly hilarious with all of his bug puns- Oh wait, I said no spoilers. Anyway... does this mean this is a perfect movie?

Conclusion

The short answer: no, I don't. I feel like some scenes have a bit of a pacing problem. Some scenes linger longer than they should have, then some where you start to get invested with the characters then BOOM, song. By the way, I had no idea this was a musical before rewatching this movie. What do I think of them?... Ehhhhh there okay I guess. While I do like this movie, I feel like there is better stop motion you could be watching. I give this movie 7/10 pumpkins.

The Visit

Written by Frankie Schwartzott

Bzzzzzz.

"No, no no no no no!"

The TV buzzed with static and shut off. Reed buried her face in a couch pillow and groaned with frustration. She had just moved into the house _ which she had specifically bought to get away from the crushing pressure of her perfectionist father and her unsupportive friends (if one could even call them that) _ and was already having issues with the appliances.

Great.

She got up to check behind the cabinet that the television was mounted above on the wall. All of the wires were plugged in their respective holes and outlets, not a cord out of place. Reed looked out the window, but the sky was perfectly clear, faintly shimmering stars poking through the sea of endless darkness. "Huh." She turned to go to the door to check the satellite dish, but she stopped when the lights went out.

Reed groaned again.

She stumbled through the blackness, reaching out blindly for something to hold on to. It was so dark it seemed to Reed that even the ambient light of her suburban lane _ which would normally be streaming through the large windows _ was dimmed. Just as she thought she felt the arm of the couch, Reed tripped over something and tumbled to the floor, hitting her head on what was probably the side table.

When Reed lifted herself off the floor, her head was pounding, she was overcome with dizziness, and a strange buzzing was filling her ears, making it difficult to focus. She unsteadily made her way to the couch and plopped down on its cushions.

She was so confused. Reed knew the house was old, but the realtor had told her that everything outdated and broken was replaced and that the house was basically new; just like her, in this strange place where nobody knew who she was or where she came from. She had already paid the bills, and there weren't any storms raging outside that could cause a power outage.

So what's going on then?

The buzzing noise in her ears grew louder and louder. It wasn't a painful buzz, but Reed grew more and more anxious as its volume increased. She felt uneasy, almost sick, and...

Like someone was watching her.

Reed's arms were prickly with goosebumps. She looked frantically around the room, but there was nobody there. The buzzing grew louder still, and the temperature in the room dropped drastically.

And then Reed saw something impossible.

A vibrating column of faint, grey light started to appear. As the vibrating quickened, the column began to take form. The image became clearer and clearer, until standing before Reed was a figure.

A semitransparent woman _ who looked to be in her twenties, with curled blonde hair and warm brown eyes, wearing a 40s-style dress and a chain of pearls around her neck _ was standing before Reed with her gloved hands folded neatly in front of her. Reed stared in disbelief. *I must have blacked out, and this is all a dream.* She closed her eyes tightly and forced herself to wake up, but when she opened them the woman was still there, only now her lips had the slightest upward curve. Reed would have screamed, but she was too startled to even breathe. The

buzzing in her ears was still present, but not as bothersome, as though she had gotten used to it. Every now and then the woman's shape flickered, and the faint glow surrounding her dimmed slightly with it. Her eyes were filled with deep sadness, as though they hadn't been filled with light for many years. Reed decided that whether she was dreaming or not, she had to know who this mysterious figure was.

"Who are you?"

The woman smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. She paused, and then "A good question. A simple one, ordinary, yet so much more. I am Alice Price, and this was my home." Alice gestured to the room and seemed to become lost in some distant memory. "I am dead, and have been for some time now." Alice looked at Reed and smiled.

Reed shivered.

Alice Price was a ghost. Somehow, this didn't frighten her. In fact, Reed's fear lessened, and she let out the breath she was holding. She straightened up just as she was about to ask a question, but in a soft flash, Alice had disappeared. Reed blinked in surprise and looked around her. In the hallway near the staircase, she could make out a faint pulsing of grey light. She made toward the source of the light, where Reed found the young woman gazing into nothingness, and asked, "Why are you here? Now?" Reed had so many questions. Who was Alice when she was alive? Did she have a family? Living relatives? While her head spun, the elegant woman in front of Reed laughed softly. "Another good question. I don't know, really. I know that every person who moves into this house leaves after my visit and that I fade a little more each time. I think I'm meant to resolve something, perhaps within myself, but I gave up hope of that a long time ago."

That would explain the flickering, Reed thought. Alice vanished again, and Reed looked around for any sign of her luminous shape. She didn't know Alice, but the woman had something, deep inside her, that was so captivating. When Reed had found her again, Alice was sitting in the window seat of the spare bedroom upstairs, looking solemnly out at the street below. Alice had been dead for years, wandering aimlessly around this old house with no companions or guidance.

This time Reed didn't ask any questions, and when she was ready, Alice spoke. "Do you know what? I've been living in this house for 95 years, and each moment of that time was a miserable one, every last minute spent keeping a tear at bay." Reed wondered how such a beautiful soul could be so damaged, so lost, and so broken. As if Alice had heard the whisper of Reed's thoughts swirling in her mind, Alice answered the unasked question.

"I will tell you my story _ how I died, my family... everything, really _ so that I can figure out why I can't leave this place." Reed nodded in agreement, and Alice began the narration of her life. It was a long, difficult story, and by the time Alice had finished speaking, Reed had tears glistening down her cheeks. Alice had lived in this house with her family her whole life, and in all that time nobody ever cared about her, loved her, or wanted her. Her parents had only wanted boys, and being the only girl in the family was a lonely road. She had tried her hardest to impress her family so that maybe, just maybe, they would look at her and be proud, rather than disgusted. They never did _ in fact, they had practically considered her a mistake, a stain on the family name, never good enough _ and Alice's lack of friends only added to her misery. Her brothers picked on her both at home and in school, and nobody dared to be seen with someone

the popular, attractive, Price brothers ridiculed. Not only was Alice an outcast in her own home, but at the place where she had always hoped to escape.

