

It's Halloween horror movie time. Why do some people love to be scared while others are squeamish?

We devour tales of psychopathic killers on true crime podcasts, watch movies about horrible monsters, play games filled with ghosts and zombies, and read books that describe apocalyptic worlds packed with our worst fears.

This paradox is now being resolved by research on the science of scary play and morbid curiosity. Our desire to experience fear, it seems, is rooted deep in our evolutionary past and can still benefit us today.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other 'disruptive' innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

At first blush, getting close to danger seems like a bad idea. Why would natural selection have instilled in animals a curiosity about the very things they should be avoiding? But there is an evolutionary logic to these actions. Morbid curiosity is a powerful way for animals to gain information about the most dangerous things in their environment. It also gives them an opportunity to practice dealing with scary experiences.

...

Today people inspect predators through stories and movies. Depictions of predators are found in stories passed along through [oral traditions around the world](#). Leopards, tigers and wolves are frequent antagonists in regional folklore. We also tell stories and see films about monstrous fictional predators such as ferocious werewolves, mighty dragons, clever vampires and bloodthirsty ogres.

Indulging in stories about threats is a frighteningly effective and valuable strategy.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)