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OR VIEWS OF METRO GOLDWYN MAYER STUDIOS INC., ARROW FILMS, AND/OR THEIR  
RESPECTIVE AFFILIATES AND/OR EMPLOYEES.

# **CAST**

**KAY LENZ**

Sarah Goodwin

**TONY BILL**

Paul Yates

**KATHRYN CROSBY**

Mrs. Goodwin

**MORGAN FAIRCHILD**

Jennifer Lawrence

**MORGAN BRITTANY**

Patty Goodwin

**ROBERT HAYS**

Scott Rafferty

**SHELLEY WINTERS**

Mrs. Erica Hunter

**TISA FARROW**

Alberta "Mouse"



## **CREW**

Directed by  
**ROBERT DAY**

Produced by  
**JAY BENSON**

Teleplay by  
**DON INGALLS, CAROL SARACENO  
& KENETTE GFELLER**

Story by  
**TOM HOLLAND & CAROL SARACENO**

Director of Photography  
**RIC WAITE**

Film Editing by  
**ANTHONY DIMARCO**

Music by  
**JOHNNY HARRIS**



# The Initiation Of Sarah

An innocent coed, a secret sorority,  
its bizarre rites of womanhood...  
Suddenly, a quiet college campus is  
plunged into an endless night of terror!



# “WE’RE YOUR SISTERS NOW”: BONDS OF SISTERHOOD IN THE INITIATION OF SARAH AND SORORITY HORROR FILMS

by Lindsay Hallam

Sororities and fraternities are a predominantly American phenomenon. Also referred to as Greek-letter organizations, they are societies located at colleges and universities, where students apply for membership and are subjected to a hazing period where their loyalties are tested. Those who make it through are then initiated into the group and live in the sorority or fraternity house for the duration of their studies, but membership is for life and continues on after graduation.

On screen sororities and fraternities have been represented primarily in two genres: comedy and horror. “Frat-boy humor” became popular in the 1980s in films such as *National Lampoon’s Animal House* (1978) and *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), showing fraternities populated by sex-crazed young men who partied hard. The focus was on lowbrow gags based on bodily functions and silly pranks; while there were often battles between different fraternities, or with misfits excluded from the fraternal system, the tone was always light and irreverent and no one ever really got hurt.

When it comes to sororities on screen though, things take a darker turn. While there are sorority comedies such as *H.O.T.S.* (1979) and *The House Bunny* (2008), sororities are more often featured in horror, where the female-only space of the sorority house is intruded upon by malevolent and dangerous forces. These forces can sometimes come from within the sorority itself, generated by internal rivalries, jealousy, or a shared secret, or they come from without, forcing the sorority sisters to band together in solidarity. The notion of “sisterhood” is thus always central, as women who are not related by blood become bonded together through a mutual life-threatening experience. As is often the case in horror films, the question at the center is whether to look after number one and

save yourself, or to risk your life for the sake of others. Ultimately, the moral of the sorority horror film is that the sisterhood always comes first.

The first “sorority horror” dates back to the 1932 film *Thirteen Women*. In this film a group of women who were once sorority sisters get their horoscopes read by a swami, who then replies to them all in writing, each of them receiving word of a tragic event to come. One by one they succumb to the different fates foretold to them, until one of the women finds that the swami has been under the influence of Ursula Georgi, who had been rejected by the sorority due to being mixed-race. While Ursula’s non-whiteness is used to render her as both exotic and dangerous, her vengeance stems from the prevailing exclusivity and racism inherent in the sorority system (something that is addressed in later sorority horror films such as the 2019 remake of *Black Christmas* and the television series *Scream Queens* [2015–2016], and is tackled head on in Spike Lee’s 1988 musical *School Daze*).

## SORORITY SLASHERS

The sorority horror film does not really come into its own until the 1970s, with two films in particular from this decade establishing the common tropes: Bob Clark’s 1974 film *Black Christmas*, and the 1978 TV movie *The Initiation of Sarah*. *Black Christmas* is now recognized as the first slasher film (predating John Carpenter’s *Halloween* by four years), with its primary setting in a sorority house repeated several times in slashers of the 1980s, as in *The House on Sorority Row* (1982), and *Sorority House Massacre* (1986).

