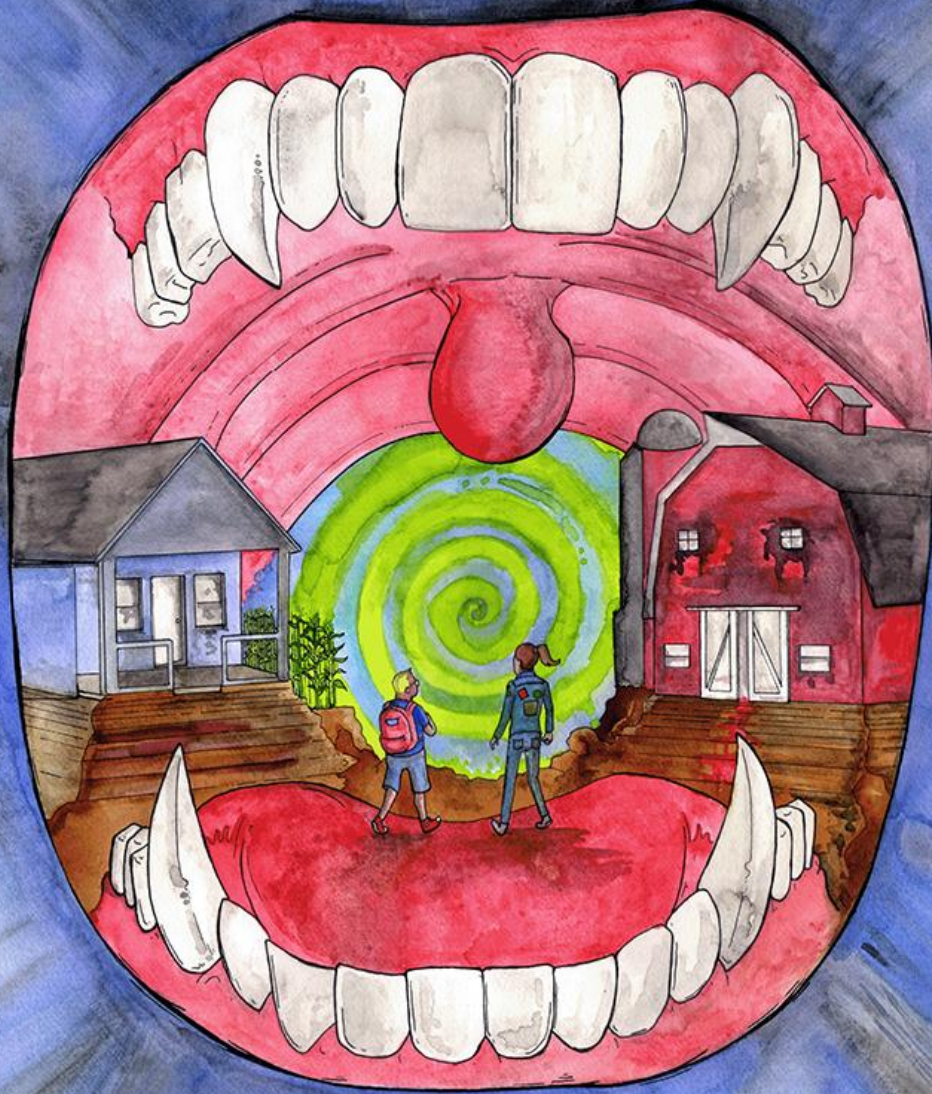


SCREAM



STREET

A STORY FROM SPACE

scream street

A Story From Space

It was Halloween night. The sun was setting and still felt warm to the skin, unusual for this late in October. In the town square, people were out enjoying the early evening breeze, ready to celebrate the night's festivities. Shuffling down the street, a boy bops and bounces with his headphones on. He takes out his walkman and flips the cassette to the B-side. He presses play and starts moving again, a sway in his step. The boy takes a paper from his backpack and carefully unfolds it. It's a hand-drawn map. The map shows a large blue shape, labeled "lake", with a house located above it. Using his finger, he traces a path around the lake and a few blocks to the destination circled on the map: "Scream Street". Stuffing the map into his back pocket, he continues on his way.

As his excitement builds, each step he takes around the lake gets a little faster. He approaches the corner and makes a left. "Two.. blocks.. to.. go..." Singing to the beat of the music, he looks down at the cassette tape, "No... sleep... 'till Scream Street!". Looking ahead, he sees a crowd coming together, growing in size. Hustling, he finds a place in the line. The boy gets on his tippy toes trying to see the front. No luck. He notices all the costumes people are wearing. A large man in a T-rex suit. The short arms make him giggle. There is a woman dressed as a witch; her husband as the broom. They move from the line revealing a man wearing a clown outfit, startling him. "Whoa, creepy," he says, shuffling himself back in line.

