

SEVERAL FUN & BIZARRE HALLOWEEN STORIES TO READ!



High Plains Library District

CommUNITY

OCTOBER 2025

Movie Vault

Dungeon

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**Kids'
Halloween
Book**

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What do **YOU** have to **SAY** about our **newsletter?**

What do you have to say about our newsletter? Think about this as our Letters to the Editor option. If you have something to say about our newsletter, head to mylibrary.us/letters to get your feedback in the right hands.

My New Favorite Kids' **Halloween Book**



When you've got kids, you want something for Halloween season.

And we've all made the mistakes, right?

You pop in a movie you remember watching as a kid, and then you see...a couple scenes you DID NOT remember.

Or, wow, a lot more swears than you remember. Maybe you saw it on TV? With some heavy editing?

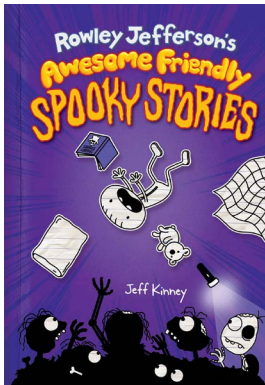
Or you pull out a book you remember loving, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, and then you open a page to something like the one above.

And you're like, "Well, I would like my child to eventually stop being terrified as opposed to spending the whole month of October in one long, endless scream, hmm, maybe this is a bit...advanced."

But then you go the other way. You find a book like [*Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance*](#), and..you know

what? That book rules. The only problem with it is that your kids will be dancing around the house, pretending their bodies are falling apart, annoying you with cries like, "Dad, dad, catch my brain!" Then they throw a peeled peach at you, which is pretty funny but messy, and...this is getting very specific. Frank was a Monster Who wanted to Dance: good book, but not much Halloween to it.

I found a book that I think really rides the line. It's got werewolves and horsemen (headless? What other kind is there!?). It's got jokes, it's got ridiculous stories.



AND, it's by Jeff Kinney, "The Wimpy Kid Guy," so it's great for readers who won't look at anything else.

I'm talking about [Rowley Jefferson's Awesome Friendly Spooky Stories](#).

Before I recommend this further, let me be clear: Your mileage may vary.

Some parents, I know, do not like Wimpy Kid books and find

the humor inappropriate or against their values. And I am definitely not going to argue against that, your house, your rules.

I'd say the humor and scares in *Rowley Jefferson* are in the Wimpy Kid realm, so if you are cool with that, this will also likely be fine.



If you're not totally sure, read it first! It's a VERY short read. The audiobook is only like an hour, so you could probably knock it out during your commute.

And, if it's not for you and your kiddos, [fill out a Kids' PRL!](#) You can make requests, tell librarians what you're looking for in a good, spooky read, and get a list of books that are likely to please.

The Stories

One of the stories features a kid who brings all his toy trucks to school, gets picked on because toy trucks are for babies, then he finds out he's becoming a werewolf, his parents encourage him to hide his lycanthropy, but he decides not to, and he returns to school in full wolf mode, able to play with his trucks unbothered because nobody is going to tell a werewolf that playing with trucks is for babies.



There's a story about a rampaging mummy who gets pretty upset when a new mummy moves into town, a nice, toast-of-the-town mummy, and the two end up battling things out in copyright court.

And, my personal favorite, a headless kid ends up meeting a kid who is JUST a head, they become fast friends, and they decide to team up so they can take their mutual crush to the dance.

This is the kind of goofiness you can expect from this book, it runs throughout, and while you'll like some stories more than others, the overall level of pure joy is VERY high.



Talking About This Book is Fun

Here's an underrated element of kids' books: If your kids think the book is fun to talk about, they might actually talk to you about it.

Let me repeat that for everyone in the back: Your kids may, MAY actually talk to you ABOUT A BOOK.

The stories are fun to talk about because they're ridiculous. Repeating them is like repeating a good joke, you get that same satisfying punch.

His lawyer trademarked "The Mummy" which made it so that Khaba was the only one who could use the name. And then she made a big announcement about it in front of the TV cameras.



And because these stories are so goofy, you will enjoy hearing about them. Just, you know, when something doesn't make a ton of sense, just go with it. You're probably hearing a pretty accurate recounting.



For All My Childless Friends Out There

I'm not going to blow candy corn up your nose, I've had few fall evenings as fun as the time I got a bowl of candy, crushed a couple ciders, and read Rowley Jefferson's *Awesome Friendly Spooky Stories*.

The fall vibes? Immaculate, as the kids would say.

The jokes? Bangers, as the kids would say. Probably not too much anymore, but at one time they said that!

And, sure, it's for kids, but did you know that the most popular books for adults are written at the 7th grade level? And guess which grade level Rowley Jefferson's *Awesome Friendly Spooky Stories* is at?

Okay, it's grades 3-4. But think about it this way: Which grade level is best for HALLOWEEN!?