In *Black Christmas* the sorority provides a support network for the women as they negotiate with the wider patriarchal society, where they face pressures and problems such as unwanted pregnancy and sexual harassment. However, the safe space of the sorority house is soon invaded, first by obscene phone calls, and then by a killer who begins murdering the sorority sisters one-by-one. It is eventually revealed that the killer is hiding within the house, but the film ends ambiguously with the killer’s identity still not clear. The only clarity there is comes from the knowledge that the threat of violence is everywhere and all men are capable of committing it.

This exposure of a larger culture of misogyny is emphasised further in the 2019 remake, which highlights the prevalence of rape and sexual assault that is rife on college campuses. The slasher film (often itself accused of being inherently misogynist) provides a vehicle to




demonstrate that the constant threat of violence that women face in horror films is in fact a threat that most women feel on a daily basis.

## SUPERNATURAL SISTERS

While the sorority slasher presents an external threat to sisterhood, *The Initiation of Sarah* marks the beginning of a tendency in sorority horror toward the supernatural. Here the threat is more internal, with the protagonist having to battle different aspects of herself and her emerging powers.


Sold as “*Carrie goes to college*,” *The Initiation of Sarah* follows a young woman, Sarah (Kay Lenz), as she and her sister Patty (Morgan Brittany) enter college but become separated after they pledge to different sororities. Patty is confident and attractive and receives a warm welcome from Alpha Nu Sigma (ANS), the sorority that their mother was also a part of previously, while Sarah’s awkward shyness sees her being blackballed. Instead, Sarah pledges to Phi Epsilon Delta (PED), a less popular sorority presided over by house mother Mrs. Hunter (Shelley Winters), who recognizes that Sarah has unique abilities. Sarah has telekinesis, shown in the film’s opening scene when she uses her power to fend off a young man who tries to force himself on Patty (setting her up as her sister’s protector). After Sarah is subjected to an awful prank instigated by Jennifer (Morgan Fairchild) and the girls of ANS, Sarah begins to get her revenge. Mrs. Hunter convinces Sarah to use her powers as part of PED’s initiation ceremony, telling her that ANS and PED have a long history of rivalry, with Sarah being key to restoring PED back to its former glory and dominance.

Mrs Hunter is a professor at the college, who teaches “magical practices among primitive peoples.” Her interest in ancient cultures and magic is not just intellectual though, as she transforms the sorority’s initiation ceremony into an occult ritual. As Peg Aloï writes, *The Initiation of Sarah* is part of a string of television movies of the period that cashed in the Occult Revival of the late 1960s–mid 1970s, citing other examples such as *Satan’s School for Girls* (1973), *Summer of Fear* (aka *Stranger in Our House*, 1978), and *Midnight Offerings* (1981). Aloï further argues that these TV movies, and other films such as *Night of the Demon* (1957) and *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), “focus on the physical trappings of magic (the use of special tools and ritual objects, incantations and gestures),” as a way to “equate the occult with intellectual and social elitism.”<sup>71</sup>




Sororities are a prime example of an exclusive and elitist space, with several films presenting the process of initiation as one that is imbued with magical and occult undertones. *Sisters of Death* (1977), for example, opens with an initiation that goes wrong, as a game of Russian roulette results in the death of one of the pledges. The young women in the ceremony wear matching lavender dresses and veils, with the pledges sitting on what looks like an altar, clearly likening the sorority to a witches coven.

In many sorority horror films the protagonist experiences prophetic dreams and visions, as in *Sorority House Massacre*, *The House on Sorority Row*, and *The Initiation* (1984), with the paranormal and the mystical, aligned with the feminine space of the sorority house, often put in opposition to reason and science, in the form of a male scientist. In *The Initiation* there is a romance between the lead character, Kelly, and a Psychology T.A. who carries out scientific experiments on Kelly in order to find out the meaning behind her recurring nightmares. This mirrors the relationship between Sarah and the T.A. of her Psychology class, Paul (Tony Bill), who tries to convince Sarah that her abilities are all in her head.



