

# cARny

Written by

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EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT - TWO YEARS AGO

The low budget traveling carnival in full swing in this southern suburban town as midway barkers coax suckers to play their rigged games to win cheap-ass prizes.

Red-eyed CARNIES operate dozens of rickety rides, while teenagers wait anxiously in line for their turn to risk their lives on these deathtraps.

One such carnny, BJ HUNT (38, lanky, thin greasy hair, yellowed teeth) ogles and grins at the high-school girls as he smokes his cigarette and takes their tickets.

Licks his lips as he helps a southern BELLE onto the ferris-wheel as her college linebacker BOYFRIEND follows behind.

BJ  
Enjoy the ride, princess.

BELLE  
Eww. Shut up, creep.

BOYFRIEND  
Fuck off, freak.

BJ gives him the finger as a fellow WORKER pats him on the shoulder to get his attention.

WORKER  
Hydraulics at the funhouse are out again. Boss needs you to fix it.

BJ  
Cheap ass bastard. Yeah, okay.  
(points to kids)  
Those two don't ride.

WORKER  
(to Belle/Boyfriend)  
C'mon, you heard him. Get off.

BOYFRIEND  
We paid already!

WORKER  
Go on...fuck off. Security!

BOYFRIEND  
Asshole!

BJ chuckles as he walks off toward the funhouse tent, the Boyfriend yelling after him as a security guard approaches.

EXT. CARNY FUNHOUSE - LATER

BJ fishes out another cigarette and lights it as he approaches the Clown-Themed Funhouse tent, anxious carnival goers lined up out front. Calls out to the worker.

BJ  
Boss out back?

Worker nods and points behind the tent, waving him on.

BJ rounds the corner and hears a loud CLANG CLANG in back. Follows it to find BOSS beating a generator to it's grave.

BOSS  
Goddamn piece of shit, come on!

BJ  
It leaks like a sieve.

BOSS  
I hired you to fix it!

Boss throws the wrench at him, as BJ dodges it.

BOSS (cont'd)  
Get it working or you're done.  
Don't think the locals would like  
your kind staying behind.

BJ picks up the wrench, and the threat. Hardly bothered by either, as he twists it in his grip.

BJ  
I gotchu, Boss. It'll be back on in  
a jif.

BOSS  
Then get in that clown gear and  
keep this ride open. Top it off, so  
it lasts the rest of the night.

A DUDE in a clown costume exits the back of the tent as Boss storms off, while BJ exhales smoke through yellow teeth.

Dude starts to unzip the grimy red suit, as BJ watches Boss walk off.

DUDE  
Lucky you. Where you want it?

BJ  
Set it by the gas can. I'll fetch  
it after.

EXT. CARNY FUNHOUSE - LATER

Boyfriend, along with a few college teammates approach the funhouse looking for trouble, as Belle and her girlfriends follow close behind.

BELLE

The guy said funhouse. He's gotta be around here. Go beat his ass.

BOYFRIEND

Fuckin-A right, we are. Follow me.

They passes Boss yelling at the attendant out front about something, then sneak around to the--

BACK

--just as BJ, dressed in an even grimier red satin clown suit tops off the compressor with gas, the cigarette still in his mouth.

Boyfriend steps forward, his buddies right behind him.

BOYFRIEND (cont'd)

There you are, carny.

BJ turns his attention to the defensive line as gas overfills the compressor and flows on the ground and the leg of his costume.

BJ

Look, assholes. I've gotta job to finish here so--

BELLE

Not so tough now, are you Clownman?  
(to Boyfriend)  
Fuck him up, fellas.

Belle fishes out her cellphone and starts to video as the others fan out to encircle BJ.

BJ

I really don't have time for this, guys, but if you really want me to kick your ass, I'd love to--

BJ quickly splashes gas toward Boyfriend, then brings the wrench down toward the closest PLAYER1, who dodges, pivots, and punches BJ solid across the head toward PLAYER2--

--who catches him and holds his arms back, as the gas can falls to his feet and pours out beneath him.