The boy was nervous to even be at such a spooky event. The town's Haunted House is always the most popular place to go on Halloween. He's always wanted to go, and finally this year his mom said he was old enough. He checks his watch and stuffs his ticket into his backpack as he waits for the line to move. He turns around to see a young girl, a little older looking than him, join behind him in line. Shyly, he turns away. Looking ahead, he sees there is still a long way to go before his turn. "This line is moving at a snail's pace," he says to himself.

"Did you just say snail piss?" The girl behind him asks, bursting into laughter.

"No! I said snail's pace!" Both giggle, his cheeks turning a rosy red before an awkward silence sets in. He thinks to himself for a moment trying to come up with something cool, something hip, something... suave to say. He musters up the courage to add, "I like your jacket."

"Oh, thanks! My grandma is teaching me how to sew the patches on myself," she says, showing off her denim jacket with classic monster patches on it. "This one's my favorite," pointing to a masked man with a machete.

"Awesome!" he says. The patches on the jacket cover all the horror classics, each one cooler than the last, and in the process she reveals a prominent scar on her right arm. "No way! I have a scar, too," he shows off a scar on his lower back, pulling up his shirt, his shorts almost dropping down inappropriately. Clumsily, he gathers himself.

"Well, I love the color of your backpack," she says.

"My mom says it's 'dark fuschia'," he responds.

"Neat, whatcha got in there?" she asks.

"My stuff," answering happily like a golden retriever.

She stares at him for a moment. “Uhhh... right...” She can’t help but giggle to herself. Despite his best efforts, she can tell that he is a dork, but she doesn’t mind. “So, like how old are you? Aren't you a little young to be here alone?”

“No! No.. I’m.. I’m 11!” His cheeks more red than the clown suit he saw earlier.

“11?! You look like you're 8!”

“How old are you?” he asks sheepishly.

“I’m 12, today’s my birthday!” she says, cheerfully.

“Wow, Halloween candy and birthday presents, that must be the best!”

“It’s pretty great, check this out,” she pulls a small rubix cube from her jacket pocket. “My friend gave me this.”

“I love rubix cubes, I used to have one just like that!” he says.

“Yeah, and since it’s my birthday, I can do whatever I want. And, obviously, I wanted to come to the scariest Haunted House in the COUNTRY!” her enthusiasm grows.

“The country!?” Excitement brews between the two.

Before they know it, they are the next two in line. “Ticket, please,” it’s impossible to tell if the teenager taking tickets is in zombie makeup or if they are just that bored. Handing over their tickets, the worker tears them in two, and lets them pass through. They walk up the steps of the house as the sounds of “tickets, please” fade away.

“Do you think they ever say anything else?” she jokes to him. Excited, they rush up the steps, to the front door. From outside the entrance, they hear howls and screams. The girl reaches for the doorknob, but suddenly, it begins to open slowly on its own. “Wayyy cool,” she says. Strobe lights spill from behind the door, blinding their eyes as they take their first steps in. “Are you ready? I heard this was pretty scary,” she says timidly.

“Uh... sure, yeah, I’m ready,” stuttering to get the words out, but trying to be brave, he speaks up. “Stand behind me, I’ll go first.”

“No, you stand behind me.” Grabbing his hand she leads them both through the front door, into the haunted house. Walking slowly, the wood floorboards creak as they carefully inch forward down the hallway, flashing lights and cobwebs fill up the space making it hard to see too far ahead. They enter the parlor, the sign reads “Oddities of the World”. They are greeted by a decrepit mummy wrapped tightly in blood splattered cloth. Continuing along, there is a jar holding a decapitated head floating in formaldehyde. And, in the corner, a massive taxidermy Yeti, made with precision and fine details, both the children jump at its sight. They inch toward it cautiously, looking up at the towering beast.

“Let’s walk butt to butt,” she says.

“You mean back to back,” he responds.

“No, butt to butt. Lower center of gravity,” she pulls him down into a squat position, giving them a 360 degree view of the environment. “Much better,” she says. “See, look at that balance! We are a spinning top of courage.” Suddenly, a ghost puppet drops from the ceiling, sending them both running down the hallway. Eventually they hit a door. It's locked. They turn to see some hellish looking mutants rushing toward them. Spooked again, they make a run for it.

“This way,” he yells. They run back down the hall, to the bottom of the staircase, before gathering themselves for a breath. They look up at each other and begin to laugh.

“I nearly lost you there,” she says. Taking another deep breath, they courageously continue through the house. “Follow me,” she adds, leading the way up the stairs to the next floor. Gingerly, they move step by step, gripping the carved wooden railing, when in an instant, they are bombarded with a river of spiders rushing toward them, forcing them quickly up the stairs. At the top, they are met with a butchered, mutilated clown, laughing in their faces.

