Darkness Falls Across the Land

For the past few years, I’ve had one of the most interesting jobs to attempt to have a conversation about. When you tell people, “I work in shows at Six Flags,” a number of questions come up. “What shows do you do?” “Do you dance?” “Do you wear the costumes?” So, what is it that I actually do? Allow me to show you.
Right now, Six Flags is celebrating the fall with its annual Fright Fest program. As you enter the turnstile, you’re greeted not with cheery pop music, but with grating organ tunes and Michael Jackson’s “Thriller.” Instead of shrubs and flowers, corn stalks and tombstones line the Main Street Graveyard. As the path splits into a large cobblestone walkway in front of the gazebo, you see some familiar friends from the summer. Looney Tunes Daffy Duck and Marvin the Martian wave in front of the Looney Tunes Emporium, surrounded by a gaggle of small children. Marvin lines them up along one side of the path, while Daffy waits on the opposite side.
But they are not alone.

Two boys in suits limp over in line with them, their faces pale and tattered with stitches and smears of blood. They instruct the children to hold out their arms and lumber slowly toward Daffy Duck. Green light. Daffy turns around and the swarm of zombie children charge forth, hungering for duck brains. Red light. Daffy turns back toward them, and the horde stops.

Some of the children refuse to go near the zombified boys, holding up their “ghoul repellent” glow-in-the-dark spider rings. The zombies assure them that they’re nice and they won’t scare them during the day.

But when the sun goes down, everything changes.

Shortly after dusk, I hurry down the south end of the park. Through the gates of Area 51, an alien lunges at a group of girls with a guttural yell. Nearby employees can’t help but chuckle as they scream and stumble forward. Area 51 soon turns into Demon District, where smiling clowns in grotesque make-up shriek and cackle at groups of guests. I make it safely past the clowns and to the employee exit.
Instead of clocking out, I turn and climb the stairs to the make-up room. “What are we doing today?” asks one of the make-up artists. I sit down in one of the chairs and say, “Our Russian friend will be ticket-taking at the Mansion.” A couple of the artists smile, eager for the return of the famous Anya Stalingrad. Freshly painted in the style of the dead, I power walk back through the midway of screaming monsters and up the hill to the Midnight Mansion attraction. After a quick costume change, Anya Stalingrad emerges from the side door. “Preev yet, my darlings,” she says in a thick Russian accent. Her face is ghostly pale and gaunt with decay, and a lush fur cape hangs off her shoulders. “How many in group?” she asks the next person in line. “Line up against fence, and stay back.” When someone steps out of line, she turns and screams at them, “I say back against fence!” until they timidly shuffle backwards. A smile slides across her lifeless face whenever a scream echoes.
up the hill as she counts her way through the cue line in the chill, moonlit night.

By closing time, it's hard to tell the living from the dead. The house full of zombies slumps over, exhausted and hoarse as the supervisors play another round of “who broke what?” By the time I finally get back home, anywhere between 11:30 p.m. and 1:30 a.m., I look like I crawled out of a coffin.

And that’s just one day. There are seven more left of Fright Fest at Six Flags New England in Agawam, Massachusetts. Do you dare to join me in walking among the dead?