

# Do Not Disturb: Elisa Lam & Other Film-worthy Hotel Murders



Written by Ananda Dillon  
Senior Staff Writer at Movie Pilot  
2016

In 2013 a particularly intriguing news story broke in Los Angeles depicting the odd case of a young woman, Elisa Lam, found dead in the rooftop water tank of the downtown Cecil Hotel where she was staying. Her story would potentially have been quickly written off as a tale of accidental death except for an especial amount of spookiness that surrounded it, mainly video footage (seen below) from an elevator showing the odd behavior of the victim just before her untimely death.



Image: Housely.com

Ruled a suicide and widely puzzled over by independent investigators and the internet at large, it didn't take long for Hollywood to sniff out the intrigue in such a story and option it for film. *The Bringing* was a script featured on the 2014 Blacklist written by Brandon and Phillip Murphy, the most recent draft updated by Kevin Kolsch and Dennis Widmyer with Jeremy Lovering (*In Fear*) set to direct (formerly [Nicolas Winding Refn](#)). Today [it was announced Michael Peña has been cast](#) as the investigator tasked with solving the case. No doubt uncovering more of the gory history of the Cecil Hotel — an inspiration for *American Horror Story: Hotel* — in the process.

The source case and the film sound terrifying, but Elisa Lam isn't the only poor soul to meet her end in a place usually reserved for vacation getaways and romantic trysts. So in anticipation for the chills headed our way via *The Bringing* here are a few other true hotel-set murder cases deserving of their own horror films.

## Read More:

- [Dark Water: The Mystery Surrounding Elisa Lam's Horrific Hotel Death](#)
- [True Stories That Still Need To Be Turned Into Horror Movies](#)
- [Ryan Murphy Reveals Real Life Inspiration for American Horror Story: Hotel](#)

## The Amana Holiday Inn



Rose Burkert and Roger Atkison

Speaking of romantic trysts, here's a classic (and unsolved) case. In September of 1980 Rose Burkert, 22-year-old single mom, and Roger Atkison, 32-year-old married telephone repairman, checked into the Amana Holiday Inn near Williamsburg, Iowa. They almost didn't get a room for the night because, and how's this for freaky, a morticians conference was taking up most of the space in the hotel. A hotel maid tentatively peeked her head into their room the following day when there was no response well after the noon checkout time.

What she found was a shocking scene. The couple lay on the bed facedown, both their heads slashed by either an axe or a hatchet. Blood had been sprayed everywhere. When the Sheriff's department investigated they found an extremely puzzling case. No sign of forced entry and, in fact, evidence that whoever had visited the couple had sat by the bed and put his feet up on the room's desk at one point. Very casual behavior. This person had even taken the time to whittle a bar of soap and wrote a single word on the bathroom mirror, "THIS."

Burkert's ex-boyfriend was the immediate suspect, having already been a threatening figure in her life pushing her to put a restraining order against him. But the ex had a solid alibi and passed a polygraph. Another possibility was Atkison's uncle, serial killer Charles Hatcher, who coincidentally had just escaped from a mental health hospital in Nebraska. Despite 400 individual interviews with various people in the area or related to the couple, the case has not yet been solved.

