

Tunnel of Terror

by David Lubar

"No way," Rachael said. "You guys go. I'll wait out here." She put her hand on the sun-heated railing outside the Tunnel of Terror ride.

"Come on," Penny said. "It'll be fun. And we already went on the rides that you wanted."

"Yeah," Trish said, rubbing her shoulder. "We did the bumper cars twice, just because you wanted to. I don't even like them. Come on."

"It can't be that scary," Penny said.

Rachael looked at the ride. The whole thing was indoors. But it was the middle of the day. The sun was high. She figured there would be some cracks of light seeping in. And she could always close her eyes. She took a deep breath. Then, as the air flowed from her lungs, she managed to say, "Okay."

"Super." Penny rushed around the railing.

"Great." Trish grabbed Rachael's arm and ran toward the entrance.

"Is it scary?" Rachael asked as she gave her ticket to the old man who was sitting on a stool at the entrance.

The man shrugged. "That's up to you." He dropped her ticket in a plastic bucket. "But we always give you what you pay for."

Before Rachael could ask what he meant, she was herded inside by her friends. In the dark, she could barely see the cars as they came along the track. As the first car stopped, Penny and Trish jumped in. Rachael rushed forward, but there was no room.

"Hey!" she called, but the car was rolling. Rachael jumped into the next one and pulled down the safety bar. She didn't want to get too far separated from her friends. "It won't be bad," she said, speaking aloud to bolster her courage. "It's just going to be some mechanical monsters or some stuff painted on the walls. Maybe some dummies with fake blood."

The car moved toward a pair of wooden doors. In the dim light, Rachael could see the brush strokes in the flat black paint. Ahead, Penny and Trish's car pushed open the door, then vanished inside.

Here goes, Rachael thought as her own car reached the door and pushed it open with a dull thud. As the doors slammed shut behind her, Rachael entered a darkness so deep it was as if the world had never known such a thing as vision. The dark interior was beyond blackness, a cave within a cave wrapped in a shroud of velvet.

Only the jostling of the car let Rachael know she was moving. "Penny?" She called out, listening for the sound of another car or the giggles of her friends. "Trish?"

Her words seemed unable to travel beyond the darkness. She heard no answer.

The car spun suddenly, turning sharply to the left and shooting forward. Rachael screamed as she found herself face to face with a grinning skull. The jaws of the skull opened wide, then snapped shut. Rachael grabbed the safety bar to keep from leaping out of her seat.

Before her scream ended, the car spun away, leaving the image burned in her vision as the blackness returned.

Get a grip, she told herself. It's make believe. She felt foolish for screaming. All she'd seen was a piece of plastic shaped like bone. Nothing real. No true terrors. The car lurched again. A man rose up with an ax in his hands.

The scream burst from Rachael's lungs. The car spun back into blackness, then shot almost instantly toward another chamber where a hand thrust up from the ground in front of a tombstone.

Rachael forced her eyes shut. She gripped the bar with both hands and thought about running from the car. Even in her panic, she understood that this would be too dangerous.

"I'll wait," she said. She knew she could get through with her eyes closed.

The car lurched. Through shut lids Rachael sensed a brief flash of brightness. She pulled one hand from the bar and covered her eyes, trying to screen out even the faintest hint of what lay in front of her.

Something brushed her face.

String, she thought. That's all it was. Dangling pieces of string.

Another lurch...

Leading to another flash.

And another.

Soon, Rachael thought. Not much longer. It was a cheap ride in a cheap amusement park. There was no way the ride would last much longer.

It didn't.

A few more lurches and she felt a bump as the car pushed through another pair of swinging doors.

Rachael quickly dropped her hand and opened her eyes. The car was back at the start of the ride. She stumbled off and went through the door marked with the EXIT sign. Bright light made her blink.

"Cool," Penny said.

"Kinda cheesy," Trish said. She looked at Rachael. "Well?"

Rachael shrugged. "It was okay."

As she walked along the railing, the ticket man smiled at her. Then he closed both eyes tight for an instant.

Rachael turned away from him. He knows, she thought. But he couldn't. And even if he did, so what?

"Come on," Rachael said, tapping Penny on the shoulder, "how about the bumper cars again? What do you --"

The words froze in Rachael's mouth as Penny glanced back toward her. Penny's flesh had turned ancient and wrinkled. Her teeth were yellow and broken, her hair nothing more than wispy strands of white. Rachael gasped and closed her eyes. When she opened them, everything was normal.

"What?" Penny asked. "Is something wrong?"

"No." Rachael shook her head. She looked away. My imagination, she thought. The ride just made me imagine that. She stared at a tree across the path.

A man hung from the lowest branch. A thick rope circled his neck. He swung slowly in the breeze. A buzzard sat on his shoulder.

Rachael gasped and pointed. She looked toward her friends, then back at the tree.

The image vanished. In her head, Rachael heard the words of the ticket man: We always give you what you pay for.

Rachael realized she was still pointing. Her eyes locked on her fingers. Her own hand turned to fleshless bone. She thrust it from her sight and looked toward the ground.

A screaming face rose from the earth at her feet. Rachael lifted her head toward the sky. The clouds became heads with snakes for hair and fangs for teeth.

Rachael stared straight ahead, afraid to shut her eyes again, afraid that any attempt to shut out the images would bring something even worse. As she took a step to catch up with her friends, she wondered how much longer the ride would last.

Name: _____

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What were the consequences of Rachael not looking during the ride? Do you think this was fair? Explain using information from the text and your own personal experience.

Level	Responses
1	The answer did not make sense or was irrelevant.
2	The answer was brief, and did not give examples from both the text AND personal experience. It may contain incorrect information.
3	The answer contained all the requirements of the question, but did not expand upon the reasoning behind how emotional response developed the plot.
4	The answer contained exerts from the text, and personal experience, to explain in detail how the plot was developed through escalating fear.