Yeah, for sure, grades 3-4. You're old enough to be ruthless in candy-gathering, physically capable enough to wear a costume the entire night. These are the years you graduate from collecting candy in a cute little pumpkin pail to stuffing a pillow case.

C'mon, (un)live a little this October. [Have some fun with your ol' pal Rowley.](#)

You could do a lot worse. You're reading this newsletter, after all.

Did YOU have a great library experience? Like, ever?

If you're reading HPLD's newsletter, we're betting the answer is "Yes." Or possibly even "YES!"

To let our staff know that they're having an impact in your community, we're proposing a [quick letter-writing campaign](#). Write your favorite HPLD staff member a letter, and if they're up for it, we'll ask them to read it out loud for the first time on video. That way, they can see how much you appreciate them, and you can see how much your words mean to them!

The HPLD Cult Movie Vault: CHALLENGE!

Readers, it is I, your Cult Movie Vault Librarian Who Writes These Newsletters, Too.

Title needs work, I know. Listen, I SHELVE stuff, I don't make up titles, let alone JOB titles.

I'm writing to you not from the comfort of my beloved Cult Movie Vault, but from a dungeon in which I've been trapped. And you know this is serious because I didn't end that last sentence with a preposition. I'm THAT desperate for help, I'll even try and get grammar nerds on my side. Er, ignore that comma splice.

Because only you, reader, can free me.

Allow me to explain.

This tale of woe begins back in the 90s, the days when, well, things looked kind of a lot like they do today, what with all the fashions and so on coming back, reminding me that I wasn't cool then and remain uncool now — back in the 90s, your hero, which is me in this case, just go with it, worked a job at McDonald's. Why?

So I could join Cortado House Music Club.



Many of you are probably familiar with Cortado House Music Club and their deals like “6 CDs for a penny!” and “8 CDs for a penny!” and, in a stroke of marketing genius that must have taken someone months to concoct: “12 CDs for a penny!”

What will the big brains over there think of next? A BIGGER number of things for the same amount of money?

Fewer of you, but some of you, are also familiar with Cortado House Movie Club, which had pretty similar setups like, “11 movies for

1-cent each!” and the cryptic “11 movies for 1-cent each, plus two more for a low price!”

What are the economics of this? Could I have all 13 movies for a nickel? Can someone graph this in a way that makes any kind of sense?

The only possible response when you saw a Cortado House Movie Club ad was along the lines of, “What kind of madman is in charge of this? There must be a Krazy-Kaplan-esque figure behind all this to even conceive of such a money-losing deal!” (you're welcome for that reference, my Midwest transplant friends).

If you were ever in one of these “clubs,” you know that they weren’t as exclusive as their magazine ads would have you believe. The only criteria for entry, it seemed, was a willingness to fall for marketing, one penny, and a complete disregard for reading the fine print.

All of which I had (and still do, as evidenced by my VAST collection of souvenir squashed pennies).

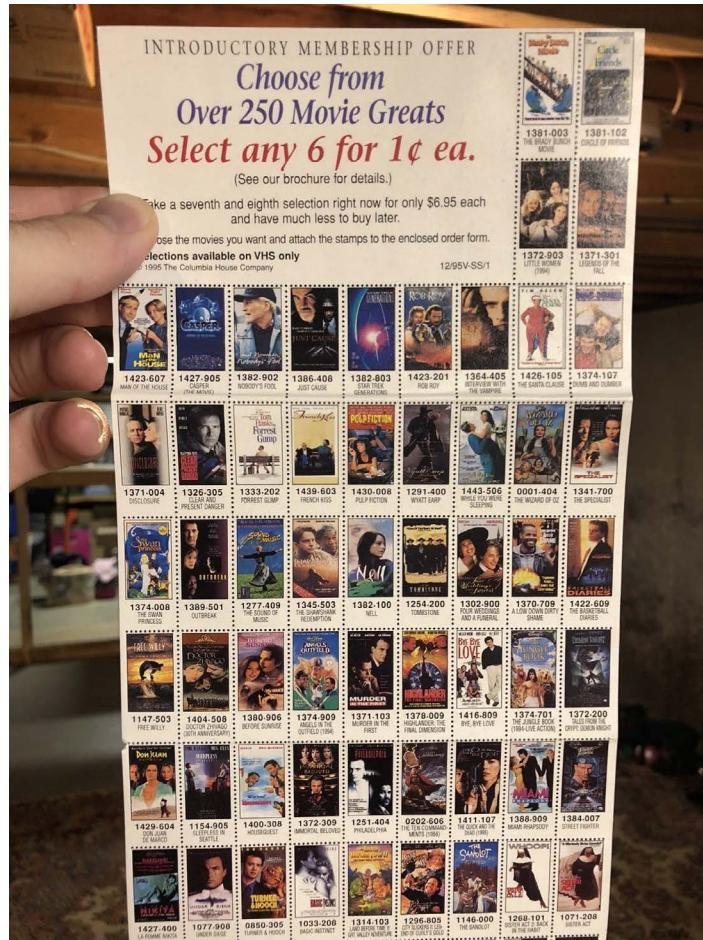
I joined Cortado House Movie Club and received 11 movies plus a very small navy blue duffel bag, which I used for a ridiculously long time because, of course, every nice bag I’ve ever had breaks immediately, and this crappy giveaway bag that I didn’t even want lasted FOREVER.