Boyfriend steps forward and gets in BJ's pock marked face.

BOYFRIEND  
You like looking at high school  
girls, freak?

BJ looks over his shoulder toward Belle, camera out. Pivots the cigarette in his mouth and mouths a kiss toward her.

BJ  
Why? You like boys?

BOYFRIEND  
I'll fucking kill you, carny!

BJ adjusts the cigarette in his teeth and inhales, the end of the butt glowing red. Then mumbles through his breath.

BJ  
Then see you in hell.

As he headbutts the red-hot coal into Boyfriend's cheek, keeping it there as he SCREAMS out.

BOYFRIEND  
AAAAAAAHHHHH--

Boyfriend punches the shit out of BJ, the red hot cigarette falling to the ground and into the pool of gas--

--as it catches on fire and quickly flares upward on the gasoline soaked costume.

Player 2 lets go and everyone backs away as BJ becomes enveloped in flame, arms wailing about, screaming.

BJ  
AAAAAAHHHHHH--

His eyes capture the horror of Belle's, while she and the other girls keep videoing him, as some of the others panic.

PLAYER1  
Jesus, do something.

PLAYER2  
Like what? He's fucked!

And then BJ's screams turn to maniacal laughter, as his burning body falls against the funhouse tent, as it too, catches fire and spreads upward.

BJ  
--hhhahahahahahahahaah--

Boyfriend and the others watch as SCREAMS are heard from INSIDE the tent, patrons trapped, while BJ locks eyes with him, behind rising flames.

BJ (cont'd)  
--dyin can't stop meeee..hahah--

BOYFRIEND  
Get the fuck outta here is what.  
Hurry! We were never here!

Everyone runs away while the fire consumes the tent and BJ's eyes never leave the escaping kids, the laugh incessant.

EXT. GREENSBORO PARK - DAY - PRESENT DAY

A beautiful fall day in North Carolina as EDDIE LESTER (19, fit, handsome), aka Player2, hikes along a deserted trail talking into his phone as he shoots a selfie video.

EDDIE  
Special Ed here in Greensboro Park,  
kickin' it live with you on TikTok.

He flexes his well-sculpted bicep and ZOOMS in on it then his infectious smile.

EDDIE (cont'd)  
Shout out to my boys DeeJay and  
Froggie Fresh! Be sure to check out  
my Insta and X threads, peeps. You  
can also follow me on...

He stops suddenly, eyes squinting with interest.

EDDIE (cont'd)  
What the-

He points the camera toward a LONE FIGURE in the distance.

EDDIE (O.S.)  
What the hell is that?

He ZOOMS in on the FIGURE far away.

#### **ON VIDEO**

The clear outline of a CLOWN holding a silver balloon in one hand and a SHINY object in the other comes into focus.

EDDIE (O.S.)  
 (whispers)  
 Damn, this is crazy. You seein'  
 what I'm seein'?

Eddie continues toward the mysterious figure, slowing his pace to 'sneak up' on this guy.

EDDIE (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 (whispers)  
 Holy shit, it's one of those creepy  
 clowns just wandering around out  
 here. Let's check this out, peeps.

He flips the camera POV so we see Eddie's eyes reacting to this insane sighting. The camera flips back around...

...and the clown is way closer now. And that shiny object in his other hand is also in plain sight.

EDDIE (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 Fuck! He's got a knife!

Eddie sprints away from this killer clown. Fast!

The POV shifts back to the clown gaining on him, the balloon whipping behind, his colorful costume billowing in the wind, knife slashing back and forth, WHITE FACE snarling.

EDDIE  
 Oh my God! Someone help! PLEASE!  
 HELP M--

The POV shuffles around showing the path, the SOUND of his footsteps and heavy breathing. Then flies around to...