When Alice died she was alone, with nobody there to call for help. She had been walking down the street in the evening one night in mid-autumn. Alice was about to turn a corner when she heard voices behind her, laughing. “I turned around to find a group of men with paper bags holding bottles of liquor in their fists. They started to drunkenly stagger toward me, catcalling and shouting. I attempted to ignore them, but they had eventually caught up with me, and I remember that I could smell the acrid odor of whiskey on their breath. One of them said to me, ‘So, pretty lady, got any dough in that handbag of yours?’ I had only a few dollars, so after dumping the contents of my bag to the ground, another said, ‘Those pearlies on your neck look real shiny, they’d look even nicer in my hands.’ He ripped the necklace off of me, and soon the rest of them joined in. I struggled and screamed, but it didn’t matter. One of them, the one who had taken my purse, had pulled out a knife... oh, it was so horrible! I’ll never forget the darkness in his eyes right before it happened, the way he laughed...”

As Alice drifted off in the memory, she flickered and vanished, yet again. Reed was so frozen in shock from the story, but as she let out a shaky breath she grounded herself and started off to search for Alice, which didn’t take long. She was in a hallway just across from the spare bedroom, looking at her reflection in the mirror. “When I woke up in my childhood bedroom, I hadn’t quite realized what happened, thinking it was all just a wild dream. But, when I approached my mother that morning and greeted her, she didn’t even bat an eye. I tried again, a bit louder, but she still didn’t acknowledge me. That was when I wondered if maybe my dream wasn’t a dream at all.” Alice gave a small, humorless chuckle. “I waved my hand in front of her face, and then tried to shake her shoulder, but my fingers just passed right through her. My suspicions were confirmed, and I was truly invisible.”

Alice faded away this time, but Reed found her easily enough, sitting down on the suede armchair in the living room. “For the first decade or so, I couldn’t make myself seen, but I learned to, eventually. By then my parents had died and my brothers all had families of their own. That was the worst time in my, well, not-life. I was lonesome before, but at least they had acknowledged my existence. I was completely unseen and unheard this time, and though I shouted and screamed, they couldn’t hear me. Nobody could.”

Alice stopped there and breathed out a heavy sigh, and then, “I do believe that I shall never be at peace. How could I be? How, when my own family didn’t grieve my death?”

Reed was overcome with both sadness and compassion for this poor, forlorn soul. She, like Alice, knew what it was like to be treated as nothing but a disappointment. Her heart beat for Alice Price, who had never known happiness or love.

Reed moved to embrace Alice, but she had forgotten that this woman was not solid, and Reed’s hands plunged into Alice’s form. It was like ice water, stabbing little knives into her skin and making Reed’s stomach turn over. Alice cracked a small smile and placed her freezing hand over Reed’s shoulder, which was both comforting and strange at the same time. The shock of cold that ran through her body from the touch made a lightbulb go on in her mind, and Reed’s heart flooded with the warmth of empathy for this lost spirit. Ghost or not, Reed and Alice were the same, and this simple fact compelled Reed to help her. Whatever it took, however long it

would take, Reed would make sure that Alice Price could rest, after over 70 years of wandering, in peaceful bliss.

“Alice,” she said, “I know this is your house, and you’re dead, but... would you want to be my roommate?” Alice seemed to be confused by this. “We could get to know each other better, hang out, do all of the stuff that you didn’t get to experience in your life. We could help each other, you know? I can help you transcend this plane of existence, and you can help me to be myself, the way I never could with my family, or you could with yours.” Then Alice understood. Her eyes softened as she said, “You want to be my friend?” Reed nodded and smiled, and then, so did Alice.



She seemed as though she were about to say something when her glow started to flicker again, except it wasn’t a flicker. Alice was glowing. Her eyes lit with some unidentifiable emotion, but Reed supposed it was peace. Alice stood up from the armchair and looked down at Reed with a smile. She was getting very bright now, almost too bright to see anything. Just before Reed shut her eyes from the light, she heard Alice say “Thank you.”

And, just like that, she was gone. The faint buzzing in Reed’s ears had ceased, the lights were back on, and the TV was playing again. She rubbed at her temples and let out a long sigh. Had it all been a dream? Reed looked back at the screen, and something was different. On the top of the cabinet there was an old picture frame, and softly smiling up at Reed was the radiant image of Alice Price.

Blood and Tears

By Sky Ragudos

Lucy was lying awake, the only light in her room was her phone. She was texting Mina, telling her about her day as always, the only difference was that today three different boys had asked her out on dates. Mina hated these late-night texts, but this one had actually made her turn on her phone notifications. Her best friend? The idiot who thinks sleep is for cowards? Getting asked out by three boys? This she had to hear. The first was Quincy, a smart boy, and a straight-A student, his dream was to go to a school for scientology. She knew he didn’t like her, someone probably made fun of him for not having a girlfriend and he tried to get one just to spite them, so he asked the only girl he was friends with. He took the rejection well and left.

The second was Jeremy, he was a football player, he would have been a great boyfriend, but she knew Jeremy had a crush on Quincy, he was definitely dared to ask her out because she was the prettiest girl in school, and he was laughing the entire time. He also took the rejection well, because he was laughing the entire time.

You know after two of your friends ask you out you think the charade would stop there. But no, her dream boy David had asked if she would like to go to the movies with her. They probably coordinated this on the same day, it sounds like the kind of prank they would pull, they were best friends, inseparable, of course, Cayden, the fourth addition to their gang, had to go work for some old guy in England and leave them. It was a, uh, tearful farewell (let’s just say

Lucy and Mina had never seen so many men crying in their lives.) She told Mina about how she screamed in delight, and probably scared some innocent passersby to death. She was so happy, and of course, Mina was happy for her too.

After Lucy was done with her story, Mina went to bed, and Lucy stayed awake, listening to the sound of the wind through her open window. Then she heard something, something the size of a bird, maybe bigger, flew in. She sat up and turned on the light, she couldn't find anything, she sat up and wandered through her room. She was terrified, then sat down on her bed. Lucy felt cold, freezing, like there was a fan behind her. Then she felt a long, dangly hand grab her neck. She screamed and passed out on the ground, blood dripping from her neck.

David was walking to Lucy's house, trying to call her. He had texted her when she woke up, nothing. He called her when he left, nothing. He was almost running to her house, he didn't know why he was so scared of what happened to Lucy, maybe she was hurt he didn't know. Then he heard someone following her, he ran faster, pushing himself forward.

"Dude!" He heard Jeremy yell. He turned around to see Jeremy running after him, with Quincy on his back, complaining. "Jeremy, I really don't think that this was necessary."