Also, that duffel didn’t hold all the VHS tapes I got, which seems like a crime. I assumed this duffel bag was for carting around all the new movies I had. I mean, shoot, I was set to be the most popular kid in school, right? Constantly invited to the houses of others to watch movies with giant bowls of popcorn and nobody noticing I was eating those giant bowls of popcorn entirely by myself, they’d be so enraptured by my movie picks. *What taste! We were wrong about you, Pete, and all those things we thought about you, wow, I’m eating about as much crow right now as you are popcorn!*

Now, I don’t recall exactly the financials of Cortado House Movie Club, but it was something like this:

You get 11 movies for a penny, GREAT DEAL.

Then, by the end of the following year, you MUST purchase 4 more movies, and they have to be movies priced at a certain rate or above. Read: Really expensive, feels illegal kind of expensive, you could probably buy a VHS-sized



7 THE GREAT 1¢ MOVIE DEAL. MOVIES FOR 1¢ Each

PLUS 2 MORE AT GREAT SAVINGS! Details below.

2077501	2048007	2036009	2018406	2055002

2023109	APCALYPSE NOW	0200105	DON'T BE A MENACE TO SOUTH CENTRAL WHILE DRINKING YOUR JUICE IN THE HOOD	1147503	DEVIL IN A
0910802	BALTO	1508308	FREE WILLY	1454701	KING OF KIN
0910703	MY FAIR LADY (TIK)	1987502	GETTYSBURG	1213305	LAST MAN
0910604	TALES FROM THE GRYPH: OCEAN KNIGHT	1372200	ROB ROY	1423201	A RIVER RU
0286906	TOP GUN	0426908	NINE MONTHS	1479506	SINGIN' IN (REMAST
1923408	DIE HARD	0367607	HIGHER LEARNING	1381805	THE REMAST
1939503	DIE HARD 2: DIE HARDER	0641806	THE JUNGLE BOOK (1994-LIVE ACTION)	1374701	DUNSTON (
1426105	DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE	1482209	LOSING ISAIAH	1413400	BATMAN FC
1251404	DESPERADO	1485101	OPERATION DUMBO DROP	1495605	BATMAN FC
1433903	HOW TO MAKE AN AMERICAN QUILT	1921204	WHITE SWALL	1948305	SUDDEN DE
1302509	OUTBREAK	1389501	THE ADVENTURES OF MILO AND OTIS	0598403	THE SWAN
1510995	BASIC INSTINCT	1032208	FRENCH KISS	1439803	THE AMAZI
1510995	BIMBO 2 IN THE BODDY	1042509	MARY'S ROOM	1439803	THE AMAZI
			MARS ATTACKS!	2089407	
			THE GODFATHER (TIK)	2066306	
			THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT	2082501	
			FIERCE CREATURES	2079200	
			GET ON THE BUS	2087708	
			THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS	2057404	
			MARY'S ROOM	2083301	
			TURBID ENF	0980204	
			FREE WILLY 2	1992106	
			THE ADVENTURES OF MILO AND OTIS		

brick of silver for less.

So, at the end of the day, maybe you got 11 movies for a penny, but another, more accurate way of looking at it was that you got 15 movies for \$175 bucks. Which still probably put you on top, but The House had other ways of extracting money from you.

Sorry, I had to stop writing for a moment. A guard just passed by my cell. I asked when I would get some food, and he said, “Pipe down!” and smashed a VHS tape against the bars holding me in. I guess maybe the tape was supposed to be like a club or something, but all the VHS tapes are so old, it just kind of crumbled against the bars and didn’t look like it’d hurt that much.

One of Cortado House Movie Club’s best tricks was their monthly picks.

Every month, you’d get a postcard in the mail that told you what the next pick of the month was. It was usually a blockbuster, a big movie that was a crowd-pleaser, a solid 6 out of 10, nobody’s favorite, but everybody had seen it.

If you didn’t want that month’s pick sent to you, all you had to do was check a box that said, “No, thanks” on the

postcard, stick it back in the mail, and Cortado House wouldn’t send it to you.

However, if you didn’t manage to get that postcard back in the mail, which I almost NEVER did because I was 15 and that was apparently too much responsibility for me, they would send you the tape.

You could still write on the box the tape shipped in, “Return to sender,” and you wouldn’t be charged for it.

However, if you got a boxed VHS and opened it, you got charged.

And there was absolutely NO WAY to open those boxes without destroying them, no way to see which tape was inside without ruining the box, so there was a little bit of subterfuge going on here.

