

# grim

Issue No. 7 September 2020

## TEENAGE WASTELAND

High School, Hormones & Homicide

ADOLESCENCE  
OUT OF CONTROL

ARE YOU AN EVE  
OR A LILITH?

FINDING YOUR  
COVEN

AUDRE'S  
REVENGE  
BITES BACK

TEEN  
CREEPS  
PODCAST

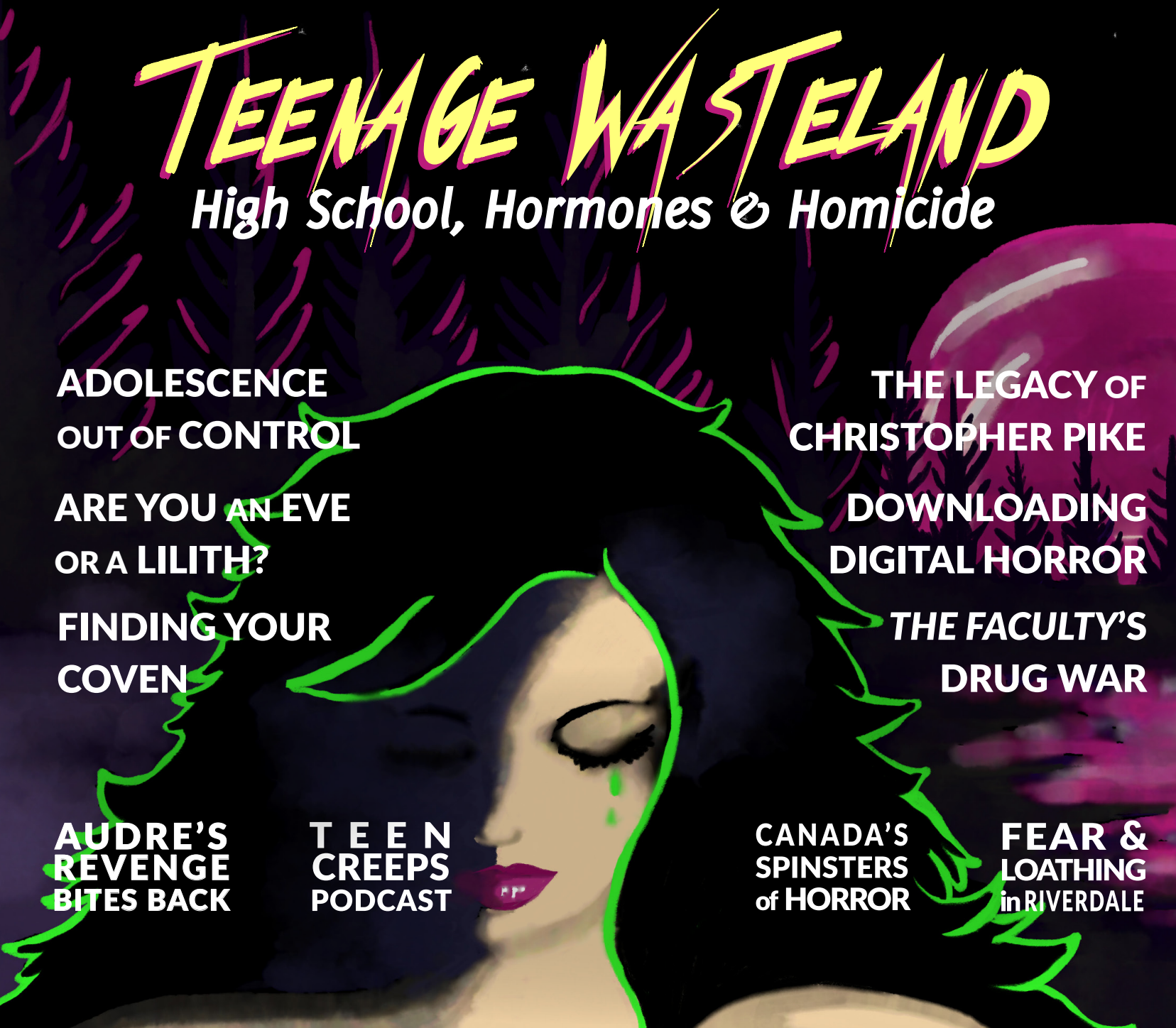
THE LEGACY OF  
CHRISTOPHER PIKE

DOWNLOADING  
DIGITAL HORROR

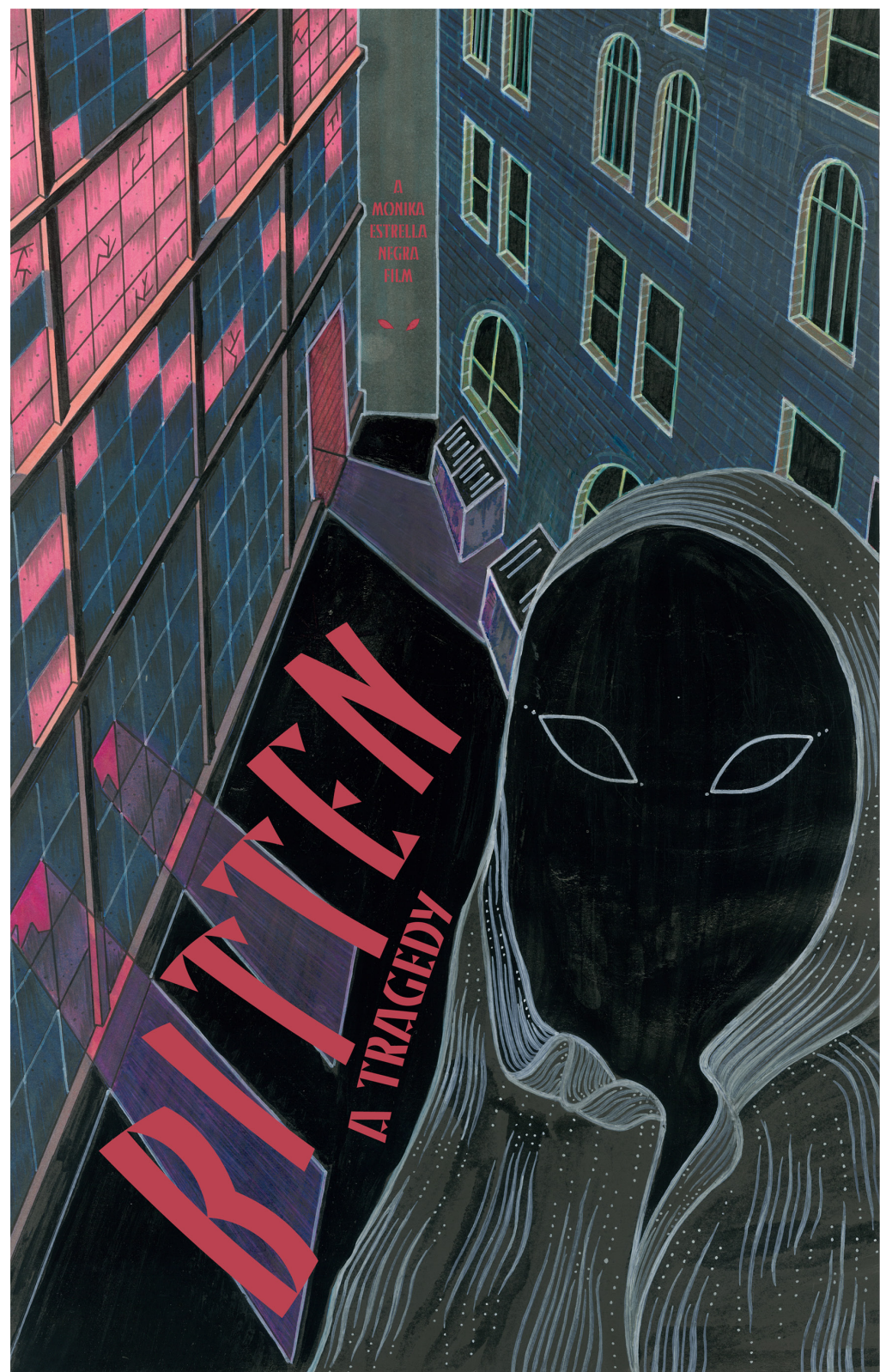
THE FACULTY'S  
DRUG WAR

CANADA'S  
SPINSTERS  
of HORROR

FEAR &  
LOATHING  
in RIVERDALE



AUDRE'S REVENGE FILM AND 4MILECIRCUS PRESENT



Written and Directed by Monika Estrella Negra • Cinematography by Valerie Bah  
 Starring Monika Estrella Negra, Dylan Mars Greenberg, Luzifer Priest and Sarah Schoofs  
 Soundtrack by Anna Vo • Produced by 4MileCircus • Executive Producer Mariam Bastani  
**COMING WINTER 2020**

**grim**

September 2020  
 No. 7

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**Special Thank You**

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## Editor's Note

### Calling 2020 'Challenging' is the Definition of Understatement.

From the Hong Kong protests to the Australian bushfires to the tragic failure of the impeachment of he-who-shall-not-be-named to the ongoing horror of the novel coronavirus pandemic to the epic Black Lives Matter uprisings to whatever new emergency, revolution, or atrocity is happening as you read these lines, 2020 has served up a relentless deluge of anxiety-provoking historical events.

None of us are untouched by the ravages of this calendar year. While there have been some bright spots (a greater awareness of systemic racism borne of the protests against white supremacist police violence, much-needed legislative and policy changes, and the prospect of real justice in several cases), the psychic toll of 2020 weighs heavy on our collective consciousness. Being in lockdown for much of the year has isolated us from our friends and (chosen) families, and witnessing endless footage of police brutality continues to hurt our hearts.

As such, many of us have turned to old comforts to soothe our troubled souls. Much-loved media from the past is seeing renewed popularity as people host watch parties and indulge in youthful favourites. As such, this issue's theme of teen horror feels appropriate for this time, drawing as it does upon the entertainment that so many of us enjoyed during our own adolescence. Featuring essays exploring everything from the 1990s Teen Horror Cycle (as defined by Alexandra West) to the work of YA novelist Christopher Pike, we may consider this issue a comforting reprieve from the anxieties and tumult of this past year. But, even as we find our small distractions where we can, we mustn't grow complacent.

Examine your privilege. Improve your praxis. Continue to donate, protest, amplify, share, and educate wherever possible.

Black Lives Matter. Black Art Matters. Black Words Matter.

And, please—wear your fucking mask.

Valeska Griffiths  
@bitchcraftTO

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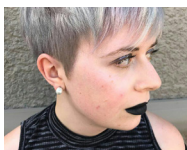


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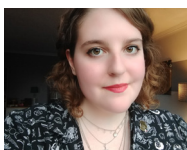
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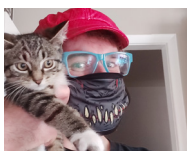
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**Alex Neufeldt** is a writer and journalist based in Treaty 1 Territory—Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is a recent graduate of the University of Winnipeg. You can find her on twitter at @AlexEJNeufeldt, read more of her creative work in *Juice Journal*, and read her journalistic work in *The Uniter*.



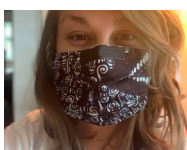
**Amy Bowman's** greatest loves include teen movies and all things spooky, so she is thrilled to contribute to this issue of *Grim*. She does a bunch of stuff in Toronto, but is most proud of her trivia championships. For more *bon mots* and trenchant insights, follow her on twitter @sovietmovies.



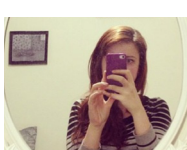
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**Elizabeth Grice** has always loved creepy stories. She has an M.A. in English Literature from Queen's University, where her research focused mainly on reanimated corpses in Gothic fiction. Since her main interests in film are death, femininity, and the supernatural, she spends a lot of time watching horror movies (and costume dramas). She also enjoys peppermint tea, pretty much anything involving ghosts, and curating a look that has been described before as "preppy witch."



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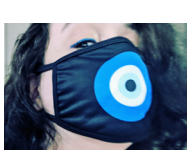
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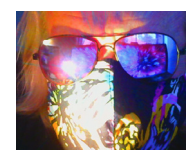
**Lily Todorov** is a freelance illustrator from Toronto with a background in art history and film studies. Her interest in the horror genre began as early as the age of six, when she watched *The Ring*. Ever since, she's been hooked on the things that keep her up at night. She welcomes you to check out her art on Instagram @lilytodorov and on *lilytodorov.com*.



**Lindsay Traves** is a writer, blogger and columnist based in the Big Smoke. After submitting her Bachelor's thesis, "The Metaphysics of Schwarzenegger Movies," she decided to focus on writing about her passions which include sci-fi, horror, sports, and graphic novels. She's probably talking about *Scream* right now or convincing a stranger to watch *The Guest*. You can find her blogging @TheSmashList, recommending often missed great movies to fill your watch list, and her running internal monologue @smashtraves.



**Mariam Bastani** is the operations coordinator of *Rue Morgue* magazine and co-founder of *Audre's Revenge Film*. She was also the content coordinator of *Maximum Rockroll* magazine, has been the front person for several hardcore punk bands, has been on a number of academic speaking tours regarding POC in punk, taken part in several women in horror panels, and hates all racist scum. Mariam has a B.A. in Theology and Religious Studies from Loyola University Chicago and has a deep mistrust of academia and most white people.



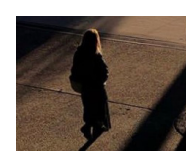
**Michael Williams** is a lifelong lover of horror who delights in the uncanny and occasionally writes about it. He is also in charge of programming at *WIWLN's Insomniac Theater*, the Internet's oldest horror movie blog written by him. The best time to reach him is before dawn.



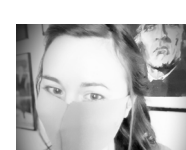
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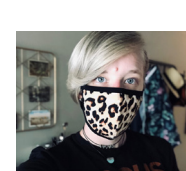
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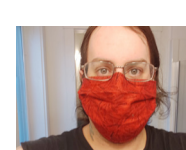
**Sophie Day** may be one of the wimpiest-est horror fans you've ever met, but she wears that title like a badge of honor. She is a contributor to *Bloody Good Horror*—where she enjoys being accused by trolls of being an angry feminist—and is one of the hosts of the podcast *Behold an Electric Terror*, as well as the *28 Days Lady-er* podcast.



**Valeska Griffiths** is the founder and co-editor of *Anatomy of a Scream*, executive editor of *Grim*, and co-editor of *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film* (House of Leaves Publishing). She is the serial comma's ride-or-die, served on the jury for the *Ax Wound Film Festival*, presented at *Frightmare in the Falls*, and occasionally guests on podcasts. She spends her time dancing (badly) around her bedroom, watching makeup tutorials, and living deliciously. October is her natural habitat. Haunt her on twitter @bitchcraftTO.



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**Zack Long** is editor-in-chief, podcaster, writer, and script consultant of *Scriptophobic.ca*, a site dedicated to helping genre writers improve their craft, and the author of *Scream Writing: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing the Horror Screenplay*. He's written for *Grim*, *Daily Grindhouse*, *Scriptophobic*, *Anatomy of a Scream*, *Film and Fishnets*, and *Horror-Writers*. He can be found on twitter @LightisFading.

# LEAVE THOSE KIDS ALONE

## Identity & Conformity in High School Horror

by Nina Nesseth

**Sex and puberty are far from the only horrors of adolescence.** I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that my teen experience was way more preoccupied with navigating my own identity and where I fit in among everyone else than I was concerned with what changes my body might be going through. Often, the thing most terrifying to teens is other teens.

Adolescence comes with a unique power to shed and try on new identities, maybe for the benefit of making chameleonic shifts through peer groups, maybe to find a sense of belonging in their own bodies. High school horrors often place special focus on the mutability of teenagers, but what they have to say on the topic is garbled. They ride the line of appealing to teen desire for individuality while also acting as cautionary tales. Ultimately, teen horror is written by adults. No amount of clever, snappy dialogue can hide the fact that these adult writers do teens a disservice. It's not always clear whether they're trying to tap into teen insecurities or adult fears.

In her dissection of teen screams of the '90s, *The 1990s Teen Horror Cycle: Final Girls and a New Hollywood Formula* (2018), Alexandra West took a close look at films that explored the horror of fitting in, including David Nutter's *Disturbing Behavior* (1998) and Robert Rodriguez's *The Faculty* (1998).

Tellingly, *Disturbing Behavior* is an updated take on Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* painted onto American youth, while *The Faculty* draws deeply from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978). Both films position adults as threats to teen individuality. In *Disturbing Behavior*, parents enlist their teens into a program that uses experimental brain implants to mold their young boundary-testers into fresh-faced, high-achieving students known as the Blue Ribbons. In *The Faculty*, parasitic aliens have taken over the adult staff at Herrington High School

and are wielding their authority to take over the student body.

**No amount of clever, snappy dialogue can hide the fact that these adult writers do teens a disservice. It's not always clear whether they're trying to tap into teen insecurities or adult fears.**

What's nefarious about both the Blue Ribbons and the alien-infected students isn't simply that they're transformed. The real horror is that these teens have zero control over their identities and no way to explore who they want to be and make mistakes along the way. The volatile feelings intrinsic to adolescence are literally harmful to the Blue Ribbons and to everyone around them. The alien-infected students become puppets to their Alien Queen.

There was a massive missed opportunity to make the Blue Ribbons in particular sympathetic characters. After all, every Blue Ribbon was once just a teen trying to figure life out, testing boundaries and rebelling in their own ways. Instead, they are only ever positioned as threats, as

violent minions to Dr. Caldicott (Bruce Greenwood), the adult who initiated the Blue Ribbon program.

As West points out in her analysis, both films have troubling endings. *Disturbing Behavior* ends with Steve (James Marsden) and his friends huddled on a ferry headed away from Cradle Bay with their personalities intact. They've bucked the forces trying to push them to conform, but in doing so, they are no longer welcome or safe to stay in Cradle Bay. What's left unaddressed by the film is the idea that the adults of *Disturbing Behavior* are just as afraid of the chaos of adolescence as teens are, but where the teen fear stems from fears of rejection, the adult fear comes from a lack of control. As for the Blue Ribbons that survived the night, there's no returning them to a state of individuality.

The outcast students of *The Faculty* may have destroyed the Alien Queen, but they do transform regardless. The epilogue of the film looks suspiciously like the "happy ending" that Alien Queen Marybeth (Laura Harris) had offered to Casey (Elijah Wood) and his



friends, where "[the] jock can be smart, the ugly duckling beautiful, and the class wuss doesn't have to live in terror." In fact, the class wuss is the school hero, and he and the popular newspaper editor are an item; the goth has shed her crayoned-on eyeliner and blacks for a sweet pastel sweater set that she can wear while smooching the jock; and the brooding drug dealer is now a cleaned-up football player (bizarrely in a questionable relationship with his teacher). Rather than upholding the identities that they fought so hard to conserve, the kids of *The Faculty* have somehow all drifted closer to the mean, the average American teens you might spy in an afterschool special.

So, what exactly is the message that horror was trying to sell to teens in 1998? *Disturbing Behavior* and *The Faculty* both give us villains that threaten individuality, but defeating these villains doesn't reward the teen protagonists with the comfort that who they are is a source of power. Instead, both films seem to convey the idea that destroying the systems that uphold a status quo will either a) leave you without community; or b) move you to change yourself and conform to your peers in the aftermath. What an unappealing way to leave movies that otherwise appeal to teens that may have felt like outcasts and seen themselves reflected in *Disturbing Behavior's* snarky, sullen Rachel (Katie Holmes) or *The Faculty's* nervous and nerdy Casey.

**These days, fictional teens are facing down the horrors of themselves in relative isolation.**

Perhaps it was real-world events such as the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 and subsequent violences that rippled through American high schools, but the new millennium saw narratives tipping towards shy, bullied, or outcast teens lashing out at the world. Gone were the days when misfit teens would band together to defeat forces that sought to control them. These days, fictional teens are facing down the horrors of themselves in relative isolation. In 2009's *Jennifer's Body*, Needy (Amanda Seyfried) doesn't have anyone to consistently lean on as she tries to find her identity as a person separate from her now-undead-and-demonic BFF. In 2012's *Excision*, Pauline (Annalynne McCord) explores herself and her sexuality in ways that appall and alienate her peers. The decision to remake *Carrie* in 2013 and



perpetuate the image of one teen in tumult and alone against everyone else at her school is telling; even *The Rage: Carrie 2* (1999) granted outcast telekinetic Rachel Lang (Emily Bergl) a degree of implied solidarity in the young women who had been targeted before her.

In a narrative specifically centred around fitting in, Lisa Brühlmann's quiet coming-of-age horror *Blue My Mind* (2017) follows 15-year old Mia (Luna Webler), who wants to enter the group of cool and rebellious girls at her new school. She struggles to keep up with their social transformations and find a place to fit in. Meanwhile, her body undergoes a transformation that both prevents her from conforming to her desired peer group and forces her toward monstrosity. Mia cannot stop who she is becoming and she tries her best to understand what she is, digging through her parents' drawers for evidence of adoption papers and giving into impulses to eat live fish. For Mia, piecing together her identity comes with a sort of futility. She can try to be a rebel or a party-girl, she can steal lipstick and try on new clothes, but trying on these identities won't stop her legs from fusing into a tail. Understanding herself comes with the understanding that the peers with whom she's been so desperately trying to belong were never her natural peers

to begin with. Like many teens, I found a sense of community after high school and learned that I didn't have to spend so much energy desperately trying to impress people to fit in. Mia's biology forces her out before she can learn this for herself, and it's unclear whether she'll find community in her new life as a sea creature.

Unlike both *The Faculty* and *Disturbing Behavior*, what's driving Mia to fight for her identity, Needy to fight her best friend, and Pauline and Carrie to unleash their personal brands of terror doesn't come from adult figures or alien beings. They're driven by either their own unusual natures or by their peer groups. They can't confide their fears or conspiracy theories because those confidences wouldn't rally people around them. Telling would put them at risk of being further cast out.

Will we ever see teen horror shifting back toward community as part of the quest for identity? Films that put the power of teen friendship into focus like *IT: Chapter One* (2017) and *Assassination Nation* (2018) are still less common than films that see teens alone and brooding in their misery. Given the physical and social isolation that 2020 has created worldwide, a little more friendship in horror might be just what we need. **g**

# Horror in a Digital Age

## Unfriended, Ratter, and the Terror of Tech

by Kelly McNeely

**If you're going to set your horror film in the "modern" age, there are certain technological conveniences that must be eliminated.** If it's easy to call for help, there's no plot. There's no thrill. There's no movie. In the early '00s, cell phone batteries were astonishingly short-lived. Service was inconveniently (or, perhaps, conveniently) unreliable. There was an explanation that allowed the story to move along and the teens to get killed. But some films laughed in the face of this challenge and adapted to embrace the new technological gifts; films like *Cry\_Wolf* (2005), *Pulse* (2001), *FearDotCom* (2002) and *One Missed Call* (2003).

