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## the overnight desk

## What a way to Poe: Lugosi and Karloff star in 'The Black Cat' at SIFF Cinema on Oct. 27

Two of film's masters of horror team up for the first time in the devilishly dark flick

By Sheri Quirt  
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NWsource staff



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"Supernatural, perhaps ... baloney, perhaps not." Bela and Boris compete to see who has the best glower.

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When the coming attractions tease a film starring Bela Lugosi as a psychiatrist and Boris Karloff as a cultured madman in a tale "suggested by" Edgar Allan Poe, you know you're in for a deliciously wicked evening at the pictures. The horror giants' 1934 buddy flick, ["The Black Cat,"](#) screens Monday, Oct. 27 at [SIFF Cinema](#) as part of the "Dark Nights" series.

The story opens on two ineffectual actors as hapless American honeymooners, traveling through Eastern Europe and oblivious to the fact that it's probably not a good sign when Bela Lugosi is booked into your train compartment. But Bela is in fact the good guy this time -- or at least, the less deranged guy -- on his way to Karloff's creepy mansion on a hill to settle an old score.

A stormy night and a road accident draw the newlyweds into the web to, yes, spend the night in the haunted castle. Built on the site of a WWI massacre 15 years before, the house is an art deco dream of chrome, lighting, geometry and the de rigueur majestic staircase. You half expect Fred Astaire to pop out from behind a door in white tie and tails.

Karloff effortlessly blows the other performers into next week whenever he's onscreen, even when he isn't speaking. David Bowie could make an interesting go at the role in a remake; but it's a task to imagine a replacement for the moon-faced Lugosi, elegant, dignified and impossible to watch without feeling a tug of sympathy for his real-life fate.

The film flies by in a surfeit of smoking jackets, bumbling gendarmes, Satanic rituals, sacrificial virgins and a gallery of female corpses Karloff keeps on hand for unspecified recreational purposes -- all in just 65 minutes! None of the Poe I read in school played anything like this.

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