

## Viy

Prepared by: Ricky Wilson, 2004-03-30

### Background Info

This film does an excellent job of following its source material, and as such the plot of the film is nearly identical to that of Gogol's composition. Khoma Brut and two friends set off for home during their school vacation and become waylaid in a dense fog. They come upon a small farm run by an old woman who begrudgingly gives them lodging for the night. Khoma is forced to sleep in the barn and is accosted in the middle of the night by the crone who, through the use of magic, climbs upon his shoulders and proceeds to ride him through the air. Khoma, ever the bright young lad, eventually deduces that this woman is, indeed, a witch. Through invoking the power of the cross he turns the tables and forces the woman off him, upon which he begins to beat her with a stick. After a sound thrashing she becomes a beautiful young girl who moans she is dying, and Khoma runs off into the night. Upon arriving back at the seminary he is greeted by his headmaster's order to go read the scriptures over the deceased daughter of a wealthy landowner, as apparently she requested that he do with her dying breath. Khoma immediately realizes the unpleasant parallels between this girl, who was mysteriously beaten to death, and the witch from the prior night. Under severe coercion he travels to the estate and is forced to read the scriptures for two nights, during which he is tormented by the undead witch. We begin our clip during the gloaming of the third and final night ...

### Film Studies Info

**Forced Perspective:** Forced Perspective is a broad category, including everything from making Tokyo look life-size in a Godzilla movie to facilitating upside-down antics in the video for Lionel Ritchie's classic "Dancin' on the Ceiling." What it really boils down to is creatively altering the proportions or alignment of set pieces to give the viewer a distorted sense of space. If, for one reason or another, a film requires the laws of gravity to be shifted, it is extremely easy to simply build the sets upside down, horizontal-side-up, or whatever else may be called for and then just flip the film upside down. This is used in **Viy** during the final haunting scene when the imps are crawling down the walls of the church. In this case, the filmmaker would simply build the "wall" on the floor and film the scene from a bird's-eye view. Then, when the imps just scuttle from the "top" to the "bottom" on the floor, it really appears that they are crawling down a vertical wall. A far more extreme example of this technique was used in the filming of David Cronenberg's remake of **The Fly**. The script called for Jeff Goldblum, accidentally mutating into a human/fly hybrid, not just to walk on the wall or ceiling, but actually to make a circuit of all four walls of a room. To create this effect, the filmmakers built a huge mock-up of the room on what amounted to a gerbil wheel skewed about 45 degrees. Thus, when Goldblum "walked" across the room, the room actually shifted while he remained in place.

**Blue-Screen/Green-Screen:** Remember matte painting from **Tsar Saltan**? Well, what if instead of a static city scene or forest you need some action in the background? Say a

rampaging dinosaur or, in the case of **Viy**, gigantic ghostly hands? That's where blue-screen (or more recently, green-screen) comes in. What this technique does, in effect, is transpose one image over another, creating a layering effect which can cause an actor or actress to be doing anything from flying over a cityscape to fending off said ghostly hands. The actor stands in front of a screen literally painted bright blue and acts as he would in the aforementioned scenario. Then, whatever action will take place in the background is filmed on another segment of film. Thus, for the scene in which Khoma is menaced by the gigantic hands there would be one shot with Khoma cowering over his podium in front of a gigantic blue sheet and another shot of the spooky hands reaching out of a miniature set (another example of forced perspective!). Then, using specialized film printing, everything colored blue in the shot with Khoma (i.e., the background) is removed, leaving clear film, and this image is then matched up with and overlaid with the shot of the spooky hands. The final effect is Khoma being menaced by gigantic hands all around him without the need for any actual giant hands. It was later discovered that green was easier to blot out on video and other more modern equipment, so facilities will now often have "green rooms" as opposed to "blue rooms" for this purpose. This technique is still practiced today, but the vast majority of the clipping and pasting is done on a computer editing suite as opposed to an actual, mechanical film processor.