

The Monsters Come Out on Halloween Night

By John E. Petty

It was the perfect Halloween evening: a dusky twilight, cool and crisp, with just a hint of the winter that was to come in the air, highlighted by the scent of the first homefires of the season. All of a sudden, the leaves had turned from cool green to fiery shades of red and orange, as if in celebration of this age-old holiday. Now dry and brittle, making an earthy carpet on the concrete sidewalk, they crunched underfoot, a sound largely drowned out by the shouting and laughter of children on their neighborhood rounds, asking for treats and offering tricks.

Billy Pagano, ten years old and feeling so grown-up, was, for the first time, being allowed to go door-to-door on his own, unfettered by his mother and father who, in years past, had stood on the sidewalk as he knocked on neighbor's doors. Billy loved his parents, but being taken around like that was for babies, and Billy was no baby.

"Do you really think we should let him go by himself," his mother had said.

"What's the harm," his dad had replied. "He's a good kid, and besides, we know everyone in the neighborhood. What could happen? Besides, he's gotta grow up sometime."

Billy's mother hesitated. "But what about that boy...?" she asked.

"What about him?" Billy's father answered sharply. "You don't know any more about that than I do. It's probably nothing. In a few days, the boy'll come back and it'll all be over. Look, Martha, you can't baby the kid all his life. You've got to cut the apron strings sometime."

And so it had been decided. Billy was to go trick-or-treating around the neighborhood – and only the neighborhood – with a stern injunction not to talk to strangers. Of course, he solemnly promised to obey, eager to begin his rounds.

Halloween had always been Billy's favorite holiday, beating out Christmas by a mile. Sure, getting presents was great, but Halloween was something special. It was about monsters, and there was nothing Billy loved more than monsters. He had seen all the classic movies: *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Wolfman*, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, even *Godzilla*. Each Sunday, when the newspaper was delivered,

Billy grabbed the TV section and pored through it, looking for listings of monster movies. He could always count on Chiller Theater – its intro showing a six-fingered hand rising out of a murky swamp and placing the letters of “chiller” one by one – for something good, and Saturday mornings were typically rife with black and white classics like *A Bucket of Blood* and *Robot Monster*. Often, Billy would take his tape recorder and place it next to the television’s speaker so that he could preserve at least the dialogue of his favorite pictures. Sure, he’d miss a few moments when he had to flip the tape, but it was worth it. Then he’d sleep with the tape recorder next to his ear, the volume turned down really low so as not to give himself away, and listen to the sounds of monsters as pictures played in his head and filled his dreams.

Being a monster kid wasn’t all about TV, though. On the first Saturday of the month, Billy would walk two miles to Baker’s Stationary, the only store in the area that carried Billy’s bible, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. A black and white magazine devoted entirely to monster movies, Billy gladly handed over his allowance money, dutifully saved over the past few weeks, and immediately studied the garish color cover. Then, sated on the horrors on the surface, Billy dove into the issue, eagerly devouring stories about the glorious monster films of the past, and the men and women who made them come to life, each article peppered with frequent groan-inducing puns courtesy of the magazine’s editor, Forrest J Ackerman, Billy’s personal hero. If there was something better in life than *Famous Monsters*, Billy had yet to find it.

Every minute that wasn’t spent in school was spent in the company of fiends, demons, the undead, mummies, and vampires: in short, monsters. Billy read about them, talked about them, watched them, built models of them, drew pictures of them, and dreamed of them. And now it was Halloween, the one day of the year when everyone shared his obsession for the grisly, the ghoulish, and the grim.

As he walked down the road, approaching the first house on his route, Billy thought about his favorite monsters. He pictured the Wolfman, loping through the fog-shrouded forest, with angry villagers in hot pursuit, and of Godzilla, hundreds of feet tall with a hapless train car clutched in his mighty jaws. He thought of Frankenstein’s Monster, innocently throwing a small girl into a pond to drown, and of Dracula, turning into a bat to elude his enemies. As he walked, black and white thoughts flickering through his mind, Billy was conscious of every rustle, every sound, every errant breeze, knowing that any one of them could be a monster hidden

just out of sight. Yes, Billy was scared, but scared in the fun way that was what Halloween was all about. Even though he was only ten, Billy knew that monsters weren't real... although often he wished they were.