While early examples were still finding their footing, this trend of techno terrors continued with teen and adolescent horror leading the charge. New entries evolved to develop sophisticated and complex problems that understood their target audience, crafting some clever horror stories that focus on digital dangers that turn aggressively real. Films that use technology not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a catalyst or source for the horror.

Now, not to sound like a tinfoil-hat-wearing paranoid proponent of shutting down the internet, but when you think about how much blind faith we put in our computers, our phones, our texts, and so on, it's actually pretty frightening.

Generally, we're fairly apathetic to this. We pay no mind to targeted ads that pop up based on keywords pulled from a private text, and we never actually read the User Agreement. At this point, we barely even register notifications about account security leaks. But, to quote *Unfriended: Dark Web* (2018), "it's a deep goddamn ocean, and there are sharks swimming below you."

The subgenre of teen tech horror attempts to both enlighten and frighten its viewers. Films like *Ratter* (2015) demonstrate our blind trust in our tech, preying on the knowledge that we really do keep our devices on hand at all times—and there are unseemly characters out there who will take advantage of that.

*Ratter's* fresh-faced college student Emma (Ashley Benson) goes about her day with comfortable optimism, blissfully unaware that every step she takes, every move she makes, someone's watching her. Her constant proximity to a tech device—be it her cell phone, laptop, or gaming camera—betrays her, allowing a stranger to hack in and actively obsess over (and eventually intervene in) her day-to-day life.

Online anonymity is the blessing that curses us all. From the safety of hiding behind a screen, we feel we can get away with anything. The keyboard can be wielded as a weapon, holding a magnificent, dangerous power. By showing the film from the perspective of the mystery man behind the screen, it effectively violates the oblivious victim and drags the viewer along in the process. We see what he sees, and we feel for Emma as she unknowingly falls prey to his persistent gaze.

Part of what makes *Ratter* so effective is that we have no confirmed identity

for that faceless, nameless threat on the other side of the screen. It doesn't give us a convenient explanation and leaves the door open to the possibility that this could happen to anyone. And it does. The title refers to an online phenomenon known as 'rattling', where someone will hack into a stranger's camera technology to secretly watch them. It's enough to make you want to cover every webcam in your house.

And then, there's *Assassination Nation* (2018), which demonstrates how thin the veil of security really is. When someone hacks the personal accounts

**The keyboard can be wielded as a weapon, holding a magnificent, dangerous power.**

We all use these devices on a day-to-day basis without really understanding how they work, or how vulnerable they are. *Unfriended: Dark Web* shows us at the mercy of our digital footprint when Matias (Colin Woodell) steals a laptop from a local cafe. Naturally, the laptop's owner is keen to get it back and recover the dozens of snuff films that lie within its hard drive. Though he tries to distance himself, each time Matias logs in, he and his friends are pushed ever closer to their demise.

They are haunted and hunted by an anonymous villain that tracks their every move. This criminal works in the seedy underbelly of the web where no rules apply, using code names and bitcoin to hide their real identity. With all the awful opportunity that flows

through the dark web, it operates on anonymity; it relies on it. The friends are wandering through the wild west of the internet where virtual gunslingers roam free, full of dark and twisted desires that always come at a price.

Each film pulls from our current technoclimate to build a unique brand of horror that preys on new anxieties and weaknesses. It's particularly effective for teen-focused horror because those who were raised in a digital age are at the point in history where everything they do can be (and often is) shared online. But we don't often think about the long-term ramifications of this.

These films all base their plot—and in *Unfriended: Dark Web* and *Ratter*, their visual storytelling—around the new dangers we find online. Our blind trust in tech, the problems with online anonymity, the seedy underbelly of the world wide web; when mining our societal anxieties for relevant horror material, it makes sense that writers and filmmakers would tap into that. It's not a question of "getting with the times," it's understanding that there's a whole new market of terror-based opportunity. Our world is ever-shifting, much like the horror genre itself, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the effect that tech has on us all.

George Orwell understood the horror that "big brother" could be watching you, while teen-focused modern horror exposes the fact that anyone could be watching—and it's far more likely. It accepts this bizarre and scary reality to explore scenarios that are not only socially devastating but, ultimately, life-threatening. And all you have to do is log in. **g**

7

# The Real Crash: Surviving Your Final Destination

by Amy Bowman

The *Final Destination* series tends to be remembered as little more than a death factory. Though the franchise can lay claim to some of the most inventive death setpieces in the '00s, the teen-centric films, namely *Final Destination* (2000) and *Final Destination 3* (2006), also examine something deeper. In these instalments, Death is the ultimate villain, but the horror is in survival.

When Alex (Devon Sawa) gets himself and six others off the doomed plane in the first film, and when Wendy (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) retrieves several classmates from an ill-fated rollercoaster in the third, they believe they've been lucky enough to survive and can attempt to recover quietly. Unfortunately, Alex and Wendy will first become the faces of their tragedies.

Alex's teachers and the parents of his friends irrationally blame him for the disaster and he is continuously followed by the FBI, who are suspicious of his involvement. At one point, he tells agents Schrek (Roger Guenveur Smith) and Weine (Daniel Roebuck), "I saved six lives, six

lives, and everybody at my school thinks I'm a freak." Even watching television with his dad cannot offer respite, because there is near-constant coverage of the plane wreckage and subsequent investigation. Alex quite literally cannot look away from the accident that nearly took his life.

**In these instalments, Death is the ultimate villain, but the horror is in survival.**

Meanwhile, Wendy is unable to go to school to retrieve her yearbook without each person she passes shooting pitying glances at her. Unlike Alex, she does not seem to have any relationship with her parents and has a contentious relationship with her sister, Julie (Amanda Crew). She finds no comfort in anything beyond the idea of leaving her hometown of McKinley. Both teens long to be given space to grieve and to find a way to move on. And then Death starts leaving clues.

Once Alex and Wendy begin to recognize hints that their fellow survivors are not truly safe, they are consumed with a new

kind of survivor's horror—the burden that they, and only they, can determine who Death will come to claim next, and how, and where. In essence, Death has made these two deeply ordinary teens the stars of movies in which they never wanted to be. Those friends and classmates, not wracked with the same pressures, insist they will not let these accidents be the most important part of their lives and do not want to hear that their time is up. As a result, Alex and Wendy spend the rest of their runtimes attempting, and mostly failing, to save their friends from Death's grand design.

Eventually, many months later, our protagonists have left the places where their tragedies followed them everywhere. They are certain they now truly have their whole lives ahead of them, that they have bested Death. After finally releasing themselves of the burden of survival, Death cruelly comes for Alex and Wendy. Whether it's out of youthful naïveté, pure desperation, or something in between, they've never considered that Death does not play fair and will make its own rules to win. **g**

Female sexuality in Western civilization has long been defined by religious doctrine imposed on young women entering into maturity, who are faced with two prominent archetypes of womanhood; the subjugated woman, Eve, and the monstrous demoness, Lilith.

These women were the first wives of Adam, and both personify unchecked disruptive female sexuality. Regardless of the path a young woman decides to take—that of submissive Eve or defiant Lilith—there remains the prejudicial idea that there is inherent shame in being a woman.

The coming-of-age subgenre of horror often explores this duality. The young women in these films are taught to be an Eve figure through obedience and only using sex for procreation. If women deviate from this path and indulge in their sexual desires, act independently, or question established patriarchal rules, they are like Lilith—monstrous and a danger to 'societal norms'. Four films that explore this dichotomy are Robert Egger's *The Witch* (2016), Karyn Kusama's *Jennifer's Body* (2009), Mitchell Lichtenstein's *Teeth* (2007), and Julia Ducournau's *Raw* (2016). In *Teeth* and *Raw*, we are introduced to Dawn (Jess Weixler) and Justine (Garance Marillier), young women who experience terrible consequences when they enter into womanhood and engage in sex for the first time, similar to Eve when she tasted the forbidden fruit and cursed all women after her. Whereas in *The Witch* and *Jennifer's Body*, we have Lilith

# Thrilling Eve

## Becoming 'Dangerous' Women

by Jessica Parant

figures in *Needy* (Amanda Seyfried) and *Thomasi* (Anya Taylor Joy), young women with sparks of independence and defiance that allow them to break free of patriarchal oppression.

### The Submissive Woman: Eve's Curse

One of the concepts that feminists have challenged over the years is the fundamentalist Christian belief that women are to blame for all evil. It was Eve who first ate from the apple and then tempted Adam, which led to mankind's expulsion from Paradise. Eve's transgression brought sexuality into human existence as both became aware and ashamed of their nudity and engaged in sex. Eve disobeyed God; as she was the mother of humanity, women were then seen as susceptible to evil, temptation, and sin. As it was a woman who birthed evil into the world, it was only through forcing women to accept their subordination to men that it would be corrected.

In *Raw*, we are introduced to introverted and anxious lifelong vegetarian Justine as she arrives at veterinary school. From the outset, we can tell that Justine is a smart young woman with a strong moral code looking to find her footing. She is subjected to hazing and, in one ritual, is forced by her sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf) to eat a raw rabbit kidney, causing Justine to suffer a strong physical allergic reaction. Afterward, Justine shamefully begins to crave the taste of meat, first trying to steal a hamburger, then eating shawarma and, still unsatisfied, moving on to raw chicken. It is not until Alexia accidentally cuts off her own finger (and Justine cannot stop herself from tasting it) that things begin to truly change. Just like Eve and the eating of the forbidden apple, Justine's indulgence of human flesh, a taboo, promotes a sexual awakening.

It becomes evident in a sexually charged dance scene in front of a mirror that Justine is connecting with the wild feminine energy in her. When she has sex for the first time with her roommate Adrien (Rabah Nait Oufella), she realizes that the stronger her arousal is, the stronger her desire to eat human flesh becomes. She finds out that Alexia suffers from the same taboo hunger, but is disturbed by the fact that her sister actually embraces it. In Alexia, we see our Lilith figure, a woman who welcomes the monstrous side of herself. Her lack of morality is on full display when she causes car accidents to feed her hunger, which horrifies Justine. As the sisters fight over the affections of Adrien, Justine's strong moral code comes into conflict with her sister's *laissez-faire* approach to their situation.

Justine discovers that their condition is congenital (passed down from their



mother), a woman who struggles with her own urges when aroused. Justine and Alexia are cursed with a condition that makes them evil in the eyes of society. Just as religious doctrine states that women live under a curse due to Eve's transgression in Eden, Justine realizes that she must carry the burden of what being a sexually active woman will entail for her; endangering those who become intimately close to her.

**Just like Eve and the eating of the forbidden apple, Justine's indulgence of human flesh, a taboo, promotes a sexual awakening.**

In *Teeth*, we see Dawn as a young woman who looks to be a leader in an abstinence group, where she speaks about the importance of "keeping your gift" (preserving your virginity). However, as she begins to develop feelings for Tobey (Hale Appleman), a member of the group, she finds herself opening up sexually, but struggles with her bodily desires. This is seen one night when Dawn has a sexual fantasy about Tobey and attempts to relieve her desire by masturbating. She stops, remembering her pledge to stay pure; she must deny herself in order to stay committed to her promise and save herself for marriage. This is evident in the sexual fantasy

itself, which has her dressed as a bride. While Dawn continues to explore her feelings for Tobey and becomes physical with him, he, unfortunately, takes her forward advances as 'consent' and rapes her. In this act of violation, Dawn's vagina castrates Tobey. From this point on, Dawn continues her transition into womanhood by coming to terms with her sexual identity and the development of vagina dentata.

When Dawn tries returning to the abstinence group and talks about her assault, she is cast out. She has become Eve, another 'dangerous' woman who must be exiled. She fell victim to the stain of original sin and could not be redeemed. Dawn seeks solace in a male friend and has sex with him, experiencing pleasure without horrific repercussions. When she later discovers that she was used to boost his ego, she uses her 'teeth' to castrate him in an act of revenge. After being hurt and betrayed yet again, Dawn accepts what men would consider a monstrous ability and what others would deem an illness that needs to be cured; she transitions from a cursed Eve to a moral Lilith.

**The Defiant Woman: Lilith's Damnation**  
In Jewish lore, Lilith was Adam's first wife who was created from the Earth just as Adam was; whereas Eve, his

second wife, was created from Adam's rib. Lilith viewed herself as Adam's equal, as seen by her refusal to lie under him during intercourse. She rebelled against Adam and left Eden of her own volition. When she refused to return, she was cursed by God and his angels to become the mother of demons; to prey on weak-willed men and vulnerable newborns. However, because she did not take part in the original sin, Lilith does not suffer the same curse as other women, which is to live under male rule and suffer through menstruation and childbirth. Yet, she is seen as representative of threatening, wild, feminine sexuality.

In *The VVitch*, Thomasin is a young woman living in isolation with her Puritan family due to her father's (Ralph Ineson) prideful ways. While she is a dutiful daughter who does what she can to help her family survive, you sense the spark of independence in Thomasin that comes with puberty. She questions her father's decisions and speaks her mind when she feels she is being wronged. This leads her to come into conflict with her mother (Kate Dickie), the other woman of the household, who treats her teenage daughter as a threat. She recognizes that Thomasin is coming of age and needs to be married off so she can fulfil her duties as a good Christian

woman. Marriage and the subsequent child-rearing will keep her too busy to think for herself.

Thomasin's father struggles the most with her puberty, as he would prefer to keep his little girl. When Thomasin's mother suspects her of theft and her brother's disappearance, her father comes to her defence because she is still a child to him. He maintains this viewpoint even after Thomasin is accused of being a witch. He refuses to acknowledge this change that could potentially destroy his family.

The fact that she steps out of her 'place' as a woman and questions the patriarchal figure could only mean one thing—she truly is a witch. Thomasin is now a monster that must be caged, judged, and burned. In the end, after enduring the deaths of her entire family and killing her mother, Thomasin makes a choice to "live deliciously." She embraces the very monstrosity that was believed to be within her. Instead of choosing the life of a repressed Christian housewife, she chooses the power that comes with her sexual freedom and, like Lilith, leaves 'paradise' to be free of the patriarchal shackles placed upon her.

In *Jennifer's Body*, we are introduced to two best friends Anita (known as

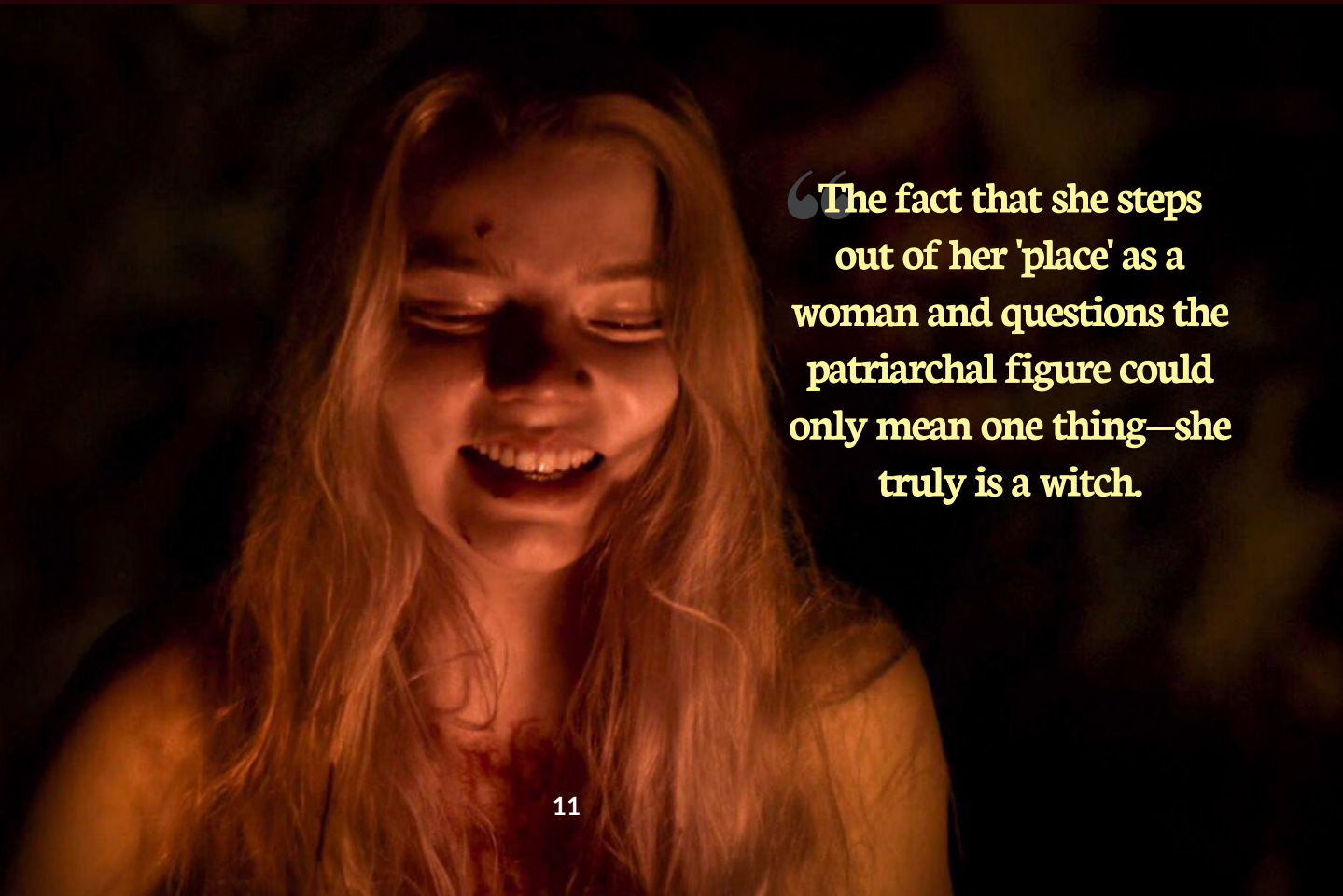
'Needy') and Jennifer (Megan Fox). They are the typical tropes; Needy the modest 'Plain Jane' in comparison to the beautiful and sassy Jennifer. Having been friends since they were children, their dynamic is complex, with a hint of sexual tension. From the start, Jennifer is our Lilith figure; flirtatious, independent, opinionated, and unafraid to take what she wants. When indie band Low Shoulder mistakes her for a virgin and attempts to sacrifice her in a satanic ritual to gain fame and fortune, she returns from the experience demonized. Like Lilith, she becomes a literal man-eating succubus. Jennifer enacts revenge against weak-willed men (just as Lilith was said to do) and eats them to maintain her strength, beauty, and supernatural powers.

**Needy becomes the man-killing monster that men fear when women cannot be controlled by force or wooed by male charms.**

While Jennifer has become the embodiment of Lilith, Needy also begins a transformation. At first, she takes on the burden of Jennifer's secret as a means to protect herself and her boyfriend Chip (Johnny Simmons), and to save Jennifer. However, as Needy spends the film being gaslighted by

her boyfriend, she begins to change. No longer is she the timid, submissive young woman of the film's first act. Needy takes matters into her own hands and, in the climactic battle between her and Jennifer, she is bitten, soon transforming into a monstrous woman. Like Jennifer, she embodies the literal Lilith archetype by becoming a demon. Yet, unlike Jennifer's chaotic acts of revenge, Needy deliberately seeks out Low Shoulder. In an act of vengeance, she shows these men that their crimes will not go unpunished. Needy becomes the man-killing monster that men fear when women cannot be controlled by force or wooed by male charms.

Lilith's and Eve's stories have been constructed in a way that lays the blame for all evil in the world on the actions of a woman. That is why the patriarchy, fueled by religious intention, strives to control young girls by creating a culture of sexual repression. What I love about the subgenre of coming-of-age horror is its subversiveness. Young women come into womanhood and engage in sex for the first time through a monstrous gaze that, while it may seem demeaning at first, can also be seen as empowering. Women young and old are working to reclaim and redefine their sexuality by reconciling the feminine dualities of Lilith and Eve. *g*



**“The fact that she steps out of her 'place' as a woman and questions the patriarchal figure could only mean one thing—she truly is a witch.**





# The Iconic '90s Master of Murder

## The Cultural Legacy of Christopher Pike

by Joe Lipsett

A girl bursts into a crowded party, shooting popular classmates because she claims they're bloodthirsty creatures.

A boy is tied to a bed and fed a steady diet of cocaine by the sexiest girl in school until he dies.

A girl is recounted dark stories from a mysterious hitchhiker on an overnight road trip.

A ghost tries to solve her own murder before she passes into the afterlife and is forgotten.

Taken independently, these descriptions sound lurid and pulpy. To readers of a certain age, however, these plots evoke a wave of nostalgia, particularly for Brian Kotzky's iconic neon covers featuring evocative illustrations of teens in danger punctuated by writing in raised, cursive font.

These are all quintessential young adult horror novels by bestselling author Christopher Pike.

Pike is the *nom de plume* of Kevin Christopher McFadden, a reclusive

Buddhist who penned nearly thirty teen thrillers between the years 1985 and 1999. In the grand tradition of (especially '90s) YA authors, he never intended to write for teens; it was only on the advice of his agent that he initially gave it a shot. What he found was a passionate fanbase of teen readers hungry for horror tales that skewed older and more mature than what R.L. Stine and other contemporaries like Diane Hoh, L.J. Smith, Caroline B. Cooney, and Richie Tankersley Cusick (to name just a few) were producing at the time.

For teen horror readers, the 1990s was a goldmine of both product and self-discovery. The list above is but a short catalogue of authors who regularly churned out deliciously macabre books. Most of these texts had an obsession with sexually voracious but virginal teenage heroines, deadly parties, and threatening supernatural occurrences. And while the content undoubtedly made parents tut-tut, in many ways these books were merely the sexed-up descendants of *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*, the more chaste pulp mysteries of the previous generation (ironically Kotzky drew the covers

for more than a hundred Hardy Boys casefiles).

Pike's narratives alternated between terrifying teenage sociopaths driven by revenge, jealousy, and greed (Alexa in *Die Softly*, Sharon in *Gimme a Kiss*, Chad in *Fall Into Darkness*) and supernaturally-inclined narratives that ran the gamut from vampires (*The Last Vampire*, *Monster*) to vengeful deities and time-traveling robots (*Scavenger Hunt*, *The Immortal*, *The Eternal Enemy*). Over time, Pike's interest in yoga and meditation (plus a near-death experience) contributed to a number of texts that explicitly ventured into spiritual and existential territory (*The Last Vampire*, *The Midnight Club*, *The Starlight Crystal*).