The girls of PED, a group of outcasts rejected by other sororities, predate the self-proclaimed “weirdos” of *The Craft* (1996) who embrace their outsider status. In the PED house Sarah strikes up a particularly strong friendship with Mouse (Tisa Farrow), who is similarly shy and quiet. After Patty is forced to cut ties with Sarah or be expelled from ANS, we see Sarah forging a new sisterly bond with Mouse. As Jennifer informs Patty, the girls in the sorority “are your sisters now,” signalling that the ties that bind a sorority are as thick as blood. This point is even confirmed by Patty and Sarah’s mother, who has instilled in both of them from a young age the importance of ANS to her own college experience, remaining deeply connected to it as the Head of the Alumni Committee. Many sororities prioritize “legacy” pledges, but when ANS reject Sarah their mother urges Patty to remain, insisting that Patty shift her allegiance to her new sisters.



## BLOOD SISTERS

Patty and Sarah’s sisterhood is further challenged by the fact they are not biologically related, as Sarah was adopted when Patty was a baby. In many sorority horror films this notion of sisterhood as going beyond blood relations comes up often. For example, in the 2006 remake of *Black Christmas* the protagonist Kelli is an only child who continually states that the sorority is her family. This sisterhood is contrasted with the perverted



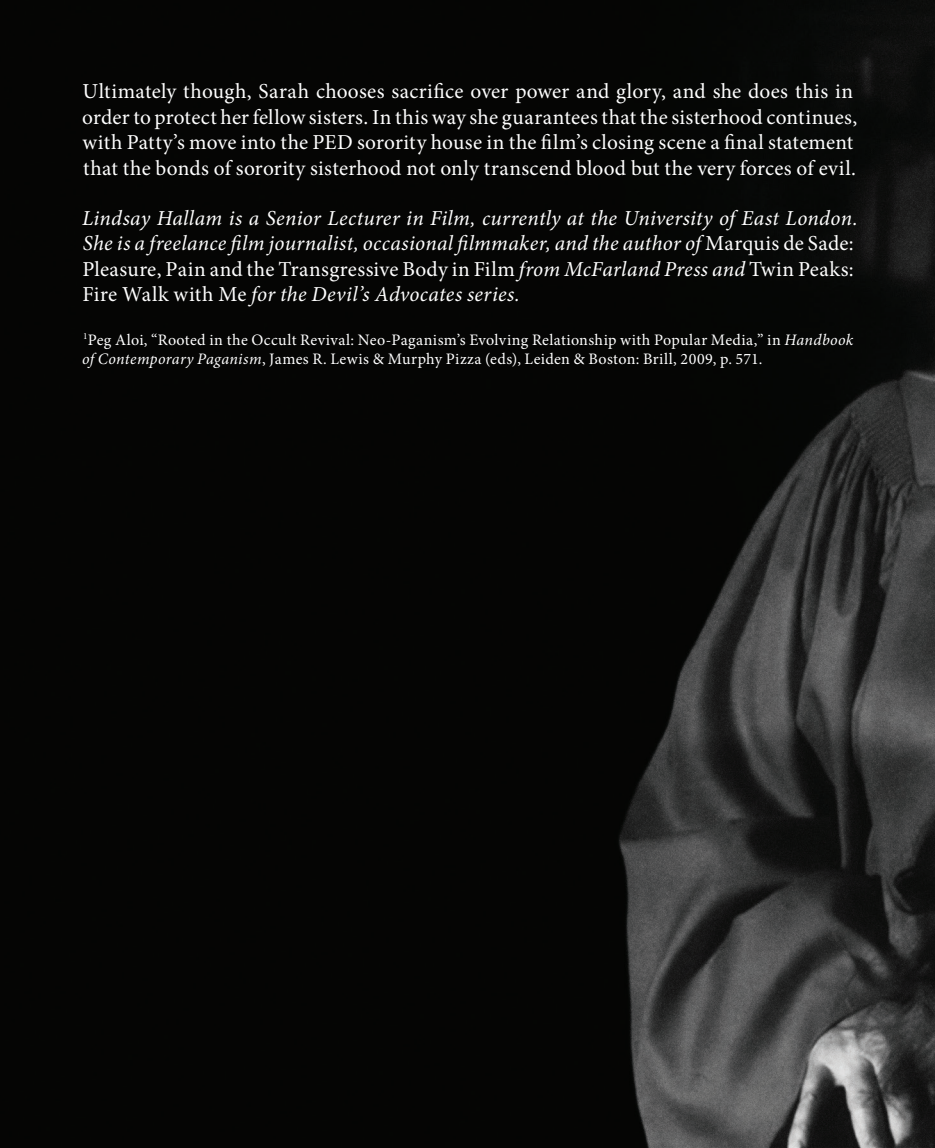
family relations of the killer, Billy, whose sister, Agnes, is the product of incest between Billy and his/their mother and joins him in his killing spree. In this instance, the non-biological bond is pure while the direct family relationship is warped and corrupted.

