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# The Great Horror Campout Review – Ghouls, Scavenger Hunts & Cthulhu Wake-Up Calls

*Ryan Turek**June 7th 2014, 11:44 am*

Deep sleep is shattered by the sound of inhuman screaming. The aggressive chords of The Sword's "Freya" blast from hidden speakers throughout the camp. The usually calm night air of Griffith Park is total chaos. You know that moment from **In the Mouth of Madness** where Sam Neill's John Trent hears all hell breaking loose in the outside world from the confines of his cell in the psychiatric clinic? *That's what's happening.* I'm totally groggy, having just fallen asleep perhaps an hour ago. At least I think it's an hour ago, I'm not quite sure. All I know is that *I was out cold*, exhausted by the evening's events.

And now a friggin' Cthulhu creature – tentacles cascading off of its face - is crashing through my tent, having unzipped the flap with its claw (or tentacle or whatever it calls a "hand"). Growling, pounding the ground, shaking my sleeping bag, he's ensuring that this is just about the most extreme wake-up call I have ever received. His mission is accomplished and Cthulhu stomps off. I throw on some shoes to survey the insanity. First, a quick glance at the clock. 4 a.m. I peek my head out of my tent and see my neighbors in our tent colony

are equally confused and panicked. I look out across the giant field we've called our main campground tonight. Monsters have come out to play. And some of my fellow campers are running for their lives. Others are having their tents turned inside out with sleeping bags tossed onto the moist grass. This is no way to be woken up.

Welcome to the Great Horror Campout.



Part haunted attraction, part scavenger hunt and part summer camp experience, Great Horror Campout returned to the Los Angeles area this weekend for a two-night run. It took root in a new location, stretching across Griffith Park's "old zoo" area, a tiny pocket of the city's giant, historic park that proved to be an ideal home.

I was invited to participate in night 1 and, I have to say, this one is a recommendation across the board. For the price you pay (tickets go for about \$160), it's basically double the cost of a trip to Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios, but it's much more immersive, you're staying overnight and you get meals, a shirt and a hell of an experience. You put into it what you want to get out of it. You want to commit to the full night of hunting, solving riddles, interacting with the various creeps and ghouls roaming the grounds? Then you're making the most of the hard-earned cash you slapped down. You want to retire early to your tent? So be it. (*And good luck with that*, I should add. Your personal space will likely be invaded at some point by a freaky pig-tailed girl who is prone to giggling like a lunatic.)

Great Horror Campout begins with an assembly of campers and there you'll meet the "Head Master" – a Billy Zane meets Bill Moseley-esque disfigured man who lays out the rules and objectives for the evening. As a camper, your mission is to participate in the "Hell Hunt" and roam the grounds, get involved in macabre activities and collect items (or "SCAG") that you can barter to either spare your life, escape tight confines or simply hold onto to become a "Hellmaster" by the time the sun rises. There's a chance you might get thrown in a cage. Or a trunk. Or trapped in the corner of an RV like I did with Bloody Mary herself hissing into your year. There's also a very good chance you might find yourself squeezing the teat of a giant arachnid to supply nutrients to a pale, forearm-sized maggot that would made David Cronenberg grin.

You might have to barter for an inner tube to go floating through the "swimming hole" where unknown terrors lurk beneath the surface of the water (no shit, they actually have scuba divers waiting to freak you out). In another pocket of the campground, a voodoo ritual takes place. Elsewhere, a mad doctor asks that you help him in an autopsy.

What you need to know is that *there's always something happening*. There are always bodies to be found in the bushes for you to sink your hand into to find SCAG (prepare to handle gore). And you have to be sharp and read the dossier that is sent your way before the event begins. This will help you maneuver around the grounds and provide insight as to what creatures populate the various areas. (I was pulled into a Moth Man's embrace, totally covered in this thing's wings. It spun me around and pointed me deeper into the woods... where I found a bloody nest-like mound. Inside I found some items I needed!)

As the night wears on, the Head Master will often change the rules of the game – his voice booming from the speakers set up all around the event – or call an "all campers" assembly, or, he'll ask specific tent communities to engage in "Blood Tag" – a brutal, "anything goes" water gun war where you'll likely walk away covered in green or blue or red dye (all of it washes off). This all takes place from about 9pm to 2:30am; that's when you're asked to retire to your tents until the break of dawn. Breakfast awaits starting at 6am and there's a closing ceremony at 7am.



The commitment level on behalf of the Great Horror Campout's cast is top-notch. Some of the make-up is terrific (I'm looking at you, "Vulture") and you'll never find a single person breaking character (watch out for the motorcycle-riding clowns). I had that aforementioned pig-tailed girl enter my tent for what felt like ten minutes as she just sat there giggling, playing with my sleeping bag and often, excitedly screaming "SOFT!" or "PERV!" until she got bored with me and moved off into the night.

My only regret is not moving fast enough to score the treasured SCAG. It's your job to hunt through each zone, but if a zone is dry...it's dry until a they replenish the SCAG during an all-camper assembly. I found some zones would yield very little (I felt the "mad doctor" zone was a bit timid, as was the voodoo area), but there is *so much* to experience that outweighs the weak spots.

Great Horror Campout is an imaginative experience that's full of surprises and brings the fun of the Halloween season to horror fans thirsty for gruesome, macabre activities. The event is touring through California, Oregon and Texas, **so see if it's heading your way this summer** and check it out!

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