*For teen horror readers, the 1990s was a goldmine of both product and self-discovery.*

Sex was often a driving factor but, unlike other teen thrillers, characters in Pike books actually did have sex. The



conflict in Pike's books was frequently the result of lust, jealousy, and the complicated emotional negotiations that precede or succeed a sexual encounter. In this way, teens' obsessive tendency to fixate on sex and sexuality, combined with the perils of navigating the precarious social hierarchy of high school, felt like authentic teen issues and less like plot-driven mechanisms. Most importantly for teen readers who were grappling with these issues, Pike's books eschewed judgment and avoided preachy moralistic lessons. Characters were too busy trying to survive to advocate for abstinence or a drug-free America.

Pike was at his best when sex, (supernatural) violence, and characters' humanity intersected in meaningful, complicated ways. My introduction to his *oeuvre* was *Scavenger Hunt*, a book that—on the surface—is about Cessy and Davey, a pair of ancient lizard siblings who lure horny teens out to a desert temple where they are sacrificed in order to extend Cessy and Davey's lives. When I read the book against my parents' expressed wishes at age 10, I was horrified by the idea of getting dumped into a pit full of acid. Over time, however, I realized that the book is far more complex and nuanced: protagonist Carl is struggling with survivor's guilt over the death of

his best friend Joe, who has returned in disguise to seek revenge because he irrationally blames Carl for letting him die. Add to this the heartbreaking development when Rick, the book's disabled and most intellectually mature character, sacrifices himself to prove to Cessy the value of humanity and save the others from certain death.

*Pike's books eschewed judgment and avoided preachy moralistic lessons. Characters were too busy trying to survive to advocate for abstinence or a drug-free America.*

The level of respect with which Pike treated his teen audience is one of his greatest traits. While his books obviously adhered to the tropes of the genre and the demands of his publishers at Scholastic, Pike never talked down to his audience. In spite of the frantic publishing schedule, the majority of his books also featured three-dimensional characters, primarily women, with strong personalities and relatable conflicts.

The continued enthusiasm for Christopher Pike books is a testament

to the connection he forged with readers. In recent years, his books have been republished in omnibus form under new titles (fan favourite trilogy *Remember Me* is now *Until The End* while *The Last Vampire* became *Thirst*) and the nostalgic commemoration of his writing persists in podcasts like *Teen Creeps* (see page 49).

In some regards, it's disappointing that the majority of Pike's output was published just before Hollywood began adapting popular YA titles for film and television at the turn of the century. As it stands, only one of Pike's iconic texts made it to the screen: 1990's *Fall Into Darkness* debuted as a made-for-television movie in 1996, directed by Mark Sobel and starring teen heartthrobs Jonathan Brandis and Tatyana Ali.

Pike's popularity has waned in recent years as other publishing giants came to dominate the literary landscape, but there's no denying the impact of his teen thrillers from the 90s. For readers like me, these tales of sex and death were a gateway drug that spurred a lifelong love of literacy, as well as horror. Without Pike's lurid, sexy, pulpy novels occupying space on my nightstand and in my imagination, who knows where I would be? Rather than a master of murder, I would probably be on the road to nowhere. **g**



# Stepping Out of the Shadows: The Brave New World of *The Lost Boys*

by Sophie Day

In its original trailers, Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* (1987) was advertised as a fairly run-of-the-mill, schlocky vampire film that, at its centre, holds a love story. While both of those things may be true, the love story at the film's core is different than audiences may have assumed from its marketing.

The film follows two brothers, Michael (Jason Patric) and Sam Emerson (Corey Haim), after their move to Santa Carla, California with their newly single mother (a flawless Dianne Wiest). Shortly after arriving in town, Michael spots a beautiful young woman, named Star (Jami Gertz), on the boardwalk, in the company of a group of equally beautiful men. The gang's leader, David (Kiefer Sutherland), takes an immediate interest in Michael and, after forcing him to his literal limit, invites him back to their lair. Once there, Star fades into the background and it is clear that the four men know something that Michael doesn't. They giggle and toy with him, seeing if he will flinch, but he doesn't. After passing this second test, David hands Michael an ornate glass bottle encased in gold and jewels and offers him a drink. And drink he does, in what is arguably one of the most sensual sequences of a very thirsty film!

As the film progresses, Michael remains interested in Star and goes back to her again and again, but it is David that he can't get out of his head. We hear a literal track of David whispering his name over and over again throughout the film. While it's Star that he sleeps with, it is David who he can't seem to escape. In this way, these duelling characters seem to represent two different parts of Michael. When he confronts Star about what is happening to him, she tells him that she tried to warn him (which, she did). When David

invited him to partake, she beseeched him to say no. In this way, Star comes to represent Michael as he has been, while David represents another desire that Michael may not be ready to grapple with. For most of the film's runtime, Michael exists in this limbo. He drank from the bottle and so a part of him belongs to David, but he has not fed and so he has not fully let go. In the liminal space where Michael finds himself, he is forced to question who he is and what he wants.

**While it's Star that he sleeps with, it is David who he can't seem to escape. In this way, these duelling characters seem to represent two different parts of Michael.**

In the late 1980s, conversations about masculinity began to shift. In an article entitled "Masculinity and Self Perception of Men Identified as Informal Leaders" published in 2008, Rolla M. Bradley points out that the number of academic courses examining masculinity increased from 30 to 300. 1987, in particular, was a year that saw the release of such popular films as *Predator* and *Over the Top*, as well as *Three Men and Baby*. It was into this atmosphere that *The Lost Boys* emerged. When the film was first conceived by Janice Fischer and James Jeremias, it was modelled off of *The Goonies* (1985), which had been released just a few years earlier to great success. David and Michael were imagined as young teens and the Frog brothers (Corey Feldman and Jamison Newlander) written as chubby 8-year-olds. Perhaps most notably, Star was originally written as a boy.

Another interesting dimension of this film is the relationship between Michael and his younger brother Sam; it is competitive and sometimes short-tempered, but ultimately one of mutual love. When Michael starts acting strangely, Sam pesters him but is ultimately concerned for his brother. However, it is in Sam's reaction to Michael's transformation that we again see the way that vampirism stands in for sexuality. Upon learning that his brother has begun to turn, he screams, "My own brother, a goddamn shit-sucking vampire—wait till Mom finds out!" It is a line that feels campy and fun on its own, but weightier in light of what we have seen. Michael isn't who they thought he was, and Sam's line is a threat. Sam doesn't say "I want to help you" or "I'm here for you"; he threatens to expose him. And Michael is scared. He isn't ready for their mother to know. When Michael begins to levitate and literally be physically drawn away from their home (toward David, he presumes), he clings to the window of Sam's bedroom and begs his brother for help. Sam is scared, but Michael beseeches him, "I'm your brother, Sammy, open up!" Sam opens his window and pulls Michael inside.

In the film's climax, the other members of the vampire gang are dispatched unceremoniously by Sam, the Frog brothers, and even the Emersons' pet dog Nanook, but not David. Michael must take David on himself. This fight is up there with all of the great homoerotic fight scenes between a 'hero' and a 'villain' (move over Ice Man and Maverick). And when David dies, impaled on a rack of antlers, he looks at Michael and weeps.

Whether intentional or not, *The Lost Boys* is a film saturated with desire. Whether it's a sexual desire, a desire to stay young forever, or the desire to create a family, it's a film about people searching for something. Trying to find themselves. In its opening credits, Jim Morrison croons, "People are strange," and, in one way or another, we can all relate to that.

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# Scary Tales & Fairy Tales

## Resisting Authoritarianism in *Pan's Labyrinth*

by Elizabeth Grice

**There's a quote from Guillermo del Toro that, for years, has lived in a folder on my laptop, simply labelled 'IMPORTANT!'—actually, a screenshot of the quote is the only thing in this folder.** (My personal filing system is obviously a mess, but I do stand by this specific decision.) The quote is this: "Much like fairy tales, there are two facets of horror. One is pro-institution, which is the most reprehensible type of fairy tale: Don't wander into the woods, and always obey your parents. The other type of fairy tale is completely anarchic and anti-establishment." While del Toro has often spoken (and written) about the strong connections between fairy tales and horror and about horror's potential for subverting conservative ideologies instead of reinforcing them, his 2006 fantasy-horror film *Pan's Labyrinth* illustrates both of these ideas so beautifully that even now, nearly fifteen years after the film's original release, I can't get over how perfect a coming-of-age story *Pan's Labyrinth* is.

Rather than idealizing the innocence of childhood in contrast to the harsh realities of adult life (a move both tired and pretty pessimistic) or signalling the shift by Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) into adolescence as something harmful and monstrous (an approach which more conservative horror films often take, particularly when it comes to depicting adolescent girls), *Pan's Labyrinth* follows and celebrates Ofelia's journey to maturity as something no less magical than the world of her childhood. Indeed, through the supernatural elements of the story, the film presents

this journey as an enormous triumph that actually leads to greatly improved circumstances for Ofelia. As she learns both consideration for others and to think for herself, culminating in her ultimate refusal to obey a disturbing command at great personal expense, the film champions a rejection of patriarchal authoritarianism in both a historical setting and a supernatural one. That *Pan's Labyrinth* does this by making a weird little girl its central hero is, in the most complimentary sense of the word, absolutely fantastic.


***Pan's Labyrinth* follows and celebrates Ofelia's journey to maturity as something no less magical than the world of her childhood.**

Since *Pan's Labyrinth* was first released, there have generally been two interpretations of the film's ending. When the fascist Captain Vidal (Sergi López) shoots Ofelia during their final confrontation, this moment marks either the tragic death of the film's sensitive and imaginative young heroine due to the cruel realities of the adult world, or it marks Ofelia's successful completion of the final magical test, signalling both her maturity and her safe return to her underworld kingdom. I feel very strongly that the real ending is the latter of the two options.

Although there are several moments in the film that seem to suggest that Ofelia might simply be imagining the more fantastic elements of the story, there

is one key detail in the film that hinges upon the magical world existing outside of Ofelia's imagination. Throughout, it's an important point that only Captain Vidal and Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), the head housekeeper, have the keys to the household. After Vidal confines Ofelia to her upstairs bedroom near the end of the movie, Ofelia explains to the faun (played by Doug Jones, who also portrayed the Pale Man) that the door is locked. The faun's response is to hand Ofelia a piece of chalk just like one he gave her earlier for the completion of her second task, which she used to draw a magical doorway into another room. The next time we see Ofelia, she's in the Captain's office, holding the piece of chalk and determined to rescue her baby half-brother. Soon after, when Mercedes throws open the door to Ofelia's room (Mercedes's copy of the key is visible in the outside lock as she opens the door) and finds it empty, the only clue she can find as to where Ofelia may have gone is a chalk doorway drawn on the wall. Though we don't see Ofelia's magical escape from the bedroom, all of the clues pointing to the reality of that magical escape add up just in time to soften the blow of Ofelia's apparent death, which happens only minutes later.

When Mercedes and the rest of the rebels finally catch Captain Vidal, rescue Ofelia's half-brother, and assure Vidal that his son will never even know Vidal's name before killing the Captain (the final "fuck you" to a villain obsessed with patrilineal continuity), their small victory over Vidal's fascist outpost



**“In the end, Ofelia matures without having to learn any awful lessons about outgrowing fairy tales, or about the importance of obedience, or anything miserable like that—in fact, entirely the opposite.”**

lends the conclusion of the non-supernatural storyline a note of hope, when otherwise things still appear pretty bleak. The rebel group arrives too late to rescue Ofelia, and Mercedes, who shares a close bond with her, arrives only in time for Ofelia's final moments. Ofelia's death is wrenching and awful—but it's not the note on which her story, or the overall story, ultimately ends. The idea that Ofelia's return to the underworld kingdom will require her death has been heavily foreshadowed. To begin with, the very name 'underworld kingdom' kind of says it all. Additionally, the faun tells Ofelia during their very first meeting that the three tests she must undergo are designed to ensure that her magical essence is intact and that she has "not become mortal." All along, it seems inevitable that Ofelia will eventually need to die in order to return to her true family in the underworld—but this won't be a permanent death.


Ofelia succeeds in her first task of recovering a golden key from a giant parasitic toad, but in so doing, she also carelessly ruins the expensive dress personally sewn for her by her mother (Ariadna Gil), who grew up in poverty. Ofelia fails to understand why this carelessness hurts her mother. During the second test, Ofelia manages to recover the knife she's tasked with retrieving, but in selfishly ignoring the faun's insistence that she not eat any of the food on the Pale Man's table, she brings about the death of two of her fairy guides. It's because of this carelessness in the second task that the faun becomes angry with Ofelia and tells her that she will have only one more chance to return to her kingdom—and that in order to succeed in her third and final task, she will need to obey his orders without question. When the command that Ofelia must follow turns out to be allowing the faun to spill "just

a drop of blood" from her baby brother, Ofelia flat out refuses. (Though the faun insists that "a pinprick, that's all" will sufficiently provide the innocent blood needed to open the magical portal, he holds the large knife that Ofelia recovered in the second task in a way that is...unconvincing, to say the least.) When the faun reminds Ofelia that she had promised to obey and that if she refuses to hand over her brother, she will never be able to return to the underworld, she stands firm. When the faun disappears, Ofelia refuses to hand her brother over to Vidal, too; this is when he shoots and kills her.

**“Ofelia's death is wrenching and awful—but it's not the note on which her story, or the overall story, ultimately ends.”**

Yet, as the scene in which Ofelia is finally reunited with her parents in the underworld at the moment of her human death confirms (her blood having opened the portal instead of her brother's), Ofelia has actually passed the third test. As the faun explains, Ofelia has "spilled her own blood rather than the blood of an innocent—that was the final task, and the most important." Even more importantly, though, Ofelia's refusal to put her brother at risk shows that she's learned at last to balance her inquisitive mind and willingness to be defiant with a consideration for the safety and comfort of others. While Ofelia thoughtlessly breaks rules and allows others to suffer the consequences during her first two challenges, she thoughtfully breaks the rules during the third so that no one else has to suffer. In the end, Ofelia matures without having to learn any awful lessons about outgrowing fairy tales, or about the importance of obedience, or anything miserable like that—in fact, entirely the opposite. When the narrator mentions at the end of the film that Ofelia, in her role as Princess of the underworld kingdom, "reigned there with justice and a kind heart for many centuries," this final detail only reaffirms everything Pan's Labyrinth has already shown us about the person Ofelia has become.

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# KISSING THE SHADOWS

## In Conversation with the Spinsters of Horror

by Valeska Griffiths

Boasting a website ([spinstersofhorror.com](http://spinstersofhorror.com)), a bustling Facebook group, and their own podcast, Canada's Spinsters of Horror are well on their way to establishing their own feminist horror empire. Old friends who have long shared an obsessive love of horror, metal, and cats, Jessica Parant and Kelly Gredner are defiantly unconventional, and have spent the past two years carving out their own unique space in the horror community.

**Let's get right into it: why 'Spinsters of Horror'? It's such a deliciously provocative name, due to the connotations attached to the word 'spinster.'**

**Kelly Gredner:** Jessica actually came up with the name Spinsters of Horror! As with a variety of other negative labels used towards women (witch, slut, bitch) making a positive comeback, it's a term of empowerment for us. We are unconventional women, living unconventional lives, who love horror—

it's perfect! For me, personally, it has become more than the name of my horror project, but a realization of who I am as a woman—I live alone with my cats, am fiercely independent, and value my time/space over anything (and anyone) else. To me, a Spinster is someone who creates their own life that works for them and not anyone else.

**Jessica Parant:** As Kelly has already expressed, we are all about reclaiming the names/negative labels that have

been constantly pinned on women throughout the decades. I want people to feel empowered by these terms and not put down or slighted in any regard. Also, I have always lived a more quiet and introverted life surrounded by cats, my crafts, books, and tea—I am a Spinster at heart. And, once I got divorced, I decided I would never marry again. I do date as I am polyamorous and have a long term partner, however, I am very adamant about having an independent life outside of my

relationships and staying 100% true to myself.

**That's admirable (though unfortunately still fairly subversive in our society). You call yourselves "metal bitches" and both love the macabre. You navigate some fairly traditionally masculine spaces—do you see them becoming more open to the presence and voices of women?**

**KG:** Thankfully, I have experienced very little backlash from being a woman involved with horror (even extreme horror and metal), and I do think it's becoming a more attractive trait to men. I think they are more apt to engage now than perhaps even 10 years ago. There is still a long way to go until things are more equal in their representation, but it's happening! We have centuries of societal/gender expectations to fight against.

**JP:** Sadly, I have experienced some backlash in both the metal and horror communities as a woman, especially one who doesn't "look like" I am into the genres. Since I don't always dress or act the part that is placed upon women in both scenes, I tend to deal with some gatekeeping from time to time. However, I do notice that it is improving and men are becoming more engaged and supportive of women in both communities. That doesn't mean the work is over—I still feel we have work to do in both communities to be safe, inclusive, and receptive to women.

**100% agreed. Your site takes a semi-academic yet very accessible approach to horror critique. Who would you say is your ideal audience?**

**KG:** Originally, we did want to reach out to or focus on the female-identifying audience and give them a space to enjoy horror. But now I feel like it's grown to be more so about showing that you can take the horror genre seriously and have fun at the same time! Overall, we just wanted to include our voices into a community that we both adore so much.

**JP:** When I started podcasting with *The Dark Spectrum* (my first podcast) and now *I Spit on Your Podcast*, I just wanted to include my voice and thoughts in the horror community. I want our podcast to be inclusive and open to all audiences that are open to thoughtful

discussions about the genre, as well as having some fun. Some of my best conversations with people over the past five years have been about the horror genre and various films. But, most importantly for me, I want to shed a positive light on the horror genre. I feel that, all too often, people who say they like horror and those in the horror community are seen as degenerates by people who don't see the merit and benefit of the genre. I have said this in prior interviews and episodes, that the horror genre reveals the dark truth of our human existence and opens it up for discussion.

**Your monthly audio offering I Spit on Your Podcast provides thoughtful and well-researched discussions on horror films and themes—which episodes are you most proud of and why?**

**KG:** 'Episode 5: Rape-Revenge - Is it Feminist or Filth?' is a very early episode that garnered a lot of positive attention. I think it showed listeners that we aren't afraid to get a little dirty sometimes and tackle some challenging subject matter. I think we did so with tact and concern. It's a hard, but important, episode to listen to.

**Right, that was a great episode on a really tough subject.**

**KG:** 'Episode 18: Halloween - Stalkers and Obsession' accidentally went to a very dark place and I love it very much. I think for this one we explored a very popular and revered horror franchise and brought the discussion to a new and disturbing place, and I don't believe that is all that common for horror podcasts.

A few honourable mentions are 'Episode 19: Bisexuality in *Buffy*', 'Episode 10: Spinsters in Space!', and 'Episode 9: Cosmic Horror & Insanity.'

**JP:** 'Episode 5: Rape-Revenge - Is it Feminist or Filth?' was a hard episode for me to do because of my past and the sensitivity of the subject matter. I had always avoided rape-revenge films because I find them triggering. However, I found that discussion and the connections I made with other women in the horror community to be very healing. 'Episode 16: Exorcising the Feminine - *The Exorcist* and *The Last Exorcism*'—because of my Catholic

upbringing, I was terrified of demonic possession and I had many sleepless nights after having accidentally seen a clip from *The Exorcist* or from an exorcism show. So, doing this episode had me facing my fears and my upbringing and learning about how this practice has been used to hurt and control women since the middle ages. And, once again, it is something that relates back to witchcraft.

My honourable mentions include our 'Episode 4: Witches and Female Empowerment - *Season of the Witch* and *The Autopsy of Jane Doe*', 'Episode 22: Elvira Mistress of the Dark' and 'Episode 15: Italian Horror - *Elegant Brutality*'.

**All great picks! Final question: do you have any plans to expand on the Spinster brand in the future? What can we look forward to from the two of you?**

**KG:** It seems I have organically, and inadvertently, turned my monthly *Taboo Terrors* into a separate brand! A subgenre of *Spinsters of Horror*, if you will. I have now done two interviews for *Taboo Terrors* and I would love to do more in the future. We have also started a new series called 'Spinster vs Spinster' where we have friendly debates on films that we either love or find overrated. I am currently working on expanding our merch to include more design options for fans. I am always coming up with new wacky ideas and schemes that Jessica, thankfully, always agrees to!

**JP:** Honestly, where we are now is beyond anything I ever imagined for this project. I had set out wanting to just do a podcast and few blog posts a month about a genre I developed such passion for. However, as Kelly is our Social Media and Marketing Manager, if she brings up an idea I am generally apt to go along with it, which has allowed us to grow more in what we offer and expand outside of our comfort zones. We do have some plans for the Spinsters in the upcoming six months with more 'Spinster vs. Spinster' episodes and some other ways to engage with the Spinsters socially. Apparently, my streaming of horror video games is something people enjoy, so we may do more of those in the future. As well, we plan to keep writing and expanding our reach through various other horror mediums. 

# The Daydreamer's Hero

## Mastering the Great Escape

by Vincent Bec

For many horror franchises, each new chapter brings with it a new final girl. In Renny Harlin's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988) the final girl torch is passed from Kristen Parker (Tuesday Knight) to Alice Johnson (Lisa Wilcox). Alice is more unassuming than the average final girl. While final girls are stereotypically less flashy than the bubbly, girly girls of their friend group—doomed to die from the moment they're shown on screen—most final girls still have an effervescent, main character quality. There is a type of coolness present in many of the tomboyish final girls throughout horror history. The wardrobe of Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) from the *Scream* films may be drab and unobtrusive, but she is a confident, take-no-shit type of person from the beginning. Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) from the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) spent her film in frumpy sweaters, yet showed MacGyver-esque intelligence and resourcefulness. Both Nancy and Sidney

are a core part of their friend groups. They may dress modestly and be more introspective than other characters, but their personalities cannot be described as shy. Alice, on the other hand, begins her film painfully demure. She belongs to a popular friend group, but feels slightly removed from them, more like a side member who tagged along with her more popular brother. Unlike Sidney and Nancy, who outshine their wardrobes, Alice's personality at the beginning of *Dream Master* is even more somber than her clothing.