"Oh shut up, you said you were tired." Jeremy teased, nudging his shoulder once he sat him down.

"Well-" Quincy began,

"Guys, I think somethings wrong with Lucy," David said, rolling his eyes, forcing them to shut up.

"So that's why you're running?" Quincy said, about to go into an in-depth discussion about how that wouldn't help him.

"Huh, Mina texted us. She said Lucy was sick, apparently, she needs a doctor and..." Jeremy said, putting his hand on Quincy's shoulder "And I'm that doctor! We'll... not really, but her mom has to hire me!" David rolled his eyes again, Quincy had just graduated high school, he was smart, sure, but David knew he would be crushed when Lucy's mom hired an actual doctor. And Jeremy knew it too; he was nervous, he didn't want to see Quincy disappointed, one because it would break his heart, and two he didn't want to spend every waking second watching him complain about everything this doctor is apparently doing wrong. The three walked together and made it to Lucy's house, they knocked on the door and watched as her mother, annoyed that she had guests, opened the door.

"No." She said, slamming the door in the boy's faces.

"Can we please come in Ms. Bezeten?" David said, pulling the door back open. "Only for five minutes? I'll pay you?"

Ms. Bezeten scoffed. "Fine, but don't pay me. And when she gets better you two better not go on that date, I don't trust you, David." Jeremy snickered.

Quincy rolled his eyes and shoved him. "It's not funny." He said clicking his tongue. "Let's go." The three all shoved each other into the room, up the stairs, and into Lucy's room, as if this was the most exciting thing they would ever see. Don't ask me how they possibly made it up there standing.

Lucy was lying on her bed, pale as a ghost, next to some guy. "Excuse me?" David gulped. "Can we come in?" The man turned around, he was really funny looking, it made the boys question if he was the doctor or just some weird uncle. He had Albert Einstein's hair, and a lab coat on.

“Yes, of course, come in, come in!” He giggled. “I’m Doctor Van Tramp. Lovely to meet your acquaintance.” Quincy couldn’t believe it, this guy? A doctor?! This quirky... weird... mad scientist guy? The others were just as shocked.

“You’re a... a real doctor?” Quincy said, collapsing, it was better than him starting a rant in David’s opinion. Jeremy caught Quincy, covering his mouth in the process.

“What’s wrong with Lucy doc?” David said, looking over at his girlfriend. She was asleep, obviously unwell. The doctor’s face stiffened, he went from being the quirky weird uncle to a real doctor just like that.

“We’ll.” He said, pushing his square, comically huge, glasses up. “She’s as pale as a ghost and has almost no energy. We found two marks on her neck and her teeth seem to be getting bigger.” He gestured to some flowers that smelled disgusting, the scent was wafting throughout the room. “I brought her these flowers to help, and she seemed to have lost a lot of blood, we’re going to need a donor-”

“I’ll do it,” David said, straightaway. “I want to help her.”

“Are you sure? We would have to start the process right away.” Van Tramp said, Quincy was mumbling to Jeremy about how terrible this guy was.

“Yes.” David nodded. “OK, let’s go.”

Then after just one day, Lucy was feeling much better, even though she still showed symptoms from her sickness. Her mother had thrown the garlic flowers out her window, saying that her daughter needed fresh air. But after a week of her seeming better, she fell ill again. Van Tramp suggested that they try getting a blood donor again because that worked so well the first time, this time Quincy said he would be the donor, he thought this was a good way to stuff it into Van Tramp’s face. And he was the only other one in the group with the same blood type as Lucy. Then she started to feel better again, David was so excited, but they had to wait another week to let her leave her house. David and Lucy had discussed going to the movies, drinking milkshakes, everything. Quincy was questioning the doctor, and Jeremy was trying to convince Quincy to let it go. Then after another week when the boy’s and the doctor came to visit her, she was frozen in a painful position on her bed, dead. Her mother was also dead, and it seemed that she had a disease similar to Lucy’s, but she had lost all her blood. Van Tramp had this serious face on the entire time, David, Quincy, and Jeremy were hysterical.

“How could this have happened?!” David sobbed in front of her bed where she was laying. “We did everything we could, didn’t we doctor?” The doctor remained silent. Quincy gave him a murderous stare.

“Yeah, doc?!” He cried while attempting to argue. “What’d we do wrong?!”

“It was worse than I feared...” Was all the doctor could manage. The funeral was supposed to take place the day after her death. Doctor Van Tramp helped put her in the casket, however, he had put the same garlic flowers he put in her room when she was sick in her casket, along with a golden crucifix. That night, the pastor had come to the church and saw the body with the cross, he had looked left to right and stole the cross.

The next day the boys came to the funeral to find an empty casket. Van Tramp had tisked, the other boys freaked out. Quincy was in Jeremy's arms and David had almost passed out.

"I was afraid it would come to this." Van Tramp said, his hand shaking on the empty coffin. "Boys, we have a problem, and I'll need your help."

"W-Why s-should we..." David said, crying and shaking. Quincy couldn't even protest first, he was speechless for the first time in his life.

"Because, if you don't you might not wake up alive tomorrow morning." Van Tramp said, seriously.

"Y-You won't even t-tell us what happened to her!" Quincy said, shaking in Jeremy's arms. Jeremy was like stone, he didn't know what else to do, he was frozen in terror. Van Tramp chuckled lightly.

"If you did, you would've killed her yourself." The boys were scared and confused, but David had to know what happened to his beloved girlfriend, without her he felt like nothing. The other two couldn't see David so sad, and they wouldn't let him go on a hair-brained scheme alone with crazy doctor Van Tramp. What kind of friends would they be if they didn't go on a dangerous scheme with their best friend.

Van Tramp told the group to meet him at the graveyard at nightfall. Quincy and Jeremy came together, Quincy was clinging to Jeremy's huge arm. He might have been a lot of talk but he was terrified of dying without telling Jeremy he loved him, and Jeremy wouldn't have let Quincy come alone for anything. David had come with Van Tramp, since they had both stayed at the church for the rest of the day, trying to figure out what happened. They were wandering around the graveyard, quietly, searching for any sign of Lucy.

"D-Doc?" Quincy stuttered. "Maybe there's no one here, maybe you were wrong, let's head-" A blood hurling screech interpreted Quincy, he yelped and stuffed his face into Jeremy's arm. "I'm never wrong." Van Tramp, sighed, walking toward the scream, the boys walked behind him. David walked with a purpose, the other two shuffled behind him, mumbling their last goodbyes to each other. Then they saw a shadow, it seemed like a woman holding a wailing baby.