...an ATTACKING CLOWN, knife slashing into POV, as Eddie SCREAMS and the camera falls to the ground, pointing up into the sky, as the clown leans down and leers into it.

A quiet pause.

Then the camera moves again.

EDDIE (O.S.)  
 That'll do it. Great job, Matt!

## **END VIDEO**

MATT BUCK (19), aka Killer Clown and Boyfriend from the open, smiles and helps Eddie up.

MATT  
That wasn't too much?

EDDIE  
No way, man. Creepy as fuck. Here,  
take a look.

Matt leans over Eddie's shoulder as he cues up the video.  
They gawk at it together.

MATT  
Dude, I look sick!

EDDIE  
This is totally going viral.

Matt gives Eddie a high five, then notices something.

MATT  
Hold up. What was that?

EDDIE  
What was what?

Matt points to the screen.

MATT  
There. What is that?

#### **ON VIDEO**

Off to the side of the path where Matt is dressed as Killer Clown, is another clown. Only this one is way creeped out.

CARNY is tall and cartoonishly lanky. Long arms and legs hidden by a grimy red and black satin costume, dirty orange strands of hair shooting in all directions off his head.

Carny appears between several trees following Matt and Eddie along the path holding a shiny silver balloon.

#### **END VIDEO**

Matt and Eddie turn toward the direction of the video.

No one there.

EDDIE  
What the hell was that?

MATT  
I don't kno--



SNAP.

A twig breaks behind them and they turn around. Nothing.

Eddie aims his phone as he turns and Carny APPEARS IN FRAME right behind him, wrapping the balloon string around his neck. But it's not string, it's RAZOR WIRE.

Eddie's neck slices wide open, a red river of blood coursing down his shirt. Reaches out to Matt, gurgling as his eyes bulge wide. Panicked.

Blood SPRAYS across Matt's face, as he watches Eddie's neck split seemingly on its own, a deer in the headlights.

MATT (cont'd)

Eddie? What th--

Eddie falls to his knees still shooting the video.

Matt does a 360, freaking out, alone in the woods. Except for his friend bleeding out beside him, phone in hand.

#### **ON VIDEO**

The clown appears directly behind Matt, but as he turns to face him...Matt doesn't see anyone in front of him as Carny wraps the balloon wire around Matt's neck and pulls.

Matt grabs his neck, stumbles two steps, then falls to his knees in front of the demon clown as blood streams between his fingers and down his hands.

Carny bends toward the camera POV, then leans in close. His YELLOWED teeth and BLOODSHOT eyes contrast against his FLESH DEFORMED AND POKED FACE. But we know him. And that laugh.

It's BJ.

Or whatever remains of what he used to be.

#### **END VIDEO**

Eddie, his eyes closing, swipes his blood covered finger across the phone. The wait bar fills slowly then finishes.

The phone reads UPLOAD COMPLETE as his hand falls limp.

TITLE CARD

EXT. CAROLINA STATE CAMPUS - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Another day on a typical college campus. WORKERS assemble scaffolding for the AUTUMN FALLFEST CARNIVAL, while students mull about ignoring the chaos around them.

And with the exception of a group of people playing Frisbee on the quad, EVERYONE IS STARING AT THEIR PHONES.

- GIRL trekking across campus engrossed in her texting skillfully navigating through a crowd without looking up.

- A cute COUPLE sit on the grass taking a selfie using an AR FILTER to capture how adorable they think they are.

- BOY plugged into his phone watching a YOUTUBE video with such rapt attention that he MISSTEPS and trips on a sidewalk, nearly falling down. He spins around to make sure no one saw (no one did...they're all on their damn phones).

- TWO GIRLS posing and taking a selfie, gawking at it, giggling, then repeating with another pose and pic.

Everywhere, kids are immersed in their devices, blocking out what is happening around them. All except one.