When we are introduced to Alice, her hair is flat and stringy. It hangs slightly in her face as she stands with her head tilted down, as if she is prepared to avoid eye contact at any moment. She rounds her shoulders and pulls her body into itself, shrinking her presence as much as possible. Her arms are crossed in front of her chest, holding a notebook. This stance acts as a barrier between her and the world. However,

by the time Alice is ready to confront Freddy Krueger, her hair is pulled back from her face. Her clothing is tighter, leaving her less room to hide from the world. Her look no longer fades into the background. In this outfit, Alice stands tall in front of her mirror. Her stance is open, but firmly planted, taking up room and inviting the world to meet her. Alice's apparel isn't the only big change the audience can discern between the beginning and end of the film. Her room decor goes through a transformation as well. At the beginning, her vanity mirror is covered with pictures of her with other people. At this point, she would rather see herself with others than see her standalone image. This signifies that she originally based her self-worth on external factors, mainly her relationships with other people. By the end of the film, she removes all the pictures from her mirror, leaving her with only an internal image of self-worth. The difference between Alice at the beginning of the film and Alice at the end appears to be a complete metamorphosis. However, there is a direct line connecting who Alice was at the beginning and who she is at the end.

**Some maladaptive daydreamers describe the disorder as an addiction to daydreaming.**

The phenomenon of 'maladaptive daydreaming' was first identified by University of Haifa professor Dr. Eliezer Somer in his 2002 paper "Maladaptive Daydreaming: A Qualitative Inquiry". Maladaptive daydreaming is a disorder in which people spend about 60% of their awake time in daydreams. The daydreams of maladaptive daydreamers differ from average daydreams due to their heightened detail, clarity, and duration. However, these striking daydreams are not delusions, because the daydreamers can recognize that they are not real. There are five main characteristics of maladaptive daydreaming: the content and detail of the dreams; one's ability to control their compulsion to dream; the amount of distress it causes; the perceived benefits; and how it affects one's ability to carry out daily activities. People may daydream about celebrities, people they know, or characters they have made up. The daydreams can be a continuous

fantasy or individual narratives, and may be triggered by events, conversations, or stimuli such as noise or smell.

Maladaptive daydreaming is not a standalone problem. Instead, it is a form of escapism used as a coping mechanism to deal with a variety of situations, traumas, and disorders. Many people with depression and anxiety engage in maladaptive daydreaming to remove themselves from the life they connect to their negative feelings. In his original study, Dr. Somer found a connection between trauma and maladaptive daydreaming when he noticed that all of the maladaptive daydreamers in his study had been sexually abused as children. While escapism can be an important mental tool for people who need to remove themselves from stress and anxiety in their lives that they are unable to resolve, the problem begins when maladaptive daydreaming distracts people from their real life. Spending lengthy periods of time in a vivid fantasy world can lead to avoidance, difficulty keeping up with daily responsibilities, and a neglect of real-life relationships. It is a way to protect oneself from distress and pain, however, we are often better served by facing them head on. Some maladaptive daydreamers describe the disorder as an addiction to daydreaming. Indulging in these daydreams is stimulating, yet it can be dangerous to do too often and is harmful when it is used as a replacement for taking control of one's life.

In Alice's first scene, the audience gets a glimpse of her life as she leaves her house for school. As she exits through her side door to meet Kristen, her father (Nicholas Mele) comments in a harsh tone, "You're going out dressed like that?" Alice responds, "What's wrong with it this time?" It is clear that she is used to unpleasant berating from her father. Her brother Rick (Andras Jones) climbs from his window and jumps from the roof to meet the girls, stating, "It's avoid-all-contact day." Rick is able to bypass abuse from their alcoholic father by physically avoiding him, while Alice puts herself in the path of his scolding by walking past him. In spite of Alice's inability to physically avoid her father, she has created her own escape from him mentally, through daydreams.

If we apply the five characteristics of maladaptive daydreaming to Alice's life,

it is clear that she uses it as a way to withdraw from a variety of problems, from her alcoholic father to her general dissatisfaction with her inability to have control in her life. The first characteristic is the level of detail in the daydreams. Alice's daydreams are so lifelike that the audience is unable to differentiate them from reality until another character snaps her out of the dream. The next characteristic is a person's ability to control their compulsion to daydream. Alice's first daydream of the film takes place in the school parking lot while surrounded by her friends, and is interrupted by Rick asking if she is "spacing again." She daydreams enough for the habit to be known to the people around her. Additionally, she is unable to wait until she is alone to daydream.

**Alice's daydreaming has been a safe place for her to practice the person she wants to be until she is strong enough to bring the tactics she practiced in her dreams into her real life.**

The fourth characteristic of maladaptive daydreaming is its perceived benefits. In her daydreams, Alice is able to be the one thing she wishes to be most: assertive. In the daydream mentioned above, Alice flirts with Dan (Danny Hassel), the boy she has a crush on. This dream flirting isn't done in a sweet, subtle way; instead, dream Alice is bold. She calls him a "major league hunk," a phrase borrowed from her outgoing, bodybuilding friend Debbie. Later in the film, Alice daydreams about confronting her dad after he insults the dinner she made for him. In the dream, she walks up to him and smashes his bowl of food, before telling him in a voice filled with passion and anger that she is sick of his drinking. This isn't the only way she could have dreamed of confronting him. She could have dreamed about giving him a long, flowery speech about how much his drinking has ruined their lives. She could have dreamed about debating with him and making him look like a fool with her intelligence. Her dream confrontation is simple and strong. Alice doesn't dream about being an eloquent speaker, a member of Mensa, or a coy flirt. Alice dreams of escaping her docile nature and becoming strong, forceful, and self-assured.

The third and fifth characteristics of maladaptive daydreaming are similar: the amount of distress caused by daydreaming and its impact on the dreamer's ability to function. After a talk about how to control one's nightmares, Kristen asks Alice how she knows so much about dreams. Alice answers, "When it's all you have, you kind of become an expert." Alice has a loving brother and a group of friends who care about her, yet she sees herself as alone with only her dreams for comfort. She is unable to stay in the present moment; rather than enjoying her friendships, she spends time in daydreams. Furthermore, she feels distress and disappointment when her real self cannot match the strength of her dream self. Retreating into her dreams creates a barrier between Alice and the people who care about her, and allows her to avoid actually confronting her father.

During a lesson on assertiveness and martial arts techniques, Rick tells Alice she has to visualize the moves with her mind first and her body will follow. It has long been a theory that one of the reasons we dream during sleep is to give our brains a controlled environment in which to practice working through various scenarios we may face. Alice's daydreaming has been a safe place for her to practice the person she wants to be until she is strong enough to bring the tactics she practiced in her dreams into her real life. Gradually, we begin to see the assertiveness she has practiced in her dreams become a reality. When Dan meets her at the diner she works at later in the film, she immediately tells him she will drive, affirming her leadership in the situation. When they get into an accident and an EMT tries to sedate Dan, Alice stops him. As she goes from unable to speak up to capable leader, Alice's daydreams fade into the background. By the end of the film, Alice's long-held ability to control her dreams transforms into an ability to control her life. For those who desire to move on from their maladaptive daydreaming and into a life where they have control and the ability to be the person they wish to be, Alice is the ultimate reflection of their hopes and dreams.

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## Consent in Crisis: Mourning The Loved Ones

by Valeska Griffiths

**I didn't attend my high school prom (or anyone else's for that matter).** None of my friends did—I hung out with the witchy, punky, goth crowd and school dances were generally viewed with disdain. As a consequence, I don't have strong connections to many movies based on or around prom, apart from Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976)—I'm immune to their spell of nostalgia, and old biases die hard.

Sean Byrne's *The Loved Ones* (2009), however, is a deliciously twisted take on the traditional high school rite of passage; a hot pink jawbreaker with a

surprisingly vicious core and one hell of a saccharine earworm of a character theme. The Australian horror film could rightly be categorized as torture porn, which usually isn't my particular bag either, but its gleeful sense of humour, unabashed absurdity, and candy-coated aesthetic actually make charming its mining of the depths of human depravity and suffering. Much of this is due to the electrifying performance of Robin McLeavy as Lola Stone, the seemingly sweet and mousy loner who oozes charisma and insanity in equal doses when spurned by her high school crush, Brent (a brooding and unwashed

Xavier Samuel.) The story in a nutshell: girl likes boy, girl asks boy to prom, boy turns her down, boy ends up with some new holes in his body. You know, the typical high school love story.

But the A plot isn't the only interesting piece of the story. The secondary plotline, which follows Brent's friend Jamie (Richard Wilson) and his prom date, moody goth Mia (Jessica McNamee), offers a surprisingly nuanced take on consent and trauma.

The film opens in a car, with Brent's father teaching him how to drive. All seems well until a shirtless, mutilated, dead-eyed young man steps onto the road. Brent swerves to avoid hitting him and smashes the car into a tree, killing his father. The fallout from this moment is heavily implicated throughout the rest of the film in not only Brent's story, but also in Mia's.

For all of its giddy indulgence in a pop-art pastiche of grim violence and subverting rites of passage, this is a film deeply concerned with grief and the ways that we cope (or fail to) with

devastating loss. Brent is not a typical angst-filled teen—six months after his father's death, he is dealing with suicidal ideation, a deep sense of guilt, and a mother whose desperation to keep her son close is pushing him away. He is unable to express himself emotionally with his loving girlfriend, Holly (Victoria Thaine) and is a cutter. But Brent is not the only one who is reeling from the trauma of that fatal accident.

**“For all of its giddy indulgence in a pop-art pastiche of grim violence and subverting rites of passage, this is a film deeply concerned with grief and the ways that we cope (or fail to) with devastating loss.**

Mia is one of the film's most interesting characters. Midway through a first viewing, you could be forgiven for questioning the significance of the secondary plot—Jamie and Mia's evening involves a great deal of drinking and drug use, but no real communication. Its connection to the main story seems tenuous, at best. But its inclusion is actually brilliant as both a pointed but subtle response to slut-shaming and as a jumping-off point for a dialogue about rape culture.

On the night of the prom, a sullen Mia seems hell-bent on obliteration as she and Jamie pre-game in the

parking lot. The camera lingers as Mia drinks deeply from a large bottle of vodka, and we see multiple shots of her smoking an enormous joint as though it were keeping her alive. Jamie watches in disbelief, awe, and trepidation, eventually suggesting that they go inside. While exiting the car, she stumbles and falls to the ground. Though they make it to prom, they don't last long. During what seems to be their first spin on the dancefloor, they are ejected by their principal after a wasted Mia is caught performing a sexual act on her bemused date.

Back in the car, they sit silently until Mia suddenly starts kissing Jamie; they wind up having sex in the back seat. Although Mia is the aggressor in her encounters with Jamie, she is clearly incapacitated and therefore unable to truly consent. In his infatuation and desire to lose his virginity, Jamie disregards this fact.

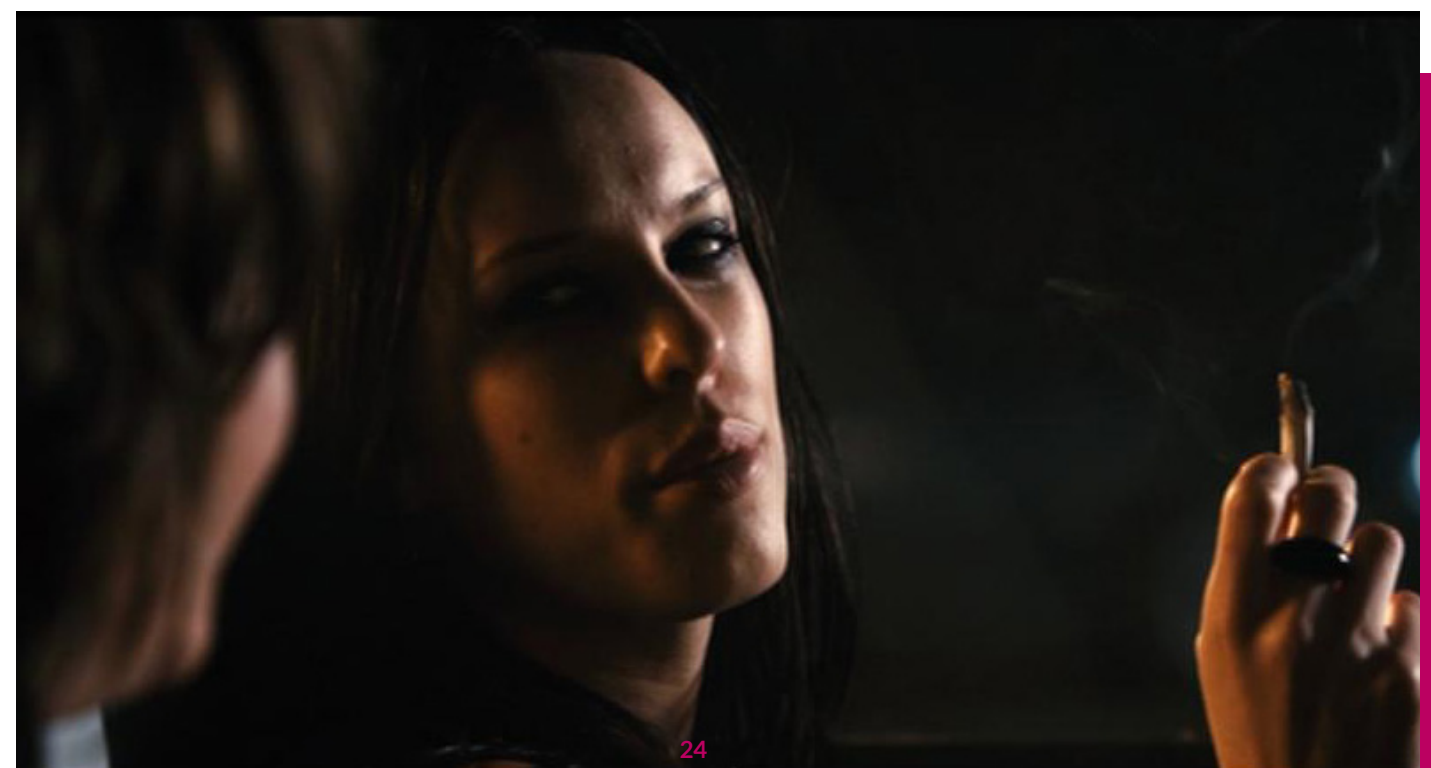
His first sexual act is one of rape.

As likeable as he is—and he is a very likeable character—it is crucial to recognize this act for what it is. In making him likeable, the film counters prevailing cinematic narratives around sexual assault. So often, rape is seen as being perpetrated solely by obvious villains—scummy, evil characters with no redeeming qualities. The deliberate and unusual choice of making Jamie a sympathetic character is reflective of the reality of many sexual assaults. It isn't just the demons hiding in the bushes, the sneering monsters that

telegraph their intentions. Rape is one decision away, and that decision can be made by anyone (don't #notallmen me). Mia's story ends with a shot of her sobbing brokenly on her bed after Jamie drops her back home.

**“So often, rape is seen as being perpetrated solely by obvious villains—scummy, evil characters with no redeeming qualities. The deliberate and unusual choice of making Jamie a sympathetic character is reflective of the reality of many sexual assaults.**

As with Brent, Mia's story is not one of typical teenage rebellion. Near the end of the film, we discover that the mutilated young man that caused Brent's car crash was her brother; missing and presumed dead, he was one of the sociopathic Lola's prior victims. Mia's deep depression about the loss of her much-loved brother is the driving force behind her drug and alcohol abuse—through substances and sex, she seeks to mask her unspeakable pain. Mia is nearly silent throughout the film's runtime, unable to articulate her anguish or ask for comfort. Before revealing her trauma and deep damage, the film invites us to judge her actions, rendering us complicit. Once we understand her story, we are invited to judge ourselves. [g](#)



# We Are the Weirdos, Mister

## Witchcraft, Rebellion & Friendship in *The Craft*

by Prisca Lam

Andrew Fleming's cult sleeper classic *The Craft* (1996) conjures a world where otherness and trauma may generate transformational connections and friendship. The film follows Sarah Bailey (Robin Tunney), a transplant in a Catholic high school in Los Angeles, and a band of misfits rumoured to be witches. The misfits worship a deity named Manon and dabble in witchcraft, but are missing a fourth member to complete their coven. After seeing that Sarah exhibits supernatural powers, the girls become convinced that in her lies their missing link. Together, they see that their powers combined can will into reality anything they desire.

The film hints at a fully fleshed, moving universe outside the narrative where racism, classism, unachievable beauty standards, and poor mental health support plague the four girls. In this film, the girls express this rebellion in a host of ways: through their costuming, their identification with their "weirdo" identities, and their banding together for a sense of unity, friendship, and strength.

### TEENAGE REBELLION (FOR WEIRDOS)

The four main characters in *The Craft* are different from those of contemporary teen girl flicks insofar as the girls are all outcasts, wronged by the cutthroat high school hierarchy around them. The popular girls ridicule them, and the boys on the football team call them "the bitches of Eastwick." Contrary to films like *Jawbreaker* (1999), *Heathers* (1988), or *Clueless* (1995)—satires which represent and deconstruct a band of popular female socialites and their cutthroat friendships—the coven in *The Craft* never shows any sort of ascension or descension in the contained world of the high school. Bonnie's (Neve Campbell) burns force her to see herself as a "monster" incapable of performing normative femininity, while Nancy's (Fairuza Balk) class and turbulent

family background disallow her from participating in normative upper-class cultures. Rochelle's (Rachel True) blackness remains a physical marker for her to not fit in, despite her talents and her wealth, and Sarah suffers from mental illness, leading her to be ostracized. *The Craft* introduces us to a group of girls who have never and will never fit in, because they are fundamentally cast aside by normal society.

The othering of these main characters functions to create a narrative for teenage girls that exists outside of social ascension and high school popularity, for the "weirdos" who never could fit in, and perhaps never want to. Emily Chandler (2016) notes that, "*The Craft* [...] acknowledges that as long as popularity hinges on being middle-class, normatively bodied, white, (hetero) sexually chaste, and mentally healthy, many girls will be barred from achieving this subjectivity" (p. 115). By suggesting alternatives to the popularity contest that most teenage girl films, like *Mean Girls* (2004), *John Tucker Must Die* (2006), or *Bring It On: All or Nothing* (2006), contain, *The Craft* imbues significant value to the formation of social groups that bind together based on solidarity or shared social experiences. Unity can be created in difference, and they find support systems within one another in friendship.

Similar to political collectives who mobilize through opposition, the coven in *The Craft* find social power in their solidarity, as well as supernatural powers in their banding together as witches. As they grow closer, their costuming begins to change as well. The high school's homogeneous unity is amplified by their crisp, gender-segregated Catholic school uniforms as the coven increasingly break uniform codes in order to express their identity or underscore their otherness; they accessorize increasingly in gothic

symbols, such as crosses, heavy makeup, dark colours, and lace.

Through combining traditionally feminine items of clothing with deviant, tough, or powerful accessories like spikes and harnesses, Melissa Maerz (2010) claims that gothic subculture creates a possibility for teenage girls to "critique femininity while at the same time indulg[ing] in it" (p. 36). They strut as a matched unit down the hallway, basking in their newfound confidence as a unified group, in a way that Chandler notes is subversive, as "none of the other students notice the coven's improved sense of self (and more stylish and provocative clothing) [...] consistent with *The Craft*'s lack of interest in notions of popularity" (p. 115). Thus, *The Craft* offers a world for a coven of social pariahs to explore their otherness and find happiness and strength within their differences. In the film, witchcraft—the physical manifestation of solidarity and friendship—proves to be the most allying force that these girls hold together.

### OUR COVEN

*The Craft* also offers solidarity for the group through Wiccan paganism, or witchcraft. Historically, witches were persecuted heavily in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries during witch hunts and trials, and an estimated 85% of the people tortured and executed were women over the age of forty (Thurston, 2001). The setting of an upper-class Los Angeles Catholic high school functions to create a similar atmosphere of persecution and social alienation for the coven, contrasting the religious symbols that adorn the classrooms with their nature-based Wiccan religiosity and the secular gothic-style crosses that drape their clothing. The other teenagers in the film call them "witches" and "sluts" readily, bringing issues of misogyny and heteropatriarchal sex-shaming in the



*The Craft* offers a world for a coven of social pariahs to explore their otherness and find happiness and strength within their differences.

history of witch trials into the present day of the high school.

In the 20th century and towards the present, modern interpretations of Wiccan paganism began to allow "the integration of feminist, environmentalist, and queer-positive politics with religious experience," (Tosenberger, 2010, para. 1) creating a space of agency and control, as is seen within the coven in *The Craft*. Rather than positing them as satanic ritualists, *The Craft* represents the coven's relationship with witchcraft as a binding force, a retributive power, and a source of strength and love. In one of the most iconic scenes of the film, the coven skips school to go to a field and invoke the spirit of Manon for the first time.

For the first and only time in the film, the sun shines brightly on the four, creating a liminal space of lush green fields, warm light, chirping birds, and wide-open spaces. It is a sort of paradise, an escape while the rest of the high school continues its life far away, as Juliana Hatfield sings "Danger is great joy / Dark is bright as fire / Happy is our family / Lonely is the ward." The coven calls one another "sisters" as they invoke the power of Manon through "perfect love and perfect trust." It is only after their circle is complete—all four of the girls join powers, completing the compass

of North, East, South, West—that their power is harnessed into the material world to cause miracles. The moment of bonding and of the realization of their shared powers is blessed by Manon; a kaleidoscope of butterflies flit down to bless them in a spiritual, transcendental moment of friendship and vulnerability.

Their powers are infinitely strong, but the witches limit their scope to within their own lives: righting the issues that have plagued them and caused them pain. Sarah wishes for a love spell and the most popular boy in school falls in love with her. Rochelle's spell causes a racist girl on her swim team who bullies her for her "nappy hair" to slowly lose all of her blonde locks. Bonnie's wish is granted, and the burns on her back miraculously heal, restoring her confidence. Nancy's first brush with power incites the death of her abusive stepfather, whose death in turn reveals a \$175,000 insurance plan that finally allows for her and her mother to move out of their trailer home.

Roger Ebert critiques that, "What I have always wondered about supernatural characters in movies is why their horizons are so limited. Here are four girls who could outgross David Copperfield in Vegas, and they limit their amazing powers to getting even." I believe that Ebert's critique

is sound, but myopic. As Anne Cohen (2018) notes, "too often, women feel powerless to change circumstances—political, social, financial, take your pick—that feel beyond their control. *The Craft* presents a universe in which any slight could magically be made right, and in our current climate, that's an appealing prospect." For the coven in *The Craft*, witchcraft is not a tool of power but rather, a tool to create a utopia. The coven rights the wrongs that dominant, white, upper-class American society has condemned them to through the magic of witchcraft within their contained hamster wheel of their high school. *The Craft* imagines solidarity as a viable tool to even out injustices, to induce karma in a seemingly unfair world, or to punish those who have hurt them. Witchcraft, then, is an allegory of the power of opposition: the religiosity of having a coven, or a community, of individuals outside of normative societies predicated on popularity, wealth, or success.

