

## A CLOSER LOOK AT

***Frozen* Tries and Fails to Be Both Traditional and Modern**

1. With your group, find five inconsistencies or weaknesses named by Schindel in the movie *Frozen*. Do the members of your group agree with Schindel's assessment of *Frozen* that "while it's never outright bland, it lacks staying power"?
2. Make a list of three movies that you personally like but others find flawed. Compare your list with those of other group members. Then, choose one of the movies from your list and defend it. Why, despite its flaws, do you consider it an entertaining and worthwhile movie?
3. Of course, Disney produces princess movies because they rake in huge profits. Discuss the princess-movie genre with your group. What are the major features of this genre, and how do various Disney movies stretch the genre to offer new and original takes on the prototypical princess story?

## IDEAS FOR

**Writing**

1. A "movie trailer" mashup uses songs or images from one movie to create something funny with scenes from another movie. For example, search for "Brokeback to the Future" or "Avatar/Pocahontas" on YouTube. Write a review in which you choose one of these mashups and discuss why it is funny or insightful.
2. Write a rebuttal or counterargument to Schindel's review of the movie *Frozen*. Keep in mind that *Frozen* was a smash hit when it was released and it's still popular today. Do you think Schindel was wrong about the movie, or do you think the movie is popular despite the flaws he points out?

## Why We Crave Horror Movies

**STEPHEN KING**

*This curious article was first published in Playboy in January 1981 when Stephen King was emerging as one of the great horror writers. It's not a standard review, but it has many of this genre's elements. Watch how King stretches the genre to achieve an interesting purpose.*

I think that we're all mentally ill: those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better—and maybe not all that much better, after all. We've all known people who talk to themselves, people who sometimes squinch their faces into horrible grimaces when they believe no one is watching, people who have some hysterical fear—of snakes, the dark, the tight place, the long drop . . . and, of course, those final worms

and grubs that are waiting so patiently underground.

When we pay our four or five bucks and seat ourselves at tenth-row center in a theater showing a horror movie, we are daring the nightmare.

Why? Some of the reasons are simple and obvious. To show that we can, that we are not afraid, that we can ride this roller coaster. Which is not to say that a really good horror movie may

not surprise a scream out of us at some point, the way we may scream when the roller coaster twists through a complete 360 or plows through a lake at the bottom of the drop. And horror movies, like roller coasters, have always been the special province of the young; by the time one turns 40 or 50, one's appetite for double twists or 360-degree loops may be considerably depleted.

We also go to re-establish our feelings of essential normality; the horror movie is innately conservative, even reactionary. Freda Jackson as the horrible melting woman in *Die, Monster, Die!* confirms for us that no matter how far we may be removed from the beauty of a Robert Redford or a Diana Ross, we are still light-years from true ugliness.

And we go to have fun.

Ah, but this is where the ground starts to slope away, isn't it? Because this is a very peculiar sort of fun indeed. The fun comes from seeing others menaced—sometimes killed. One critic has suggested that if pro football has become the voyeur's version of combat, then the horror film has become the modern version of the public lynching.

It is true that the mythic, "fairytale" horror film intends to take away the shades of gray . . . . It urges us to put away our more civilized and adult penchant for analysis and to become children again, seeing things in pure blacks and whites. It may be that horror movies provide psychic relief on this level because this invitation to lapse into simplicity, irrationality and even outright madness is extended so rarely. We are told we may allow our emotions a free rein . . . or no rein at all.

If we are all insane, then sanity becomes a matter of degree. If your insanity leads you to carve up women like Jack the Ripper or the Cleveland Torso Murderer, we clap you away in the funny farm (but neither of those two amateur-night surgeons was ever caught, heh-heh-heh); if, on the other hand your insanity leads you only to talk to yourself when you're under stress or to pick your nose on the morning bus, then you are left alone to go about your business . . . though it is doubtful that you will ever be invited to the best parties.

The potential lyncher is in almost all of us (excluding saints, past and present; but then, most saints have been crazy in their own ways), and every now and then, he has to be let loose to scream and roll around in the grass. Our emotions and our fears form their own body, and we recognize that it demands its own exercise to maintain proper muscle tone. Certain of these emotional muscles are accepted—even exalted—in civilized society; they are, of course, the emotions that tend to maintain the status quo of civilization itself. Love, friendship, loyalty, kindness—these are all the emotions that we applaud, emotions that have been immortalized in the couplets of Hallmark cards. . . .

When we exhibit these emotions, society<sup>10</sup> showers us with positive reinforcement; we learn this even before we get out of diapers. When, as children, we hug our rotten little puke of a sister and give her a kiss, all the aunts and uncles smile and twit and cry, "Isn't he the sweetest little thing?" Such coveted treats as chocolate-covered graham crackers often follow. But if we deliberately slam the rotten little puke of a sister's fingers in the door, sanctions follow—angry remonstrance from parents, aunts and uncles; instead of a chocolate-covered graham cracker, a spanking.

But anticivilization emotions don't go away, and they demand periodic exercise. We have such "sick" jokes as, "What's the difference between a truckload of bowling balls and a truckload of dead babies?" (You can't unload a truckload of bowling balls with a pitchfork . . . a joke, by the way, that I heard originally from a ten-year-old.) Such a joke may surprise a laugh or a grin out of us even as we recoil, a possibility that confirms the thesis: If we share a brotherhood of man, then we also share an insanity of man. None of which is intended as a defense of either the sick joke or insanity but merely as an explanation of why the best horror films, like the best fairy tales, manage to be reactionary, anarchistic, and revolutionary all at the same time.

The mythic horror movie, like the sick joke, has a dirty job to do. It deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidity unchained, our

most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized . . . and it all happens, fittingly enough, in the dark. For those reasons, good liberals often shy away from horror films. For myself, I like to see the most aggressive of them—*Dawn of the Dead*, for instance—as lifting a trap door in the civilized forebrain and throwing a basket of raw

meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath.

Why bother? Because it keeps them from getting out, man. It keeps them down there and me up here. It was Lennon and McCartney who said that all you need is love, and I would agree with that.

As long as you keep the gators fed.

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT

### Why We Crave Horror Movies

1. List the three qualities (criteria) that Stephen King argues are the characteristics of an excellent horror film. Do you agree with these criteria? Would you add or subtract some of them? How does King use these criteria to sort the good horror movies from the bad?
2. King's style is especially interesting in this article. He seems to be making a straightforward argument about the difference between good horror movies and bad horror movies. But occasionally, he throws a strange sentence at the readers, creating a pained laugh or a dark thought. Find a handful of these moments in the article. How does he use style to bring about this dark humor?
3. This review is about horror movies, but King's real motive is to explore the psychology behind people's fascination with such movies. He identifies several reasons why people crave horror films. Highlight these reasons and discuss them with a group in your class. Do you agree with King, or do you think people have other reasons for enjoying horror movies?

#### IDEAS FOR Writing

1. Write a rebuttal to King's article in which you dispute his reasoning or offer different reasons why people like to see horror movies. In your rebuttal, you could challenge King's criteria, or you could question whether he is right about why people enjoy blood and gore. You might even challenge the worth of these kinds of movies altogether. You don't need to completely disagree with King, but you should distinguish your argument from his in a significant way.
2. Rent or go see a horror film, perhaps one based on a Stephen King novel. Write a review of the movie using King's evaluation criteria in this article as the basis of your review. Unlike King's argument, your review does not need to define the criteria. Instead, assume King's criteria reflect "common expectations" that most moviegoers will accept. Unlike King, you do not need to make a broader argument about the psychology of these movies. Instead, review the movie as though you were writing for a newspaper or a movie review blog.