And yet, the purity of the sisterly bond in sorority horror comes from a struggle that involves pain, blood, and death. In her seminal book *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) Barbara Creed analyzes *Carrie*, the main influence on *The Initiation of Sarah*, and argues that the titular character is an example of the witch archetype whose supernatural abilities are linked to her changing body and the beginning of menstruation. Throughout the film *Carrie* is associated with blood, from the opening scene where she experiences her first period, to the prom night prank where she is soaked in a bucket of pig's blood. Both events are catalysts for her telekinetic powers to come forth, culminating in *Carrie*'s fiery revenge.

In contrast, *The Initiation of Sarah* is bloodless, having to tone down the violence and gore for a television audience. Like *Carrie* though, *Sarah* is also subjected to a horrible prank but is pelted with mud and eggs (a substance also associated with maternal femininity and birth) rather than blood, similarly rendering her as disgusting and abject.

As stated previously, several sorority horror films present sorority sisters as witches and *The Initiation of Sarah* climaxes with a witches ceremony, presided over by Mrs. Hunter. Intercutting between the two initiations, the blue and yellow robes and silly jokes (such as pretending peeled grapes are eyes) used by ANS seem like child's play in contrast to the black robes and hoods worn by PED. Mrs. Hunter stands at an altar clad in red, speaking in incantations and holding a knife, giving the initiation the look of a Satanic ritual.

While Creed argued that the figure of the witch is associated with the changes of puberty and menstruation, there is another common representation of the witch as hag, an older woman who is no longer fertile. In witch trials of the past, it was often old and middle-aged women who were accused of witchcraft, in some cases even charged with feeding on the blood of children. Mrs. Hunter not only uses Sarah's powers but also her youth to return PED back to what it once was, showing Sarah a photo of herself when she was younger and telling her how she was once surrounded by male attention. It is not surprising then that Sarah's revenge on Jennifer involves turning her old and decrepit, the loss of youth and beauty presented as a fate worse than death.



Ultimately though, Sarah chooses sacrifice over power and glory, and she does this in order to protect her fellow sisters. In this way she guarantees that the sisterhood continues, with Patty's move into the PED sorority house in the film's closing scene a final statement that the bonds of sorority sisterhood not only transcend blood but the very forces of evil.

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<sup>1</sup>Peg Aloï, "Rooted in the Occult Revival: Neo-Paganism's Evolving Relationship with Popular Media," in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, James R. Lewis & Murphy Pizza (eds), Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009, p. 571.