### SHARED TRAUMAS

Trauma functions similarly as a binding force, working to ally them together even closer through vulnerability and emotional, interpersonal connection. Midway through the film, the girls have a sleepover where they share their deepest secrets and fears. The coven participates in acts of care for

one another. Sarah braids Rochelle's hair lovingly, in stark contrast to the people in their school who constantly make racist remarks about it. Rochelle says, both awkwardly and unsurely, that she's sorry for the death of Sarah's mother; incapable of saying much more that can address the heaviness of the moment. Meanwhile, as Bonnie begs Manon to take away her scars, Nancy watches her with concern in her eyes, mouthing "baby" to herself in empathy and pain; she turns away when the sight becomes too much to bear.

The scene is starkly different from the previous scene of transcendence in the open field. Instead, it takes place in the private space of a bedroom—the room dark, save for candles and a fireplace, representing light as both a destructive source as well as an illuminating one. They share their weaknesses and traumas with one another in hushed tones; secrets that they all keep within themselves, within the protective love of the coven. They recognize, too, the impossibilities of ever understanding one another's traumas completely. Bonnie's quest to be beautiful is something that Nancy cannot fully comprehend, but she shows care and love regardless. Rochelle can only utter an apology that seems disingenuous to the admission of Sarah's mother's death, but she sits in silence for a moment in respect.

*The Craft* shows a multifaceted, multidimensional possibility for friendship to be more than just a binding force for weirdos. It also becomes a space for sharing, for safety, and for vulnerability; where traumas can be expressed in understanding and empathy. In *The Craft*, friendship becomes a sacred space for emotional connection, for love and for secrecy; a spiritual experience in and of itself.

#### PUNISHMENT?

Friendship in the film is a rebellious, powerful force, and a healing one. But its ending seems to collapse all of the significance that it imbues as the girls turn on one another, as their powers "come back threefold" and their witchcraft spins into chaos that causes more evil than good. In its conclusion, following a lengthy magic-infused fight, Bonnie and Rochelle lose their powers, and break their friendship with Sarah and Nancy. Nancy is relegated into a mental institution—where she's "gone crazy" and remains bound forcefully to the bed. Sarah escapes relatively unscathed, keeping her powers and punishing all of the girls for using witchcraft for evil.

This ending is already reworked. The film's Wicca consultant, Pat Devin, had an issue with the original ending where Rochelle and Bonnie join forces with Sarah to kill Nancy, impaling her on a coat hook—she defends Nancy's character, saying that "Nancy, who had been abused, neglected, molested and finally driven mad ... was not intrinsically evil and did not deserve to die" (Yohalem, 1997).

Indeed, she doesn't. Nancy's rage as she kills Chris—angrily accusing him of calling girls sluts when "[he's] the slut"—is a feminist declaration of revenge for her sisters, and yet she is treated as a woman drunk on power after this moment, causing the splinter that destroys the coven. Chandler claims that the film offers two scenarios: "either three of the girls can unite to vanquish the fourth, or all four girls can live and their coven is splintered" (p. 121). For Chandler, the impossibility of "saving the world together" lies in the difficulty of pure female friendships, which the film upholds. She claims that the coven's schism represents an

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unforgivable betrayal.

However, in my opinion, the film builds a strong cast of women and in the end falls under trappings of heteropatriarchal ideals of womanhood: women must be punished for excess (Nancy) and praised for their restoration of the status quo (Sarah). It is no mistake that Sarah—white, upper-class, able-bodied, sexually chaste, and traditionally feminine—is the only one who escapes unscathed while the rest of the coven is returned back into their social places, left behind with little conclusion. What can we do with such a disillusioning ending?

*The Craft* remains culturally relevant, a cornerstone for teen girl film even today for its nuanced and complex representation of teenaged female friendships—one predicated on shared experiences and traumas. It creates a space where it is possible for the 'others' to simply exist outside of normative society, and find a life outside of the social climb—in warm spaces outside of school, in shared religiosities and spiritual experiences, and, most importantly, in a community that exists even long after high school graduation.

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# CLICK ME IF YOU DARE

## Creepypasta as a Symbol of Chaotic Power

by Gina Freitag

**Creepypasta has a way of staying with you.** Born in a digital environment and hauntological in nature, this modern horror fiction lingers on with each copy-and-pasted reiteration on social media. Its other-worldliness exists in that gap between storyteller and reader, where virtual creatures and serial killers become spectres lurking in tweets, blogs, and forums, never really taking physical form but leaving terror in their wake all the same.

This insidious force gains momentum with each new reader interaction and collaboration, inspiring nightmarish internet legends that sometimes mask themes of youthful troubles and follow a person around both on- and off-line. It's Jeff the Killer, that bullied student driven to murder, who cut off his own eyelids in a fit of madness, who whispers "Go to sleep" in your ear at night before he strikes. And poor Ted the Caver, guided by curiosity and lost in the dark while exploring that strange local cave, never to be heard from again.

**Born in a digital environment and hauntological in nature, this modern horror fiction lingers on with each copy-and-pasted reiteration on social media.**

And, of course, there's Slenderman. No one wants to catch a glimpse of that lanky, faceless, gentleman creep, standing stock-still at the edge of school property or in the woods, drawing children and teens in with his thrall. His story gained additional exposure through recently developed properties like Irene Taylor Brodsky's 2016 HBO documentary, *Beware the Slenderman*, Sylvain White's box-office disappointment, *Slenderman* (2018), and even Red Letter Media's

YouTube instalment, "Did Red Letter Media Invent Slenderman?" (2017), in which hosts Mike Stoklasa and Jay Bauman reflect on a similar character from their 2006 film, *The Recovered*. This creepypasta is suddenly anchored in terrifying reality. But, of the three examples, the documentary is perhaps the most disturbing, with its examination of the figure and the role he played in that Waukesha County, Wisconsin, criminal case. You know the one: two twelve-year-old girls were charged with attempted first-degree murder, citing Slenderman's dark influence over their violent actions.

This creepypasta tests the boundaries between hoax and actual encounter, moving beyond computer screens and audience imaginations to devastating real-life effect. It ostensibly obscures those boundaries for other creepypasta ghouls in the digital ether. Normally, these narratives have only two possible outcomes:

...either they rise and fall in popularity on the Internet as spirits being periodically reawakened into restlessness as they are copied and pasted, remixed and spread until they are forgotten, or they are conjured into a fictional existence away from the hauntological state of the Internet through screen adaptations that bring the narrative – and crucially its status as a work of fiction – into reality (Ondrak, 2018, p. 176).

The Slenderman example aside, the underlying ontological ambiguity in creepypasta allows for a suggestion of 'the real': they're usually written about in colloquial speech in an unpolished style, jumping between online platforms; their "decidedly fragmented and deconstructed way of telling stories [elicits] a sincere feeling of believability" (Ondrak, 2018,

p.167), like gossip about 'a friend of a friend'. It prompts a "recollection of [the] obscure" or "a manufactured memory" (Ondrak, 2018, p.174) for those sincerely engaging with it. The story of 'Candle Cove' (expanded upon in the *Channel Zero* series), captures this sentiment through exchanges in an online forum, with participants recalling the same terrifying children's show that apparently never existed; a bonding moment over a collective nightmare.

Creepypasta captivates and expects an interaction, effectively holding sway over those who attempt to harness its chaotic power. It excites morbid curiosity, beckons others into its folds, and evokes a sense of invincibility in the creatures conjured. Once created and shared, you can no longer control creepypasta. Readers participate in this chaotic power through a Frankensteinian complicity in borrowing and copying parts to reconstruct life anew, not unlike another creepypasta figure: the Doll Maker. This disturbed figure crafts and trades in accursed dolls with the uncanny appearance of humans, inevitably bringing about devastation and death.

Though cinematic translations of creepypasta narratives haven't seen the same popularity or success as their digital origins, the 'transmission' theme is arguably already embedded in contemporary horror in symbolic ways: in the inexplicable reanimation of recurring villains and their endless slew of sequels, and in the intangible forces transmitted from body to body as they stalk their victims. But who knows what the future will bring?

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**Riverdale, home to Archie and the gang, is the perfect town.** Time passes and the world changes, but everything in Riverdale maintains its static bliss. Archie comics represent a version of the world at peace, a world where the middle class is more concerned with a broken-down jalopy than any lasting social change. That will all change for the residents of Riverdale when Reggie Mantle kills Jughead Jones's beloved pet, Hot Dog.

Created in 1939, Archie and the gang represented the ideals of the time, set to appeal to the same audience as Andy Hardy movies, movies that indulged in classic American idealism. As the real world grows and evolves, new characters and sensibilities sneak into Riverdale, but nothing 'bad' ever happens there (or nothing worse than Jughead being short on his tab). Beneath the reality of the Riverdale is something else; a world with no room for deviation.

In 2013, the world of Archie met the world of horror with the release of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's *Afterlife with Archie*. Horror is entropy incarnate—when it arrives, things have to change. By bringing terror to Riverdale, *Afterlife with Archie* allowed readers to look into the deeper psychology of beloved character archetypes as they're thrust into life-or-death situations. Zombies have invaded the perfect town of Riverdale and they're ripping their way through the entire populace. For many, this means death, for others, it means something much worse.

The origins of *Afterlife with Archie* will sound familiar to people from the video store era. Much like the sensation of going to your local Blockbuster and grabbing a movie for the cover art, creator Aguirre-Sacasa laid his eyes upon a variant cover for an issue of *Life with Archie* featuring undead versions of the familiar characters. In a 2013 interview with Chris Cummins for Den of Geek, Sacasa said of the origins of the book:

"I was obsessed with Archie and I was obsessed with horror. I was in my local comic book shop in L.A. called Golden Apple, and I saw Francesco's cover for issue 23 of *Life With Archie* and said 'Oh my God, Archie's doing a zombie book!' So I bought it, and then when I got home I saw it was just a variant (cover)."

The artist behind the cover was Francesco Francavilla, known for horror covers and posters. The two partnered up and created *Afterlife with Archie*. Aguirre-Sacasa is known for his work as a showrunner on CW's *Riverdale* and Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. The ten issues of *Afterlife with Archie* feature some of the most complex and layered stories told within the Archie framework; with mere panels, they tell a story that will leave readers shivering with discomfort for days.

As a plot device, zombies are often used to explore the base humanity of characters. By dipping a gaggle of nice Riverdale kids into the foam of a zombie mouth, *Afterlife with Archie* allowed readers to view the polished archetypes for who they really are. Pulling back the curtain on 'wholesome America' tends to expose deep-seated racism, misogyny, and dark secrets, and *Afterlife with Archie* utilized zombies to pierce the veil, allowing readers to see what was behind Riverdale's vision of perfection.

We've seen this 'unmasking' explored before. Bryan Forbes's 1975 feminist horror *The Stepford Wives* (and its 2004 remake) showcased the perfection of traditional values through the eyes of a group oppressed by them: married women. After moving to a quaint town where traditional values and gender norms are held in high esteem, the wives notice something strange afoot. The strangeness turns out to be the literal replacement of the progressive women with traditional wife robots, as a means of keeping things "nice" for otherwise upset oppressors: the men.

**By peeling back the paint and kicking through the drywall, the film explores the peaceful progress that is often viewed as earth-shattering violence.**

1998's *Pleasantville*, directed by Gary Ross, sent modern teens into a 1950s sitcom that represented the perfect America. Tobey McGuire plays David, a teen obsessed with the escapist representation of traditional America for which he longs. Trapped in literal black and white, *Pleasantville* seems like the perfect town where everyone has a picket fence and 2.5 kids, but just beneath the surface are stories of women who want to go to school,

unsatisfied spouses stuffed into gender roles, and rampant sexual repression. By peeling back the paint and kicking through the drywall, the film explores the peaceful progress that is often viewed as earth-shattering violence. A fiery protest is positioned by oppressors as the enemy to peace, but these are the types of steps the oppressed must take in order to foster change.

In *Pleasantville*, *Stepford Wives*, and *Riverdale*, what is viewed as 'nice' is often hiding something more dysfunctional. By unleashing zombies into Riverdale, *Afterlife with Archie* was able to explore that. The 'nice,' traditional town is often used as a tool to curb progress and position it as the enemy. Tarana Burke's #MeToo movement was used to shatter everything about Hollywood (and ultimately beyond), exposing the disaster that hid in plain sight. The signs of oppression were always there, but not until we were forced to face them did we address the issue, resulting in a flurry of firings, 'cancellations', and falls from grace.

The reaction by many was to skewer the movement as "ruining everything." We had preferred to see something 'nice': Hollywood making nice movies, Bill Cosby as a sweater-wearing father figure, Louis CK as a king of comedy, Mario Bitoli as a cuddly Italian chef. Those shouting "burn it down" are often positioned as the villains of the story, but unrest is necessary for progress, and the first step is to strip down what is viewed as 'perfect.' Archie's zombie apocalypse stands as the unrest that leads the charge of progress.

# Paradise Lost

## Life After Afterlife with Archie

by Lindsay Traves & Andrew Roebuck

Archie comics have progressed alongside the world. Kevin Keller, Archie's first gay character, was introduced in 2010, and Riverdale was not quite set ablaze. While a 2013 issue chronicled Kevin's wedding and celebrated Riverdale's biracial gay couple, in the real world, the issue was protested by a group called 'One Million Moms' (who have also decried such dangers as Mattel's inclusive line of dolls and "cussing" in Burger King commercials).

**Those shouting "burn it down" are often positioned as the villains of the story, but unrest is necessary for progress, and the first step is to strip down what is viewed as 'perfect.'**

To compare Riverdale as we know it from Archie comics to the town of Pleasantville isn't to accuse it of being a symbol of oppression for those who don't conform, but to label it a relic of the time of its creation; escapism for those of us who long for what David saw in *Pleasantville*. If Riverdale represents the supposed American ideal, then *Afterlife with Archie* is the disillusionment of those ideals through the lens of a zombie apocalypse. It is for those of us who turn to horror to analyze our real world anxieties and challenge the status quo.

When zombies upend society and the illusions are gone, stories of close siblings, traditional marriages, and

competitive friendships become rape-revenge tales, stories of cheating husbands, and self-esteem-slammings love triangles. When slapping zombies onto the page, *Afterlife with Archie* didn't hesitate to throw everyone into the fray.

With apparent intentionality, disaster came to Riverdale immediately following the portrait of the untouchable privileged white guy finally going too far, and the reactive sympathies of a minority character. When Reggie Mantle drove recklessly through Riverdale, he finally did the unthinkable and killed Jughead's dog, shattering the emotional core of the gang. It came to Sabrina to attempt to rectify the tragedy with witchcraft, setting off a chain of events that burnt Riverdale to the ground.

With each familiar relationship tested, readers either had suspicious feelings confirmed or were forced to face unwelcome truths. Hiram Lodge, the rich white patriarch, is an adulterer; the Archie-Veronica-Betty love triangle is a massacre to the sultry brunette who learned to derive self esteem from the attention of men; the teenage witch is a Satan-aligned necromancer.

In Archie comics, Jason Blossom is Cheryl's overprotective brother; a bit too jealous and comfortable commenting on his sister's appearance. He's the pill that makes the mean-spirited Cheryl seem balanced. When zombies are used to peel back the sunshiney Riverdale veneer, their relationship transforms from the story of a mean girl with an

overprotective brother to a *Flowers in the Attic* style horror story of abuse that culminates in rape revenge.

In 1971, Archie introduced Chuck Clayton, Riverdale High's first black student, and, in 1976, his girlfriend Nancy Woods. Chuck and Nancy were able to exist amongst Riverdale residents, but they remained othered. Kept in their quadrant for the duration of nostalgic 50s Riverdale stories, the zombie apocalypse revealed that Nancy was in a secret, taboo relationship with Ginger Lopez. The progressive version of Riverdale in the 1970s might have welcomed Chuck and Nancy, but would not have been so kind to the interracial lesbian relationship, something we saw with the reaction to the story of Kevin Keller.

From the ashes of Rockwellian America rose the stories of the oppressed and repressed citizens of Riverdale. Zombies represented the civil unrest, symbolic of the movements that pierce the veils and force progress. By reanimating the beloved Hot Dog, the necromancer revealed the rotting corpse underneath the perfect town.

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# Der Nachtmahr: Mental Illness & Transformation in a Teenage Nightmare

by Carolyn Mauricette

*The Nightmare*, 1781 (oil on canvas) Fuseli, Henry (Fussli, Johann Heinrich)  
Credit: Detroit Institute of Arts, USAFounders Society  
Purchased with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman/Bridgeman Images

**Teenage mental health can be a rocky road.** Many factors contribute to the quality of mental health, from physical changes, environment, socioeconomic status, and region. The World Health Organization cites several factors including the “desire for greater autonomy, pressure to conform with peers, exploration of sexual identity, and increased access to and use of technology. Media influence and gender norms can exacerbate the disparity between an adolescent’s lived reality and their perceptions or aspirations for the future.” It’s a trial by fire to maintain your sanity during this formative, conflict-filled time in a person’s life, especially in this fast-changing world.

Cinematically, we’ve seen films like *Black Swan* (2010), *Donnie Darko* (2001) and *Daniel Isn’t Real* (2019) putting a unique genre spin on young people and mental illness. With director AKIZ’s (Achim Bornhak) 2015 film *Der Nachtmahr*, we can add another to this list. AKIZ uses a creature tied to classic Romantic literature and art to personify a young woman’s struggle with mental illness, self-acceptance, and her relationship with reality.

Tina (Carolyn Genzkow) is almost eighteen, comes from an upper-middle-class home, and is part of the ‘in crowd’ at school. She attends a drink- and drug-fueled party where she sees something in the bushes, has a weird, dream-like experience of being run down in the road, passes out, then comes home to hear strange noises in her kitchen. She swears there is something in the house and her parents have the home inspected to reassure her. After attending therapy sessions at the behest of her parents due to her disturbing behaviour, Tina makes contact with a fetus-like creature. Initially repulsed and terrified, she starts to feel what it feels and begins to care for it. Before she can explore her relationship with her charge, her parents discover the creature and, in a traumatic takedown, have it taken away to be studied. Tina must break her creature free and show the world who she is, despite her troubles and what people think of her.

There are many interpretations of *Der Nachtmahr*, and the director welcomes them all. Some have said they felt the film was about abortion, bulimia (since the creature binge eats), substance

abuse, mental illness, a demon coming to claim a soul, or a coming-of-age story. During most of the film, we are unsure of what is real and what is a projection of Tina’s mind—even when her parents discover the creature and frantically do away with it—but we are certain of their concern for her mental state. Tina’s friends distance themselves from her and, along with her terrified parents, create only frustration for this young woman as she struggles for a grasp on reality.

**AKIZ uses a creature tied to classic Romantic literature and art to personify a young woman’s struggle with mental illness, self-acceptance, and her relationship with reality.**

As a child, director AKIZ was influenced by Stephen Spielberg’s *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and the symbiotic relationship between Elliot (Henry Thomas) and his alien friend. Like Elliot, Tina feels what her creature feels; forcing her to come to terms with her demons as her actions directly affect this new being in her midst. Once repulsed by its milky eyes, grey pallor, and knobby, hunched form, she soon embraces it as an extension of her reality for them both to exist.

Tina’s struggle is illustrated by personifying it with a creature while also making the film a snapshot of the era using current technology, music, and youth, but there are ties to Gothic Romanticism and horror as well. The title of the film is inspired by the 1781 painting “Der Nachtmahr (The Nightmare)” by Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), which famously features a woman asleep with a demon perched on her chest as a horse looks on. The word *nachtmahr* according to AKIZ, is archaic in the German language and means creature or imp, not a direct translation of the common word ‘nightmare’, but it ties the painting to the film. Fuseli’s famous piece was a break from contemporary neoclassical art, where it conveyed a feeling instead of meaning and introduced sexuality, the supernatural, and Gothic horror to the artistic world at that time. Along with Fuseli’s iconic painting, we also have a reference to his contemporary, English poet and artist William Blake (1757-1827) in the film. Both were major figures during the Romantic

era (approximately 1800-1890) and in Gothic art, and they play an interesting role in *Der Nachtmahr* where we see perception, reality, and sanity transcend to the sublime.

The Romantic Era countered the Age of Reason (late 17th to 18th centuries) and veered towards the experience, feeling, and self-expression, as well as the sublime where the emotional experience of art exceeded the ordinary. We also see the rise of the great Romantic writers like Shelley and Byron, champions of Gothic horror. During this time, Blake was known for creating his own mythology in an oppressive world. He was outspoken against organized religion, championed humanitarian rights, had visions of the divine, and was considered mad by some, but within his complex writings lies a link to the mystical through subversion. Whether he was critiquing politics and religion or preaching the virtues of the sublime, his is a many-layered language and one that describes a constantly changing state of being.

**Blake emphasized experience instead of logic in his work, and this applies to what Tina feels during her transformation as she rebels, defies expectations, and creates her own reality.**

Blake’s *The Book of Urizen*, a prophetic Genesis poem written to contradict religion, reason, and logic, brings us closer to Tina’s transformation and acceptance of her mental state. Kim Gordon, lead singer of the band Sonic Youth, plays Tina’s English teacher and discusses Blake’s tome, particularly the verse regarding the birth of Orc, a mythical figure who is born to Blake’s version of Adam (Los) and Eve (Enitharmon). Orc in simple terms represents rebellion, revolution, and freedom:

“Coild within Enitharmon’s womb/  
The serpent grew casting its scales, /  
With sharp pangs the hissings began /  
To change to a grating cry, /  
Many sorrows and dismal throes. /  
Many forms of fish, bird & beast /  
Brought forth an Infant form /  
Where was a worm before.  
The Eternals their tent finished /



Alarm'd with these gloomy visions / When Enitharmon groaning / Produc'd a man Child to the light.

A shriek ran thro' Eternity: / And a paralytic stroke: / At the birth of the Human shadow."

Students discuss the birth/death metaphors while Tina notes the passage represents a feeling with no name. It's here that we see her slowly embracing her perception as different from others. Throughout the film, we get a sense that she has never quite fit in—when her creature appears, this is more than evident. Blake emphasized experience instead of logic in his work, and this applies to what Tina feels during her transformation as she rebels, defies expectations, and creates her own reality.

The ending of *Der Nachtmahr* is ambiguous by design and open to viewer interpretation. In the final frames, Tina dresses as a warrior, breaks her creature out of a lab, and crashes what was meant to be her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Her friends are

horrified when they see her with the creature and her parents try to rescue her, but Tina's creature helps her break free by literally taking the wheel and driving off into the night. Tina's debut as her new self is either an ascension to her sublime state of being or a mental break—it's left for us to decide. We can believe that she is embracing her mental illness, succumbing to it, or taking it for one last spin. Was she admitted to an institution, is she a visionary like Blake, did she die, or simply escape into the night for a new beginning? There's reason to believe that several timelines occur throughout the film, as AKIZ uses dreamlike, parallel realities and one major rewind sequence to create a disorienting feeling for the audience that mimics Tina's surreal experience, implying a break from current reality and culmination of alternate ones. The film becomes our own individual sublime experience which is key to an interpretation born of the Romantic era creators.

