

Sam Watches Horror Movies

Sam was 81. He settled into his favourite armchair, his Jaws shark popcorn bowl full, and turned on Netflix to watch the latest horror movie. Sam loved chills, vicariously experiencing danger. Creative gore was cool. It was a cheap thrill which hurt—and affected—no one. Sam loved cheap thrills, they were vital to his entertainment.

Sam saw his first monsters on TV, in local broadcasts of old **Flash Gordon** serials. He grew watching monsters in movie theatres: **King Kong** reprises, **The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms** (he walked into the theater, eight, just as the Beast attacked the lighthouse).

There was always a monster. They were portrayed with care. Werewolves, dragons, vampires, mummies, ghosts. Godzilla. Now the horror movies he saw available on Netflix often mixed monsters with the real world, real monsters: friends, family and society. What was solid and reliable—walls, doors, borders—now were entries into alien worlds that mirrored ours. Horror was now drawn from real life. The old monsters were a sideline.

Real life was bad enough, Sam figured. Little of it was entertaining in any but a disaster tourist way. Endless wars, high prices and lower services, bad air and extreme weather. No cheap thrills there. Sam found the new horror films enlightening, perhaps, but certainly disturbing. He shifted restlessly in his chair, watching them.

Sam had to find a new entertainment to provide cheap thrills.

He chose the news. On TV, about a third of the news were now disasters. Explosions, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, heat domes, tidal surges, floods and droughts. It was harder on the web, but Sam found plenty of such videos. On YouTube, there were collections!

Yes, they were real events and people were actually killed. That somewhat lessened the entertainment value. But, as with horror films, the news provided what the audiences wanted: stuff getting blown up and destroyed. Earthquake footage was spectacular. Sam ate popcorn from his Jaws bucket, relaxing in his armchair, feeling much less stress.

He knew cheap thrills were immoral—but he had popcorn to eat.