It wasn't that Billy wanted to harm anyone, or wished the terror of a rampaging behemoth on his family, his friends, or his town. It was just that the worlds he saw in the movies were so much more interesting, more exciting than the boring old world in which he was forced to live. In the movies, there were still mysteries to be solved, and "things that man was not meant to know." That was a world of possibilities, in which something new, something different could lurk around any corner, a world in which the potential of science was unlimited. Billy remembered how much he had looked forward to the first moon landing, hoping that the astronauts would discover something exciting, at least some small hint of alien life. When they brought home nothing more exciting than a bunch of dull rocks, however, Billy was sorely disappointed, his joy in the excitement of scientific discovery obliterated. From then on he knew that even though the movies he loved were in black and white, the world they portrayed – one in which radioactive monsters could rise from the sea, in which men could turn into bats or beasts or behemoths, and in which shambling things could rise from the grave, impervious to all harm – was infinitely more colorful than his own. That was a world in which exciting and unexpected things could – and did – happen, a world in which one could never know all there was to know because strange things and bizarre creatures were hidden in every old house, under every body of murky and still water, and within every clutching grave. To a ten-year-old, this was the best of all possible worlds.

But all his disappointment, in the world as it was, was behind him now. Tonight was Halloween, and he couldn't wait to make the most of it. Billy was dressed as The Wolfman, complete with a mask he had ordered from the back of *Famous Monsters* ("'Moving Face' Life-Like Super Monster Masks! The Same Masks Used by World-Famous Universal Pictures!") His mother had saved the clippings from the last time she trimmed the dog, and had glued that hair to a t-shirt that Billy wore under one of his father's ripped work shirts, giving him the appearance of a lupine, hirsute chest. She had done the same to a pair of fingerless gloves and a pair of socks that Billy wore over his shoes, along with an old pair of strategically ripped jeans. The result might not have won any prizes, but Billy was thrilled with his appearance, and was sure he was going to give a fright to everyone he met.

Before he got to his first stop, Billy saw a group of older boys gathered around a younger, smaller kid dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt with the hood pulled up over his head. Billy recognized the older boys, three high school kids who everyone knew were trouble, but he had never seen the younger boy before. The big kids had taken the boy's Halloween bag, and were rifling through it.

"Hey, give that back," the boy insisted, "or I'll tell my Dad and you'll be sorry."

Kenny, the biggest of the three high school boys, didn't even look at the boy, but shoved him, knocking the youngster to the ground.

"Shut up," he said. "You gotta pay a toll to use this road." Kenny turned and took a menacing step towards the boy, a surly grimace on his face. "Ya got a problem with that?"

"N-no," said the boy, scootching backwards on the ground. "I guess not."

With that, Billy ran forward towards the group, not sure what he was going to do, but sure he had to do something.

"Hey you guys," he yelled. "Get outta here and leave him alone."

Kenny and his friends stopped, shocked that anyone would consider standing up to them. Especially someone as small as Billy.

"Well, well, if it ain't Billy Pagano," Kenny said, taking several steps forward. "You gonna make us leave, punk?"

Billy stood his ground, hoping that no one could see him shaking. At least with his mask on, the bullies couldn't see him sweating.

"If you don't leave, Kenny," Billy said, "I'm gonna tell Mr. Pratt who it was who busted his mailbox."

In a moment, Kenny crossed the distance between them and grabbed Billy by his shirt, hoisting him up into the air. Billy could smell the odor of stale cigarettes on Kenny's breath, and could see the jagged remains of one of his front teeth recently broken in a fight.

"You're not gonna tell anyone anything, ya little snot," Kenny hissed. "Ya hear me?"

Before Billy could respond, the darkness was broken by the twin beams of approaching headlights. Taking his attention from Billy, Kenny looked back over his shoulder.

"Hey, c'mon Kenny," one of the other boys said. "Let's get outta here. Somebody's comin'!"

Kenny turned back to Billy just long enough to say, “This ain’t over, punk,” before dropping him to the ground. Quickly, Kenny and his friends faded into the darkness, pausing just long enough to scoop up the bag of candy that they had taken from the younger boy, just in time to miss the car that drove by on the quiet road without stopping.

Billy sat on the ground, still paralyzed with the shock of realizing that he had just escaped a savage beating. His heart was pounding as if it was trying to leap out of his chest, and his breath came in ragged gulps. This was real fear, not the fun kind of fear that Billy got from his favorite monsters, but a real, unpleasant fear brought on by a brush with real, palpable danger. In the back of his mind, Billy thought, “this must be how people would feel if they saw The Wolfman for real.” He decided he preferred movie fear, the kind he knew couldn’t really hurt him, and that he could enjoy in the safety of his living room.

Without knowing how or when he had appeared, Billy suddenly noticed that the smaller boy, who Billy now judged to be about his same age, was beside him. The hood was still up over his head, making his shadow-shrouded face hard to see. Even so, Billy didn’t think he recognized the kid either from school or from the neighborhood.