*Der Nachtmahr* is the first part of a film trilogy to personify birth, love,

and death, but AKIZ doesn't make it simple to decipher exactly what has been birthed. Tina rebels and creates her own revolution with her Orc-like creature leading the charge for her freedom. If she suffers from mental illness, the ending of the film leaves her in the hands of her parents in one reality; in another, she accepts it, so she can manage a condition that never really goes away. Instead of suppressing her creature, those around her might let her make peace with it, as a part of her journey to adulthood. While we don't know what happens to Tina, her choice to accept her creature, whatever it represents, is the first step to dealing with or conquering the demon she discovers within.

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## Let It Bleed: Monsters & Power in Maturity

by Emily von Seele

In her seminal 1993 work, *The Monstrous Feminine*, Barbara Creed states: "The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience...As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity" (Creed, 1993, p.3).

This is true across horror, but is specifically relevant to horror films revolving around teenage girls. The onset of sexual maturity is a benchmark that forever changes how a woman is perceived. Ask any midwestern father and he will tell you that the moment his daughter turned thirteen, she became a totally different person. The sweet little girl was gone and a demon stood in her place, wearing makeup, staying out late, and plaguing the household with her fits of rage and constant attitude.

Adolescence has always been a battle, but for teenage girls, it is twofold—we have to deal with the changes that our own bodies are undergoing, while also dealing with the near-constant judgment and negative assumptions from the world around us. Even as we

struggle to understand our growing breasts and our widening hips, the patriarchy notices them immediately and places unspoken expectations on us. Even as we struggle to understand ourselves and create a space for our growing minds, society sees us only as harpies—angry, mindless, and vicious.

This fear of womanhood is reflected in a number of adolescent horror films, wherein the main characters are faced with some element of growing up, ranging from puberty, like in *Carrie* (1976), to sexual awakening, like in *Teeth* (2007). In these films, the characters undergo the expected changes that come with womanhood, while also receiving far more than was anticipated.

In *Carrie*, a lonely and isolated teenage girl (Sissy Spacek) gets her first period in the locker room shower. She is mercilessly tormented by the other girls who throw pads at her and chant "Plug it up!" (or some derivation, depending on which adaptation you are watching). With her period comes another awakening—Carrie has the gift of telekinesis that has been lying dormant until she reached maturity. With the onset of menstruation, this power begins to appear. At first, it is completely uncontrolled, as Carrie screams in the locker room and shatters a lightbulb above her head.



As time goes on, Carrie grows to be more and more in control of her newfound ability. Eventually, when her worst tormentor dumps a bucket of pig's blood on her at the prom, Carrie finally lashes out. She bars the doors of the school gym and sets the entire place on fire—all with the power of her mind.

Even as we struggle to understand ourselves and create a space for our growing minds, society sees us only as harpies—angry, mindless, and vicious.

Culturally, *Carrie* reflects a societal fear of menstruation. Not only of the act (which the patriarchy would have us keep secret and to ourselves) but of the larger implications. Carrie undergoes a change with her puberty. It is one that gives her a horrible power and makes her dangerous. In her mother's words, Carrie has become a "witch" and has been given "Satan's Power." Though it's the most natural thing in the world and something that affects 50% of the population, our reproductive system is still something that society fears.

In *Teeth*, Dawn's (Jess Weixler) changing body is kept secret from her through the power and control of religion. A woman's body is viewed as something "precious" (in other words, unspeakable). Her virginity is not her own. It is a gift to be saved and given to her future husband. When Dawn begins to explore her sexuality for the first time, she discovers that she carries the mythical Vagina Dentata, which activates and attacks her partner if she feels threatened.

A woman having control over her own body and sexuality is a concept that makes our patriarchal society cringe. A woman's body is something to be controlled and conquered. The idea that she would hold power over it is innately threatening. In traditional male/female relationships, society sees the man as being the more dominant power. By giving the "weaker" party the power in this pairing, the formerly dominant side becomes fearful that something



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untoward may happen to them (all the while, never understanding that their fears are the fears that women face every day).

**A woman having control over her own body and sexuality is a concept that makes our patriarchal society cringe.**


While these films reflect society's fear of womanhood, they also reflect the innate potential that women hold. With these seemingly horrific changes also comes a newfound power. Both of the characters experience it in their own right, just as each woman does in her own life. Patriarchal society may try to tell us that our maturity puts us at a disadvantage to men and demands that we take on a subservient role, but our maturity brings with it its own magic, just as it does in fiction.

Carrie might have been the butt of the high school joke, but her powers allow her to finally take revenge on her tormentors. Her story may not have a happy ending, but her power also allowed her the possibility of breaking free from the torment that she suffered at the hands of her abusive mother and her classmates.

Dawn is afforded a tool with which to protect herself from the unwanted advances of men. While it starts as an automatic defence mechanism, she eventually learns to control it. By the end of the film, she has power over the dentata and is able to unleash it, allowing her body to finally become her own.

These coming-of-age horror films reflect the fear that our patriarchal society has of our bodies and our independence, but they also show the power that those things innately hold. Through the journeys of these characters, we see what we, as women, are up against, and we see ourselves in the fight, wielding the power that comes with our natural maturity.

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# ONCE BITTEN:

## Audre's Revenge & The Current State of Horror

by **Monika Estrella Negra**

**I never thought that my latest film, *Bitten, a Tragedy*, would have an end. I have tried numerous times to dedicate myself to the idea of a completed fourth film, but it has proven to be more difficult than expected.**

A bit of back story—I ended up in Toronto by way of an abusive relationship and a desire to build Audre's Revenge Film, a collective of creatives, with my best friend and business partner Mariam Bastani. I was used to roughing it, as I had bounced around from place to place post my divorce in 2014. Audre's Revenge Film began in Chicago shortly after I had decided to stop organizing shows within the DIY punk scene of Chicago. I had always been a cinephile to a certain degree, however, I was interested in playing along with horror as my medium. Horror has always held a special place in my heart because of its lawlessness. There are so many opportunities to create a story that can be considered horror, that in life are seen as arbitrary to those who do not directly experience the narratives expressed. My community has always been queer, trans, and very leftist. However, in my particular experience, I faced a lot of anti-blackness even from some radical circles I was a part of, and it caused irreparable trauma that I am still dealing with today. It is from this trauma that I created the inaugural film of my 'career': *FLESH* (2016).

Fast forward to 2018 and I have just returned to Philly with a vision of *Bitten* in hand. I wanted it to be a story of evolution regarding my

*Vengeance* Anthology, that I created post-*FLESH*. The second and third films, *They Will Know You by Your Fruit* (2017) (co-directed with Valerie Bah) and *SUCCUBUS* (2017) were made within my time spent in Montreal and Toronto. It was my goal to make a movie in each city I inhabited, in order to capture the spirit of differing experiences and perspectives of the Black women who lived there. Each story, each film, and each photo set were a direct incarnation of the stories shared between myself and other Black women. Our common threads were the complexities of existing in a world that never meant to see us survive. This is what Audre Lorde, the famed Black Warrior Lesbian Poet, wrote about in many of her essays. It is for her that our company is named.

In *Bitten*, Lydia is an archetype for the brash, alt party girl who doesn't seem to have any depth outside of her daunting appearance. However, upon arriving at a warehouse party in West Philly, USA, it is obvious that she is searching for something. In my mind, Lydia is searching for an answer to her own haunting within her own life. Especially in this time of political unrest, anti-racism work amongst white individuals, and a pandemic, Lydia has the timely re-presence in my imagination. When I wrote the film three years ago, my priority was to show a different side to the horror community that the mainstream community wrote off so easily.

Now with 'diversity' being a buzz word in everyone's repertoire, and

with production houses and brands seeking to reconcile their (ancestor's) privilege guilt, the eye has been turned to our community. Though the risk of tokenism runs rampant, and there are many who have stolen or appropriated our language, music, style of dress, and unapologetic Blackness, there has been a lot of solid work created by independent Black filmmakers being made available. Filmmakers such as Misty Dawn, England Simpson, Somica Spratley, and Ashlee Blackwell have created, despite the lack of support from many film outlets that withhold their resources for 'professional' nepotistic pursuits.

I wanted *Bitten, a Tragedy* to represent the superficiality of white redemption and what proper anti-racist work should look like. To become anti-racist and to be at the top of a hierarchical food chain is to struggle. It is not a 'feel-good' experience and, in a way, an active process of disintegration is needed in order for 'equality' to ring true. In the film, Lydia finds a promising hook-up at the party. Throughout the night, a series of ancestral visions

occur between herself and the young lady she meets. In an effort to remain mysterious about the film's plot, there is plenty that may be said about the wiles of any late hook-up in this day and age.

**I wanted *Bitten, a Tragedy* to represent the superficiality of white redemption and what proper anti-racist work should look like.**

Ancestral veneration is not something exclusive to Black and Indigenous/POC cultures. It is also a source of power for Indigenous European ancestry and has taken on multiple forms in transgenerational context. It has also been a cause of ancestral warfare, which is what we are currently undergoing now. The traditions of the past—white supremacy, colonization, anti-Blackness—are in the process of being destroyed. However, one question lingers with the film and Lydia's purpose for being: how far are white people willing to go to destroy the very thing that has determined

their foothold in this life? How far are white people willing to go to deal with the ghosts of their ancestors' complacency or violence, in order to retain their privilege? Are they truly capable of destroying that legacy of violence or would they rather sit complacent while the cycle of violence continues to ravage our communities?


It doesn't matter how you dress and it doesn't matter how much money you give to poor Black people (which you should do ANYWAY). What matters is deconstructing that haunted legacy of inequality and stepping into a newer world of inclusion and true equality. The same can be said for ridding one's self of what 'horror' truly encompasses as a genre. Though its lawlessness can be detrimental to some (lest we forget the ongoing sexual assaults, elitism, and blatant sexism that plagues the film industry as a whole), it can be used as a place of expression for those who seek a better world for the marginalized. I sincerely hope that my last and fourth instalment—and my dear Lydia—can make this a reality. 



Photo: Eva Wo

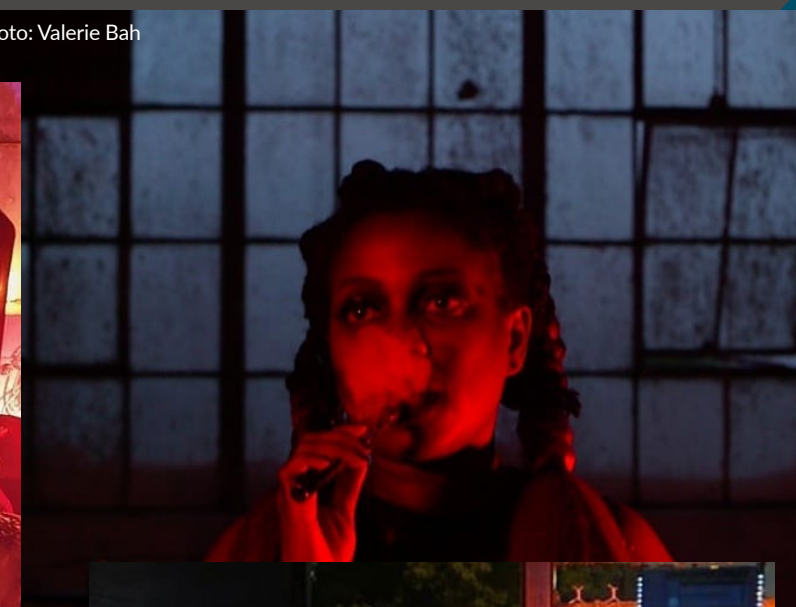


Photo: Valerie Bah



Photo: Lucid Strike

Aside from the same themes present in most teen horror films (non-conformity, sexuality, stupid adults, vicious high school hierarchies) there is one area that makes Robert Rodriguez's 1998 teen horror/sci-fi film *The Faculty* stand alone in the canon—drugs. Even upon first viewing of this *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* meets *The Breakfast Club* mashup, one is struck by its distinct use of drugs, which reflects not only the accepted, yet inaccurate connection of drugs to rebel youth, but decades of the enduring effects of the US drug war.

Many drug storylines in teen movies portray dealers and users as losers, degenerates, and bad kids. Enter local dealer of Ohio's Herrington High, Zeke Tyler (Josh Hartnett); a muscle-car-driving bad boy with a comparatively 'urban' wardrobe. However, he is also highly intelligent, the rich son of jet-setting parents, and a dealer who built his own lab and doesn't get high on his own supply. Although Zeke sells drugs, drives recklessly, smokes, has a gun, and sexually harasses a teacher—all 'bad kid' flags—these behaviours are "rebellious," not criminal. Zeke is sympathetic because of his redeeming 'white' qualities. Because whiteness has always been centred, white teens will never face the punishment reserved for non-white teens and likely be put in an expensive rehab while their Black, brown, and Indigenous counterparts are policed and criminalized. White kids will always get a second chance because they are good kids gone bad or too intelligent to exist in the mind-numbing world of high school, while everyone else is presumed born criminal—specifically Black youth.

Zeke is sympathetic because of his redeeming 'white' qualities.

By the time *The Faculty* was released, the drug war had escalated quickly since its official beginning with President Nixon in 1971. One of Nixon's top advisors, John Ehrlichman, admitted that it was started primarily to vilify the people who were causing them trouble, linking the anti-war movement with marijuana and Black people with heroin. This colonial approach ramped up during the Reagan era, creating policy demanding punitive measures based on the

## Guaranteed to Jack You Up The Drug War & The Faculty

by Mariam Bastani


'morality' of the drug user. With that, mass incarceration of POC began. This legacy of false association endures today, with structural racism at the crux of the criminal justice system. It's no wonder that at primarily white Herrington High, the white drug dealer is well-known and selling with little caution; also, drugs being accessible and students using is an open secret.

While *The Faculty* does not make an explicit statement against the drug war, it does show its failure and, further, its life-threatening distraction to real issues that plague young people (among many others). In tandem with its colonial and moralistic roots, drug policies are also heavily informed by temperance-based views positioning drugs themselves as the cause of addiction. This false rationale asserts that if the drugs are to blame for addiction, suppliers are also to blame. This viewpoint makes no mention of systemic prejudice, safe drug use, decriminalization, or education, just costly focus on primarily supply-based prevention. *The Faculty* highlights the ineptitude of this approach. As in most teen movies, parents are clueless to struggles kids are having stemming from mental health issues, violence, bullying, etc. The film opens with the football coach hurling sexist insults and threats, alpha-male style, at the young players. Nerd Casey (Elijah Wood) is physically assaulted. Popular girl Delilah (Jordana Brewster) is cruel to everyone, assaulting gotho Stokes (Clea DuVall) with homophobic insults. Despite all of this, any behavior

outside of the 'norm' must be rooted in drug use.

This legacy of false association endures today, with structural racism at the crux of the criminal justice system.

It's important to note that during the '90s Clinton administration there was debate over treating drug use as a disease. Much public and congressional attention focused on areas of Clinton's budget that allocated an increase in prevention and rehabilitation; not surprisingly, more money was allotted to the increase in law enforcement and supply-sided drug eradication. Essentially, it was the same shit. In *The Faculty*, conformity is the disease, except at the film's disappointing end. The final scenes highlight the privilege of these characters and their eventual capitulation to the system that victimized them, because whatever discomfort they experienced before the invasion was not so severe that they would give it up. In the end, these white kids become their parents.

Despite this, using with others is what determines who the heroes are and drugs save the day, which is often true for those of us who have little to no mental health, medical, economic, and other essential needs access by systemic design. The drug war is one major cog in the machine that keeps grinding us down, and *The Faculty* is a time stamp that reflects the futility and danger of a costly and racist legacy. 

In tandem with its colonial and moralistic roots, drug policies are also heavily informed by temperance-based views positioning drugs themselves as the cause of addiction. This false rationale asserts that if the drugs are to blame for addiction, suppliers are also to blame. This viewpoint makes no mention of systemic prejudice, safe drug use, decriminalization, or education, just costly focus on primarily supply-based prevention.



# Unlocking the Curiosity Door *Stranger Things* as a Modern Adolescent Fairy Tale

by Rebecca Booth

French writer Madame d'Aulnoy coined the term *contes de fées* ('fairy tales') in her 1697 collection of stories with fantastical characters and magical elements. Printed collections popularized by later male authors such as Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and Hans Christian Anderson were developed from—and largely plagiarized—earlier oral and literary tales (Warner, 1995, p. xii). Scholars broadly categorize the fairy tale via these two categories: "genuine" tales passed down orally, often associated with the lower social classes and delivered by maternal or matriarchal figures as a cautionary lesson in both nursery settings and domestic gatherings of women, and "literary" ethnographic and popular documentations of these cultural texts. As Marina Warner asserts in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995), both served to warn young children, adolescents, and younger women of the dangers of the world via "pleasure in the fantastic" and "curiosity about the real" (p. xvi). These original fairy tales were much darker, more sinister,

and more morally assertive than their contemporary siblings.

**Over the centuries, such strong themes within the fairy tale were diluted to suit a younger audience, as this fiction became synonymous with children's literature.**

For example, the earliest recorded version of *Sleeping Beauty* is found within the *Perceforest*, a collection of six books containing prose and poetry that describe the fictional history of Great Britain. The book originated in France sometime between 1330 and 1344 and includes a chapter on the *Histoire de Troilus et de Zellandine*. Unlike the romantic, if anti-feminist, child-friendly version of the tale, in which the Princess is awoken from her cursed state of perpetual sleep with a kiss from Prince Charming, Troilus impregnates Zellandine while she lies unconscious, and she gives birth to the child without waking. Over the centuries, such strong themes within the fairy tale were

diluted to suit a younger audience, as this fiction became synonymous with children's literature.

*Stranger Things* (2016-), the Netflix Originals series written and directed by Matt and Ross Duffer, can be read as a contemporary adolescent fairy tale in the way it draws on the horrific roots of this genre, embodying similar dark themes, archetypal characters, and magical or supernatural elements particularly evident in the oral or female-authored fairy tale. In doing so, it acts as a gateway to the horror genre for an adolescent audience. Praised for its pop-culture references to 1980s television, films, and music, inciting a nostalgic response in viewers, *Stranger Things* organically evolves and extends to wider themes and narrative influences in subsequent seasons. This article will focus solely on the first series, which can be read singularly as a focused fairy tale narrative.

The story takes place in 1983 and follows a group of adolescent boys—Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Dustin

(Gaten Matarazzo), and Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin)—in a town called Hawkins, Indiana. When searching for their missing friend, Will (Noah Schnapp), who vanishes after coming face-to-face with a mysterious monster, the boys discover a young girl hiding in the woods. The girl identifies herself as Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown), which correlates to a marking on her wrist, and is revealed to have telekinetic powers. The friends eventually learn that Eleven (or El, as she is affectionately nicknamed) is a government weapon, a result of MKUltra, the Central Intelligence Agency's mind control program that ran from the 1950s to the 1970s and involved illegal experiments on human subjects. Eleven has escaped her captors, specifically lead scientist Dr. Brenner (Matthew Modine), after excessive experimentation exposed the potential of her abilities and her mind ripped a hole between this world and another, the Upside Down.

Will encounters a creature that can travel through both dimensions and is transported to the Upside Down.

Believed to be dead by the town, he communicates with his mother, Joyce (Winona Ryder), via electrical energy, such as making lights in the house flicker in code. Joyce is thus disbelieving when Will's body is found in a quarry. The local sheriff, Hopper (David Harbour), has been investigating the disappearances of several community members (victims of the creature) and is suspicious of the government base located on the outskirts of the town. He discovers that Will's 'body' is not real, and has been planted to cover the disappearance of the boy. Hopper teams up with Joyce, Mike's older sister Nancy (Natalia Dyer), and Will's older brother Jonathan (Charlie Heaton) to find Will; their plan is to enter the Upside Down through the gateway in the depths of the government base. Joyce and Hopper are caught sneaking into the base and Hopper strikes a deal to tell Dr. Brenner of Eleven's whereabouts as long as he and Joyce can go into the other world to rescue Will. They locate and bring Will out alive while the monster, wounded after being

baited by Nancy and Jonathan (in order to distract it from Joyce and Hopper's presence in the Upside Down), kills Dr. Brenner and goes after the children. Eleven, severely drained after killing a group of government officials, sacrifices herself to save her friends by fighting the monster with her mind: she obliterates the creature and is engulfed in the swarm of particles.

*Stranger Things* is thus concerned with a variety of universal themes that can be mapped against the landscape of classic and modern fairy tales, such as good versus evil, death, guilt and redemption, faith, friendship and loyalty, love, sexual awakening, morality, and bravery. The show's modern commentary on such themes is revealed via its reliance upon and manipulation of structural elements and archetypal characters identified within Vladimir Propp's syntagmatic categorization of Russian fairy tale functions in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). For example, Will's disappearance is the 'absentation' function, as his removal

from the community instigates the narrative tension: the rescue mission undertaken by his family and friends, and the corresponding reveal of the wider government conspiracy.

Similarly, Propp asserts that seven abstract archetypes can be found in the fairy tale, with some characters performing multiple roles that ultimately prompt action. The boys' favourite teacher, Mr Clarke, is the 'dispatcher,' or oracle, of this tale, unknowingly providing them with the knowledge required to progress in their quest. From his explanation of parallel universes, to a how-to-make-your-own guide in building a sensory-deprivation tank, he is the ostensive source of scientific understanding that feeds into the magical elements of this tale.

Instead of a wicked stepmother, the 'villain' archetype is a morally ambiguous stepfather figure: Dr. Brenner, the lead scientist in the experiment program. Manipulative and austere, he has convinced Eleven to call him 'Papa,' an ironically endearing term considering the sterile environment and conditioned paternal relationship. The shadowy persona of Dr Brenner's villain remains as mysterious as the covert world he signifies, his classic archetypal role merely a mechanism for narrative action.