"Oh it's just-" David began as his light moved onto the women, he dropped his flashlight. It was Lucy, but she was different. She was in her prom dress and it was torn to shreds, her eyes were glowing red, and she was covered in blood. The scream was from a child, no older than 4, Lucy was sucking the blood out of him. After only a moment the child went limp, he had stopped screaming. He was dead. David screamed, catching the attention of, the now devious, Lucy.

"Ah hello." Her voice wasn't sweet and light anymore, it was rough and demonic. "You look delicious David..."

"S-She remembers my name...?!" David said, collapsing on the ground, crawling away from his girlfriend. "She's a vampire, so not all of her soul is gone."

“VAMPIRE?!” They all screamed, Jeremy had grabbed a nearby piece of wood, David still couldn’t get up, Quincy was cowering in fear behind Jeremy, and Van Tramp, the only calm one, had opened up a bible. He started mumbling religious spells, Lucy started hissing. He stopped for a minute.

“Ah, good.” He said, looking at Jeremy. “You found a wooden stake.” Lucy stood up and pounced on David.

“He’s MINE!” she yelled as David screamed for his own life. Van Tramp took the stake out of Jeremy’s hands and started hitting Lucy with it. She growled. “I want his blood in my mouth...” She mumbled, still trying to bite David. “It smells so sweet...” David continued to scream, begging Lucy to stop. But she wasn’t human anymore, she couldn’t help herself.

“David, you need to take this piece of wood and stab it in Lucy’s heart!” Van Tramp said, trying to hand David the wood.

“No, you kill her, you’re the doctor!” “I can’t without hurting you too!” “I don’t care, do it!”

The boys were never found again. The graveyard had been covered in blood, and when their friend Cayden had returned he claimed to have seen Quincy and Jeremy, leaving the town on a plane, horrified. Van Tramp went missing, David was said to be dead, and Lucy? Well that’s none of your business, is it? Now, I must dispose of you; it’s nothing personal, but no other mortal can know the truth. My name? I think you know very well what it is... you smell so sweet...



Not Guilty

By Sarah Schoeneman

The words “not guilty,” ring over and over in my head as I hail a taxi and step inside. Squeezing some of the cold rain out of my hair, I tell the driver where I want to go. My lawyer had asked me to celebrate our victory with drinks, but I had declined. There is something I need to do first.

Though feeling safer than I have in months, I still have the driver drop me off a few blocks from the graveyard. I walk there briskly, hardly noticing the cars racing by or the people who pass me on the street. I had carefully picked an outfit that was black enough to seem in mourning if I am spotted standing before a grave, but not too black that it seemed suspicious to the jury. I turn into the row of gray rock, my movements precise, sharp, anticipatory. Over the small hill, past the huge marble chamber of someone who wanted to be remembered more greatly than the dull life they had lived, and to a slightly larger than average grave in a slightly northeast of center area of the graveyard. The perfect place.

I reach into my coat pocket and pull out a crumpled flower. Kneel down and stick it into the plot of earth adjacent to the grave. With my opposite hand, I dig a bit into the mud and feel a notch in the stone. Now pretending to be hunched over weeping, I pull the bit of stone out of the grave and feel a plastic bag. I stuff it into my pocket, stay a few minutes for good measure, and then saunter home.

The cramped studio apartment was much too easy to search, I think, inwardly praising my former self for thinking of the gravestone idea. I take one look at the plastic baggie before stuffing it in my dresser drawer, the back of my throat burning. My great-grandmother's ring, finally rescued from that horrible museum. What other choice did I have? They wouldn't have given it to me. And I'm not rich enough to buy it.

The burning sensation in my throat grows stronger and I try to swallow it down, but before I can, I'm heaving onto the floor. It won't stop. *Shouldn't I be happy about this?* I think to myself before the world goes black.

The cell door is opened with a *clang*. "Dinner!" says the prison guard.

I'm tugging my hair, and a good amount is left in my hands when I pull them away. I blink away the scene of my apartment until all I can see are the gray walls of the solitary confinement cell. My vision can't seem to focus. I don't talk to anyone while I eat, and then I am back in the tiny room, trying not to slip back into my fantasy.

Is it even a fantasy? Do I wish I hadn't been caught? If I hadn't been caught, I would be guilty and sick of myself. Is that worse than being shut in this tiny room, no space for me to talk, think, breathe? Would the guilt be worth it if I could talk to someone for even a minute?

My brain goes in circles. *It was stupid to confess. But I'd be guilty if I didn't. But I'd be free if I didn't. Would I really be free? At least I wouldn't be locked in this room. I shouldn't have confessed. It was stupid to confess. But I'd be guilty if I didn't. But I'd be free if I didn't. Would I really be free? At least I wouldn't be locked in this room...*

Horror Story

By Kai Doty

Prologue

It was a normal Wednesday the day I died. Uneventful, calm even. My name is Dom, and if you're reading this, it might be too late. Not just for you, but for everyone. The whole world. She's going to find you. There's no doubt about it, and it's futile to try and hide from her. Thinking you can beat her just because she's a girl won't help you; it might just be the thing that kills you. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's just pretend this Wednesday was normal.

I woke up and glared at my alarm clock that was blaring its warning. I had to be at school in ten minutes or Mrs. G would give me a hard time. She hated tardy students even if they were

only late by five seconds. I walked down the hallway that led to the kitchen and grabbed a bagel. As soon as I went to turn on the lights, they flickered on themselves. Huh. Must've been one heck of a storm last night if the winds are still messing with the power. I turned on my phone and turned around to put my bagel in the toaster. Standing right behind me was this creepy looking girl, almost as tall as me. She grinned, showing red-stained teeth. I took one look at her and bolted. No way was I dealing with *that*. I jumped on the bus as it pulled up, and the bus driver gave me a weird look.

"See a ghost kid?" he asked, smirking. I shook my head, thinking that he had no idea. The bus pulled up to the high school I spent most of my time, and I immediately ran to my friends who were waiting for me by the entrance.

"Guys. You're never going to believe this." I told them about the murder Barbie in my kitchen, and props to them for not suggesting I get my head checked.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jack, already planning something no doubt. "I don't know, dude. I might have just imagined the whole thing, I mean I did have a *lot* of coffee this morning." He looked at me doubtfully.