“Are you okay?” the boy asked.

“Um... yeah... yeah, I guess so,” Billy answered.

“Thanks for... um... thanks,” the boy stammered, embarrassed at his weakness.

“That’s okay,” Billy said, getting up off of the ground. “Those guys are always picking on kids smaller than them. They’re just a bunch of jerks.”

“Yeah. Well, see ya,” the kid said, as he started to walk away.

“Hey, wait up,” Billy yelled after him. “Aren’t you going trick-or-treating?”

The kid stopped and turned. “I dunno,” he said. “I guess so.”

Billy looked at him. “Then we’ve gotta get you a costume. Come with me,” he said, quickly adding, “My name’s Billy Pagano.”

“I’m Davros Antonescu.”

“Davros? What kinda name is that?” Billy asked.

“I think it’s Romanian.”

“Well, that’s not gonna do around here,” Billy said, not entirely sure where Romania was. “A name like that is gonna get you beat up. I’ll call you Dave.”

“Okay,” Davros said, hesitantly.

“I don’t recognize you from school,” Billy said, trying to get a better look at his new friend.

“Yeah, I go to a special school.”

“How come?”

Dave shrugged. “I dunno. My mom says I’m special.”

“Oh. C’mon,” Billy said, breaking into a run, “my house is right over here.”

The two boys ran over several lawns, bursting through the door of Billy’s home and heading straight up the stairs, two at a time while Billy yelled, “Hi Mom this is my friend Dave! I’m gonna get him a Halloween costume then we’re going right back out.”

Billy’s room was at the top of the stairs, and the first thing that Dave saw was the full-length Frankenstein poster that adorned the door, a stunning black-and-white image of Boris Karloff as the Monster. Billy opened the door quickly with a “C’mon,” ushering Dave into a shrine to all things monstrous. There were monsters everywhere, from the posters and photos that hung on the walls to the built-up model kits that decorated several bookcases, to the masks on styrofoam heads that stood sentinel on the headboard over Billy’s bed to the many books that filled the shelves and spilled out onto the floor. Bypassing all of these, Billy immediately headed for a chest that sat under one window and opened the lid. Inside was a treasure trove of monster memorabilia which Billy started sifting through purposefully.

“Gee, you really must like monsters,” Dave said, somewhat in awe of the overwhelming collection.

“Yeah,” Billy said, “monsters are great. Do you like ’em, too?”

“Um, yeah... I guess.” Dave didn’t sound too sure, but Billy was too excited to notice.

Focused on the task at hand, Billy kept tearing through the chest until he found what he wanted. “Here they are,” he yelled triumphantly, holding up a set of plastic vampire fangs. “You want to be a vampire?” he asked.

“Sure,” Dave said.

With that, Billy crossed to his closet and took a long black cloak with a stiff collar off of a hanger. “Here,” he said, “This’ll look great. Take your hood off.”

Dave hesitated, but did what he was told. As he lowered his hood, Billy got his first good look at his new friend. Dave wasn’t a bad looking kid, with thin, straight black hair, dark eyes, and high cheekbones, but there was something, something Billy

couldn't exactly put his finger on, that wasn't quite right. Perhaps it was the waxy look of Dave's skin, or his sallow complexion. Whatever it was, Billy brushed it off and returned to the task of making a monster.

"C'mon, we gotta fix your hair," Billy said, leading Dave into the upstairs bathroom. Reaching into the medicine cabinet, Billy pulled out a tube of Vitalis and squirted some into his palm. After rubbing his hands together, Billy smoothed back Dave's hair, slicking it back, revealing a perfect widow's peak. With the fangs and the cape to round out the outfit, Dave was every bit the proper vampire. Billy handed him an old grocery bag, and pronounced his new friend ready for trick-or-treating.

Together the boys ran out the front door and down the street, eager to get their first offerings of delicious candy. Making up for lost time, they moved quickly from one house to the next, Dave's newfound enthusiasm growing with each stop.

As the first burst of adrenaline wore off, the boys slowed down, walking instead of running to the next house. The twilight had faded, and darkness had fallen over the streets, making it the perfect Halloween night. Feeling more secure in his new friendship, Dave turned to Billy and asked the question he had been dying to ask all night.

"So what is it about monsters you like so much?"

"I dunno," Billy replied. "They're cool. They're creepy and scary, but in a fun way. They're exciting."

"Would you ever want to meet a monster in real-life?" Dave asked.

"A real one or an acting one?" Billy said.