It's one of those things where it seems like Cortado House is giving you a lot of opportunities to not pay for a movie you don't want, right? Like something we can manage.

Here's the kicker: The Cortado House picks, the ones they sent in the mail, did not count towards your 4-movie requirement. If you opened one, you'd end up having to pay full price for a movie you didn't necessarily want, AND you'd still have all 4 movies to go, all 4 of those full-price buys still left.

Here's what happened to me, where my tale of woe really begins:

I played a lot of *Goldeneye* on the Nintendo 64, and so of course, I rented the movie. I remembered it being...fine. Maybe a little slow for me, a kid who wasn't as charmed by Pierce Brosnan's alarmingly hairy chest as some of my friends' moms seemed to be.

But after playing so much *Goldeneye*, I was like, "Naw, man, there's no way a bad movie could be made into a game THIS AWESOME." I basically gaslit myself into thinking I was out of my mind when I watched the movie, it HAD to be better than I remembered.

So I ordered *Goldeneye* from Cortado House, and it'd count as one of the 4 movies I needed to buy anyway.

After a couple weeks, a tape came in the mail. Thinking it was *Goldeneye*, I tore it open. And the tape was...*Batman and Robin*.

That's right, the Cortado House pick for that month, the postcard I never sent in, was for Joel Schumacher's *Batman and Robin*. And because the shipping dates crossed over, I was now the owner of *Batman and Robin*.

I have so much to say about *Batman and Robin*. But that's an entry to itself.

After a screening of *Batman and Robin* that made me both angry and a strange feeling I didn't understand then but

now have realized is "I just need a good cry," I concocted a scheme.

Back to the cardboard boxes from Cortado House: these things were very secure, meant to sort of be destroyed by any attempt to peek at what's inside. See, that's part of the scam at work: by the time you realize you're about to watch objectively the worst Batman movie, not objectively a mid James Bond movie, it's too late, the box is torn, and

you can't send Batman and Robin back where they came from (some kind of threatening disco purgatory based on the look of the movie).

These boxes, in my memory, they were glued together, and they had perforations sure to rip, making the box...not tamper-proof, but evident you've tampered with it.

I mashed up cardboard with some water into a sort of slurry, a disgusting word that should only be used for disgusting things, hence

the reason there is no gum flavor called "Slurry Mint."

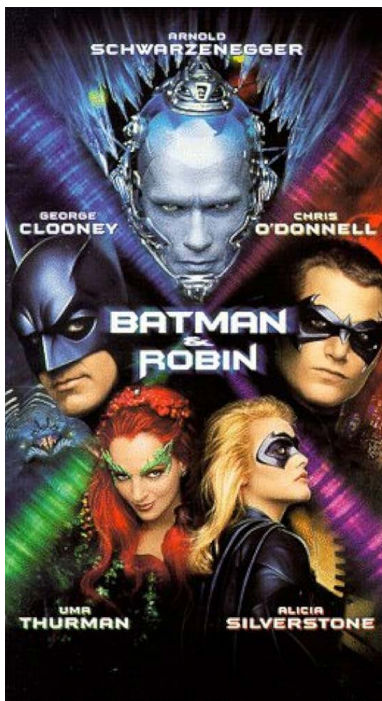
I molded the cardboard slurry back into place, even using a needle to dig little perforations in the box.

Here's the gamble I was taking: It was possible, even probable, that whoever worked at the warehouse where tapes were returned was just an hourly worker on some kind of assembly line, and they maybe, perhaps, didn't inspect every tape box.

You might recall that I was working at McDonald's at the time, so I was familiar with a job where it's not everybody's jam to do things pitch perfect every time. I will admit, I was not good at centering pickles on burgers, I rarely fixed those errors, and I have no regrets.

Maybe the tape would get tossed into a bin of tapes, worthless stuff like *Batman and Robin*, to be melted into a, well, slurry, an appropriate, if environmentally-questionable fate for a *Batman and Robin* on VHS.

Reader, I am not a good gambler. Not only do I rarely win, I rarely manage to purchase a scratch ticket without embarrassing myself. If the directions have more than 2 steps, I WILL mess them up, and even if the scratcher is still valid, I'll kill any suspense that might've



been had in scratching it.

And the gamble I took with Cortado House, boy was I wrong.

...

Sorry, almost done. I'm tying all these pages to a pigeon's leg. He's getting a little antsy, crossing his wings, which I didn't know pigeons could do, and tapping his toe, which I would've guessed pigeons could do, but this getting messages out of a dungeon stuff is all pretty new to me.

I didn't hear anything back after I sent in *Batman & Robin*, so I assumed Cortado House had taken the tape back, and we were square.

Cut to the present.

Late one night, which is 8 PM for me on that particular night because I am over 40, and as you know, the SECOND you turn 40, your bedtime gets earlier and earlier so you can get into bed and sleep like garbage for longer stretches. 8, maybe 8:04 that night, there was a knock on my front door. I answer, a hood gets thrown over my head, and I'm bundled into a van. At least, I assume it was a van. I had a hood on and couldn't see much. So it could've been a sedan, or a pickup. I really couldn't say what kind of vehicle it was.

