Our previous battle…

…was a heckuva long time ago. Jeepers! My apologies. But we’re back on track and ready to announce the winner of the last fight!

If you’ll recall, Tawny Kitaen of *Witchboard* was up against Janet Wright of the lesser-known *American Gothic*. It’s not a surprise to learn that Ms. Kitaen takes the win and will move onto the semi-final round. We wish we could see more of Ms. Wright’s fabulous Fanny (that didn’t sound quite right), but she will take a bow and leave the ring for good. As for Kitaen’s Linda, we’ll see you in the near future. Get some rest, stop playing the damn board by yourself and prepare for your next battle!

Final votes for “Mummy Babies & Ouija Boards”? Not a tremendous turn-out (may I remind all of you fantastic voters that Facebook “likes” are wonderful, but they don’t translate to votes). Kitaen: 35 Wright: 16

Also, ‘twas nice to see *Witchboard* director Kevin Tenney as well as Ms. Kitaen herself getting in on the fun!

This next bout is barely legal. Okay, that also sounds mildly perverse. But we’re allowing a couple of former child stars into the ring to battle one another. This battle will be known as “Child Stars Battle!”

Drew Barrymore has gone onto a successful career as America’s Sweetheart. Wait, she was in the ‘80s too. Apparently, she’s just beloved in whatever decade she appears in. She had her share of genre films as a child, including *E.T.*, *Cat’s Eye* and one of the films we’ll be focusing on this time around – *Firestarter*.

I’m gonna lay it out on the line here, and state that I have not seen this film since the 80s, so I frankly wasn’t sure if I would find any good moments from Barrymore – to make her case in this battle.

After crying my eyes out for the last 15 minutes of the film (on this recent viewing), and marveling at Barrymore’s “Charlie”, I think it’s safe to say that I found some obvious moments worthy of praise – which I will now impart to you, our devoted voters!

I’ll start with the usual – one of her quieter moments – before we move head on into the emotional display she provided for the rest of the film. As she’s first getting to know John the orderly (George C. Scott) in her gussied-up suite (why on earth would they have so many flammable things in that room?) and he attempts to make conversation, she flat out tells him to “Go to hell”. And it’s brilliant. Barrymore does this little thing several times throughout the film, but nowhere is it more fun than here. It’s just a slight raise of her eyebrow, but it tells us that Charlie is damn proud of how she stands up to him in that exchange. Her arms are crossed, her lips pursed as she bitterly exclaims, “Go to hell”.

There are plenty of dialogue-free scenes for Barrymore in *Firestarter* – namely the moments where she uses her awesome powers. Her hair is blown back, the sweat speckles her face and the tears (this girl can cry!) roll down her cheeks. But it is her eyes which tell the story. For a child actor, it’s pretty amazing what she is able to communicate with her eyes. There’s a strange sense of knowledge of what she is doing as she torches these bastards in The Shop. You can see the guilt. You can see the rage. You can see the love. That last, extended massacre in and around the stable is a crazy sight! She absolutely breaks your heart.

And of course, to make a solid case for Barrymore, you’ve got to address the scene at the end, as her father dies in her arms. Barrymore’s performance here turns you into jelly. Her delivery of, “Daddy, are you okay? You’re bleeding” puts a lump in your throat – I don’t care whether you consider yourself a softee or not! Charlie’s seen a lot, but she’s still a kid – unbelieving that her dad has been shot. She’s got the innocence down.

(fun side-note: It seems I neglected to include the smoldering David Keith in my Ultimate Horror Hunks of the ‘80s competition. What can I say? I’m not perfect.)

Barrymore’s competitor in this battle is also a former child star, who has gone onto a nicely prolific career following her Oscar-nominated stint in *The Exorcist*. Of course, that’s her most recognized role, but for our purposes (these are all about the ‘80s, not the ‘70s) we will examine another one of her legendary horror films. This time, the 1981 underrated *Hell Night* will be our muse. In it, Blair plays Marti, a sorority pledge forced to spend the night in a possibly haunted, certainly creepy, “abandoned” mansion with three other pledges (including Jeff – played by former Horror Hunk of the ‘80s contestant – Peter Barton). It’s a pretty basic stalk-n-slash, but not without its unique charms. I will simply say “bedroom rug” and leave it at that.

Blair’s Marti is your textbook “final girl”. How many horror theory books and publications will back up this statement? *All of them*. She’s got the manly name, she’s left alone to battle the evil creatures and must rely on her wits and previous expertise (in this case, her experience as a mechanic) to help her find salvation and survival.

Blair’s got some nice dialogue moments in the film – her quiet exchanges with Jeff before the Garth family comes-a-callin’ are genuine and sweet. But it’s the reactions she gives which are most priceless and the most fun. There are too many to name them all, so let’s delve into the really good ones. Upon finding Jeff’s body on the ground outside Garth Manor (oops, SPOILER!) after he has been tossed from a second story window, she barely has time to register his death (Garth is right on her tail), but in this split second, we see that she was genuinely starting to feel for Jeff – and that hurts a little bit (not to mention the fact that the beautiful Peter Barton is now dead – what a waste!) Another one which stands out to me is Jeff’s reveal that Peter (the head honcho behind the whole initiation process – played by Kevin Brophy) is dead. There’s a hopeless and exasperated cry from Blair – just before she and Jeff venture into the subterranean confines of Garth Manor. We’re right there with Blair as she sort of whines and pleads with Jeff. We wouldn’t go down there either, Marti!

But aside from Blair’s fun reactions, one of my favorite moments in the film is after Seth (Vincent Van Patten – who should have found a place in my Horror Hunks of the ‘80s contest – fail!) returns with the rifle and enters the foyer of the mansion – yelling out to Marti and Jeff that he has killed the killer. That doesn’t go quite according to plan, and the gun he pilfered from the local police station skids to a stop in the middle of the floor. Jeff (complete with his injured leg) and Marti watch helplessly from the upper balcony. As the silence from the bottom floor grows more intense, and the gun is unclaimed (in the lovely sea of light on the main floor) Marti takes a moment before making the decision to venture down the stairs and retrieve the gun. Blair really lets us see her gears moving. It’s brief, but effective – and frankly one of the first moments where we can see that Marti is taking charge. It’s a nice shift in the character and Blair sells it. But, she doesn’t get the gun. “A” for effort, though!

The film ends with Marti waking up in the wrecked car, the body of one of her tormentors impaled on the sharp spikes of the damaged fence. The sun is coming up and Marti squeezes out of the car, past both the gate and the body of the last Garth family member. We see exhaustion. We see relief. We see anger. We see the remnants of fear. But Blair also gives a subtle smirk of triumph.

As far as final girls go, Marti’s not the end all/be all. But Blair’s Marti is spunky, cute and resourceful – and as is to be expected in such a film – semi-virginal (despite her period costume’s ample exposure of cleavage).

So how will you vote, friends? The child star who was an actual child when she filmed the picture in question? Or, will you send your love to the woman who used to be a child star, but was of age when she shot the other flick in question? Drew Barrymore or Oscar-nominee Linda Blair?

The choice is yours! Good luck to our two lovely ladies in this current bout!

Onward we go! See you in a few, devoted voters!