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6 Russian and Soviet Movies to Get You in the Halloween Spirit

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"Viy" pits the pious against the demonic. **Screenshot / FSUE Mosfilm cinema concern / YouTube**

While Halloween isn't a widely celebrated holiday in Russia, there are plenty of scary, spellbinding and downright gruesome tales to be found in the country's rich literary and cinematic canons.

And with Russia on partial lockdown starting Saturday, there's no better way to spend Halloween than revisiting some of these at home.

We've compiled a list of some of the most frightfully entertaining Russian and Soviet films to watch this Halloween weekend. Some are available with English subtitles, but most are in Russian:

Viy (1967)

Based on the horror story of the same name by 19th-century writer Nikolai Gogol, "Viy" tells the story of a young priest who is ordered to stand vigil over the dead body of a young woman.

Over the next three nights he is beset by increasingly terrifying apparitions, with witches, demons and other evil powers vying for his soul and putting his faith to the ultimate test.

The first and only horror film to be produced in Soviet Russia, “Viy” is considered a masterpiece of Russian and Soviet horror even today.

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[The Hound of the Baskervilles (1981)]

The Soviet television adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories became one of the most popular shows in the U.S.S.R. and was constantly quoted and rewatched by families.

"The Hound of the Baskervilles," the third film in the six-part series shot in the 1980s, tells the story of a British noble who spent his youth in America and suddenly comes to inherit an old mansion in Britain. However, the estate’s owners tend to die in mysterious, seemingly supernatural circumstances. Sherlock Holmes and his associates try to make out how they died and how to keep the current owner alive.

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[The Canterville Ghost (1970)]

Based on the 1887 short story by Oscar Wilde in 1887, "The Canterville Ghost" also tells the story of Americans moving to an old British castle and encountering the supernatural. The Soviet cartoon is a lighthearted and humorous tale of ghosts and children getting along.

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[Mister Designer (1988)]

With the mysterious bohemian atmosphere of early-20th-century St. Petersburg as its setting, “Mister Designer” was one of the first attempts to make a thriller in the Soviet Union. Based on the short story “The Gray Automobile” by Alexander Grin, the film tells a story of an artist-designer grappling with ideas of beauty, death and resurrection.

The movie is filled with elements of modern art, fashion and eroticism, reflecting the artistic decadence of pre-Revolutionary Russia. The film is also known for its music composed by Sergei Kuryokhin, one of the leading Russian composers of the time.

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[Icci (2020)]

In the remote republic of Sakha in Russia’s Far East, a young family visiting their family in the

wilderness face a chain of supernatural events rooted in a tragedy that happened long ago. The characters face their own fears while confronting an ancient demonic power linked to local indigenous beliefs.

In addition to being filmed on-location in Sakha, “Icci” was also shot in Yakut, the region’s native language. “Icci” is one of the many films to come from the region in recent years amid a flowering of homegrown filmmaking culture known as Sakhawood.

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Devil’s Flower (2010)

In “Devil’s Flower,” a college student is haunted by supernatural characters in her dreams. She and her friend discover an old book that plunges them into a world beyond reality. Although it has some similarities with the “Twilight” films, “Devil’s Flower” is mostly famous in Russia for how bad it is; the movie was panned by reviewers and even received awards for being an exceptionally bad film. But it's often the “worst” movies that become cult classics.

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