Is this important in the middle of this story of kidnapping? I feel like it is, but sometimes my instincts to set the scene go a little too hard and I kill a little bit of the story's urgency.

Eventually, the van(?) stopped, they pulled me out, shoved me into a room, pulled off my hood, and locked me in. "Welcome to the Cortado House Dungeon," a tall, Angus Scrimm of a man said in a raspy, scary voice.

"Ooo, cool!" I said. "Is this like the Criterion Closet? Do I get to make picks? They released *Army of Darkness* in the Criterion Collection, right? I don't see it..."

The tall man's voice was even raspier, a sure sign of being fed up with me already. I know what being fed up with me sounds like, I hear it a lot. "No, it's nothing like the Criterion Closet! And, NO, *Army of Darkness* is not in the Criterion Collection."

"Wow, okay. Crushing all my dreams in one go."

"You are here," the tall man said, "Because you tried to pull a fast one. Does THIS look familiar?"

I turned and saw the tall man whip out from behind his back a cardboard box, one that looked like it'd been glued together by an ape who was halfhearted about the project and just not really feeling it that day, and also had never glued anything together and didn't understand the basic aesthetics of cardboard boxes or have any concept of how a mail-in movie club might work, let alone how to bamboozle one with arts and crafts.

Yes, reader, that's my overly long description of my copy of *Batman & Robin*.

The tall man said, "For your crimes against cinema—"

"Cinema?" I said. "Seriously? Because I maybe fudged the numbers a little on a home movie-mailing service?"

"You broke a sacred trust in cinema," he said. "Trust is all we have!"

"Can we at least agree to call it 'cinema-adjacent?'"

"Fine." Now we've reached the phase beyond fed up and have entered complete exasperation, a phase where sometimes I get what I want simply because everyone else is tired of dealing with me. "For your crimes against a cinema-adjacent industry, you are doomed to this dungeon unless you can COMPLETE THEE MY TRIALS THREE!"

"Complete thee?" I said.

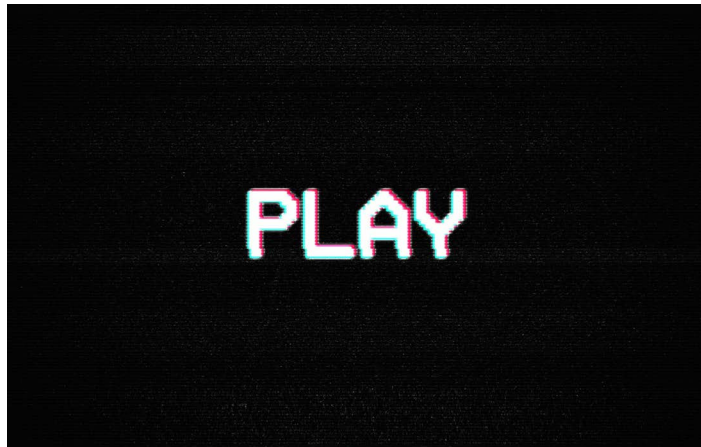
"I need 'thee' in there for the rhyme. Sorry, I know it's clumsy.

"Trial the first: You must pay the amount you owe for this tape, adjusted for inflation, as well as being adjusted to the value of the particular movie in question. Which comes out to... actually, shoot, we owe YOU \$4 dollars."

The tall man managed to collect \$4 dollars exactly by going around the dungeon and asking all the guards for change.

"Trial the second: You must convince your community to come together and complete a series of cinematic tasks, movie feats that will challenge their very sanity. They must watch everything on a movie list that will bring them to the brink of reasonableness!"

And so, readers, I bring you this list of cult and horror movie challenges, furnished by the Cortado Movie Club. If you, as a team, can watch all of the things on this list in the month of October, you will free me from my unfair imprisonment! Not totally unfair, I guess, but My Disproportionately Harsh Imprisonment!



You might be wondering why you should bother. I'm also wondering that. Let me look at my notes, here...

Oh, if you can watch a movie for each category and free me, I'll make a prize for everyone who participated! Probably a pin. Unless that ends up being ridiculously expensive. In which case I'll make it like a nice thing, pin-tier, but maybe not so hard on the wallet. I mean, I DID just get in-dungeon-ed for not paying for a VHS tape, if that gives you some insight into how high I'm flying, financially.

The Rules:

[The full list of categories/movies is here](#). This list will remain full and intact for the duration of the challenge.

[Here is the form where you can check off all the movies that you watched](#), categories you fulfilled, and so on. As people check off movies from the form, they will disappear.

This is a group effort, so if you make your way over to the form and find your category gone, someone else beat you to it! But don't despair, see if your movie might fit another category. If not, well, you'll just have to watch ANOTHER!

You can check off multiple categories with the same movie, so if something fits two different things, boom, done.