“What's wrong, sweetheart, are you caught in the spiders' web?” the clown says manically.

“You wish, creep!” she says pushing her way past the horrors. Hand in hand, they brave each room, surrounded by sounds of deranged laughter until... the laughter shifts to a mixture of screaming... and then... “Wait, do you hear that?” she says.

“I don't hear anything,” he says.

“That's the problem,” she sneaks them into a dark, small closet in the hall. Using her quick thinking, she presses the button on the boy's watch, creating a small bit of light. “What's going on out there? It's like everyone's gone.”

“Everyone but the scary things...”

“Exactamundo. Okay, I've had enough scares for one day, let's get out of here! I'm starving,” she says, holding her grumbling tummy.

“Okay, sure!” he says, slowly opening the closet door. “Coast is clear,” he says. Cautiously, they exit the closet into the hallway. “This way!”

“No, it's this way,” she pulls him the other direction. They once again walk butt to butt, maximizing their field of vision. The haunted house has become almost silent in comparison to when they first arrived. The only sound coming from the creaking floor boards. The lights are low with the faint shimmer of strobe lights panning through the halls. They walk with soft footsteps, on high alert. Making sure to peek around each corner, steadily they creep forward. Something strange is happening. She finally breaks the silence, “Are we walking in a circle?”

“We can't be, it's probably up ahead.”

She stops them, “Isn't this the closet?”

Looking up they read the label on the door, "Oh no! You're right!" he responds. Just then the sounds of a screeching cry ring out, followed by a witch-like ghost swooping down from behind them. The two scream and separate, the ghost chases the boy as he sprints for his life.

"This way! Follow my voice!" he hears from a distance. He tries to locate the voice in his panicked state. He makes it back to her. Finding another staircase, they quickly scramble up it, making their way into the attic. They slam the door shut behind them. It is futile, as the ghost phases through the wall. Doom is imminent. Backed into a corner, the witch closes in. Holding tight to one another, they prepare for their demise. Peeking behind her, she sees a trapdoor. She quickly maneuvers the latch, opens it, and grabs his hand. "Quick, this way," she says.

Jumping down the trapdoor, falling fast, they brace themselves to hit the ground. But they keep falling. "What is happening!?" he screams.

"I don't know! It's... like ... some sort of portal..." Her voice echoes through the tunnel-like tube. It appears like a colorful web. Before they know it they are catapulted from the stream and onto the street of a quiet road. Dusting themselves off they check all their major extremities. "Are you okay?" she asks.

"No broken bones, and no blood. Can't scratch the Cadillac that is the body of youth after all, at least, that is what my dad always says."

She laughs at the boy's bad joke. "Um, did that ghost almost eat us?"

"It appears that way," he says.

"Did we just travel to another universe?"

"Like a wormhole?" he responds.

"A worm-what?" she asks with a confused look on her face. The girl was more of a history buff than a science fan at school.

"A wormhole, you know - a hypothetical connection between widely separated regions of space and time," answering her question. He continues as he removes an inhaler from his backpack, pressing the button as he inhales. Standing in silence for a moment, they try to make sense of it all. The boy exhales.

"Uh... what?" she says, blankly.

"Like space, meteorites, planets, stars and all that..."

"I don't see any stars," she responds.

"Just because you don't see them doesn't mean they aren't there," he says, feeling quite wise.

"Well, I'm hungry," she says.

"Me too," he replies matter of factly.

Trotting down the sidewalk they see some buildings that look oddly familiar. "Hey, doesn't that look like Ms. White's smoothie shop?"

"Yeah, you're right, and that's Mr. James' Barber Shop - my mom brings me there for my haircuts."

"But... why do they look so different?"

"Look at that!" he says, distracted by a massive pole with a circulating cheeseburger.

Grinning ear to ear, they race to the entrance of the Scream Street Diner. Walking in, they notice how quiet and eerily empty the restaurant is. "Let's sit by the window, I like to people-watch," she finds a booth near the front of the restaurant and sits down.

"I'm starving!" he says, looking around for the waitstaff, "where the heck is everybody?"

After a few more minutes, a waitress emerges from the kitchen. She walks toward them with a slight limp and a strange look in her eye. Eventually making it to their table, she drops off their menus and walks away, without saying a single word.

"Uhh.. that was rude," she says.

"Totally," he responds.

Rushing, they grab their menus excited to have some food. They're silent as they deliberate what to order.

Moseying her way back to the table, the waitress arrives, once again not saying a word. The waitress appears more disheveled than before, but the two are too starved to notice anything out of the ordinary, their heads bent toward the menu.

"You go first," he says.

