

HOW TO SURVIVE A HORROR MOVIE

R. J. JACOBS

“There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance, number one: you can never have sex. Big no-no! Big no-no! Sex equals death, okay? Number two: you can never drink or do drugs. The sin factor! It’s a sin. It’s an extension of number one. And number three: never, ever, ever under any circumstances say, “I’ll be right back.” Because you won’t be back.”

—**RANDY MEEKS** (JAMIE KENNEDY), *SCREAM* (1996)

How do horror movies ramp up tension? By reminding the audience that death is right around the corner. Throughout the history of the genre, certain tactics increase a character’s chances of making it to the end of a horror film. Other maneuvers ensure a character’s demise.

Let’s explore.

A good horror film employs a sense of unpredictability that keeps audiences on their toes while following fairly tried-and-true “rules” about which characters live and which die.

RULE #1: AVOID ANY SORT OF SEXUAL SITUATION. Never have sex in a horror film; in fact, don’t even think about it. One should stay dressed and keep their clothes on at all times because even showing too much skin is a massive risk. Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*—the grandfather of “modern” horror and slasher films—arguably sets this rule in motion. The film’s main character, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), makes a decision that proves fatal by taking a shower during her stay at the Bates Motel. She stole some money, made a getaway, and then drove into the night. But the shower? Ill-advised, even if she just wanted to clean up a bit.



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The no sex rule even became set in stone as the slasher film craze took full effect in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. John Carpenter’s subgenre-starting *Halloween* laid the groundwork for the decade of horror to come during the scene where unfortunate teens Bob (John Michael Graham) and Lynda (P J Soles) are killed by Michael Myers (Tony Moran) immediately after having sex. Bob, in particular, breaks a myriad of rules: he has sex, wanders off by himself, and then cracks open a beer. More on those last two later.



For killers in slasher movies (see *Friday the 13th*) characters having sex is almost like a direct alert to their location. Other times, the monster comes with the sex itself. In movies like *Species* and *Jennifer’s Body*, sex is a death trap for naive men to get with literal monsters.

On still other occasions, sex functions as a curse. In the 2014 horror-thriller *It Follows*, a young woman winds up as the target of a mysterious evil force

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that follows her around after having sex with her boyfriend. Eventually, her friend is kind enough to lift the curse from her by having sex with her, before...(of course) paying the ultimate price.

RULE #2: NO DRINKING, NO DRUGS. Straight edge is the way to go in a horror movie. Similar to having sex, intoxicants are a slippery slope. Oftentimes, characters find themselves too inebriated to run from the killer and end up as easy prey. In *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*, marijuana enthusiast Ted (Lawrence Monoson) meets his demise at the hands of Jason Voorhees (Ted White) simply because he's too high to hear his friends calling for him. In the B-movie *Sleepaway Camp II: Unhappy Campers* deranged camp counselor Angela (Pamela Springsteen) finds two campers (Carol Chambers and Amy Fields) partying a bit too hard and then later delivers this line: "Let this be a lesson to you... Say no to drugs."



Paramount Pictures, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

RULE #3: BE NICE TO YOUR FRIENDS. Adding to the list of horror movie sins is generally being a jerk. Typically, when a character is rude and hard to get along with, it's game over. And because karma is omnipresent in the horror genre, jerky characters often end up with the most gruesome deaths. Brian De Palma's genre classic *Carrie* is perhaps the ultimate example of this; everyone who was ever mean to the titular character (Sissy Spacek) throughout the film ends up dead. In the 2009 *Friday the 13th* remake/reboot, overall miscreant Trent (Travis Van Winkle) is served inarguably the most horrific death of the film by being impaled with several large spikes. In fact, the entire *Saw* franchise is built around the idea of people who have done terrible things fighting to escape death at the hands of Jigsaw (Tobin Bell). Your best shot is to be a morally sound, law-abiding citizen.



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Unfortunately, cleanliving and kind words only get you so far in horror.

RULE #4: YOU HAVE TO BE IN SHAPE. The first rule of survival in Ruben Fleischer's undead comedy *Zombieland*? Cardio. This rule is perfectly exemplified in *Christine*, when the slovenly Moochie (Malcolm Danare) succumbs to the wrath of the titular killer vehicle where a more agile character could have easily slipped away.

Which leads us to the last rule.

RULE #5: STAY AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS. Poor decision-making is the number one cause of death in horror, and there is maybe no worse decision than running directly into a place from which bad vibes emanate. Make logical decisions about where you shouldn't venture. Countless horror films are set



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in haunted houses or in direct proximity to graveyards. If the locals tell you to stay away from a certain place, maybe try to never set foot there. In the nightmarish 2012 thriller *Sinister*, down-on-his-luck true-crime writer Ellison Oswalt (Ethan Hawke) brilliantly moves his family into a house where another family was horrifically murdered not long before hoping to write a book about the murders that will become a big hit. NO. Despite warnings from local law enforcement, he stubbornly stays put and all is not well in the end.