We of course have a band of heroes with the younger characters, who are introduced animatedly participating in the tabletop role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons. The game acts as an anchor for the children as they face adversity, fantastical and mundane, throughout the series. Each displays bravery in the face of danger, as well as a fierce loyalty: they sneak out in the dead of night to look for their missing friend, attempt to evade government officials to ensure Eleven isn't recaptured, and Mike jumps off a cliff to save Dustin from being knifed by the town bully. However, these well-meaning, if naïve, acts are eclipsed by the selfless and resilient spirit of Eleven—who uses her powers in each situation to save herself and her friends. Despite being torn from her mother's womb and raised as a human lab-rat with no concept of the outside world, she is the most compassionate and inherently good character in the series. It is interesting that she is the character relied upon by the male group to save them in times of peril, thwarting the traditional fairy tale

trope of the damsel in distress. This is particularly evident in the final episode, when she uses her powers to save her friends knowing that it will kill her. Her character dually incorporates the 'helper' and 'donor' archetypes as per Propp's paradigm, in that she herself is the magical gift used to win the fight and sacrifices herself. This act is compounded by the fact that we understand Hopper has revealed Eleven's location to Dr. Brenner in exchange for entry to the Upside Down to save Will. His duplicity marks him as the 'false hero' of the quest, as this difficult decision, which leads to Eleven's sacrifice, is unknown to many of the other characters also embodying the 'hero' archetype. The final scenes suggest Hopper knows Eleven is alive, as he leaves her favourite food in the woods, but his actions—weaponizing Eleven over protecting her as a child—renders him a 'flawed hero,' a trope developed in subsequent series.

Classic fairy tales have a 'princess' archetype, also known as the 'sought-for-person' or prize, won by the 'hero.' However, eschewing the wholesome archetypes of modern literary fairy tales, Nancy's narrative draws on female-authored fairy tales to subvert the conventional relationship between gender roles, passivity, and power. Though it is Nancy who actively decides to search for the monster and travels alone through the portal to the Upside Down in Mirkwood, it is her navigation of burgeoning sexual relationships and refusal to be intimidated by peer-pressure that ultimately defines her character.

Dating the most popular boy at school, Steve (Joe Keery), Nancy is staunch in her refusal to sleep with him despite increasing pressure. When she finally decides the time is right, she initiates this act on her terms. When thrown together with Jonathan as they hunt the monster, Nancy appears to develop feelings for him. However, rather than play the tangled love-triangle to expected ends, these relationships refreshingly and importantly deconstruct the 'Prince Charming' role for a contemporary, younger audience. The voyeuristic actions of Jonathan, as he photographs Nancy undressing as she is about to have sex with Steve, and the fact that Steve, after seeing Nancy with Jonathan and jumping to conclusions, 'slut shames' her via spray-painted signs across the town, harken back to oral tales warning of potential dangers for women

in a patriarchal world—here a direct reference to sexual manipulation and harassment. However, these depictions are complicated by Steve's guilty conscience developing his seemingly shallow character into a heroic role outside of his relationship with Nancy, and Jonathan's internalized longing for Nancy, as he would rather her be happy with Steve than selfishly admit his feelings. This complexity, and the fact that Nancy does not need either man to save or define her, marks the trio as a modern incarnation of traditional roles.

**Nancy's narrative draws on female-authored fairy tales to subvert the conventional relationship between gender roles, passivity, and power.**

As the name suggests, the Upside Down is revealed to be another dimension that exists parallel to ours and appears to be a dark mirror of the world we know. Within Germanic mythology, *Myrkviðr*—literally translated as mirky/dark/black wood—is referred to as a dark and treacherous forest that separates worlds; those who navigate it must do so with great care, even the Norse gods. The term was anglicized by William Morris in *A Tale of the House of Wolfings* (1888), and later implemented by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* (1937), as *Mirkwood*. In *Stranger Things*, Will meets the monster on the road leading to Mirkwood before he is transported to the other dimension; it is also here that Eleven encounters the boys for the first time, as well as the place that Nancy and Jonathan discover a gateway to the other world. This reference suggests that the Upside Down is reminiscent of the dark or enchanted wood of the fairy tale.

The enchanted forest is a place of transformation, where magic thrives and monsters and supernatural beings dwell. In the last scenes of season one, we discover that Will has been residually affected by the extended period he spent in the Upside Down, as he vomits a black slug into the sink. Will also has a flashback here or, more worryingly, is temporarily transported back to the other dimension. The fact that a worm-like creature was attached to his face when he was discovered by Hopper and Joyce in the Upside Down suggests that Will has some sort of parasitic connection to that place. Indeed, in myriad mythologies, heroes travelling beyond the boundaries of our


world are deeply affected by the time spent in the other dimension and are oftentimes unable to leave because of this contamination.

**“...fairy tales are fantastical morality plays, syntagmatically informed cognitive lessons wrapped in stories that stay with us, and which we in turn pass on to younger generations.**

In Greek mythology, Persephone was abducted by Hades, god of the underworld, and taken to his domain where she was tricked into eating pomegranate seeds. As she had eaten food from the underworld, she was forced to remain there for the winter months, corresponding to the number of seeds she had consumed. Her mother, Demeter, goddess of the harvest and agriculture, mourns for her daughter during these months, which affects the seasons. Mirroring this mythology, it seems that Will has been affected in a similar way by his own time in, and infection by, the underworld of *Stranger Things*, which informs several story strands in subsequent seasons. This allegory also relates to and highlights the show's importance for an adolescent audience: fairy tales are fantastical morality plays, syntagmatically informed cognitive lessons wrapped in stories that stay with us, and which we in turn pass on to younger generations. *Stranger Things* provides vicarious “pleasure in the fantastic” for its adolescent audience while focusing its contemporary lens on a variety of timely themes to explore and promote discussion concerning “curiosity about the real” (Warner, 1995, p. xvi). Particularly for adolescents who may not be familiar with the horror genre, the show's parallels with the dark world of the fairy tale unlocks the curiosity door to horror's subversive, political, and empowering commentary.

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**“Particularly for adolescents who may not be familiar with the horror genre, the show's parallels with the dark world of the fairy tale unlocks the curiosity door to horror's subversive, political, and empowering commentary.**

# Teenage Fury: The Modern Drama Queen's Coming-of-Age

by Michael Williams

Many modern, female-centred, coming-of-age horror movies share roots with ancient Grecian dramas wherein individuals act as stand-ins for greater societal concepts. Coming-of-age stories feature an essential turning point that allows the protagonist to display their progress towards maturity. Needy, Hayley, and Brigitte, the protagonists of *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *Hard Candy* (2005), and *Ginger Snaps* (2000), reach that point and beyond as they display characteristics similar to the stages of development the ancient Greeks went through on their evolution toward a legal system that was fair to all, as fifth-century BC playwright Aeschylus illustrated in his play cycle *The Oresteia*. The three plays, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*, symbolically tell the tale of ancient Greece's coming-of-age via the conversion from lawlessness and vigilantism to a legal code that applied to all and was enforced by the government, not individuals. This progression is mirrored by the adolescent girls' transition from the chaotic powerlessness of childhood to the responsibility that comes with the agency of adulthood.

The belief that guilt was an inheritable trait and children could be held responsible for the actions of their parents was embraced by the ancient Greeks in their mythology. A prevalent example is the curse on the House of Atreus, which appears in many of mythology's best-known stories, *The Oresteia* being one. Although its origins are not clear, many sources attribute the beginning of the curse as King Tantalus' punishment by the gods for blasphemy. They cursed his bloodline, guaranteeing his descendants would suffer for his crimes. *The Oresteia* uses the final generations afflicted by the curse to illustrate Greece's transition towards a just rule of law.

Powerful females' prevalence in horror

run the gamut from supremely evil characters such as *The Brood's* (1979) Nola to children fighting evil monsters like Nancy from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). In Aeschylus' allegorical plays, the agents of divine justice are cast as females: Athena, the Goddess of War and Wisdom, and the Erinyes, also known as The Furies, frightful daughters of Uranus, whose purpose was to torment the worst offenders. In the contemporary, coming-of-age horror films mentioned earlier, the focus is on the young females' transfiguration to powerful, independent beings. They began by manifesting weakness and being dependent on more forceful characters before gaining strength and independence to successfully free themselves and fight evil.

**Coming-of-age stories feature an essential turning point that allows the protagonist to display their progress towards maturity.**

*The Oresteia* begins at a time when there was no legal code or authority. Justice was up to the individual's discretion and enforced by acts of vigilantism. In *Agamemnon*, the first play of the trilogy, King Agamemnon, a descendant of Tantalus and affected by the curse, is assassinated by his wife for sacrificing their daughter to Diana on his way to The Trojan War. Though she had no sanctioned authority to act, neither is there any authority to hold Agamemnon accountable. Ironically, the same lack of an authoritative legal code that allowed her husband to go unpunished also protected her.

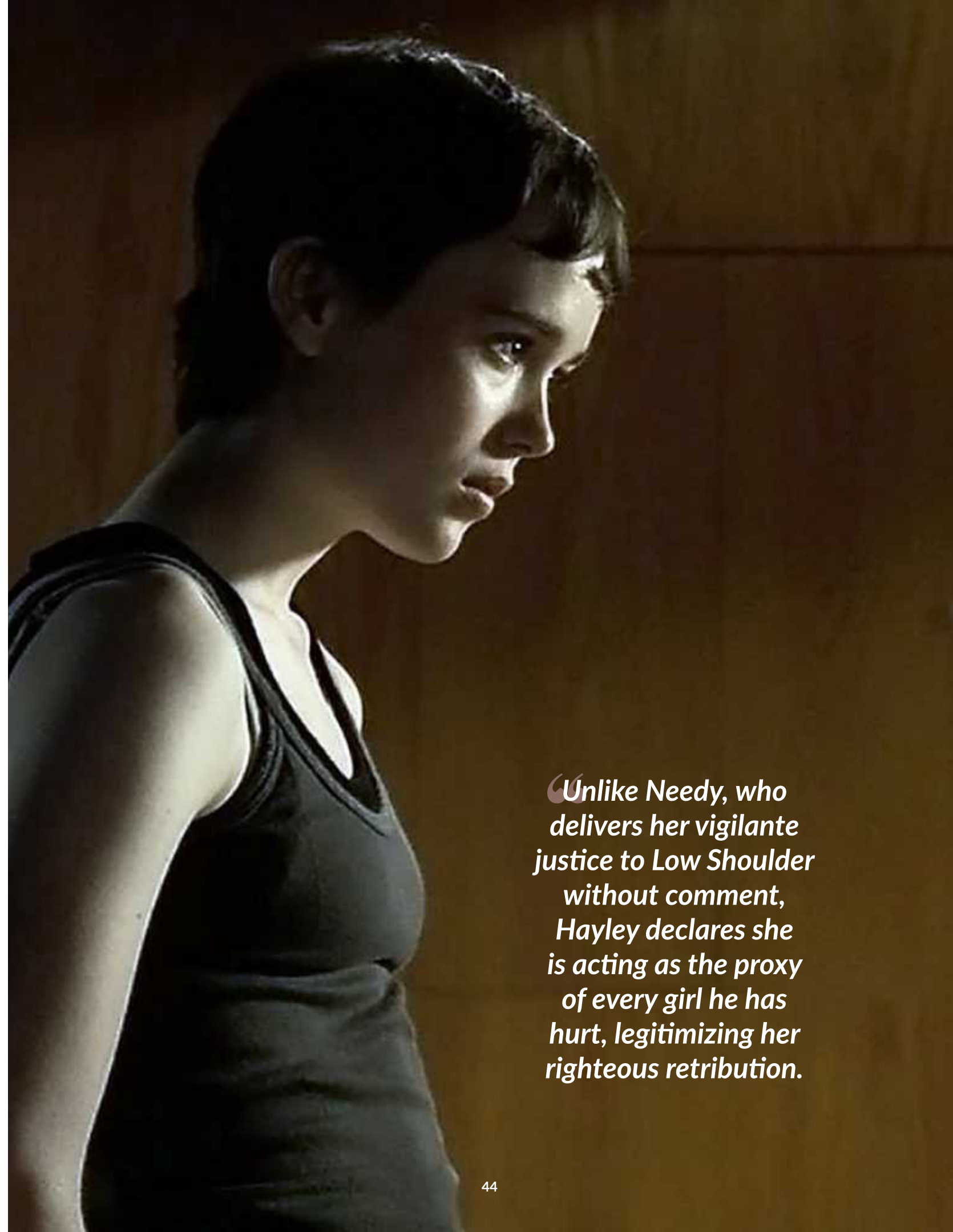
A hallmark of the coming-of-age genre is a character's development of agency, the ability to do things independently. In Karyn Kusama and Diablo Cody's *Jennifer's Body*, high school student Needy (Amanda Seyfried) commits an act

of vigilantism similar to Clytemnestra's when she slaughters rock band Low Shoulder in retaliation for killing her friend and unleashing a demon in her hometown. She begins the movie insecure and unsure of herself, content to follow the lead of pretty and popular Jennifer (Megan Fox). However, she breaks from Jennifer's influence when she discovers her friend has become a monster. Jennifer's transformation is the result of the band's bungled attempt at a satanic sacrifice. After Needy kills the demon in Jennifer's body, she discovers that surviving the battle has empowered her and she goes after the band to make them pay for their crimes.

The Goddess Athena's decision to use a trial by jury in *The Oresteia's* second play, *The Libation Bearers*, to decide the fate of an accused criminal became the foundation of the legal code that the ancient Greeks adapted. Matricide was considered one of the most egregious crimes in ancient Greece. When Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, killed his mother to avenge his father, the Furies (Erinyes) awoke to torment him. They pursued him to Athens where he fled to appeal to Athena for relief. Wishing to avoid discord among the divinities, she chose to let a jury of citizens decide Orestes' fate, only casting her vote if there was a tie. She was so pleased by the outcome, she declared that all legal disputes would be settled this way.

Hayley (Ellen Page), the young teenage girl from David Slade and Brian Nelson's *Hard Candy*, follows the paths of the Furies and Athena as she both torments and tries Jeff (Patrick Wilson), a man she accuses of being a child pornographer, paedophile, and murderer. *Hard Candy* inverts the tale of Little Red Riding Hood by making the weaker-appearing Hayley stronger than the wolf. Her immaturity and gullibility is a ruse to gain access to

**“Unlike Needy, who delivers her vigilante justice to Low Shoulder without comment, Hayley declares she is acting as the proxy of every girl he has hurt, legitimizing her righteous retribution.”**





Jeff's home to gather evidence of his guilt. Confronted by her findings and revealing his brutal nature after Hayley performs a pseudo-castration, Jeff confesses and is sentenced to death. Unlike Needy, who delivers her vigilante justice to Low Shoulder without comment, Hayley declares she is acting as the proxy of every girl he has hurt, legitimizing her righteous retribution.


One of the highest purposes of a fair legal code is protecting the innocent. Athena's choice to end the curse and to stop holding children accountable for their descendants' crimes, in *The Eumenides*, the final play of *The Oresteia*, extends the responsibilities of law to that purpose. After acquitting Orestes with her tie-breaking vote, she makes two important declarations: the Erinyes are now repurposed as protectors of justice and are renamed the Eumenides. She also puts an end to inherited guilt by ending the curse on the descendants of Tantalus. Orestes and his surviving sister, Electra, are freed from the sins of the past. From now on, everyone is born innocent and under the protection of the law.

As *Hard Candy* used the figure of the Big Bad Wolf as the antagonist, John Fawcett and Karen Walton's *Ginger Snaps* uses wolves as lycanthropes to be the perpetrators of the evil that ensnares and exploits the innocent. Lycanthropy moves from one 'generation' to the next via bite just as inherited guilt transfers from parents to their children. High school student Brigitte (Emily Perkins) becomes alarmed when her older sister, Ginger (Katherine Isabelle), is attacked by a werewolf. As the next full moon draws near, Ginger's appearance and



behaviour begin to change as the violent nature of the werewolf begins to assert itself. When Ginger fully transforms, she traps Brigitte and attempts to infect her. Brigitte realizes it is up to her to kill Ginger and end the curse, lest she become a werewolf too and join in the slaughter.

According to Aeschylus, the gods themselves set the example of how humans can free themselves from relentless cycles of bloody retribution like the one that beset the House of Atreus. The Atreidi paid the price for

their ancestors' blasphemous behaviour until freed by Athena's judgement in the trial of Orestes. In doing so, she showed humanity a path to a higher form of justice that applied to all and protected all. Needy, Hayley, and Brigitte sought to balance the scales of justice and in doing so were recast from their adolescent selves into powerful creatures who acted with the authority of the gods to slay evildoers. Their coming-of-age stories staunch the flow of blood started by evil men and monsters to make the world safer for all. 



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**We don't talk about what happened to Paul.**

We know (we think we know) but we don't talk about it.

Our neighbors don't know (they think they know) but they do talk about it. They don't say anything to me.

But even if they did I wouldn't hear it much, seeing as I don't go into town for school anymore. Ma says it's because of what Ms. Lowdry said about Paul.

But I have chores to do. We all know that's the real reason.

Pa never asked him where he went, what he did, or what made him come back. Pa's mouth used to like a rabbit from a rattlesnake. So did Paul's. Doesn't anymore. Pa also didn't ask about that. He didn't ask about a lot of things. Instead he let Paul sit on the couch and watch television. Paul was so pale, back then. I remember the glow of the tv turning him all sorts of strange colours.

He didn't even make a fuss when Paul didn't eat his old favourite meal (creamed corn, popovers, red potatoes, chicken-fried steak). Mom and Aunt Lily spent two hours preparing it and I had to bike into town to get his old favourite ice cream (Chapman's Heavenly Hash). Paul didn't even end up wanting it, so I got his scoop. After Paul went to sleep his first night back, I asked Pa why he didn't ask him anything.

Some things are between a man and his Lord.

Some things are not for little sisters to know (yet).

I don't think Pa knew then, but I think he saw the same thing I did. I think he was still surprised, though, when everything else happened.

Here are my chores now:

- I get the eggs
- I feed the chickens
  - pigs
  - cow
- I wash what needs washing
- I clean what needs cleaning
- I make lunch for Paul
  - the rest of us

I pick the apples

I make the apple juice

I go out to where the walkway meets the road (58 steps from our porch) and I sell the apple juice. Aunt Lily used to sit on the porch and keep me company but now Ma does that.

We make supper for us and Paul

We eat

Me and Ma do school until bed.

Everyday.

Here are Paul's chores:

He sleeps until lunch

He eats lunch (that I make)

He sits on the couch and watches television

He eats supper (that I make)

He sits on the couch and watches television until bed.

I don't even get to sit on that couch anymore. Not that I want to.

(but I'm still mad)

I don't remember the first Sunday we missed church. Everyone else says they do. They say that's when they knew.

But I remember that week.

That Thursday was when we got Paul's first visitor, Ralph.

- a good friend from high school.
- who was betrothed to Lydia Kinderly.
- who was going to get married 3 months ago.

He and Paul insisted we have him for supper that night. Ralph wanted to catch up, and Paul, he said, must have known a mighty freedom when he was in the city for school. The call of a mighty freedom must have rubbed off on Ralph, that night, because he eloped with some city girl the next day.

Which means

- Ralph must have driven to the city that night,
- he must have left after he and Paul went out to smoke,

**LUKE 15:32**  
by Alex Neufeldt

but it must have been after I was asleep, because I didn't hear it.  
That's what Pa says must have happened.


That's what I remember from that week. That, and the fact that the next morning was the first time Paul ate since coming back. Then I started getting more chores. Couple of weeks later, Ma got the idea for the apple juice.

I don't think people were suspicious then. Now they stay away, except for the kids who linger on the edge of the farm, trying to get a peek at Paul, never speaking to me. Kids I used to go to school and church with, who used to giggle and gasp over stories about the Loch Ness Monster or the Jersey Devil. The way they look at our house used to bother me more, back before I realized they wouldn't cross the fence. I almost get lonely, just me and my quiet family, but it would be worse if we weren't on the highway into town. Cars often break down, horses often need water. And I'm out there every afternoon with apple juice, ribbons in my hair and sun in my eyes. No matter how much work I put into everyone's lunch and how much washing I have to do afterwards.

It was easier when we still had Aunt Lily, but we don't talk about that either. We talk so little that even if I don't like the people who stop for juice or a tow, mostly I do because mostly they talk to me. I'd like them even more if I got more time to talk with them, but mom always hustles me upstairs for school and bed when we finish eating supper with them. If I'm ever going to grow up to be a good young lady, she says, I need to learn to put family first.

- know when to talk and when to keep quiet.
- stay out of people's hair.

The older I get, the more I think loneliness and hunger might be the same thing.

Paul's been back for a year and a half, I don't know why he still gets to have all the visitors. I'm hungry, too. 

# Conciliat Amorem Mulierum & Maxime Puellarum<sup>1</sup>

by **Jolie Mandelbaum**

illustrated by **Lily Todorov**

**The first time she heard about the curse at bedtime, Liv was 9 and Mother poured the whole sordid story, steaming and writhing, onto her lap.** The story, but not the curse, which was somehow too terrible to look at directly. That night, Liv began dreaming before she fell asleep. A fiery demon with scalloped horns lay siege to Liv the same way Mother broke down a chicken; spine bashed, connective tendons sliced, limbs wrenched from joint, her precious body dismembered. Mother rushed in at the screams, rocked her, smoothed her hair, apologized, “No, my love, it doesn’t hurt, okay? Not physically. And it used to be so much harder to manage. Besides, it doesn’t happen until you turn 16.”

Liv asked periodically, but she was always too young to know, and was still too young to know at 13, when Mother pissed herself standing at the stove, fainted, and then died of bladder cancer after either two or 500 years, Liv couldn’t tell. That left her only with the summoning as an option. She knew almost nothing, the curse would begin in 6 months, and Mother’s papers were only bills, taxes, car registrations—not a damn thing useful in this life or the next.

Liv felt less like she was being shoved through the hole of an hourglass when she discovered that summoning a demon was in no way an obscure skill anymore. Forbidden knowledge took on a new meaning since the Internet, and if you could get to the demon without having to deal with some triangle-toothed weirdo in open ceremonial robes, why wouldn’t you? She expected to run out of time hunting down grimoires, but the goetia came from Amazon, as did a large vinyl stencil for the seal, and she patched the ritual together herself from blogs. Chalk untouched by human hands was easy. It was Crayola. YouTube confirmed that everything from the pour to the label to the sorting was the domain of machines, and the humans who fixed those machines always wore gloves. So, she stole the chalk from Walmart.

A forbidden place might also have been harder to find in 1502, but in America in 2020, everyplace was owned and was, at any time, always forbidden to someone. Given history, Liv figured she could probably keep her ass at home and fulfill that requirement. Still, it was not just the curse. The demon had also given the colonial version of their little family a gift, though Liv never learned the details of that, either. And anyway, that had been depleted by her great-grandmother. Liv was left with the dregs, the ancestral dine and dash. But the demon delivered, so she will deliver. For a forbidden place, Liv settled on her most hated teacher’s house. Finding her there naked with a demon had to at least

be a taboo, so in the middle of the night, she leaned a ladder directly under his attic window and when it had not moved in three days, she climbed in, tacked her schedule to the wall, and got to work.