"Ok... hmm, do you have a black bean burger?" she asks. Waiting for a response, she peers up at the waitress who says nothing. "Uhh, fine... I'll have the grilled cheese," she orders, reluctantly. "Doesn't this town realize that not all of us eat other living animals, I-"

"I'll have a double bacon cheeseburger with fries," he interjects with a grin.

The waitress takes their menus and shuffles away.

"What is with that lady?! I'm going to go wash my hands, be right back" she says, walking to the restroom. Passing by the kitchen she sees a fry cook repeatedly scraping the spatula against the grill and flipping - but there's no food. "This place is so weird!" she says to herself and heads into the bathroom. When she comes back, the waitress is at the table and is already dropping off their plates. "Well, at least it was fast," she says.

The two look at their meals and begin to scarf it down. They don't say a word to each other, and before long, the plates are empty. "Was it that good or were we starving?!"

The boy, ready for a post-lunch nap, responds satisfied, "That was delicious."

"Where did she go - don't we need to pay our bill now?" she asks.

"I dunno, my parents usually take care of this part," he responds.

They peek around the restaurant to see no one is around.

"Maybe kids eat free?" she asks.

"True, I do hear that's a thing."

"Well, that's good enough for me, let's get out of here, this place gives me the creeps." Stuffed, they nearly waddle out of the burger joint, exiting as they walk down the street.

"What's this?" she asks. The two stop to look at a taped up sign on the outside of a brick building, it features a photograph of a person and reads: MISSING ANY INFORMATION CALL THE SHERIFF.

"A missing person?" he responds "It looks like such a quaint town."

"Quaint? Quaint is the vibe you get here?"

They look at each other before noticing the row of papers taped up to the rest of the brick building... all for missing people.

"I don't like this... Let's try to find our parents."

"You think they're here?"

"I don't know. But we gotta try, right!?"

"Right."

They continue their stroll. Down the street there is a park, approaching they see a few people wandering in the grass. "Hmm, doesn't that tree look familiar?" she asks.

"Ah.. a weeping willow, a native plant to northern asia, but -"

"But, does it look familiar?"

"Hmm, I guess so.." he says fairly unconvincingly.

"Let's keep walking," she says.

They continue searching for help or information. Walking through a neighborhood, they spot a few people in a park.

"Maybe they can help us!" As they get closer, the people begin to look familiar.

“Hey, wasn’t that the woman on the poster?” she asks. “Let’s see if she needs help.”

She approaches the woman and taps her on the shoulder.

“Hey, lady, do you-” The woman turns around abruptly, her lips have withered away, revealing decaying teeth. Scared, the girl screams, “AHHH! ZOMBIE!!!”

She grabs the boy and runs away as fast as she can. The zombie follows close behind, the commotion attracts more zombies to chase them. “Run!” she yells. The two sprint for their lives. They are able to pull away from the slower zombies, but with no idea where they are, or which direction to go, panic sets in. Adrenaline drives them forward, panting hard as they run. Across the lake, a farmer sees the kids running by with some zombies in the distance.

“Ay! Ay! Y’all kids, come here,” a farmer shouts in a jarring southern accent. “Run this way!”

She hears the yelling and pops up quickly like a deer looking for where it came from. On the other side of the lake, she sees someone waving in the distance.

“This way! Come quick!” the farmer waves incessantly.

She grabs the boy's hand and pulls him across the street and through the corn field. The farmer continues to yell and she follows his voice. They burst from the corn field to near the porch of the farmer.

“Come inside, come inside.”

The two can barely breath as they are hunched over gasping for air, scared for their lives. The farmer shuts the door, keeping the danger at bay, one by one he turns each of the several locks on the door.

“Can you believe that... zombies... in our town.” He sighs heavily, “This used to be just the most quaint little town you ever seen. Corn in the fields, ducks in the pond, folks in church every Sunday. ‘Til them hippies started moving into town. Playing their rock music, driving their fancy cars, and having children. Hippies are barely adults themselves, surely. They shouldn’t be reproducing! What happened to the good ol’ days, am I right?”

The two stare at the farmer, finding him stranger with every word or southern quip he uses.

“But we’re childr- “ the boy begins.

““Shhh,” she interrupts.

The farmer goes on, “See, and that’s why I just couldn’t let that keep happening. Towns like this need heroes in times like these. Those heroes can be any ordinary person, even a farmer like myself. Never again will anyone dare cross Farmer Jerry or this here farm on Scream Street!” The farmer walks out of the room quickly.

Looking around, the girl thinks to herself, “Wait, this looks just like the haunted house.” Scanning the room, noticing the layout. Her confusion grows.

The farmer comes back into the room, "That's why I had to do something."

"What are you talking about?" she asks.

"Oh, you'll understand soon enough, kiddo."