"Sure. Whatever let's just get to class." Class. Sure, that'll be easy. I walked to first period, my mind churning with half collected thoughts and worries. I opened my laptop once Mrs. G told us to, and typed what the girl had looked like into Google. The first site that came up was List Of Death Deities on Wikipedia. That looked promising, and a bit scary, so I clicked on it and began to read. The girl had a gray dress on, stained with things I don't want to think about, and had a large pair of wings. She looked young but had the air of someone thousands of years old. I looked for anything matching that description and came up with Dea, an obscure goddess from early Mesopotamian civilization. She went after the souls of the dead that escaped from the infernal regions and dragged them back. As I was reading this, my screen went dark. As did every light in the room. Everyone in the classroom started screaming, probably because the murder Barbie had just appeared at the front of the room. Everyone bolted for the door when she grabbed Mrs. G and turned her to dust. I never really liked Mrs. G, but that's just not a good way to die for anyone. Dea spread her wings and launched herself out a window, shattering the glass.

We all rushed to the windows and looked down. Our classroom is on the third floor, and we couldn't see her on the ground. So she must be able to fly with those wings. I heard screaming from below us, which was the freshman wing, and I ran for the stairs. As I ran through the halls, the screaming got louder. It was coming from the cafeteria, which was in a state of pandemonium. Dea was there, as I had thought she'd be, and she stood over the body of our principal, Mr. Mas. I could already tell he was dead. Around him lay the bodies of my fellow classmates, including Jack. The screaming had stopped, and Dea looked up from Mr. Mas, and her eyes locked on me.

"So," she rasped. "The hero has come to stop me, how quaint." She smiled at me, and I could tell I wasn't making it out alive. She smirked at me, and I bolted, running for my life. The lights overhead flickered once or twice, then went out. I didn't slow down, so of course, I ran

into a wall. I fell to the ground, stunned, and I could hear Dea behind me, steadily walking towards me.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are.” she sang in her raspy voice. I tried to stand, but an icy pain shot through my head. I could feel blood soaking through my hair. I crawled towards the bathroom door to my right, futilely trying to escape Dea. She continued to ask where I was, and it struck me that she couldn’t see me. Or hear me, either. I wonder why if she had killed everyone in this school so easily, why she hadn’t killed me. I gave up trying to hide and just accepted the fact that this was the way I’d die. This is how my last day is going to go. I tried again to stand, ignoring the flash of pain in my head the best I could and stood. She’s going to kill me anyway, so why not go out swinging? I looked around, realizing that somehow I had run into the gym, and saw a bunch of equipment. We had just started archery, maybe Dea could be killed by an arrow?

I grabbed a sheath of arrows, a black compound bow, still unsure of what I was going to do. Dea must have heard me or got the idea to check the gym in her head because she walked through one of the doors opposite me. Behind came the sound of shuffling, and in walked my classmates. Or... what was left of them. She had created her own zombie army out of my friend’s bodies. They stumbled towards me as Dea watched with that cold sneer on her face. I quickly shot off an arrow towards one of the zombies and I hit its chest dead center. It didn’t do anything and they just kept coming after me. One of them managed to get close enough to grab my arm, pulling me towards it. They all crowded around me, blocking my sight of Dea. But I could still hear her, laughing as the dead tore me apart. I said my last prayers and surrendered to the encroaching darkness.

We were unstoppable. We tore down nations, enslaving their people, and turning them. As we grew in number, Dea got stronger. She didn’t suspect a thing from her beloved army of the dead. She didn’t think to check if I was dead or not. She didn’t even notice one day when I went missing. She didn’t care, because her army didn’t last that long. Even as the dead crumbled, she made more. So when I came back, armed and deadly, she was surprised. When I drove a knife through her heart, she still thought she could win. When I died for the hundredth time, I welcomed death knowing I stopped Dea. I still wander the earth, waiting for my chance to inhabit another body and be a warrior. I am the spirit of war, and I have won every battle I have fought .

The Case of Melissa Greenholm

By Ashlyn Houghton

One dark and stormy night, a girl was walking down the street. She had long blonde hair and beautiful blue eyes that could light up the room when she walked into it. She was tall, maybe about 5’5 to 5’6. Some way up the street, she stopped in front of a house, a strange blue glow coming from the windows. She was curious, so she went inside. After she shut the door behind her, she heard a whisper, a whisper that seemed to be calling her. *Melissa*, it said. *Melissa, come*

down to the basement. We have been waiting for you. The girl didn't necessarily want to listen to the voice, but it was so hypnotizing that she didn't want to disobey it. She went down into the basement and turned on the light. As soon as the door shut behind her, the blue glow stopped, the lights went out all throughout the house and the girl started to scream and scream.

10 days later

I am hanging out at my house with my best friend, Kai. We are watching TV when a news flash appears. We click on it and see it's about a girl named Melissa Greenholm, who disappeared 10 days prior. I shoot a glance at Kai in shock and see my reaction mirrored there. We know Melissa personally. She is our best friend and we are never seen apart. No one speaks for a full half-hour. We are all just staring at one another. I finally spoke up.

"We have to find out what happened to her, Kai." I have a knack for mysteries. My father is a detective, and ever since I was younger, whenever he wasn't home, I would go through his paperwork and figure out who committed the crime. I was almost always correct. Kai is looking at me weirdly. I know exactly what he's saying, without him even having to say it. Kai hates mysteries. Even though he comes along with me whenever I have a mystery to solve, he absolutely *hates* every second he's there.

"Kai, I know you hate it, but please? You don't want to make your bestie sad, do you?" I can see the expression on his face change immediately and he sighs. Whenever he does this, I know I have won.

"Fine, Maria. Fine, I'll come." *Yay! I knew I could convince him to come with me!*

Kai then says, "When do you want to start the investigation?"

"Tomorrow?" I can visibly see him flinch, though I can't fathom why he would. *Is it too soon? I can't just sit here and not investigate it! Kai knows that I itch to investigate whenever I can as soon as I possibly can!* I would never have expected what happened next. Kai closes his eyes and sighs again. He then opens them and replies,

"Yes. Tomorrow works fine."

"Full disclosure: I honestly never would have thought you would say that, bro."

"Of course. You're my best friend, I would do anything for you, man."