I will also warn you that most of these titles are probably not for the kids. Please use your normal judgment in picking a movie for the family. Don't just take the word of someone who has been in-dungeon-ed because of his decision-making.

Please watch movies that fulfill the categories, and do it by the end of October!

Otherwise, I'll never be freed...and we'll never find out the third task!

[Find the full list here as well as in the text below.](#)

[Find the checklist and start checking movies off here.](#)

THE LIST

Of all the movies HPLD has on disc, these are officially catalogued as Cult Movie Vault Films. Please watch each of them:

[Lifeforce](#)
[Pieces](#)
[The Serpent and the Rainbow](#)
[Society](#)
[Terrorvision](#)
[The Video Dead](#)
[Night of the Comet](#)
[Samurai Cop](#)
[Things](#)
[Jacob's Ladder](#)
[Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight](#)
[Dagon](#)
[Laserblast](#)

[The Changeling](#)
[The Gate](#)
[Popcorn](#)
[Street Trash](#)
[Maniac Cop](#)
[Prince of Darkness](#)
[Dolls](#)

These Movies Are On Disc in Some Cases, and All of them are on Kanopy:

[The Howling](#)
[Longlegs](#)
[Stopmotion](#)
[Escape Room](#)
[Magic](#)
[Phantasm](#)
[Alice, Sweet Alice](#)
[Assault on Precinct 13](#)
[Vampire's Kiss](#)
[Memoirs of an Invisible Man](#)
[Harold and Maude](#)

Pick Any Horror/Scary Movie That Fits These Categories:

A movie released between 1970 to 1975
A movie released between 1975 and 1980
A movie released between 1980 and 1985
A movie released between 1985 and 1990
A movie released between 1990 and 1995
A movie released between 1995 and 2000
A movie released IN THE YEAR 2000!
A movie released between 2000 and 2005
A movie released between 2005 and 2010
A movie released between 2010 and 2015
A movie released between 2015 and 2020
A movie released between 2020 and now
A movie released this year
A movie released the year you were born
[A randomly selected horror movie](#)
A horror movie selected by putting your first name into our catalog and picking from what comes up.
A movie that terrorized you as a child.
A scary movie that you watched at a sleepover.
A scary movie set in Colorado.
A movie with an IMDB score of less than 4.0.
A "family" horror movie.
A scary movie with a scene that takes place in a library.

Movies Only For Those of the Stoutest of Bravery Levels (some are on disc, all are on Kanopy)

[Basket Case](#)
[The Greasy Strangler](#)
[The Sand](#)
[Bad Taste](#)
[Toxic Avenger](#)
[Yoga Hosers](#)

And, of course, the final, most heinous of all:

Batman and Robin

A Bizarro Halloween



In my old job, before I became this Cryptkeeper-type newsletter-writing figure, this husk of a human being chained to a desk (which does lift up so I can stand, which is ergonomic and all), I worked as a librarian.

In the course of librarianship, you get opportunities here and there to shape the collection just a little bit.

The major way I shaped our collection was in accidentally convincing one of our collection development librarians to buy a small handful of Bizarro books. She bought maybe 10 or so, I devoured them,

nobody else did, and so of those original 10, only 3 remain. Their titles are:

[Quicksand House](#) (not too weird), [Hammer Wives](#) (weird, but descriptive. The titular story is about a polygamist who has multiple wives with hammers for heads), and then there's...[Cuddly Holocaust](#).

How to describe that one...well, imagine if you crossed *Toy Story* with a dash of *Small Soldiers*, and then slapped that

into a horror/WWII epic, and you'd be most of the way there.

Although these are the only three books I'd classify as True Bizarro, there ARE a few books in our collection that are Near-Bizarro, Bizarro-Adjacent.

Even though none of you checked out those original Bizarros, it's possible you like Bizarro more than you think.

What Gives Bizarro a Bad Name?

I will admit right away that Bizarro lit has an in-your-face, edgelord sort of vibe.

There's a penchant for covers that are kind of lewd, a lot of them use words in their titles that turn readers off before they've even considered the books themselves, and the premises of most of these books are downright ridiculous.

Like, for example, *The Greatest F***ing Moment in Sports* by Kevin L. Donihe.

Ridiculous title, granted. Although I can kind of imagine someone shouting this on ESPN. Would they be fired? Sure. But it'd be pretty memorable.

The premise is that a down-and-out cyclist, who is down-and-out because he has just survived a bout with Ebola AND lost his coach in the last year, desperately needs to win a race. But everyone is against him, AND he refuses to harm any bugs, which can be a problem when you risk losing whenever you stop to let a caterpillar cross the road.

There are books about living, grotesque malls and the bug-people who inhabit them, books about multiple William Shatners from other dimensions converging in one spot. These are books about space walruses.

What you need to understand is that Bizarro's heyday was the early 2000s, and at that time, it was difficult, if not impossible, to get a novel published if you had swears in the title or a premise that didn't really fit neatly into a genre that Barnes & Noble had a section for. When you combine both? You're not set up for success.