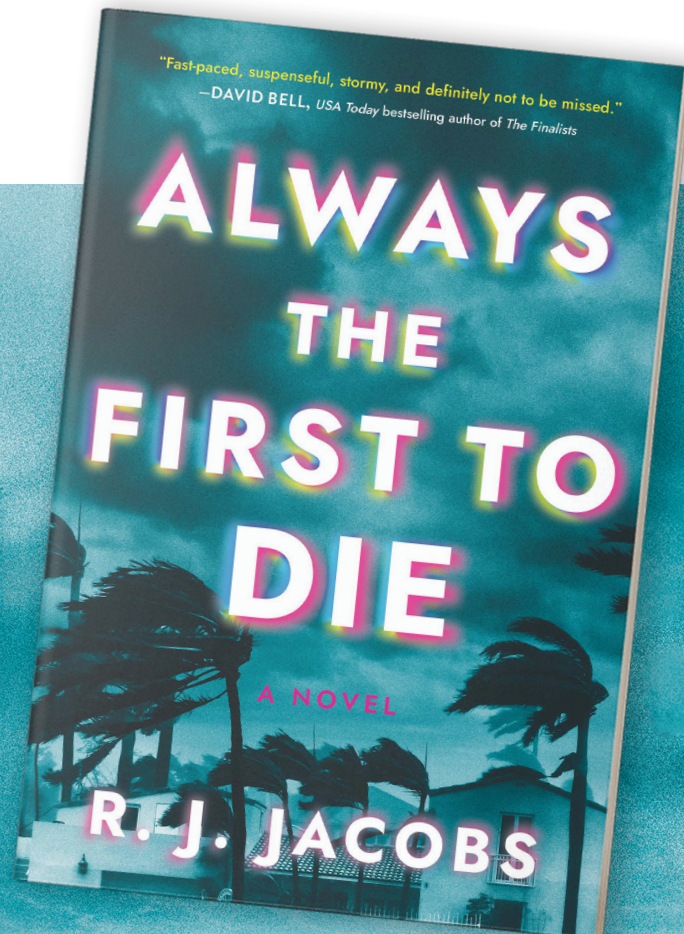
As a general rule, stay away from cabins in the woods, sheds, barns (particularly at night), remote homes in rural areas, and other places where evil could possibly dwell. Surround yourself with people who have street smarts and/or self-defense mechanisms, and never, ever wander off alone. Stay healthy, be alert and aware of the surrounding area, don't ever engage in hedonism, and do good unto those around you.

As the *Final Destination* films point out, death is ultimately unavoidable, but the tactics put forth in this article will increase your odds. Be a smart person who hardly does anything wrong and...you just might make it.

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FINAL DESTINATION

Oh, and don't be the killer.

They're usually not around for the credits.



AVAILABLE
SEPTEMBER
2022



ALWAYS THE FIRST TO DIE

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READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Horror movies play a pivotal role in the story. Are you a horror movie fan? If so, what's your favorite and why?
2. In the prologue, the narrator mentions Rick's movies giving "a promise of fear." Why do you think people are drawn to horror as a genre and this promise of fear?
3. Imagine you were Quinn right before the hurricane was due to hit the Keys. How would you feel? Have you ever had to make a natural disaster plan? If you had to quickly evacuate, what three things would you bring with you?
4. What do you make of Lexi's connection with her husband, Cam? What role does he play over the course of the story?
5. If you had the opportunity, would you star in a horror movie like Lexi? What role would you want to play? How do you think you'd feel seeing yourself get killed on screen?
6. What do you make of Rick Plummer's methods for capturing his "true, authentic fear"? Do you think they are effective? Do you think they are warranted?
7. Why do you think the Pinecrest was chosen as the set of Rick's most famous horror movie? Would you like to spend a vacation there, even after knowing about the Pinecrest curse? What movie set would you love to visit?
8. What do you make of the relationship between Lexi and Marla Moretti? Do you think Marla was treated fairly by Rick and the other characters in the story?
9. Do you see any parallels between iconic horror tropes and *Always the First to Die*? Which can you name?
10. What do you make of Rick's relationships with his family members after the story comes to an end?

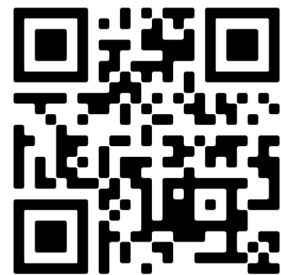


ALWAYS THE FIRST TO DIE

PLAYLIST

1. "Hunger Strike" by Temple of the Dog
2. "Plush" by Stone Temple Pilots
3. "Dollar Bill" by Screaming Trees
4. "Waiting Room" by Fugazi
5. "Where It's At" by Beck
6. "Get It Together" by Beastie Boys, Q-Tip
7. "Feel the Pain" by Dinosaur Jr.
8. "Wave of Mutilation" by Pixies
9. "Honey Don't Think" by Grant Lee Buffalo
10. "A Small Victory" by Faith No More
11. "Tearjerker" by Red Hot Chili Peppers
12. "Sin" by Nine Inch Nails
13. "Headhunter V1.0" by Front 242
14. "Three Days" by Jane's Addiction
15. "Nearly Lost You" by Screaming Trees
16. "Fade into You" by Mazzy Star
17. "100%" by Sonic Youth
18. "Sick of Myself" by Matthew Sweet

FIND
THIS
PLAYLIST
ON
SPOTIFY!



SCAN ME