"Meet at my place again tomorrow, then?"

"Yes."

"Okie Dokie yo." We laugh and he leaves with a last wave. I wave back. After he's gone I remain at the table for a while, lost in my thoughts, as I usually am when I get a case to solve. This is an interesting case. The news said nothing except that she disappeared into a house in the middle of the night, and never came back out. Also, there was a blue light associated with the case. After a while, I decide to go upstairs and get ready for bed. I'm not exactly tired yet, so I grab my book and start to read. As I am reading, I start to think more about Melissa's case and what happened, but I can't come up with anything other than what the news told. But then, I remembered the blue light. The only thing that lures people in with that color light is...I sit bolt upright, my heart pounding, head racing. I consider whether or not I should call Kai. I decide not to and try to fall asleep, but I can't. I just lay there, thinking about the chilling epiphany I just had. It is now midnight, and my brain is starting to shut down. Soon I fall asleep and start to dream.

In my dream, I am walking down the street and see a girl ahead of me. I try to yell, but I don't think she can hear me. I then see the blonde hair and know immediately who's ahead of me. Melissa. I yell her name, but she ignores me. She then stops in front of a house with blue coming from it. *Uh oh.*

"Melissa!" I cry. "Melissa, don't go in there!" She doesn't turn and walks straight into the house. Nothing happens, then all the lights go out and I can hear her screaming with all of her strength.

I wake up from the dream in a cold sweat, breathing heavily and broken. *I just dreamt of the Melissa case.* I glance at the clock and see it's 9:30. *Shoot I should probably get going.* I make it to get out of my bed when my phone starts buzzing at the bedside table. I look at the caller ID and see it's Kai. I answer quickly.

"Hello, Kai."

"Hey Maria, how are you, my little detective?"

"Kai, something creepy just happened to me, man. I'm nervous."

"What? What happened?"

"I'll tell you later, just hurry over, okay?"

"Alright, I'll be over in 5 minutes. See you soon!"

"Bye." I hang up and try to steady myself. I have *never* had a dream where I had a case pop up before. This was the first time it had happened. I am lost in thought, again, when the doorbell rings. I open it and see Kai. I gesture to him to come in. He obliges and follows me to the living room, I on the couch, him standing. We look at each other for a few short seconds before I speak.

"So last night I had a dream. You may think it quite normal, but it was not."

"Really? What happened in the dream that made it abnormal?"

"It was about the Melissa case."

"What!? You never have a dream about a case!"

"I know! Which is why it's so abnormal! I don't know why on Earth it would happen now, because it's never happened before. Anyway, shall we investigate?"

"Sure." His face says he wants to say more but he doesn't. I decide to ignore it and move on.

I grab my computer and look up, with Kai over my shoulder, everything I could about the Melissa case. What I find excites me. It apparently happened a few houses down from mine.

"Kai, we have to go to the house. It's not that far from here at all." I can see his face contort to fear, which basically happens whenever I suggest solving a crime, because, as I said before, he hates it.

"Alright fine, let's go." I'm surprised, but not too much. Even though he agrees, I can see he's having a bit of a panic attack. This hasn't happened before, so I begin to worry.

"Kai, hey man, breathe. In and out. In and out. It's going to be hard, but I will be here with you, so don't forget that, okay? And hey, you've done plenty of other crimes with me and you did perfectly well with those, remember?" After I say this, I can see his panic cease. His body relaxes and I know my words have hit the spot.

"You're right, Maria, you're absolutely right. Let's go investigate this thing." He leads me out the door and down the street to the address. The fog is so thick, we can barely see, but we eventually make it to the house. I take the lead from here, flicking on my flashlight as we enter through the door and showing it around. I hear a little eek from behind me.

“If you wanna hide, you’re losing your mind, you wanna lean on somebody. I’ll be that somebody for ya.” I whisper. He immediately calms down after I say that line, and we continue.

I don’t find anything suspicious in any of the rooms so I decided to go into the basement. As soon as I flick on the lights, I have a feeling we will find something. Something chilling and horrible. And I am right. I am looking around when I hear a shriek. I turn around and see Kai pointing at something. We got closer and get a scene of nightmares.

The sight is horrible. The body was mangled, the skin was falling off, bite marks were *everywhere*, blood was pouring from every single spot, eyes, nose, ears. Whatever that had attacked Melissa was definitely not human. No human could have done anything *close* to this. We are staring at the body, when a voice, that isn’t human, says creepily from behind us,

“Hello, children, I have been waiting for you to come to find your friend. Now it is your turn to meet the same fate.” Suddenly all the lights shut off on their own. We bolt out of there, screaming at the top of our lungs, down the street, into my house, and upstairs to my room. We stand there, panting, neither of us being able to speak.

We finally say in unison, “Melissa was attacked by a demon.” From that day forth, I was traumatized. I gave up my job as a detective. To all people reading this, fair warning. Don’t go outside at night. The same thing might happen to you, as what happened to Melissa. You have been warned.