At that moment, the boy starts to look a bit strange, "Oh, I don't feel so good." the boy says.

"You know what those hippies love?" The farmer says, "A nice, juicy burger. You want to make a change, sweetheart? Go right for the food source, ha!"

"You're crazy!" she says. The boy starts to show some premature signs of zombification. "AHH, you're being zombified!"

"Quick grab my epi-pen" he shouts nervously.

"Uhhh... I don't think it's that type of reaction" she replies.

"AHhh -grahhh", the zombie blather begins. At this point, the farmer removes an ax from the shelf. He holds it menacingly, taking a swing at them, she swiftly dodges his attempt, pulling her friend with her. She sneaks into another room shutting and locking the door, keeping the farmer at bay for the moment.

"If it's not me, it'll be your zombie friend that gets you, girl! Muhahaha!!" The farmer laughs an evil, evil laugh.

"I have an idea," she says. "Let me see your backpack, we need to get into the attic, did you see where the stairs were?" The boy snarls at her, already too zombie-brained to be of any help, but not at the violent stages... yet. "Boys, what *can they* do?" she says to herself.

"Ohhh, sweetheart, where'd ya go?" The farmer sneaks around the other side of the kitchen entrance. On the other side the girl sees the blade of the ax pushing the door slowly. "There you are!" he chases after her. Escaping narrowly, the girl pulls the boy down the hall and up the stairs. Flight after flight she climbs until they reach the attic door... "Stay out of there!" the farmer yells from below as he makes his way up the stairs.

They make their way into the attic slamming the door shut. She turns around to see the boy's condition has worsened, growing more aggressive, she must hurry before he attempts to attack her. "Oh no, oh no, look at you!" she says, the boy's tongue slumped out of his mouth, his words are muffled and ooze drips from his nose.

"Hold on just a few more minutes, I promise."

"You're trapped now, little girl". A thunderous crack shakes the door as the farmer swings the ax. The door begins to split! The girl screams. Panicked, the girl looks around the room, and sees the edge of a door covered by an old rug. She finds the trap door, swinging it open she reveals the portal. "Hurry,

follow me!” she says, grabbing the boy’s hand. Without warning, the boy tries to bite her hand. “Wait.. no stop.. it’s me...it’s...” “ she holds him off and wrestles him to the ground.

With one final heave of the ax, the farmer breaks through the door and hurries up the steps, “Nowhere to go now, little girl, hope you enjoyed the...”

She pushes the boy through the portal, and jumps in after him, narrowly missing the ax's sharp blade. Falling through the portal like lily pads down a waterfall, traveling through the multiverse... rumbling, tumbling, stumbling, and eventually falling into a whole new world. The girl hits the floor and dusts herself off. “Where the heck am I?” She gets to her feet, realizing her friend is not with her. “Where are you!?” she screams, still catching her breath. Continuing to walk, she notices the stars shine above her, brighter than she's ever seen before. “Wow, it's so bright out here, look at those stars!” She takes in the scenery for a moment. She is calm and relaxed in the silence. In the distance, she can hear something, so she begins to walk toward the sound. Being as quiet as she can, she moves, mindful of each step she takes through the forest, the crunching of leaves beneath her feet.

Meanwhile, the boy lands roughly, but still intact. Dusting himself off, he pauses to calculate the situation. “Where the heck am I? Where is the haunted house an- wow, look at those stars,” he says, distracted by the beauty of the night. Getting back on track, the boy removes his backpack and fusses inside, “Let’s see here.” He pulls out a compass and confirms North. A little confused he begins to mosey along.

On the other side of the lake the girl continues to walk. “Hello?! Where are you!? Where is anybody?” She sees a path, looking down to see the imprints of tires. “Hmm, I should follow those tracks.” Walking down the path she sees a sign. Getting closer she reads, “Camp Happy Screams.” Below a tagline says: “Home of Happily Screaming Children.” She studies it for a moment, before getting startled from a noise behind her. “Hey now, I am trained in kung-fu - do not mess with me.”

A disgruntled child emerges from the darkness.

“Oh my goodness, I thought I lost you. Are you okay?”

“What?”

“You were a zombie, and the farmer-”

“Zombie? What are you talking about?”

“Are you serious, you tried to freaking eat me, I -“ A sound comes over the loudspeaker, interrupting her rant. The boy is a bit confused and not as excited to see her as she is him. He doesn’t remember being a zombie or falling through the portal, or who this person even is... She completes an ocular pat down, screening for any zombie behavior. Giving him the all clear, they continue, “Let’s go see where that’s coming from. It’s so dark and I’m exhausted. Maybe there is a place to rest here.”

