

What's It Like

GO AHEAD, SCREAM!

Blade writer spends a night with the undead, perfecting his haunting skills

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This is the tenth in a year-long series we call "What's It Like?" giving readers a first-hand look at some interesting activities in the region.

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Monsters are very particular about their footwear.

You might not have noticed this, but "Crazy Bob" Turner swears it's so.

"One of my pet peeves is tennis shoes," he told me. "Monsters don't wear tennis shoes."

The devil wears Prada, from what I hear, but I settled for some old black dress shoes as I prepared to spend a night scaring people as a zombie hobo in Fremont's Haunted Hydro Dark Attraction Park, which Crazy Bob owns with his wife, Beth.

Being undead isn't as easy as you might think. It requires preparation.

First, I watched a video. Crazy Bob's Haunted House Makeup Video: Volume 2 showed how to use gelatin to make your face horrifyingly bumpy, and also how to become a hairy werewolf (complete with Duran Duran's "Hungry Like the Wolf" playing in the background).

Each of the 60 or so monsters working the park every night (factory workers and teachers and others who can scare up some dough on the side here) goes through sessions in makeup and scare tactics, as well as safety. They're encouraged to come up with their own costumes and often switch roles to keep things fresh.

I didn't have the benefit of this training, so I asked a fellow monster for some tips.

"Don't say, 'Boo!' " she warned.

And with that, I was ready.

MULTIMEDIA

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Ryan E. Smith, left, and Tom Sluder, Jr., are prepared to scare. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

My night began in the makeup room over an hour before showtime. There were rows of ghouls quietly getting ready in front of mirrors and bright light bulbs - kind of how I picture backstage on Broadway, except these actors were carefully applying oozing sores and ghastly colors.

Unfailingly polite monsters ambled in and out - an evil clown, a nasty chef, a green ... thing.

"Looking forward to scaring with you," said Tom Sluder, Jr., a 22-year-old from Fremont with devil horns sprouting from his head and cheeks and body parts hanging from a necklace.

One side of the room had a rack full of costumes; another had a variety of wigs.

In front, a big board listed every room in the haunted house and who was assigned to each. My name was under "Skid Row," a shanty town for the undead with plenty of good hiding places.

My monster makeover was done by Bill Gnepper, a 46-year-old dressed as a druidic priest. He told me to douse my face with hairspray (making it easier to remove the makeup later) and then apply a clown white base. Using his long finger he added some black and green highlights - you know, to bring out my zombie eyes.

As I added some green lipstick, I asked about his choice of color.

"You know, gangrene?" he said.

And while my dentist may be proud of my teeth, the people here were not.

"We need some nicotine on the teeth," Mrs. Turner said after inspecting my outfit.

Crazy Bob himself, wearing a bow tie and a bullet hole, applied some gunk to my chompers before addressing the assembled multitude of monsters and leading us on a parade to the public and then the Hydro.

Looking like I had just walked out of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" video, I disappeared into the haunted house about 7:30 p.m.

There were still a few minutes before our first victims arrived, so I decided to get into character, practicing deep, menacing growls. I tried to act like a zombie, but not the lumbering, flesh-eating ones of Night of the Living Dead. Too slow. I wanted to pop out of corners like fright lightning.

I wandered around Skid Row, inspecting its twists and turns and calculating the best place to add up some scares.

When an organ started playing an eerie, hypnotic tune and I heard the first patrons coming our way, I crept into a corner and lurked. Zombies do a lot of lurking.

Other monsters sent up cackles and snorts and shouted things like "Fresh meat coming your way!" but I crouched quietly, muscles tense, ready to pounce.

Before long, I could see my victims' shadows coming toward me through the wooden slats of my hiding place. Still, I didn't jump out right away. I waited for the perfect moment, waited until I could actually see the second person in line pass by.



White facepaint is the basis for Ryan E. Smith's transformation at the Haunted Hydro Dark Attraction Park in Fremont. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

Then I sprung at them and unleashed an evil, monstrous, blood-curdling roar.

They responded with looks of concern.

I got no scream. I got no jumps. And I certainly got no puking or peeing, which other monsters had boasted about in the makeup room.

Apparently these people did not realize how close they were to becoming my dinner. This despite reminders from the other monsters, who kept up a call and response of "Dinner!" and "Screamers! Taste like chicken!"

Screamers are the best part of working at a haunted house. They are those girls who shriek in terror from start to finish. Any time someone would cry with fright, news would carry through the house like lightning.

"Screamers!" the monsters called to one another. "Screamers coming!"

It may be easy to scare them, but it's so satisfying. It's the monster equivalent of hitting a home run every time.

Of course, there were others who were impossible to scare. They're the ones who told their friends: There's a guy behind that wall. Or they'd look at you after you jumped out at them holding a decapitated head and ask to touch it. Or they'd say, as one girl did to me in a matter-of-fact, almost pitying tone: "You didn't scare anyone."

But for every person I didn't scare, there was one who jumped out of her shoes. I particularly enjoyed spooking

the guys - and hearing them admit it seconds later to their friends.

And I loved watching veteran monster Garner Lasher, 28, of Fremont, who would freak people out by quietly following them through Skid Row or making a sudden, loud noise by slamming his fists on a metal table.

O this night, the darkness was pierced only by the light of a full moon — how perfect! — and the sound of screams mingled with a chainsaw.

As the hours passed, I got one 10-minute break and a pocketful of hard candies to soothe my throat, which before long was hurting from all the roaring. The stream of victims slowed and the monsters began to tire.

When it was all over, maybe around 12:30 a.m., Crazy Bob marched through the Hydro again, adding us to a final monster procession that formed behind him and led outside.

All were quiet as he ascended “Crazy Bob’s Step” to address his collection of devils and ghouls and bloody butchers.

He congratulated them on a night of much fright, announced the tally of 566 patrons, and named the Monster of the Night: a dude who appeared to be impaled by a stop sign.

While the rest of the happy monsters were invited to finish the evening with drinking and dancing at a night club, I headed home, happy to escape the night alive.

As I got off the Ohio Turnpike and asked the attendant for a receipt, I got a funny look and the answer, “You can have anything you want, honey.”

How odd, I thought. Then I looked in the rearview mirror and gasped.

I was still wearing my makeup.

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