It was outsider stuff. It was the punk band that the big venues didn't want.

Some Bizarro was definitely written by people looking to capitalize on this idea, just like there were punk bands that were created because they saw a way to make a quick buck, and unfortunately I think these titles are often highlighted, often displayed in a, "See, this is all trash" kind of way.

And I think there's a vibe to Bizarro that's been lost to history, a way in which it was perceived differently back in the day.

At times, Bizarro comes off as super serious to some, like it's trying to be SO EDGY, when the reality is that I often read Bizarro with a good dose of humor, a certain sly sense that the authors know EXACTLY what they're doing.

I think they know that a book titled *Broken Piano for President* about a guy who invents an ultra-addictive cheeseburger is a bit silly, a bit out there, and that's the fun of it.

These are books that are probably unreadable if you can't bring a sense of humor to them. This is not LIT-RA-TOUR, not a genre that has to be read in a gigantic home library with a ladder that has wheels on the bottom.

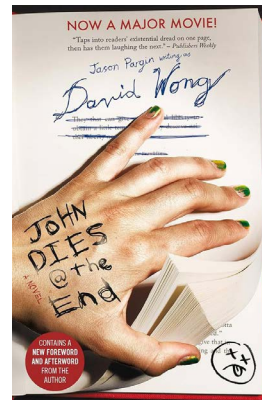
By the way, DO NOT just add wheels to the bottom of a ladder. Those fancy library ladders are attached to rails near the ceiling. When you add wheels and don't attach the top of the ladder to a rail, well, you're smarter than me, you know where this is headed.

It's a shame that the world of books feels like it can't stand united in this way, like there isn't room for super serious explorations of the human soul AND books that take place entirely while some unfortunate soul is being eaten by a bear.

The List

My goal here is to create a sort of Bizarro Rabbit Hole, maybe a funnel. At the top, we've got books that are Bizarro-ish, Bizarro-adjacent, and as you go deeper, the books become more and more like the strict definition of Bizarro.

I don't know that most people want to descend all the way down, but you might read along and find something that sounds pretty good, or maybe even *gasp* hit on something you didn't realize WAS bizarro WHEN YOU READ IT!



[John Dies at the End by David Wong:](#)

There's a good chance you've come across this one, maybe you saw the movie. If there was going to be a movie based on a Bizarro book, it only makes sense that it be directed by Don Coscarelli (*Phantasm*, *Bubba Ho-Tep*). It's quick, it's darkly funny, it has a portal to hell located in the Luxor casino from which scorpions emerge. It's just enough Bizarro to sit comfortably in the genre, but not SO Bizarro as to turn everyone off.

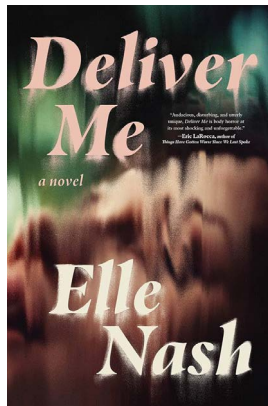


[Clowns Vs. Spiders by Jeff Strand:](#)

This is one of those great horror comedies that just WORKS. A group of clowns can only find work in a haunted house. Even though they didn't get into

clowning to scare people, it's the only option for clowns these days (thanks, Stephen King!). While they're scaring kids with clowning antics that really aren't scary at all, giant, venomous spiders show up and start eating people, webbing up absolutely everything, and force the clowns to put their giant shoes to good use smashing spideys. It's such a weird concept, it's packed with jokes while

also having some great scares, a creepy atmosphere, and some gore, and it's probably a great entry point to Bizarro.



Deliver Me by Elle Nash:

There's a *Rosemary's Baby* warning label on this one: DO NOT read this one, or even its description, if you're pregnant. I mean, maybe do, if you're steely, but I might just put this one on the ol' to-read list until that baby arrives.

Damned by Chuck Palahniuk:

Basically, imagine a Judy Blume, coming-of-age novel, except the character who is coming of age is in hell, and hell is kind of like a badly-run company where everyone is just sort of watching the clock, waiting to go home for the day. Where's the PASSION!?

The Loop by Jeremy Robert Johnson:

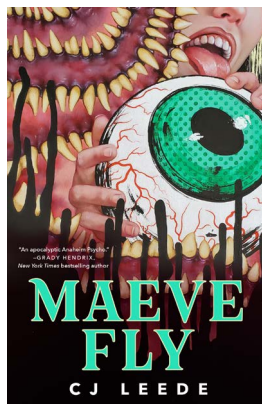
I preferred when JRJ was writing about a man who survives a nuclear disaster by wearing a cockroach suit, only to then be confronted by a man who ALSO

survived, but by wearing a Twinkie suit. However, *The Loop* was a big mainstream success for Johnson, and it is a super tense, prescient thriller with just enough Bizarro in it to keep, well, ME interested.