Wearily, the boy follows her, they walk down the entryway and into the center of the campgrounds, positioned on the north side of the Lake. Another announcement from the PA comes overhead... “All campers, head to the firepit for ghost stories and s’mores, and remember, lights out at 11... the menu for tomorrow... sloppy joes...” the voice trails off and the two see a group of children swarming in one direction, looking up you can see smoke coming from a campfire.

"C'mon, follow me," she says.

With slight hesitation, and not many options, the boy follows. The two of them trail after the crowd and end up around a campfire with other campers. The boy stumbles over another child, causing both to fall to the ground.

"Walk much, dork?" The camper says, getting back to their feet, "Great, you broke my glasses!"

"Oh no, here I may have some tape for that," the boy says, helpfully. He begins collecting some items that fell from his bag. But the camper stomps with his boot, smashing the boy's knick-knacks...

"What's that... an action figure?" the mean camper says, "What... are you some sort of baby?" The others laugh.

The girl looks down and has an odd sense she has seen the toy before. In an instant, she jumps into action, "Leave him alone, twerp!" She steps between the boy and the bully. "Don't make me say it twice. I am crazy, I am loco!" She gets into a kung-fu stance. The other campers give her a strange look and think twice before engaging any further with her.

"We're out of here, nerd!" The bullies stumble off as the boy gathers his things.

"Thanks for that..." he says sheepishly.

"No, don't mention it," sticking out her hand she helps him up.

After the bully leaves, they continue down with some of the others to the firepit. Arriving, they see a well built, blazing fire. The type that burns late into the night.

"Okay, okay, gather round. Give me that spirit-stick, I am going first," a camper declares, wearing a rainbow jacket with the camp's name on it. Another hands over the decorated spirit stick as the rest quiet down, getting ready for the first story. "Have you ever heard of the curse of Teddy Woods?" the camper says devilishly.

"Oh stop, that's just a camp myth," one shouts.

"Yeah, there is no curse!" another camper adds.

"Yeah, those are just silly robots on a stage..."

"What's the curse of Teddy Woods?" the boy asks.

"I'm glad you asked," the camper in the rainbow jacket begins. "Well, once upon a time, a group of hippies were touring their band across the country... Traveling in their rainbow colored van and stopping in for the old Screamstock festival. They were a huge hit. The owners of the camp were at the festival that night and devised a plan out of desperation. See... they were struggling for money... attendance was low... So, after the show, they propositioned the band to come play for the opening weekend of camp. They were promised a big, fat paycheck and agreed! Well... the show was a HUGE success and they offered them a contract to stay the whole summer. But the band was in the middle of

their tour. Make it big, ya know? The owner begged for one last show... and that night, while the band was playing, he went to the local witchdoctor in town. He explained his problems and begged for a potion to convince the band to stay... but the devious witch offered him one better. For only twice the price of the potion... he could curse the band... FOR ETERNITY... the greedy owner gladly obliged. He paid the hefty fee and she cast her wretched spell. That night, during the show, a bolt of lightning struck the band causing a great fire.. The owner rushed to extinguish the burning band, but instead was greeted by the creepy band we know today!"

"Oh stop - Teddy Jam band isn't cursed", a camper rebukes.

"I heard he just stole them from a carnival rolling through town."

"Yeah, those rusted things haven't even worked for 6 summers now!" another camper adds.

"Well, they say that if you sing the cursed melody that the band can come alive, just like that night!"

"Yeah right!!!"

"Sing it then!" all the campers begin to pile on.

"I don't even know the words," the camper responds, feeling the pressure of the crowd.

"Here, we wrote them down earlier," someone shoves a scribbled piece of balled up paper to the now nervous camper. "I DARE YOU TO! Double dare, no TRIPLE DARE!"

"FINE! I'll sing it," the indigent camper stands up taking the piece of paper. She clears her throat. "Oooo, it's just the way... oooo... the way you say I love ... you" she opens her eyes, to see the crowd of campers, rolling on the floor in fits of laughter at her. "Ugh! Grow up!" Embarrassed, the camper runs off into the woods.

"Who's next!" Offering the spirit-stick to the next brave story teller.

"I'll go-" the boy and girl say at the same time. "It's okay, you go," she says.

They hand the boy the stick. He takes a deep breath and begins. "Well.. this one time... in my hometown... the... the mayor... he hosted a summer carnival and well.. He... he.. He became a demon and he ate his own dog!"

"Gross!" Campers respond in shock.

The story grabs everyone's attention including the girl's. She is shocked because that was the same story she was going to tell, and probably, deliver way better... but how?

"My turn!" An excited camper shouts out as he hands over the spirit stick. Firing up some more s'mores the kids are laughing and enjoying the night and warm fire. "This story is called - the lady in the lake -"

Deep in the woods, the once embarrassed camper has cooled off and is lost trying to return to the campfire. "Hey! Hello! Where is everyone?" she yells "Hello? I got turned around, I need help!" She looks up to see a towering figure in the distance. Walking up, the camper recognizes the hunched over figure. "Teddy?" the camper says, "is that you?"