"A real one, like a real vampire or werewolf or something," Dave said.

Billy thought for a moment. "Geez, I dunno. I guess that would be pretty scary, 'cause monsters just want to kill people."

"But what if they didn't want to kill you," Dave said thoughtfully.

Billy laughed. "That would be stupid. If they didn't want to kill you, they wouldn't be monsters, would they?"

"Yeah, I guess not," Dave chuckled. "But did you ever stop to think that maybe any of the people in these houses could be monsters? I mean, werewolves aren't werewolves all the time, and vampires pretty much look like ordinary people, and how would you know if that last lady we got candy from was a witch, or if the old guy two houses before her was makin' a monster in his basement?"

"I never thought about that," Billy said, somewhat shaken.

“I heard that a boy disappeared around here a few weeks ago and nobody’s seen him since,” Dave said. “Maybe he was eaten by monsters.”

“I didn’t hear about a kid disappearing,” Billy said. “Who told you about that?”

“My dad,” Dave said. “He knows all about that stuff.”

“Oh,” Billy said. “But it couldn’t be monsters. Monsters aren’t real.” Billy’s voice took on a nervous edge as he spoke. This conversation was getting scary, and not in a good way.

“Are you sure about that?” Dave asked. “Maybe they’re just really good at hiding.”

“No, that’s not...,” Billy said, a noticeable quiver in his voice.

Dave interrupted, “...and maybe they’re somewhere near us right now.”

“All right, cut it out,” Billy said. “It’s not funny anymore.”

“Whatever you say,” Dave said innocently. After a few moments he added, “Hey, what was that?” pointing to a clump of bushes.

“What, I didn’t see anything,” Billy replied.

“Yeah, over there,” Dave said, pointing to the bushes.

“Nothin’. It’s nothin’,” Billy said as he looked at the bushes nervously.

“No, really, it’s right over there,” Dave insisted. “Go take a look.”

“I’m not goin’,” Billy shot back. “You go.”

“All right, I’ll...” Dave suddenly stopped and froze in his tracks. “Wait a sec. Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Billy asked.

Dave took his time answering. “I dunno. It was like a growl or something. C’mon, let’s both go.”

Slowly the two boys walked forward toward the bushes. Billy, both excited and terrified of what he might find, didn’t notice that Dave had dropped back a step or two, so focused was he on the bushes. Now right in front of them, Billy cautiously reached out a hand to part the foliage, when suddenly he felt hands on his shoulders and heard a blood-curdling shriek.

Terror coursed through Billy’s entire body, his blood turning to ice in his veins. Adrenaline surged through him, preparing him to run for his life. Spinning around suddenly, ready for anything, Billy saw Dave, rolling on the ground with laughter.

“Ha ha ha,” Dave convulsed. “You shoulda seen yourself! You jumped a mile!”

“Wha... why you...”

Billy's first response was to slug Dave, but after a moment, he had to agree that it was pretty funny, especially the way in which Dave had set the whole thing up. Soon, Billy started laughing as well, and the two boys continued their quest for more and better candy, once again the best of friends.

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The night drew on, and soon the boys had exhausted their route. Their bags bulged with candy and treats, and Billy was beginning to get tired. Even so, he didn't want the evening to end, and tried to think of anything to prolong his very favorite night of the year. Suddenly, a thought hit him and his eyes brightened.

"Hey Dave, you wanta see a real haunted house?"

"Um, yeah sure, I guess so."

"It's a little bit of a walk, but it's really worth it." Billy was getting more and more excited by the minute. "It's the old Henderson place. Everyone says it's haunted. I know a guy who knew somebody who went into that house and never came out."

Dave's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Uh-huh. And sometimes you can hear the ghosts and things moaning inside."

"Wow." Dave was obviously impressed.

Half an hour later, the boys found themselves in front of a large, Gothic-styled house with a wrought iron fence around it. The yard was overgrown with weeds, and the house itself, once obviously grand and stately, had fallen into a state of neglectful disrepair. Shutters hung loosely from windows that showed more panes broken than intact. The roof sagged tiredly over the west wing of the house, and one of the stairs leading up to the front door had rotted away. A light glowed faintly from within, giving the house an even spookier appearance.

"Somebody must be having a Halloween party in there," Billy said. "Come on, let's go in."

"N-no, I don't think so," Dave said, backing away. "I don't think we should."

"Come on, don't be afraid," Billy said. "It's just an old house."

"But you said it was haunted," Dave replied, "and besides, I just don't want to."

Billy sighed. He could see that there was no way Dave was going into the house tonight. Who knew, Billy thought, maybe they'd go exploring inside some other night.