In That Endlessness, Our End by Gemma Files:



Short scary stories where weird things happen, like everyone having a double who emerges from their own body, and then everyone has to fight their double to the death. This is a lot better and more tense than I'm presenting it here. That's why Gemma Files writes scary stories and I write newsletters about those scary stories.

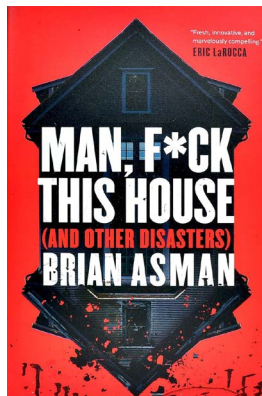


Maeve Fly by CJ Leede:

A character is inspired by *American Psycho* to be, well, Patrick-Bateman-esque, and it does NOT go well.

Man, F* This House by Brian Asman:**

Ah, the house of a young couple's dreams! Or is it the house of their nightmares?! Non-spoiler alert: Definitely nightmares.

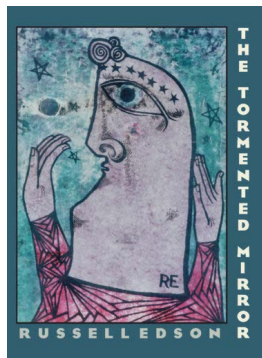


The Glassy Burning Floor of Hell by Brian Evenson:

The summary from the publisher basically starts with, "A sentient, murderous prosthetic leg." Evenson writes a good story, weird, unexpected, and with a batting average that would put the Rockies to shame. In a different, better year for the Rockies. 2025, that wouldn't be so tough.

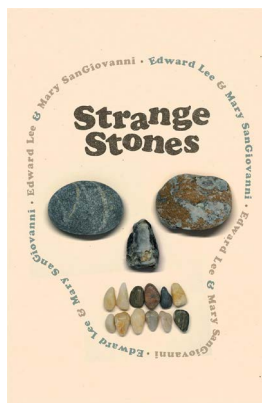
The Tormented Mirror by Russell Edson:

Edson is a poet and sometimes considered a godfather of Bizarro. Because when I say "poet," I don't mean "Roses are red" kind of stuff, I mean "As a child I had wanted to become an automobile, but then I grew up to be thirty years old."



Strange Stones by Edward Lee:

Lee is also an early Bizarro adopter. Raw, sometimes vile, and with that feeling of wildness you only get when you can't predict what you'll find when you turn the next page.



And at this point, we've touched down on Bizarro Planet. If you want to go further, I can recommend Aron Beauregard, anything by Carlton Mellick III, and you can always [check out the Wonderland Book Awards,](#)

[which give out a prize for Best Collection and Best Novel each year.](#)

Why Bizarro Matters

I'm an English major and librarian, and I can certainly see a lot of my old teachers and fellow bibliophiles shaking their heads at Bizarro.

But it matters. Like a lot of things that people dismiss before they understand them.

I think it's a genre that was actively disinterested in marketing and the financial structure of publishing. There's definitely something to that, something to the idea that a book should be an idea, a story, not something created for a market, not something we label "content" so that we can devalue the actual creator and elevate the platform it's slapped into.

I think Bizarro does, very comprehensively, what a lot of people claim good books do: it gives you a tour of someone else's head. It's more of a view than some want to read, more immediate, and sometimes those headspaces are less pleasant. But I think that brings something to books and reading, something unusual and honest.

It brings a danger element to reading. Bizarro books often make you feel like you're reading something you shouldn't be, a diary you found somewhere that seems to have been written by someone from another planet.

Why does Bizarro matter to me?

Sometimes people talk about feeling "seen" by a piece of media.

I don't usually feel that way about most books. I think people look at me or meet me briefly and think, "Oh, yeah, plenty of books out there that are about this guy and people like him."

But that's not really true.

I've always felt like a weird guy. Harmless weird, but weird. And I don't think I'm ever going to feel seen by books, by most characters like the gruff detective or the pleasant old lady detective in a small English town, or whatever other kinds of detectives we're seeing these days. I've never detected anything.

Bizarro doesn't make me feel seen, either. But it does make me feel less weird. Because bizarro is a lot weirder than I am. I mean, how could it not be? When an MMA fighter has armadillos for fists, and when that's ON THE COVER and even becomes the title of a book, and when that book is right there online next to other, more normal books, how could that NOT make me feel a little less strange?

Bizarro is, for me, and for a lot of people, a strong message: Hey, you're weird. But so is this stuff. And as long as this stuff is in the library, as long as this stuff has a place in books, you have a place in books and libraries, too.



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370 S. Rollie Avenue
Fort Lupton, CO 80621
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Kersey Library

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Platteville, CO 80651
(970) 785-2231

Riverside Library & Cultural Center

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AFFILIATED LOCATIONS

Hazel E. Johnson Research Center at the City of Greeley Museum

714 8th Street, Greeley, CO 80631
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