Looking up, she sees matted blue fur, with patches missing, exposing the wires underneath. She stares up at the disproportionately sized head and lifeless eyes. "Teddy?" the child whimpers, "I thought you were a robot, what are you doing out here?" She looks up to see the large, blue bear suddenly stand above her. "Teddy... what did you do to your banjo....noooooo-"

The rusted animatronic bear slashes the child. Her scream can be heard across the campgrounds, halting story time.

"What was that? We have to go see!!" The campers begin to panic, scattering into the darkness of the woods.

"What are you doing, don't run away!" one says.

Suddenly, over the loudspeakers, the band's creepy music begins to play, sending the campers into a frenzy. Kids begin to flee, trying to make it back to their bunks. "Every kid for themselves," a camper screams.

Chaos ensues as kids run all over the place in confusion, looking for safety from the cursed reanimated robots. The boy gets knocked down in the mix of all the commotion. On the ground, other kids begin to pass over him, making it difficult for him to get back to his feet. He begins to panic, knowing he is in a vulnerable spot.

Already on the move, the girl notices he isn't around and looks back trying to search the stampeding children. She sees a glimpse of fuschia. Instinctually, she runs back to him and grabs the strap of his backpack, the boy holds on for life as she pulls him from the mess. Leaving the firepit, the two make it to the mess hall. Hiding quietly, there are already a few campers. "Hey, is anyone hurt?" she asks.

Scared, they all shake their heads no, remaining as quiet as they can be. Suddenly a door swings open, a short stocky frog enters the cafeteria, moving with uncoordinated twitches and spastic movements. His eyes are a dim glowing green, able to see in all directions. Twisted veins and exposed wiring peek out from under the slimy skin.

"Hey Kids! Who's ready for some rock!" the frog says in one of the band's pre-programmed scripts. "I can't hear you! I said, 'Who is ready for some rock?'" The robot heaves a drumstick, throwing it so hard it pierces the wall like a dart.

"Run!!" The campers are spooked and sprint past the robot.

"Where ya going, kids, the show's not over!" the maniacal frog laughs.

Sprinting across camp, they pass the cabins on the North side of the lake. The girl sees the main hall, its shape oddly familiar. "Follow me! I have an idea!"

"No, this way - to the go-karts," a camper tells her. Split, a few campers go off to find the shelter at the track. But the boy stays behind with her.

"Why didn't you go with them?" she asks.

"They didn't help me with the bullies, when I was knocked to the ground, or when I was apparently a zombie.. that was you. Why *wouldn't I* stay with you?"

She gives a wry smile, before focusing again. "No time to be mushy, there is a killer band on the loose." On their way, another robot begins to track them down. Shifting gears, they run into the old slaughter house to escape the danger. "Quick, in here," she says.

They sit in silence waiting, hoping for the robot to pass them by. The robot rummages through the pantry. Swinging their battle-hardened bass, a bag of flour is slashed. On the ground, a shard of broken glass reflects the sinister appearance of the evil foes. Patches of rotting scales visible through the torn overalls the alligator robot was stuffed into, with distorted veins and exposed wiring emerging from beneath the torn scales. A faint scent of decay fills the air. The robot was a monstrous combination of mechanics and supernatural forces. Slowly, he closes in, strumming the out of tune guitar cinched to his hands. The sounds of kids screaming gets the attention of the robot. After a few moments, the kids leave their hiding spot.

"That was a close one," he says.

"Way too close," she says. Catching their breath for a moment, she looks around the room. She grabs an apple from the shelf. "Least there are snacks in here."

"We could stay here for like 200 years with all this food."

"Hmmm, or at least the night..." she responds, bringing him back to reality.

"Yeah! Let's just stay in here until morning!" he says, grabbing a pudding pack from the fridge.

The girl takes a moment to think and weigh her options. "Let's take inventory, what's in your bag?" The boy empties his bag of mostly useless trinkets and knick knacks. "Here, the pocketknife might come in handy," she hands it to him. "Wait - didn't you say you had a rubix cube in here?"

"Yeah.. but I... must have given it to a friend...I don't remember."

She pulls her rubix cube out of her pocket. "Hmm.. do you think.. that... maybe... I was that friend?"

"How is that possible?!" The boy thinks about his scar. But he can't seem to remember about that either. "Why did you help me back there with those bullies, and when I fell?"

"The only way to have a friend... is to be a friend." She says matter of factly. The girl notices an ax hanging in a case on the wall. "Where have I seen that ax before?" she muses.