ERIKA WALLACE (19, tall, long blonde hair, cute glasses) crosses the quad watching the Frisbee game and taking in the beautiful day.

One of the players misses as it flies toward Erika.

She watches the disc flying away from her then steels her eyes and bursts into a sprint toward it. She covers the distance quickly as the disc approaches the ground.

She slides across the grass like she's going into home plate and catches it before it hits the ground then stands up holding it over her head.

All of the players APPLAUD and WHISTLE.

DISC PLAYER  
Sweet catch! Wanna play?

ERIKA  
Next time. Have fun!

She waves to the players and tosses the disc back, then crosses the quad onto sorority row, smiling and waving to anyone who glances up from their phones to make eye contact. Which doesn't happen often.

She bounces up the manicured walkway to the-

EXT. PSI CHI OMEGA SORORITY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- beautiful multi-story brick residence house that Erika calls home away from home. Several GIRLS sit outside on the front porch ticking away on their phones.

INT. PSI CHI OMEGA SORORITY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Erika enters and bounds up the stairs passing several girls coming down chatting and texting at the same time.

Hurries down the bustling hallway and enters-

INT. ERIKA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

- her dorm room only to find her two sorority sisters BRIANA SELLARS and southern belle from the open, ASHLEY TURNER on their beds, laptops opened and phones engaged.

BRIANA

Did you see what Taylor wore last night? It was so sick.

ASHLEY

I know right? And that outfit she had on at the MET Gala? FML.

Erika drops her books on the desk and listens in.

Briana slides to her side, holds the camera out at arms length, pouts slightly then takes a selfie. She admires it, smirks, then goes back to texting.

BRIANA

We only got fifty likes on our stream last night. Fucking losers.

(sees Erika)

Oh, hey Erika. Test go okay?

ERIKA

Yeah, I think I did-

BRIANA

Did you catch the fight on Real Housewives last night?

ERIKA

-Uh, no I-

ASHLEY

Oh My God! I know right? Those women can't hold their liquor.

ERIKA

You know, if you keep watching that garbage, it's gunna kill you.

BRIANA

Okayyy mom. Whatever.

ASHLEY

You keep reporting the news, and we'll keep making it.

ERIKA

Deal. What are you two doing later?

Briana and Ashley roll over and recite the agenda.

ASHLEY

Bachelor is on at eight--

BRIANA

Love Island is on after, then-

ASHLEY/BRIANA

Live Stream!

ERIKA

You are two of a perfect pair.

ASHLEY

Hey, you're the editing queen. Can you help us later?

BRIANA

We have to build our brand. I mean, fifty likes, WTF? C'mon...please?

They get on their knees, pleading.

ERIKA

I have to do NewsDesk first. But after that, sure. I'll help build your brand. Whatever that is.

Briana and Ashley clap together and celebrate.

ASHLEY

Let's practice our TikTok!

Erika picks up her CAMERA BAG, and heads out.

INT. CAMPUS NEWS STUDIO - LATER

Two student NewsDesk ANCHORS report the latest campus news as Erika manages the control board adjusting levels. MOLLY, PAUL, and CAL, work camera, sound, and boards, respectively.

ANCHOR #1

And finally, those 'creepy clown sightings' continue around the country. And it's no joking matter.

Pictures of various clowns in different locations around the country scroll on the screen behind them.

ANCHOR #1 (cont'd)

Police are investigating several cases locally, putting a strain on necessary services.

ANCHOR #2

They're asking to not promote these activities on social media, in an effort to thwart the popularity of these types of pranks.

Anchor #1 turns toward Anchor #2 to close out the program.

ANCHOR #1

In other words, stop clowning around?

ANCHOR #2

Or go join the circus.

Both anchors chuckle uncomfortably. Just like the pros.

ANCHOR #1

That's it from us at NewsDesk, thanks for joining us.

ANCHOR #2

See you next week.

Lighting dims slowly as music cues and credits roll on the screen behind them. Erika leans into a mic.

