



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

# The Uninvited

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

*The Uninvited* was, famously, Hollywood's first authentic ghost story. It's a slick, romantic, sometimes even campy potboiler that, in its most crystalline genre moments, still delivers an irresistible darkness-at-the-bottom-of-the-stairs frisson. However glib the film gets, the sound of sobbing in the darkness runs up the back of your neck on little clawed feet.

Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey star as an oddly coupled brother and sister who decide to buy a haunted Cornwall-cliffside mansion. The resident moaners and weepers therein compel them to get involved with local secrets, namely Gail Russell, a haunted village lass standing astride a backstory of possession and murder.

Because it's the first, and because it was still wartime, Lewis Allen's film can't hope to chin up against movies from more than 15 years later, such as *The Innocents* (1961) or *The Haunting* (1963). But it's an expert launch of pulp all the same, burned into the psyche of moviegoers of the day, and fuelled by Milland's particular brand of secretive cynicism and by Russell, whose fragile, haunted demeanour serves the context in unforgettable ways. To learn about her subsequent alcoholism and jittery ruin is to feel a real Hollywood ghost story in your bones.

**Michael Atkinson, *Sight and Sound*, January 2014**

One of Hollywood's first attempts at a serious ghost story, this relatively lavish Paramount production (based on *Uneasy Freehold*, a novel by the Irish writer Dorothy Macardle) was plainly influenced by Val Lewton's cycle of low-budget chillers. Gauntly glamorous Elizabeth Russell, a Lewton regular best remembered as the other cat woman in 1942's *Cat People*, is recognisable as the model for a portrait that plays a significant part in the story here. (Like *Rebecca* and *Laura*, this makes a fetish of a picture that stands in for the not-quite-absent woman who haunts the film.) In a peculiar, extra-narrative instance of ominous doubling, the young woman most in peril from the malign ghost is played by the frail, unearthly Gail Russell, whose real name was also Elizabeth Russell.

The general classiness of the film runs to sophisticated dialogue rattled off by Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey as urbanite siblings who buy a clifftop house in Cornwall; a memorably romantic/shivery Victor Young score which spun off the popular song 'Stella by Starlight'; and a tactful approach to the story's paranormal activity that depends as much on performance as camera tricks. Some quite transgressive material was somehow sneaked past the Hays Office, including a seething Cornelia Otis Skinner as the ghost's maniacal lesbian admirer (another Lewton theme) and a happy ending which hinges on the revelation that the heroine is the daughter of her father's sensual mistress, not his frigid wife. It was Lewis Allen's first film, and he never did anything quite as striking again.

**Kim Newman, *Sight and Sound*, December 2012**

## A contemporary review

Based on the novel, adapted for the screen by Dodie Smith and Frank Partos, this is a very good job technically. Some beautiful coastal scenery and an attempt to reconstruct a Devon village give variety to the gloomy concentration on the haunted house. The production department has created beautiful interiors too. And the photography, including the ghostly emanations, is extremely efficient. The casting and acting – Donald Crisp and Cornelia Otis Skinner are in the supporting roles – are also good. It remains a question, however, whether such a film should ever be made, producing visual evidence of unexplained occult phenomena which, to say the least, have never yet been photographed.

### *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1944

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#### THE UNINVITED

*Directed by:* Lewis Allen  
©: Paramount Pictures Inc.  
*A Paramount picture*  
*Associate Producer:* Charles Brackett  
*Screen Play by:* Dodie Smith, Frank Partos  
*Based on the novel by:* Dorothy Macardle  
*Director of Photography:* Charles Lang Jr  
*Process Photography:* Farciot Edouart  
*Edited by:* Doane Harrison  
*Art Directors:* Hans Dreier, Ernst Fegté  
*Set Decoration:* Stephen Seymour  
*Costumes:* Edith Head  
*Make-up Artist:* Wally Westmore  
*Music Score:* Victor Young  
*Sound Recording:* Hugo Grenzbach, John Cope

#### Cast

Ray Milland (*Roderick Fitzgerald*)  
Ruth Hussey (*Pamela Fitzgerald*)  
Donald Crisp (*Commander Beech*)  
Cornelia Otis Skinner (*Miss Holloway*)  
Dorothy Stickney (*Miss Bird*)  
Barbara Everest (*Lizzie Flynn*)  
Alan Napier (*Dr Scott*)  
Gail Russell (*Stella Meredith*)  
Ivan Simpson (*Will Hardy*)\*  
Holmes Herbert (*Charlie Jessup*)\*

USA 1944 99 mins

\* Uncredited

The screening on Sat 17 Dec will be introduced by broadcaster and writer Louise Blain

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#### IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

##### The Uninvited

Thu 1 Dec 18:05; Sat 17 Dec 14:30 (+ intro by broadcaster and writer, Louise Blain)

##### Kwaidan (Kaidan)

Thu 1 Dec 20:00; Tue 13 Dec 17:40

##### Night of the Eagle

Fri 2 Dec 21:00; Sat 10 Dec 12:10

##### Daughters of Darkness (Les lèvres rouges)

Sat 3 Dec 20:45; Tue 13 Dec 21:00

##### Transness in Horror

Tue 6 Dec 18:20

##### Let the Right One In (Låt den rätte komma in)

Tue 6 Dec 20:45; Thu 22 Dec 18:15

##### Philosophical Screens: The Lure

Wed 7 Dec 20:10 Blue Room

##### The Lure (Córki dancing)

Wed 7 Dec 18:15; Thu 22 Dec 20:45 (+ intro by Dr Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies at King's College London)

##### Cat People

Wed 7 Dec 20:50; Mon 19 Dec (+ intro by Clarisse Loughrey, chief film critic for The Independent)

##### Black Sunday (La maschera del demonio)

Fri 9 Dec 21:00; Sun 18 Dec 18:30

##### Ring (Ringu)

Sat 10 Dec 20:40; Tue 13 Dec 21:05;  
Tue 20 Dec 21:00

##### Atlantics (Atlantique) + Atlantiques

Sun 11 Dec 14:50; Tue 27 Dec 18:20

##### Sugar Hill

Sun 11 Dec 18:00; Sat 17 Dec 20:40

##### Häxan

Mon 12 Dec 18:10 (+ live score by The Begotten); Sat 17 Dec 11:45 (with live piano accompaniment)

##### Sweetheart

Mon 12 Dec 21:00; Tue 27 Dec 12:40

##### Arrebato

Wed 14 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by writer and broadcaster Anna Bogutskaya);  
Fri 23 Dec 18:05

##### The Final Girls LIVE

Thu 15 Dec 20:30

##### One Cut of the Dead (Kamera o tomeru na!)

Fri 16 Dec 18:15; Fri 30 Dec 20:45

##### The Fog

Fri 16 Dec 21:00; Wed 28 Dec 18:10

##### Being Human + Q&A with Toby Whithouse and guests (tbc)

Sat 17 Dec 18:00

##### Day of the Dead

Mon 19 Dec 20:40; Thu 29 Dec 18:20

##### Society

Tue 20 Dec 18:15; Wed 28 Dec 20:50

##### Interview with the Vampire

Wed 21 Dec 18:10; Thu 29 Dec 20:40

##### Ginger Snaps

Wed 21 Dec 20:50; Tue 27 Dec 15:10

##### A Dark Song

Fri 23 Dec 20:45; Fri 30 Dec 18:20

##### City Lit at BFI: Screen Horrors –

##### Screen Monsters

Thu 20 Oct – Thu 15 Dec 18:30–20:30 Studio

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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