The first night, she scrubbed the walls with saltwater and a boar’s hair brush—another problem solved by Amazon’s array of certified organic beard brushes. The salt splintered her nails until they broke to the quick. Undeterred, on the second night, she poured ammonia on the rotten wood floor and spread it with a hay broom tied with her own hair. The fumes choked her even with the window open and a bandana tied around her mouth, and she gagged on her own breath as she poured baking soda over the stinking, aqueous mess. On the third night, Liv used the same broom to brush the soaked powder into a canning jar, which she sealed up with wax and threw into moving water. On the fourth night, Liv tried to burn Mother’s living room mirror, but it wouldn’t burn. Instead the glass clouded and cracked and the cheap wood blackened into cankerous spots. She called that one good enough. On the fifth day, in the woody areas just off the town’s recreational trails, she found a rowan tree heavy with pimply clusters of berries low enough for her neatly snip near the pedicel and catch in a reusable shopping bag. That night she smashed the berries with talcum powder to make a cold paste that she stored in an emptied Cetaphil jar.



<sup>1</sup> It wins the love of women, and especially girls'; *The Lesser Key of Solomon*

On the sixth night, Liv dragged her bundles up the ladder, stripped naked, filled in the sigil stencil with the chalk, and then picked her way around the lines to drop the burned mirror in the center of the circle. She warmed the flid paste between her palms and wiped red handprints on her breasts, her belly, her thighs. She swiped paste across her mouth with the back of her left hand and her forehead with the back of her right hand. Liv knew that it could lie. Demons, after all, want nothing but material wealth, they will do and say anything to get their claws into some poor sap in a better position than they are. It could show up and tell her the details of the contract were that the first person to ask the details of the contract got a hot poker in the ass for all eternity (starting now). Still, loss made Liv desperate and loneliness made her fearless, so she lit one candle then methodically tapped it against 25 other candles, considered the familiar rumble of her clothes discarded near the window, took a long breath, and began. It didn’t take long at all.

The room began to smell lightly and comfortingly of a petting zoo—dung and hay and fur thick with dandruff and oils. The space in front of Liv was empty, but when she looked down, hooves jutting from a bejeweled blanket appeared. Liv could not tell how many hooves. She folded over herself then, laying her stomach flat on her thighs, and concentrated on a single cleft. It does not speak in a hurry. When a heated voice eventually poured from the darkness, it was not kind, but measured, thoughtful, careful. Counter to the voice huffed the distinct breath of an animal punctuated with snorts and sneezes and eventually a grinding chew.

“What is your hospitality? What is your request?”

“I brought a bale of alfalfa. I would like some information. Please.” Liv thrust her face past her knees and leaned further into the floor, taking the hoof out of sight.

“I will take the bale. You provided. I will provide. As it is written.”

“What are the terms of my family curse, Duchess? I am willing to continue the line.” The last part came out unplanned. Liv popped her torso up in surprise, and the legs disappeared for long enough for Liv to see herself in the clouded remnant of the mirror. A gash of a mouth like a catfish and exhausted, deep-set eyes. “The family face” as Mother used to say, back when Mother was saying things. Dropping herself back into supplication, Liv caught a glimpse of royal blue velvet.

“You are invisible to men. Until you deliberately wish to be seen. Of course.”

Liv had not planned to correct a being that been alive since before the sun was a fire, but the scratch of her heels under her thighs reminded her that she managed to survive the contact and randomly promising herself to a demon so far, and the third time is allegedly the charm.

“My apologies, Duchess. Thank you for your knowledge of the gift, which I also did not know. I am afraid I misspoke. Please forgive me. What are the terms of the curse?”

“I do not make mistakes.” Liv began to drown inside of a tinkling laugh. “Carry your burden early, then, child. See me and check for the mistake.”



All the candles hissed into darkness at once and a figure stepped between Liv and the window, blocking the moonlight. The animal smell turned cloying and then overwhelming. Liv retched, struggling to stay silent as she spit a mouthful of vomit onto her lap. Breath assaulted her face and chest from below, reeking of melted metal and burned grass, and in her ears, the unending scraping of angular hooves, violent and clamorous. Liv cradled her face with her forearms and breathed into herself. “Stay calm. Believe what you see. Don’t leave until you are done. Stay calm. Believe what you see. Don’t leave until you are done.” She remained bowed until her lower back cramped and her stomach roiled.

When she sat up, she was alone. The sigil, the mirror, the candles, gone, her body clean, and the house silent. The shape of two forked toes and a flat pad the size of a dinner plate was burned into the floor directly in front of her and, directly behind her feet, a series of claw marks tossed splinters into the air. Liv got dressed, gathered her things, and slid down the ladder for the last time.

It was 1 a.m., but the city would be awake, and Liv was fresh out of people to tell her not to do things. As the metro escalator spit her onto the sidewalk, a man in fashionably distressed jeans and a tweed blazer drifted towards the street to avoid colliding with her. Liv wandered towards a bar visible on the next block, where just hanging around outside and looking like a 15-year-old girl ought to be enough. After an hour of women tossing her sad-eyed and concerned glances as they were corralled inside, Liv moved directly into the line of sight of the bouncer, lifted her shirt and bra, and jumped up and down. He pulled his phone from his pocket and began to thumb through it as he looked left and right for customers.

“Holy. Shit.” Liv stumbled towards an alley until the darkness swallowed her, laughing and sobbing, happy no one can see her like this. **g**

# INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

## Horror Podcast Showcase

by Joe Lipsett

When we're not enjoying spooky things, we're listening to women talk about them! This month, we're spotlighting Kelly Nugent and Lindsay Katai of *Teen Creeps*.

Listen: [teencreepsod.com](http://teencreepsod.com)

First of all, congratulations on the podcast because *Teen Creeps* has been going steady since 2016! For readers who haven't yet listened, how would you describe the podcast? What's your five second pitch?



**Lindsay:** *Teen Creeps* is a podcast where we lovingly skewer the 80s and 90s YA horror of our youth.

You started the podcast not knowing much about the other aside from the fact that you both read Christopher Pike as teens. How has the podcast—and your relationship—evolved over time?

**Kelly:** We started the podcast as people who were friendly, but not close like we are now. Something that I'm really proud of is that our friendship has grown over the course of the podcast, and you can hear it happen in our episodes.

**L:** We talk about what's going on in our lives before we record, so Kelly's now one of my closest friends. That wouldn't have happened if we hadn't done this podcast, so I'm very, very grateful it worked out this way.

At one point you changed the focus of the podcast from teen horror and the works of Christopher Pike to "YA pulp fiction". What prompted the switch to a broader definition of YA fiction and how did it change *Teen Creeps*?

**K:** We started running out of books to cover! And we wanted to keep doing the podcast.

**L:** I think our tagline of it being a podcast about YA pulp fiction was there from the beginning, but we thought we were going

to cover only Christopher Pike until we finished his oeuvre, as it were. But as we started picking up more listeners, we got more requests for other books and we thought we may as well start branching out right away! And this way we haven't run through all his books yet. We're happy that's been put off because he's our favorite and it would be a bummer to be totally done.

Revisiting YA fiction of your youth can be both nostalgic and/or problematic (confession: I co-host a YA podcast *Hazel & Katniss & Harry & Starr* and some of these older books are ROUGH). What was the appeal of these books for you as teenagers and why do they still have an effect on us as adults?

**K:** Nice! So, you get it. They told a story that I wanted to be a part of. These books were sexy, and the main characters had problems that were so much more exciting than mine: monsters, vampires, demons. Plus, hot guys always had crushes on the girls, which was something completely foreign to me. It was escapism at its finest. Granted, I was eating up exactly what was being fed to me, resulting in my teenage understanding of male attention being...interesting to say the least.

**L:** Same here. A huge part of the appeal was imagining myself as the heroine having these exciting experiences and vicariously living the life of a gorgeous teen who boys loved. That's so lame, but, oh well! And I just love scary, supernatural stuff. Always have. Of course...yeah, the books are definitely of their time and there are some problematic things in them. It's been really interesting to pick apart what effect that had on us growing up.

There has only been one adaptation of a Christopher Pike novel, *Fall Into Darkness* with Jonathan Brandis. Have you seen it and, if yes, what are your thoughts?

**K:** I have not seen it, all I know is that Tatyana Ali is in it.



L to R: Kelly Nugent & Lindsay Katai // Photo: @vonswank

**L:** I have. And somehow, while I loved both Jonathan Brandis and Tatyana Ali, I didn't think it was very good. It felt tame.

Why hasn't he been adapted more?

**K:** A lot of his stuff is a little more esoteric and/or philosophical (which is why I love it), and I think studios are kind of like, "Mmmmkay! This won't sell!" And, they tend to underestimate their audience, and shoot for what will be more broadly consumed.

**L:** That's probably a huge part of it. Also I think R.L. Stine loomed larger in culture because of how many flippin' books he put out there, so his stuff got more adaptations. And I think R.L. just puts himself out there like crazy, while Pike is more withdrawn.


If you could pick a book to be adapted (from him or any of the other authors you've covered), which would you pick?

**K:** From Christopher Pike: *The Starlight Crystal*. From anyone else: The *Cheerleaders* series by R.L. Stine.

**L:** I would also love to see *The Starlight Crystal*, but *Monster* might be my number one choice because it's so salacious. From someone else, I'd kill to see a whole series of adaptations of the *Sweet Valley High Jungle Prom/Murder Trial/Evil Twin* miniseries.

If you could pick one episode for newcomers to check out, which one would it be and why?

**K:** V.C. Andrews's *My Sweet Audrina*, or for a more recent one, Diane Hoh's *Prom Date* with Omar Najam.

**L:** It's hard to argue with Kelly's choices, but I'll add *Sweet Valley High: The Evil Twin* and Richie Tankersley Cusick's *April Fools* with Omar Najam. And our episode on John Carpenter's *Halloween* with Oscar Montoya is a departure from talking about a book, but is such a fun episode. 

# Spirit Gum

by Lindsay Traves

Welcome to Spirit Gum, the column that explores the intersection of horror and beauty. Spirit Gum is a popular adhesive used in FX and beauty makeup. Painterly people often go from well-shaped lips to well-placed blood drips, and this is the place to examine those of us who are always red-handed.

## Samhain in Style: 5 Must-Follows for Fall

The most direct intersection of makeup and horror is in how we paint ourselves into spooky new personae for the Hallowe'en season. Whether it's black and orange lipstick or full-body gore paint that gets you in the spirit, beauty influencers are a source of incredible inspiration, serving up signature "lewks" to rock on Hallowe'en. Here are some of my favourite must-follow beauty gurus to help you get painted up for Samhain.



**Katrina Marrufo (@makeupbytreenz)**  
Katrina is a freelance makeup artist and beauty influencer with an eye for the spooky. She showcases unbelievable looks and eyeshadow art to die for, but really comes to life during Hallowe'en season. She's done stunning wearable looks—like a blood-drip bottom lash line—but I can't resist this take on Sutan Amrull's *Drag Race* version of Carrie. For anything from a quick inspiration for a costume as Paimon's newest vessel to an in-depth and approachable tutorial on transforming into Sally from *A Nightmare Before Christmas*, Katrina is a must-follow.



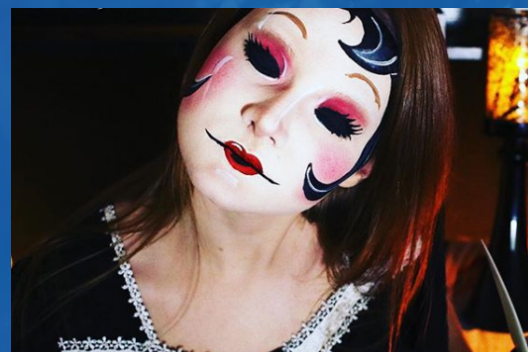
**Jony Sios (@JonySios)**  
Jony first seems like a beauty-focused makeup artist with a penchant for cliché videos showcasing rapid tutorials set to catchy music. Click through and you'll be treated to his hilarious brand of the otherwise normal with an important recurring element: blood. His appreciation for offbeat horror characters, and ability to create his own, make him a Hallowe'en (and always) must-follow! He's dropped takes on a grown-up Chucky (*Rugrats*), a straightforward Pennywise, and my personal favourite, Dandy Mott from *American Horror Story: Freakshow*.



**Rebecca Seals (@rebeccaseals)**  
Rebecca Seals is a constant source of stunning costume creation, based on characters that share her red hair. Her beauty makeup sensibilities work really well with her takes on characters like Black Widow, Daphne from *Scooby Doo*, and Kim Possible. For those of us who prefer to dress slightly more creepy-crawly, you can take a trip from Kim Possible straight through to Rebecca's take on Harley Quinn, before landing squarely on her terrifying tutorial for *Coraline's* Other Mother.



**Lucia (@issheblackorazn)**  
Another master of mixing beauty and facepaint! Her beauty looks are perfect for the moonchild in all of us, and so peppered with witchy details. Year round, she intertwines familiar beauty techniques with face and body paint in ways that are perfectly delicious, specifically her Catwoman look. Her work is absolutely dreamy and great inspiration for gorgeously adapting characters. The woman adapted the melting skin trend into a hot Power Ranger look, so you won't be short on creative ideas if you check her out.



**Lex (@MadeYewLook)**  
Ready to graduate from beauty Hallowe'en looks to full-on body painting? No one guides you through it like Lex. She creates looks from fan suggestions, art, and her own twisted mind. She'll talk you through tips, tools, and how to use drugstore makeup. She's absolutely demolished some of the best comic book characters, her twists on Disney characters are a scream, and she has a roster of beginner-friendly takes on greats like Freddy and Jason, no masks or liquid latex required. If you want a full body paint transformation into a character from Marvel or HBO, she has you covered!



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- Will H (iTunes)

**"These guys and gals are hilarious."**  
- Nick R (iTunes)

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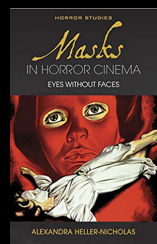
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# THE HAUNTED LIBRARY

by Zack Long



## **Masks in Horror Cinema: Eyes Without Faces**

**Alexandra Heller-Nicholas**  
University of Wales Press, 2019

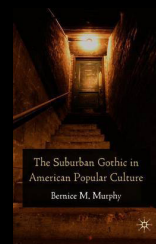
While this book may have come out in 2019, it is absolutely my favourite film studies text this year. Since it's my column, we'll just have to deal with it.

Heller-Nicholas is a scholar who has meant a lot to me throughout the years and this is her most impressive work yet. As the title implies, it deals with the way that horror films use masks. In order to examine this topic properly, though, she first delves into the historical applications of masks in art prior to film. All of this is fascinating and captivating and easily makes this book worth recommending. But there's more.

The reason that *Masks in Horror Cinema* is my book of the year is 100% due to the concept of "shamanic imagination." This term has completely revolutionized my way of thinking about art, media, spirituality, consciousness, and the way that these elements come together within the typical viewer or the popular imagination. This term is key to the text. Talking about masks in any depth requires us to look at their origin, bringing us through to the shaman around the campfire of our evolutionary cousin's tribe. Our understanding of shamanism isn't based on this shaman; we never lived in an age when we could meet and come to understand him. Instead, we have our own version of the shaman and his powers, and this gives us our shamanic imagination. It isn't real shamanism but rather shamanism as the popular imagination understands it.

This term can be used to easily describe other studies. For example, Steve A. Wiggins' book *Holy Horror: The Bible and Fear in Movies* (2018) studies the use of the Bible in horror films. He describes it as a ding, short for the German term ding an sich. This means "the thing in itself," which he uses to describe the power the Bible holds in these films. But what he is really describing is what horror films tell us about the shamanic imagination's Bible, not our own.

I would have given *Masks in Horror Cinema* a strong recommendation without this new term but this concept elevates it from a should-read to a must-read in my horror canon.



## **The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture**

**Bernice M. Murphy**  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

*The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (2009) is a fantastic text by Bernice M. Murphy, but really I could be talking about any of her books here. *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (2013) or *The Highway Horror Film* (2014) are both wonderful books and I recommend all three of them. But my favourite is *The Suburban Gothic*.

Murphy is one of the best people writing about location within horror cinema, though both *The Suburban Gothic* and *The Rural Gothic* deal with more than just film. These two books make a great pairing, as they reveal so much about the American approach to Gothic horror. *The Rural Gothic* gives a wonderful view of how the Gothic first took root in America, emerging from the woods like the titular *Witch*. If you are looking to read these books chronologically, then begin with *The Rural Gothic* before moving on. You can then jump to the suburbs or the highway, either one is fine.

*The Suburban Gothic* is a sequel, within a historical framework, as the story here doesn't really get started until after World War II. Bernice examines how the American presence in the war led to the creation of the suburbs in what is a deeply researched and utterly fascinating opening to the book. From there, she looks at how various critics of the suburbs have attacked their existence. Which brings up a fascinating point.

Most Gothic tales revolve around old towns, old castles, old ruins, and/or old cemeteries in the old country. But the suburbs are the opposite. They are cookie-cutter fresh, recycled; every lot like a city-builder with poor graphics. They're too clean, too 'the same' to be threatening in a Gothic way.

At least, a traditional Gothic way.

Thus, *The Suburban Gothic* was born. But to learn more about that, you're going to have to read the book. **g**

# Dear Countess Valencia

Countess Valencia is a certified Gothic therapist, an interior decorator with a soft spot for spooky, and a 6000-year-old Vampire-Canadian with more opinions than she knows what to do with. In each issue of *Grim*, her advice column tackles timeless dilemmas and dishes out practical solutions.



**Is it still unacceptable to practice white magic after Labour Day, or is that rule outdated?**

First off, let me applaud your commitment to witchy etiquette! Too many young sorceresses these days practice their craft willy-nilly without proper consideration for the finer points of politesse (I am not naming any names!).

As to your question, there is still some controversy regarding the use of white magic after this time—but only among the snobbiest of our ilk! Yes, this rule is definitely outdated. In my opinion, white magic is fashionable all year round.

Throw on some glitter, gather some rosemary, and cast to your heart's content!

**Is it unethical to use telepathy on a partner you suspect is cheating?**

Yikes. Questions regarding matters of the heart are always so challenging. I'm so sorry to hear that you suspect your partner is unfaithful, but I'm afraid that telepathy is not the ethical way to approach this situation. There are other, more suitable ways to solve this mystery.

If your partner is a vampire, consider procuring a drop of their blood and testing for the appearance of any new glycoproteins. If you're dating an incubus, attach a discreet tracker to one of his horns to see where he goes at 3am. If your love is (ugh) a human, try a mature conversation about the relationship and your feelings. Best of luck, my spooky love!

**Have a question for Countess Valencia? Need advice about the spookier side of life? Submit your queries via the contact form at [anatomyofascream.com](http://anatomyofascream.com).**

# CLASSIFIEDS

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Coworking space available for cheap! My massive industrial warehouse has space available for all manner of work: bloodletting, cannibalizing, poetry-writing, conjuring, hexing, scrying, autopsies, cross-stitching, idly wasting your time while the world decays slowly around you, and honing your multi-level marketing business. JK, I'd never allow MLMs in my warehouse. Call Ahmed: (666) 732-1456.

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Ceremonial robes too tight? Quick & affordable (un)holy tailoring services for all Black Mass sartorial needs. Custom garments avail. Isla: (666) 541-0700.

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## Services - Seeking

Have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight? Do you want to? In need of a ballroom partner Tues & Thurs evenings. Lucy: (666) 661-5666.

Crime scene clean-up needed! Timing of crimes negotiable. Call Priyanka or Lita: (666) 455-8123. Rates still v fair!!

## Jobs

With everyone working from home now, my own job is more challenging. Need an assistant able to create a diversion that will get homeowners to leave their houses for approx 10 min at a time. Joy: (666) 803-4932.

## Buying & Selling

In desperate search of an antidote to a mysterious herbal poison. BIG REWARD. Can't get into the details right now. Text Mari at (666) 732-2504 to learn more.

Selling ragged blanket found in the woods. Well, replace 'found' w/ 'dug up' & 'woods' with 'cemetery'. Anyway, it's green. Want it? K: (666) 546-2711.

## Romantic Encounters

**2020**

<b>JANUARY</b>	<b>FEBRUARY</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL</b>
<b>MAY</b>	<b>JUNE</b>	<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>OCTOBER</b>	<b>NOVEMBER</b>	<b>DECEMBER</b>

REAL TALK: I'm pretty much a piece of shit. I'm okay to a few people, but most curse my name on the regular. I'll probably break your heart and you'll always remember me with a grimace. If interested in a date, call The Year of Our Lord 2020 at (666) 220-2020.

## Humans for Humans

We met in the time of pumpkins and spirits. I wore black, as is my custom. You wore a guileless grin. We flouted convention and drank deeply of the cheapest beer, revelling in our own careless abandon. The music was perhaps too loud, but no one cared; it was the rhythm of the night and we were there for it. Write me sometime.

Place your free 'Humans for Humans' ad via the contact form at [anatomyofascream.com](http://anatomyofascream.com).

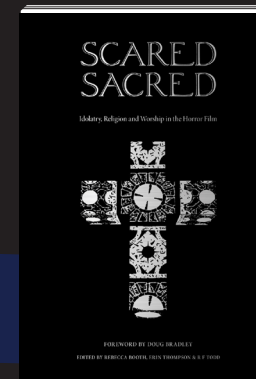
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"Every once in a while, I encounter a book, or even the rumor of one, that feels like it was written just for me: *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film*, an anthology of critical essays published by House of Leaves Publishing, more than lives up to the beautiful promise of its name. [...] With my previous book reviews, I tried to exercise some kind of professional restraint in expressing my enthusiasm for a particular work, but I'll make no such pretenses here: So far, *Scared Sacred* is very much the book I wish I'd had when I was first getting into horror a few years ago. We are perpetually haunted by old symbols and old ideas, and this book is a beautiful reminder of that."

- Laura Kemmerer, *What Sleeps Beneath*



## Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film

Edited by Rebecca Booth, Valeska Griffiths & Erin Thompson. Curated by RF Todd. Foreword by Doug Bradley.

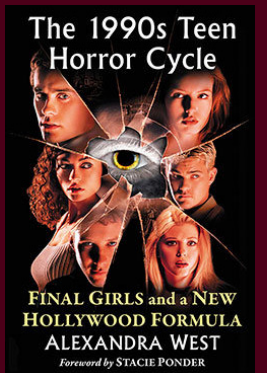
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"Alexandra West is one of the most brilliant minds working in the field of film studies today. The fact that she devotes her considerable intellect to our little bloody corner of the film world is truly a gift..."

- Jeff Schmidt, *Nightmarish Conjurings*

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