ERIKA

And we're out. Good job everyone.

The anchor's unpin their mics and head off set. Molly and Paul prep their areas while Cal pulls out a box.

CAL

Erika, you gotta check these out.

He hands her a VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSET while he slips his set on, including a pair of shiny VR GLOVES. He resembles an odd combination of Michael Jackson and Daft Punk.

ERIKA

What are you doing?

Cal moves his hands out in front of him, randomly.

CAL

It's the future of sound board engineering in virtual reality. We can operate the board from anywhere. Watch!

He slowly moves his hand forward and Erika watches as the lever on the sound board MOVES FORWARD.

ERIKA

Whoa. That's incredible!

Cal removes his headset and smiles wide.

CAL

Just beta stage right now, but put yours on and I'll show you a game I created. It's killer!

Erika slides the headset over her head and eyes, and slides on a pair of gloves, while Cal does the same.

ERIKA

I feel stupid.

CAL

Don't be ridiculous.

The two of them face each other with their arms moving about in random slow movements, their heads turning all about. They both look totally stupid and ridiculous.

#### **POV ERIKA'S VR HEADSET**

INSIDE the headset, it's an amazing 3D, full-immersion experience, as we see the POV of Erika's virtual character, her arms reaching out and touching the graphic landscape.

ERIKA (O.S.)

I can feel it! How's that possible?

CAL (O.S.)

Motion and kinetic sensors in the gloves. Cool, right?

ERIKA (O.S.)  
It's amazing.

CAL (O.S.)  
Wait 'til you see this. Push the  
'W' in the top corner. See it?

Erika sees a large "W" and 'pushes' it. Suddenly, laid out in front of her is every possible weapon you can think of.

GUNS, GRENADE LAUNCHER, FLAMETHROWER. You name it.

ERIKA (O.S.)  
Oh my gosh. Now what?

CAL (O.S.)  
Reach out and grab one.

She picks a MACHINE GUN. The others disappear from view and she is now standing in front of a virtual target range.

ERIKA (O.S.)  
Oh man, this is awesome.

CAL (O.S.)  
Careful with the--

She motions her 'trigger finger' and the gun FIRES off ROUND AFTER ROUND, blowing up targets down field. She STRAFES the ground all around her with all the excitement.

CAL (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Let go! Let go!

Erika relaxes her finger and it stops.

### **END VR HEADSET**

Erika removes the VR headset as she catches her breath.

ERIKA  
That's unbelievable! You made all  
that?

Cal removes his headset and smiles.

CAL  
Not just me. Molly and Paul helped.  
But yeah, we did.

ERIKA  
I want to invest!

Molly and Paul interrupt mid-conversation.

MOLLY

Those clowns give me the creeps.  
Free hugs? Hell to the no!

PAUL

All I know is if a clown attacks  
me, I'm going for the juggler.

Paul freezes, waiting for the guffaws. He's still waiting.  
He grabs his neck.

PAUL (cont'd)

Juggler. Jugular. Get it?

Erika, Cal, and Molly stare blankly at him.

MOLLY

Did I tell you I was in love with  
an idiot?

(points at VR headset)

I got next.

Erika hands the VR Headset to Molly and waves goodbye.

ERIKA

Heading to Jameson's.

Molly's already got the headset on and blowing up shit as  
Cal and Paul wave her off.

CAL/PAUL

Later!

EXT. CAMPUS DORM - LATER

Erika knocks on a door and enters a disaster zone of dirty  
clothes and empty pizza boxes.

Her friend JAMESON STEPHENS (19, athletic) plays XBOX with  
his roommate KYLE FITZPATRICK (19, Player1 from the open) as  
they argue.

ERIKA

The way you two live is disgusting.

JAMESON

Our ecosystem is perfect.

She carefully moves a pile of crap off the bed and onto the  
floor to find a halfway clean place to sit down.