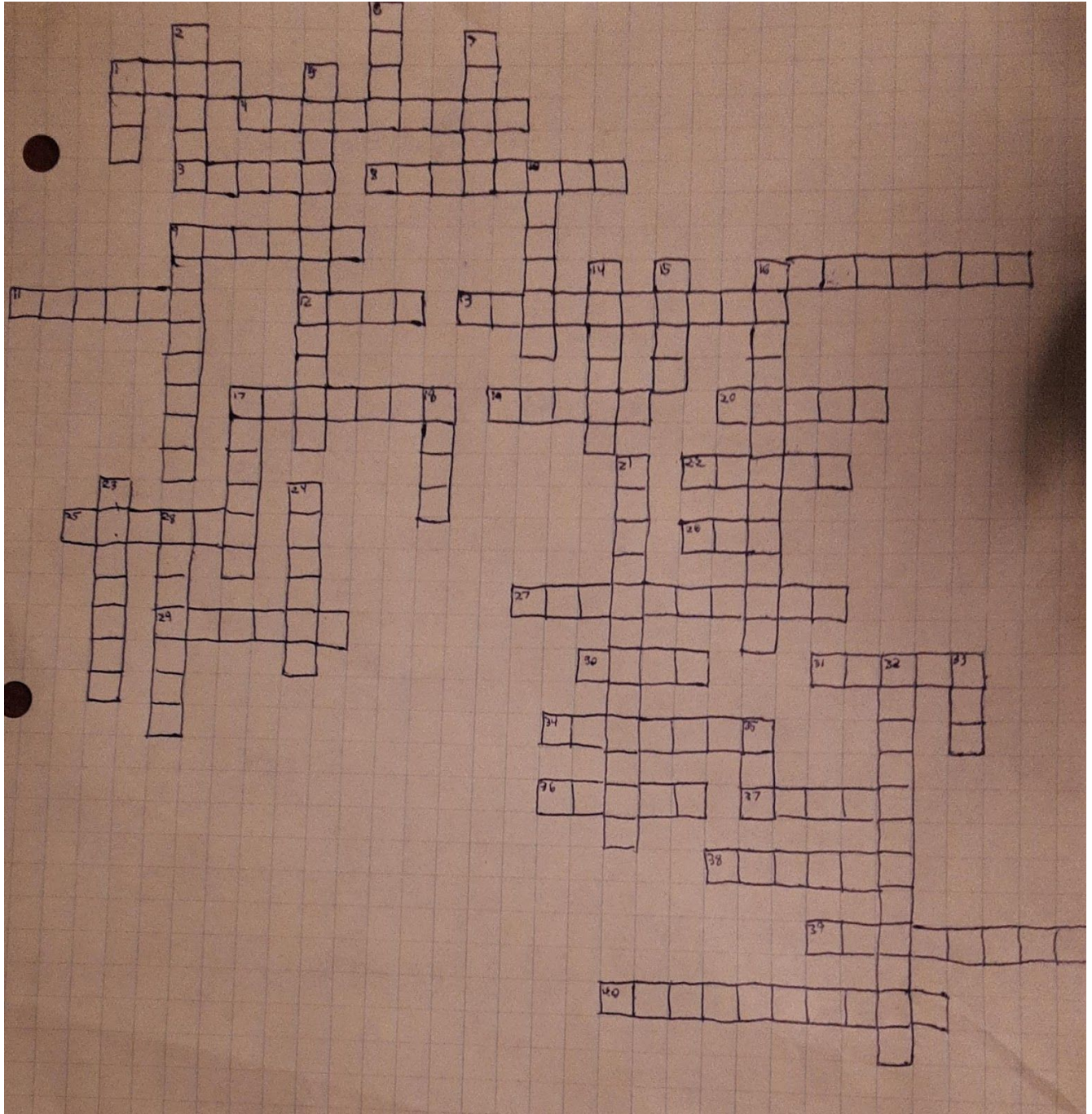
Halloween Crossword Puzzle

by Annelise Seybolt

Across

1. The season that hosts back to school, pumpkin spice, and Halloween.
3. An evil spirit. Everyone has one.
4. A doll set up in the middle of a field to scare away birds. He really wants a brain.
8. A terrifying dream of helplessness, anxiety, or sorrow.
9. A predatory arachnid that is the source of one of the most common phobias in the world.
11. A corpse that has been reanimated and spreads diseases through bites.
12. The ominous sound that wolves make to communicate over long distances.
13. A physical manifestation of death that is neither good or evil, but a force of nature.
16. The moon phase that will occur on Halloween, 2020.
17. The clothing people wear when they’re going out to trick-or-treat.
19. What ghosts and other dead things show up to do.
20. The bone in the head that usually contains a brain.
22. A sugary treat that is socially unacceptable to take from strangers, unless it’s Halloween.
25. A dead body.
26. A winged mammal that is often associated with vampires.
27. A cleaning tool that witches love to fly around on.
29. A drink with medical, poisonous, or magical powers.
30. The face piece you wear when you’re surviving a pandemic, or disguising yourself on Halloween.
31. A person who practices magic or sorcery.
34. The month of Halloween, Breast Cancer Awareness, and National Pierogi Day.

36. A social gathering of people for conversation, refreshments, and entertainment.
37. A trick of playful or malicious nature.
38. A monster that likes drinking the blood of the living.
39. A human that turns into a wolf every full moon.
40. An event without a scientific explanation.



Down

1. A cloud that is close to Earth, decreases visibility, and gives off mysterious vibes.
2. It's not a good sign when you see this red liquid coming out of your body.
5. A house that is home to at least one ghost or monster.
6. Everyone has these white flesh supports, but hopefully you'll never see your own.
7. The soul of a dead person that wanders around Earth and tends to scare the heck out of the living.
9. Spooky scary _____ send shivers down your spine.
10. When you feel fear or anxiety.
14. What small children are likely to do when someone scares them.
15. When there is little to no light.
16. The story of a young scientist who creates a sentient being through a science experiment, by Mary Shelly.
17. An old and creepy looking spider web.
18. A very wicked person would be considered _____.
21. The pumpkins that have candles on the inside and carvings on the outside.
23. A supernatural creature that frightens people.
24. The dark figure you see on the ground when there is a light nearby.
28. A fruit that can be made into Jack-O-Lanterns and highly controversial pie.
32. What you say to people when you ring their doorbell and want candy.
33. When you use witchcraft against someone, you're _____ing them.
35. Rest In Peace.

Dear Meryn

By Annelise Seybolt

Dear Meryn, I wrote in my journal. I hesitated for a minute. Where should I start? The screams? The hallucinations? The near-crippling fear? Faint cries of a wounded child echoed outside the tightly locked door. I shuddered and placed my pen back on the paper.

As you may know, I have committed many sins these past few years. I thought about this for a moment. No, no. *Sins* was too light of a word to describe all the unspeakable horrors I had inflicted upon the people of the nearby town. Also, there was no reason not to be blunt with Meryn. I scribbled out that part and tried again.

As you may know, I have murdered 34 men, women, and children over these past few years. There. That was better. I looked around the room. If any cops found me here, there was more than enough evidence to convict me. There was no way to get all the bloodstains off the floors, and no way to hide the putrid smell of decaying bodies, feces, and rotten eggs wafting up from the floors. I continued.

I felt not the smallest sliver of remorse as I chopped up their bodies like dog food, all while they begged me to stop. All of the sudden, the house went quiet. Quieter than it had been in days. I froze. My heart was hammering wildly in my ears. I held my breath as footsteps

creaked outside my door. They stopped. The sound of wind whistled through the house. There was no wind on my flesh. I had to hurry.

