

The world is clearly divided into two groups: those who are exhilarated by fear and those who prefer a nice cup of tea. I once took a new date to a screening of the comedy horror film *Scary Movie*: my idea of adrenaline heaven. The prospective partner remained in his seat for 12 minutes before he moved to the far side of the cinema door and watched the movie through the porthole with his fingers in his ears, until even that became too frightening, so we left. It was one of the least romantic encounters I've ever had (although, Reader, I am still with the big pantywaist 28 years later).

This “natural high” is definitely not for all. But for those on the “Yes, please” side of the ghost-train queue, I have a new source of inebriation. If you're travelling to New York, in a seedy room near Times Square, you'll find an escape room that delivers a prolonged adrenaline rush to the brain, leaving you buzzing for hours after the session is over. After an initial safety briefing you enter a small locked chamber containing a very angry, very hungry, very unhealthy zombie chained to the wall. The chamber keeper explains that his chains are kept tight because he craves human flesh. Just one touch from his claws will render you infected with a deadly virus and out of the game.



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Fine, you think. I will stick to this half of the room that contains most of the puzzles I need to decode to escape this room before the hour is up. But that's not fine, the chamber keeper says. “Every five minutes the zombie's chains are lengthened by 12 inches, so little by little he will be creeping towards you - and by the final five minutes, he'll be loose enough to destroy your face with his teeth.” Again, fine, you think. It's just a game. Only nobody seems to have told the zombie that . . .

We spent the next hour frantically unpicking locks, decoding cryptics, decrypting codes, while all the time listening to his agonised howls, dodging his seeping wounds, avoiding his grappling talons and sharpened teeth. The monster hissed at us, clawed at us and at one potentially deadly moment, while I battled with an anagram, lunged at me. With seconds to go we unearthed the key and escaped - ditching the usual winner's photocall - to run, screaming, down 37th Street. It was marvellous; I was high for hours.

The pantywaist didn't speak to me for two days.

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