# FROM PARIAH TO POWER: TRANSGRESSIVE ABILITIES IN THE INITIATION OF SARAH


by Alexandra West

There are many rites of passage for young people which can include anything from first kisses, to travel, to moving out on your own. These narratives are omnipresent in our culture because they are universal. We all grow to varying degrees thanks to these moves from childhood to adulthood which can often have some element of trauma attached to them. We fail and we learn, hoping to take those learnings to our next obstacle if we're lucky enough to survive these rites. The horror genre has long been fascinated with this process. From the folk and fairy tales that the Brothers Grimm collected to teen slasher films, some storytellers understand that growing up can be Hell.

One of the most iconic depictions of this narrative has to be Carrie White's. From Stephen King's 1974 epistolary novel *Carrie*, a rampant audience devoured the title character's story, a social pariah with telekinetic abilities that emerge when she gets her first period at the start of the book which culminate when she burns down her high school gym (and most of her small town) during the prom with most of her classmates inside after her bully plays a cruel prank on her.

King's novel was shortly followed by Brian De Palma's 1976 film adaptation of the same name. The film was a critical and box office success, earning Academy Award nominations for Sissy Spacek as Carrie and Piper Laurie as her mother Margaret. If you can count on Hollywood for anything, it's that a success story will almost certainly yield a lot of content inspired by said success.


Just as Joe Dante's *Piranha* (1978) followed the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), so Robert Day's *The Initiation of Sarah* followed *Carrie*. And, like *Piranha*, *The Initiation of Sarah* is also a wild, over the top, heartfelt, and ultimately satisfying experience in and of itself. The lens of the film as a TV movie adds a touch of camp value to proceedings,



with scenes that end on characters staring into space where a commercial break was once inserted to a rather dark narrative that offers none of the blood and gore it hints at.

While *The Initiation of Sarah* can happily exist in the space of a camp cult film, it's worth examining how the film evolves the narrative that began with *Carrie*. Sarah's telekinetic abilities may have been inspired by the success of Stephen King's novel and the film adaptation, but Day's film offers a deeper investigation into the social constructs of college and the young adult experience through the popular genre trope of a young woman with telekinetic abilities. If, as King wrote in *Danse Macabre* (1981), his tome about the horror genre, "*Carrie* is largely about how women find their own channels of power," then *The Initiation of Sarah* is about how women use those channels of power to create their own paths and narratives.

The invisibility of Carrie and Sarah's telekinetic powers parallel their invisibility or rejection by larger societal institutions. By utilizing these "outcasts" or "pariahs" as the audience conduit, we're allowed to see the fallacy of these institutions which are intent on co-opting or rejecting these women. Sarah's telekinetic ability may be invisible to the naked eye, but her use of it allows for the social changes within power structures to occur and ultimately, it is implied, create lasting change.



At the beginning of the film, Sarah's (Kay Lenz) power is perceptible to us the audience but invisible or ignored by those around her. The two main set pieces which rather unsuitably set the stage are when Sarah saves her adopted sister Patty (Morgan Brittany) from being assaulted on the beach in the opening scene and when Sarah almost kills Patty after she agrees to pledge with the popular sorority Alpha Nu Sigma who forbid Patty from interacting with Sarah.

The opening scene at a rather randy beach party shows Sarah and Patty on their last day at the home they know. When Patty is approached by a man on the beach who negs her about her body surfing ability she takes him up on his offer to give her some pointers and heads to the water with him. Almost immediately he starts getting aggressively handsy with her amidst Patty's repeated cries of "Stop!" and "No!" The camera closes in on Sarah's eyes as she furrows her brow and telekinetically sends him flying back into the water, freeing Patty from his grasp. The lack of any notice from anyone else on the beach and Patty's quiet reaction seem to minimize the interaction as it's never brought up again but illustrates how upsettingly normalized this kind of behavior is in social settings. The film implies that if it were not for Sarah, something very, very bad could have happened



to Patty and no one would be the wiser. This allows the audience into Sarah's POV to show the weight of such an interaction. Immediately we the audience are aligned with Sarah and weary of the world which she exists in. We are not Patty, we are Sarah who protects Patty.