"All right," Billy said. "Let's go home."

* * *

And with that, Halloween was over. Dave went to Billy's house and returned Billy's costume pieces, and then it was time for Dave to go home as well.

"Well, I guess I'll see you around," Billy said. "Say, by the way, where do you live?"

"On the other side of town," Dave said. "I'll come and see you sometime. My folks don't like for me to have people over."

As they went to the door, Billy reached into his pocket and pulled out the vampire fangs Dave had been wearing for trick-or-treating. "Here," he said, "keep these for next year."

"Gee, thanks," Dave said, smiling. "Thanks for takin' me with you tonight."

"Sure, it was fun."

Dave walked down the front stairs. As he reached the sidewalk, he turned and waved. "See ya," he said.

Billy waved in return. "See ya."

As Billy closed the door, he was already thinking about what he would do next year for Halloween.

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It was late when Dave returned home. He passed through the wrought-iron gate, walked across the weed-covered lawn, and was careful, as always, to avoid the bottom step of the front stairs, which had rotted away from neglect. He turned the large knob and opened the door, yelling, "Mom! I'm home!"

Dave's mother poked her head around the corner, smiling at her son. The candlelight framed her from beneath, setting the scars on her face and neck in sharp relief. In spite of that, she was a pretty woman, with delicate, almost elfin features highlighting her pale bluish skin. Looking at her, one could see where her head had

been surgically attached to her body, and where her skull had been opened at the forehead. Perhaps most striking was her hair, a jet black mass piled high on her head, accented by stark white streaks on either side.

“Did you have a nice time, dear?” she asked.

“Yeah, Mom,” Dave said, excitedly. “I met a really nice kid named Billy and we trick-or-treated together. Do you think I could see him again sometime?”

With an understanding and sympathetic look, she said, “Oh, Davros, you know you can’t. And you know why.”

Suddenly dispirited, Dave looked down at the floor and scuffed one foot along the dusty, faded wood planking. Quietly, he said, “Yeah, I know. I just thought...”

As Dave spoke, a cloud of mist appeared near Dave and his mother, swirling around the floor before forming a tall column in the center of the room. As the mist continued to swirl, it took on a more definite form, a form that resembled nothing so much as a human figure. As mist solidified into flesh, a voice emanated from the column.

“Davros, your mother is right. Don’t you remember the last time someone found out about us?” his father asked, now fully formed. Tall, thin, and pale with skin the color of alabaster, he had an aristocratic look about him, with high cheekbones, a patrician nose, black hair slicked back to reveal a deep widow’s peak, and thin lips which accented the oversized canine teeth that could be seen when he spoke. “We were almost caught, and had to move again. You don’t want that to happen again, do you?”

“No, I guess not,” Dave said.

“We have to be careful, son,” his father said, not unkindly. “This isn’t like the old days.”

“Yeah.”

“Now take off your costume, Davros, and come and have some dinner,” his mother said gently, wrapping her stitched-together arms around her son, trying to comfort him. “You know we’re right.”

Stepping back, Dave said, “Yeah, I know, it’s just...”

“I know, son,” his father said. “I felt the same way when I was your age. But I listened to my parents, and then I met your mother.” He smiled, his fangs on full display. “The day she became my bride was the happiest day of my life.”

Dave's mother looked affectionately at her husband, and let out a small hiss, a hiss that sounded for all the world like a disgruntled swan. They both laughed at what was, apparently, a familiar family joke.

"I guess," Dave said, gripping his hair at the top of his head and pulling upward. As he did, the mask he was wearing came away, reverting to a shapeless, limp thing.

Dave's mother smiled, and placed her hands on either side of his face, cradling his head in her hands. "There's my handsome boy," she said. "I like that so much better than your scary monster mask."

Dave beamed up at her, emotion in his good left eye. The other, no longer held in place by the mask, hung from a string of optic nerve down his cheek, swinging bumpily over his grey, cracked and mottled skin. His ruined lips turned up in something simulating a smile, making the holes in his left cheek open wider and showcasing his wickedly pointed teeth. When he closed his eye and lay still, he could easily be mistaken for a dead body after three weeks of decomposition and neglect.

"Come on, Davros, I have a nice dinner for you," his mother said cheerily.

As he sat down at the table, his mother placed a large platter in front of him. On it lay a piece of meat, cooked medium rare just as he liked it, which terminated in a hand and five small fingers. It had obviously belonged to a child not much older than Billy.

Dave sighed as he looked at the meal in front of him.

"Aw, mom, leftovers again?"