

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark, A Horror Gem In a Bloated Genre

By Adam Robb



Over the Halloween weekend, I watched a terrifyingly fun PG-13 horror movie. Based on the collection of short horror stories for children, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* written by Alvin Schwartz and haunting pictures illustrated by Stephen Gammel was adapted by Andre Ovredal in 2019. The movie stars a great cast of young and upcoming actors, Zoe Colletti (Stella), Michael Garza (Ramon), Gabriel Rush (Auggie), and Austin Zahur (Chuck), which gives it an almost *Stranger Things* vibe of four friends battling evil in their town.

The movie follows three outcasts, Stella, Auggie, and Chuck, in a small Ohio town during the rising tensions of the country's involvement in Vietnam. On Halloween night, the group finds themselves in trouble with the local bully, seeking refuge in Ramon's car. The four strike up a friendship, resulting in the idea to explore the local haunted house of the Bellows family. As legend among the town, Sarah Bellows, condemned by her family, was locked away in the basement. The local teens who visit Sarah after hours to hear her tell her scary stories, but when a child is found dead near the house, Sarah was killed. On this very night, Stella and her friends find Sarah's book of scary stories, which soon turns deadly for the group.

This movie defied most of my expectations. I thought this movie was going to be a blatant cash grab by CBS Films, but the story pleasantly surprised me. Like many PG-13 horror films in the movie industry are targeted for teens as they know that they will gather an audience and rely on cheap thrills and scares. However, this movie does, for the most part, the opposite. There are some moments in the film where it felt like a typical PG-13 movie, but for the most part, it was a terrifying tale. The effects in the movie were outstanding, except for the few exceptions that used computer-generated effects, as they were done and performed practically. These effects, created by special effects artists Mike Hill and Norman Cabrera, brought the already unnerving illustrations of the book to horrifying life. Any scene with these creatures brought some of my earliest bad dreams to life with great success as I found myself being as terrified as I was when I was younger.

Those who grew up reading these short stories through peaking through their hands, may enjoy this movie as it takes the classic short stories and adapts them into the narrative. Some fans of the books might not like the linear story as it derives from the anthological based stories presented in the book. But for people who are looking for a movie where they can turn their brains off for an hour and indulge in the nostalgic world, this film is an excellent choice. Personally, I give it a four out of five stars as it's a great introduction to horror but still has inconsistency throughout.