Within moments of arriving on campus, Patty is scouted by the sorority Alpha Nu Sigma who her mother was also a member of and has advised her to pledge with. Sarah is invited to join the "undesirable" Phi Epsilon Delta. After discovering their social fates, Patty's new (sorority) sister Jennifer (Morgan Fairchild) informs Patty that as a pledge she's not allowed to interact with members of Phi Epsilon Delta (who ANS refer to as Pigs, Elephants, and Dogs).

Patty acquiesces to Jennifer's request and Sarah runs off only to observe a fraternity lifting a piano to a floor above the quad with a makeshift rope system. Patty runs after Sarah, pausing under the piano when she catches sight of her. Day uses the same film language of tense music and a close-up on Sarah's eyes to indicate Sarah's anger at Patty at rejecting one sisterhood for another. The tension in this scene builds as we the audience wonder if Sarah's hurt feelings will get the better of her. However, in an inverted Carrie White fashion, while Sarah does cause the ropes to snap and the piano to come crashing down but pushes Patty out of the way at the last moment. To outside observers, this appears like an unfortunate accident with Sarah as the hero. These two incidents within the first 30 minutes of the film separate Sarah from her cinematic cousin Carrie. Sarah's deep ties to other women ground her ability in a world of nuance, rather than scorched earth. We see the power she can wield and how it has already upended an attempted assault and caused an attempted murder, yet no one but us and Sarah are the wiser.

As Sarah settles into Phi Epsilon Delta, her nervousness at her marked social status begins to dissipate as she finds kinship with the new women around her who are less concerned with status than those in Alpha Nu Sigma. Sarah begins to develop connections with those around her, particularly the quiet, classical music-playing Mouse (Tisa Farrow).

Here we see a departure in notions of sisters for Sarah. Sarah's adopted sister Patty is an inverted mirror of Sarah, popular, outgoing, beautiful, and well-liked whereas Sarah seems to be merely tolerated for the mortal social sins of being quiet and shy. Through Patty, we see the trappings of the social constructs at play at college, ones which her mother lauds the benefits of. Patty, we worry, will be doomed to follow in the same footsteps as her mother, Mrs. Goodwin (Kathryn Grant), joining the same sorority as her

and rising through the ranks till Patty can one day relive her glory years when the time comes to send her daughter off to college.


However, Patty's love for her adopted sister slowly but surely erodes her status at Alpha Nu Sigma. In contrast, Sarah's shy kindness and genuine interest in those around her begins to allow her to flourish, distinct from Patty. As she begins to enjoy her new sisterhood, she's determined to bring her new sisters with her, which delights house mother Mrs. Hunter (Shelley Winters) who recognizes Sarah's supernatural abilities and is determined to use them to bring glory back to Phi Epsilon Delta after a decades-long fight with Alpha Nu Sigma. The turn within the film is the co-option of Sarah's powers by Mrs. Hunter. Mrs. Hunter sees Sarah's abilities as a way to right an initiation gone wrong decades prior when Mrs. Hunter was student president of Phi Epsilon Delta. An act, which, if successful, would cause untold harm and death to both sororities.

Through this narrative, Sarah becomes the most powerful character in the film. As her confidence grows Sarah begins to stand up for herself and her friends while Jennifer is obsessed with humiliating Sarah and causing her downfall after Sarah telekinetically flings Jennifer into a water feature on campus, similar to what she did to the "Beach Jerk" in the opening scene.

Western society has never been particularly fond of women having power. Alpha Nu Sigma presents the socially acceptable way for women to have power through an ornately femininely decorated sorority house, constantly dressing in outfits befitting young Stepford Wives and fetishized views from certain bedroom windows in the sorority house that allow the occupant to observe the fraternity next door, inferring a pick-your-husband kind of scenario. Over at Phi Epsilon Delta, the young women and house mother are presented as shabby and undeserving of attention though it seems a heck of lot more adult and fun there even before Sarah's powers are put to use. As the young women—at Sarah encouragement and Mrs. Hunter's insistence—begin to have fun and occupy more space on campus, so Jennifer's rage grows as she tries to manipulate Patty and cast Sarah back to the shadows of the social calendar.