The first time I heard them was last week, just after I buried the last man, Ghalib Giza. I thought I just imagined it at first, that it was nothing more than a trick of the mind, but I kept hearing out-of-place noises and seeing out-of-place things. Was I crazy? Hard to say, but I can't take any chances. Not anymore. Not ever again.

Things like old carnival music and children giggling at first. I walked through the entire house, but it never got louder or softer. Just carnival music. For hours. A sudden chill came over me. Isn't it sad when you have no idea if the goosebumps are from the freezing temperatures or the fear of knowing that someone hostile is lurking around your house?

I didn't start to worry until I turned around a corner one day and saw Henry Amelia standing there staring at me, if you could call it that. He had no eyes, there were huge wounds on him that weren't bleeding, and he had a questionable black liquid dripping from his mouth. I looked back and he was gone. I suppose it happened fast enough that I could have imagined it, but I thought that was unlikely because I killed Henry 8 weeks ago.

No matter how crazy it may sound, Meryn, I believe that my victims have come back to haunt me. I have not seen them for a while, because I have locked myself in my room, but I have been hearing them for days. The rustling of leaves one day, a woman screaming her lungs out the next. I left the part about the time I heard a little kid crying for his parents out. That was certainly too much information.

But no matter what they try, I will not be their victim. I am the predator, I am not the victim and never will be. A horrible voice came from beyond my door.

"Goodnight, Meryn." was the only thing it said.

It took me a second to realize that this thing said those two words in my voice. That's what I always said after I finished writing in Meryn.

I stood up. Was I afraid? Terrified, but I would never admit that to someone I had already overpowered once. I quickly finished up my entry for the day.

I will win this round. Goodbye Meryn, tell my story for me. - Abigail Thane

How to Survive a Horror Movie

By Jack Accurso

Hey, my name is Jack and I like horror movies. So much so that I've seen over 100 horror movies, the good ones and the bad. And today I'm here to tell you that "There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie." While most horror movies are very similar, for a realistic sense today we're going to be dealing with a slasher horror movie. Slashers include: *Scream, Halloween, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Friday the 13th, A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and many more. When learning how to survive a horror movie

you have to know your villain. Since *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Halloween* all have supernatural killers, we're going to talk about the much more realistic movie, *Scream*.

Scream was released in December of 1996 by Wes Craven. The story follows a high school girl named Sidney Prescott in the small town of Woodsboro. Soon a masked serial killer starts murdering high school kids. The movie is a horror mystery film, where anybody can be the killer, making it much scarier and giving it a realistic sense. So how do you survive this?

- Step 1: Don't be stupid

First things first: the main key is to not be a complete idiot. Most horror movie deaths are caused by blatant stupidity. If you think something is off alert someone of what is happening. Make good choices and don't do things that will get you killed off and put on the 6 o'clock news. It's not that hard.

- Step 2: Do not do drugs or alcohol

This is a big no no. In most horror movies all the characters that drink and do drugs always end up with a knife to the gut. To avoid this just don't give into peer pressure. They can weaken your senses making you very oblivious to the situation and you can also accidentally break step 1, which is the worst thing you can do in this situation. So just remember that if you decide to do these things, then instead of waking up next to your alarm clock you might wake up next to the angels.

- Step 3: Cardio

This probably comes as obvious, but if you're in a horror movie you will be running a lot. So if you aren't faster than the killer, then I've got some bad news for you. Usually, in a real-life situation, the killer isn't going to bother with trying to catch the faster runner of the group. So I'm not saying that you should trip your friend and bolt away, but I am saying that you might wanna invest in some new shoes. Also a pretty good reason we should exercise daily and stay in shape.

- Step 4: Don't be left alone

Ok, this one should be in the don't be stupid category as well. If you've ever played the game *Among us* you should know that you never wanna be left alone. Because separating yourself from the pack makes you vulnerable and before you know it you'll be one of the victims that the final girl is walking past during the big climax.

Long story short: travel in groups and if you do happen to ever be alone then my advice for you is to not shout out "Is anybody there?" Because what do you think they're gonna say? "Uh yeah I'm in the kitchen making a sandwich, you want one?" No!

- Step 5: Learn how to fight back

Know this all depends on the figure you're fighting. If it's a big, hefty, mountain of a man with biceps the size of your head, that would make the Rock soil his pants then I'm just saying that if you think fighting is an option then you were probably the kid that thought standing on your hind legs was the best way to scare off a Grizzly Bear.

But if fighting is your only option then here's what you do. First of all you wanna size up your enemy, now most of the time there is a very easy way to make the fight quick and simple, not like *Mission Impossible*. First things first: if you can find a weapon of any sort that'll help you drastically, even if it's just a pencil. If you don't believe me just watch *John Wick: Chapter 2*. Most horror movie characters don't carry guns. They have to have their fancy signature weapon like a knife or machete. So if you can't find a weapon then your best choice is to go for the ultimate fatal blow. No, not a decapitation, not a heart stab. Your ultimate move in this situation is a kick straight up the middle that'll make your killer sing a higher note than a choir girl.

- Step 6: Don't be afraid to ask for help

Listen, pride is one of the biggest factors that results in death in horror movies. Take note of this. It's a clear and common cliché that one character thinks that they can take down the killer all by themselves. This usually works for the most part, until the character decides to get too cocky, giving the killer just enough time to send their friends running and them to heaven.

Now is it better to impress that one girl by beating up a bad guy even though your odds heavily outweigh the outcome of anything good happening in that situation? No, they're not! You have the numbers so you might as well use them before the killer picks you off one by one. Also if you think something is off, CALL THE POLICE!

- Step 7: Double Tap

Finally, the last step we have to touch on is this one. One of the easiest ways to survive a horror movie, but if this step isn't used then it is also one of the easiest ways to screw up everything you've gone through.

This is the part of the story where you've finally figured out the identity of the killer and have him in a situation where you believe him to be dead. Now I don't condone murder but if you already believe the killer to be dead then what's the risk of making sure? Just make the job easier for yourself and others and use your weapons as an insurance policy. Takes away the uncertainty of him still being alive and also makes sure that you will 100% survive.

- Conclusion

So those are my tips for how to survive a horror movie. Let me know if I missed something, but now the next time you get into this scenario then you'll be able to survive and tell

your grandchildren that if they complain life is too hard you can say that you survived a serial killer. Have a safe and Happy Halloween.



All pictures hand illustrated by Genevieve Galuski