## Murder Castle

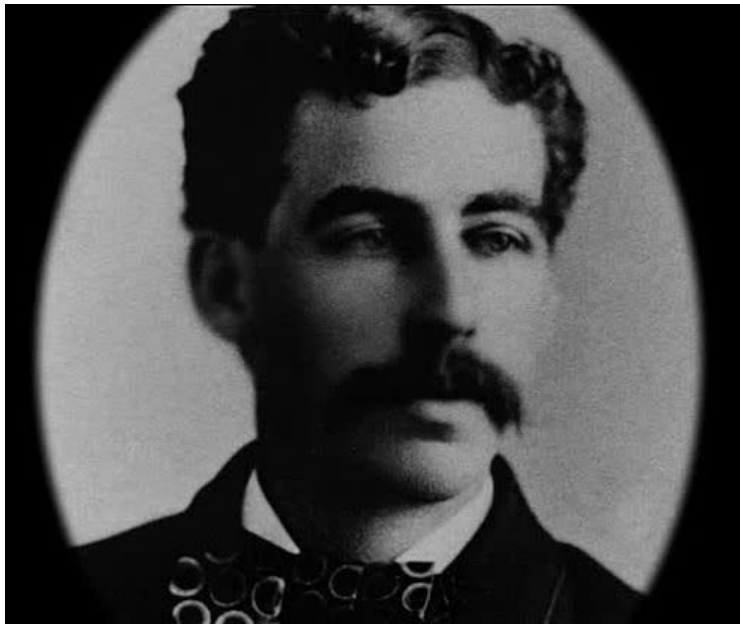


Image: Chicago Tribune

Plenty has been written about America's first serial killer, H. H. Holmes, who fed his sadistic nature by luring in the vulnerable women flocking to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. He was able to do so quite easily by custom building a hotel tricked out with ghastly hidden features that aided in the killing and disposing of poor sorry souls. By using a variety of contractors and laborers he was able to cut costs on the building of his "Murder Castle" — as the press would later call it — and ensure no one ever knew enough about his blueprints to understand exactly why he needed a soundproof gas chamber in his personal office, or the necessity of laundry chutes that could fit whole bodies leading to the basement.

Outfitted with two basements, one for disposing and one for hiding evidence, the hotel also featured additional gas chamber rooms. Additionally it had a room for hanging people — if Holmes was in that sort of mood that day — stairways that went nowhere, strange hallways built at odd angles, rooms that locked from the outside, and an alarm system letting him know when people were walking around certain levels.





Holmes confessed to 27 murders, nine of which were proven, but its likely his body count over the years was closer to 200 victims. A documentary, *H. H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer*, has been made about the prolific murderer but not yet a feature film. "Yet" being the key word. Martin Scorsese optioned the rights to Erik Larson's 2002 novel *The Devil in the White City* which follows both Holmes's time building his hotel and architect Daniel Hudson Burnham's efforts to build the Chicago World's Fair at the same time. Leonardo DiCaprio is set to star, though not sure which of the two lead roles he would take. So looks like we may see this evil genius onscreen soon enough. Additionally, Holmes inspired the character of James March in *American Horror Story: Hotel*.

## The Golden Key Motel



Image: Atlantic City Press

In November of 2006 the bodies of four women, prostitutes by trade, were found behind the Golden Key Motel on the outskirts of Atlantic City in New Jersey. Clothed except for their shoes and socks, the women were about 60 feet from each other in a drainage ditch. The first of these women killed, Molly Dilts, was murdered approximately a month before the women were found. Both she and another of the victims, Barbara Breidor, were so decomposed that cause of death couldn't be determined. The other two, Kim Raffo and Tracy Ann Roberts, had been strangled to death.

Police deduced they had a serial killer on their hands and this elusive murderer soon gained the nickname of the Eastbound Strangler by the media. One suspect, Terry Olsen, was the handyman of the motel. While he did have some disturbing hidden cameras set up and footage of his girlfriend's teenaged daughter getting dressed, there no DNA evidence to link him to the murders definitively.

A tale of sex, drugs, and a serial killer is certainly the seedy material for a decent true crime film.

## Hotel Hell - Maribel Caves Hotel



In Maribel, Wisconsin there are the remains of a hotel built in 1900. Murder is only one reason this hotel holds such a frighteningly intriguing history. Many of the rumors around this hotel are a little hard to substantiate, but considering how old the hotel is that's easy to understand. It's generally accepted that quite a few freaky things have happened here, thus the nickname of "Hotel Hell."

Among those freaky things was a mass murder of all the guests of the hotel by another of the guests who went crazy one night and then committed suicide. More supernatural is that the hotel burned three times, each time on the same date. The last time, in the 1930s, resulted in the death of all the hotel guests. Because of the fires the hotel was made inaccessible in parts after the rebuilds so an entire floor's worth of skeletons were unable to be retrieved. This seems a bit questionable, wouldn't family members demand their family's remains, but creepy nonetheless.

Al Capone supposedly stayed in the hotel, and may even have stored illegal booze there during the prohibition. Plenty of supernatural activity has been recorded at the hotel's remains including the site of blood running down the walls, voices in the basement, other sounds like bells and wheels, and of course ghost sightings. As if all of that isn't enough fodder for a horror film, a group of Black witches supposedly also performed rituals at the site opening a portal to Hell. Not sure how anyone figured that out, but makes for great stories.

There's enough rumor and superstition surrounding Hotel Hell to fill an entire season of *American Horror Story*, but I'd settle for a spooky horror film utilizing just one of these elements.



Try not to be too spooked next time you check-in to a hotel after reading about all these horrifying examples of just how wrong an overnight stay can go. There's no release date as of yet for *The Bringing* but these tales ought to tide you over as far as late night insomnia goes.



Just a normal hotel...

**Where do you want to stay next?**

[Sources: [Iowa Cold Cases](#), [H.H. Holmes Wikipedia](#), [Eastbound Strangler](#), [Wisconsin Sickness](#)]

([Original Movie Pilot URL](#))