The young women of Phi Epsilon Delta are coded as Other and given our allegiance as audience members to Sarah and those who are nice to her, we are shown the value of Otherness. This is still a relatively new narrative in Western culture. Previously, undesirable women were outcasts meant to be ignored, feared, and rejected from society. In the most extreme circumstances, such as the European and American witch hunts,






they were killed. The figure of the powerful young woman with supernatural abilities is nothing new historically, from witches to martyrs to women who simply didn't fall in line with social expectations, they have existed in countless stories and historical proceedings. What is new in the last few decades is their narrative retribution. In Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's 1972 cult book, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, Ehrenreich and English lay out the issue:


Unfortunately, the witch herself—poor and illiterate—did not leave us her story. It was recorded, like all history by the educated elite, so that today we know the witch only through the eyes of her persecutors.

And what is Sarah if not a witch? If we think of the witch as a woman with exceptional abilities (real or imagined) who can't or won't fall in line with societal expectations, then Sarah easily fits the bill. By making Sarah the audience conduit and seeing the power she can have over others through genuine connection, we see the fallacy of normalcy. Sarah's abilities allow her to expose and right the wrongs of a society hellbent on lineage and restored power. It is her connections, primarily to Mouse and Patty, that allow her see how deep the hypocrisy runs.



In her final act, after Mrs. Hunter has gotten Sarah to disrupt Alpha Nu Sigma's theatrical initiation which sees Sarah use her powers to give Jennifer a face resembling a papier-mâché project gone horribly wrong, Sarah stops the spell-like Phi Epsilon Delta initiation ceremony when she realizes it cannot be completed without Mouse's death. Rather than see her dear friend killed to solidify power after decades long in-fighting which has nothing to do with these women, Sarah engulfs both herself and Mrs. Hunter in flames, ending the madness with the hopes of something new rising from the ashes.

S. Elizabeth writes in *The Art of the Occult* (2020), "we can count on the witch to shift the narrative. In actual fact, the witch shifts the paradigm. A witch shifts power." While we cannot know the outcome from the night of the initiation, the film ends with Patty moving into Phi Epsilon Delta and Mouse helping her. There is a palpable sense of loss that Sarah cannot be with them, but hope that past trauma and grudges can be left in the past and that the women who survived can forge their own way forward.



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# ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*The Initiation of Sarah* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.33:1 with mono audio.  
The film was originally produced for American television.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution at Company 3, Los Angeles. The film was graded and restored at Dragon DI, Wales. The original audio mix was remastered by MGM.

All materials for this restoration were made available by MGM.

Restoration supervised by James White and James Pearcey,  
Arrow Films

Dragon DI: Owain Morgan, Khristian Hawkes

Company 3: David Morales, Heidi Tebo

MGM: Scott Grossman



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Technical Producer **James White**

Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**

Disc Production Manager **Beatriz Alcala**

QC **Aidan Doyle**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Authoring **Leroy Moore, The Engine House Media Services**

Artwork by **Luke Insect**

Design **Scott Saslow**

# SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Heather Buckley, Scott Grossman, Lindsay Hallam,  
Ethan Halo, Khristian Hawkes, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas,  
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David Morales, Owain Morgan, Stacie Ponder, Heidi Tebo,  
Alexandra West, Jonathan Zaurin



FCD2300 / AV451

**"THE INITIATION OF SARAH"** STARRING **KAY LENZ** **TONY BILL** **KATHRYN CROSBY** ALSO STARRING **MORGAN FAIRCHILD**  
**MORGAN BRITTANY** **ROBERT HAYS** SPECIAL GUEST STAR **SHELLEY WINTERS** DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **RIC WAITE**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **CHARLES FRIES** PRODUCED BY **JAY BENSON** TELEPLAY BY **DON INGALLS** **CAROL SARACENO** & **KENETTE GFELLER**

STORY BY **TOM HOLLAND** & **CAROL SARACENO** DIRECTED BY **ROBERT DAY**

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