"Really? That's strange, doesn't look familiar to me," he says, opening another pudding pack.

"That's it!... That was the farmer's... I know where we have to go!"

"Awww man, are you sure we can't just stay here?" he asks, mouth covered in chocolate.

"The main hall looked just like the farmer's house.... which looked just like the haunted house... it's like we are in some sort of cursed timeline."

The two sneak across camp carefully, avoiding the screams of other campers and trying not to draw any unwanted attention. Back across the lawn, they make it to the main hall safely.

"Shhh, stay quiet, and stay behind me. We have to get to the attic. That's where the portal should be. That's how we get home!" She is excited by her plan, but makes sure to keep her voice low. She turns the doorknob and slowly opens the door. It is dark as they enter. "Let me find a light." She searches the wall with her hand for a moment before flipping the switch. The light reveals three robot band members waiting for them in front of the stairs.

"Welcome to our show," one says.

"We hope you're ready to rock and roll," another adds.

"Whoa, creepy....." the boy says, shocked at the sight. Suddenly, the robots jump into motion, attacking the children.

"Run!" she screams, dodging the attacks of the cursed band. Managing to get away, they quickly find the stairs, only to find another member of the band waiting for them.

"Where ya going, this isn't backstage!" a robot chicken clucks, accompanied with a shrieking laugh. It grabs the boy.

"Put him down!" She says, trying to rescue him.

The other robots make their way up the stairs. "We would love to play another tune for you," they sing creepily.. The boy wriggles free of the robots' grasp, only to be encircled with his friend by the band. The door for the attic is in sight. She looks at the boy.

"Run through that door, and into the portal, I have an idea."

"No... I'm not going without you... "

"Stop.. you have to! On my signal."

"What's the signal?!"

"Now!"

Maneuvering by the robot band, she slides past them like a runner coming into home plate. Quickly back on her feet, she runs past the danger, drawing the attention of the robots. The boy sneaks to the door, but it's jammed. He shakes rigorously, trying to get it unstuck, "Oh no, oh no! C'mon." From behind him, a shadow begins to grow. He's doomed. "Oh no, oh no!" he shuts his eyes.

“What’re you doing?” His friend has returned safe...and in one piece... but the robots are right behind her. Together, they spring the door open.

“Look, there’s the portal,” he says.

“Outta the way!” she says, placing herself between the portal and danger. Looking back at him she says, “Good friends are like stars, you don’t always see them, but they are still there.”

She pushes him through the portal... suddenly she has a flashback. Clear as day, she sees a memory. It’s of her on the ground, tending to a large wound on her arm. A friendly looking person approaches her, handing her a bandana to wrap the wound. “Need a hand?” he asks. As she takes the bandana, the boy reaches into the backpack he’s toting to grab a rubix cube.

The boy's screams snap her back to the present moment.

He continues to fall, “Whoaaa!” He falls fast. Turning his body, he looks to see his friend at the entrance of the portal. After a few moments, he hears a scream.

“Nooo!” he says, continuing to fall. Falling until he can no longer see the entrance of the portal... until all he sees is darkness. The boy lands onto the floor of a bedroom. His own bedroom. The portal disappears, but there is no sign of his friend. Devastated, he crawls into his bed, crying himself to sleep.

The next day, chirping birds stir him from his sleep. He looks at his watch and reads the time and date. It’s Halloween. Getting out of bed, he sees the monster jacket his friend once wore. He puts it on, it’s a little big on him. He doesn’t mind.

He decides that it is only right to go trick or treating, just like his friend would have wanted. His best friend. It is Halloween after all, and her birthday. That night, he goes out sporting his jacket and a creepy serial killer mask, it’s his attempt at being festive, even if he wasn’t feeling so festive. House by house the boy wanders, with his headphones on and a pillowcase full of candy. All in all, it wasn’t such a bad night. After trick or treating for a bit, he bumps into another kid.

“Oh, cool jacket,” a girl says.

Recognizing the voice, he turns around to see his friend. He can’t help but smile wide behind his mask.

“Whoa, I love that mask!” she continues. She doesn’t remember him, but he remembers her.

“Want to trick or treat with me?” he asks.

“Okay!” she says.

The two head off into the neighborhood collecting candy and cracking jokes. He looks at his watch, it is getting late. “What a nice and peaceful night it's been,” he says.

“Yeah, and look, it’s a full moon!!” she responds.

“Did you know that historically this has been described as the ‘hunter’s moon’? Signifying the start of the hunting season for many animals?” he says.

“Oh wow, so you’re like a nerd?” she replies quickly.

They both laugh. Just then in the distance, a child begins to scream bloody murder!

“It’s a werewolf!” Someone screams.

“Follow me,” he says, grabbing his friend's hand, running off into the night.

End