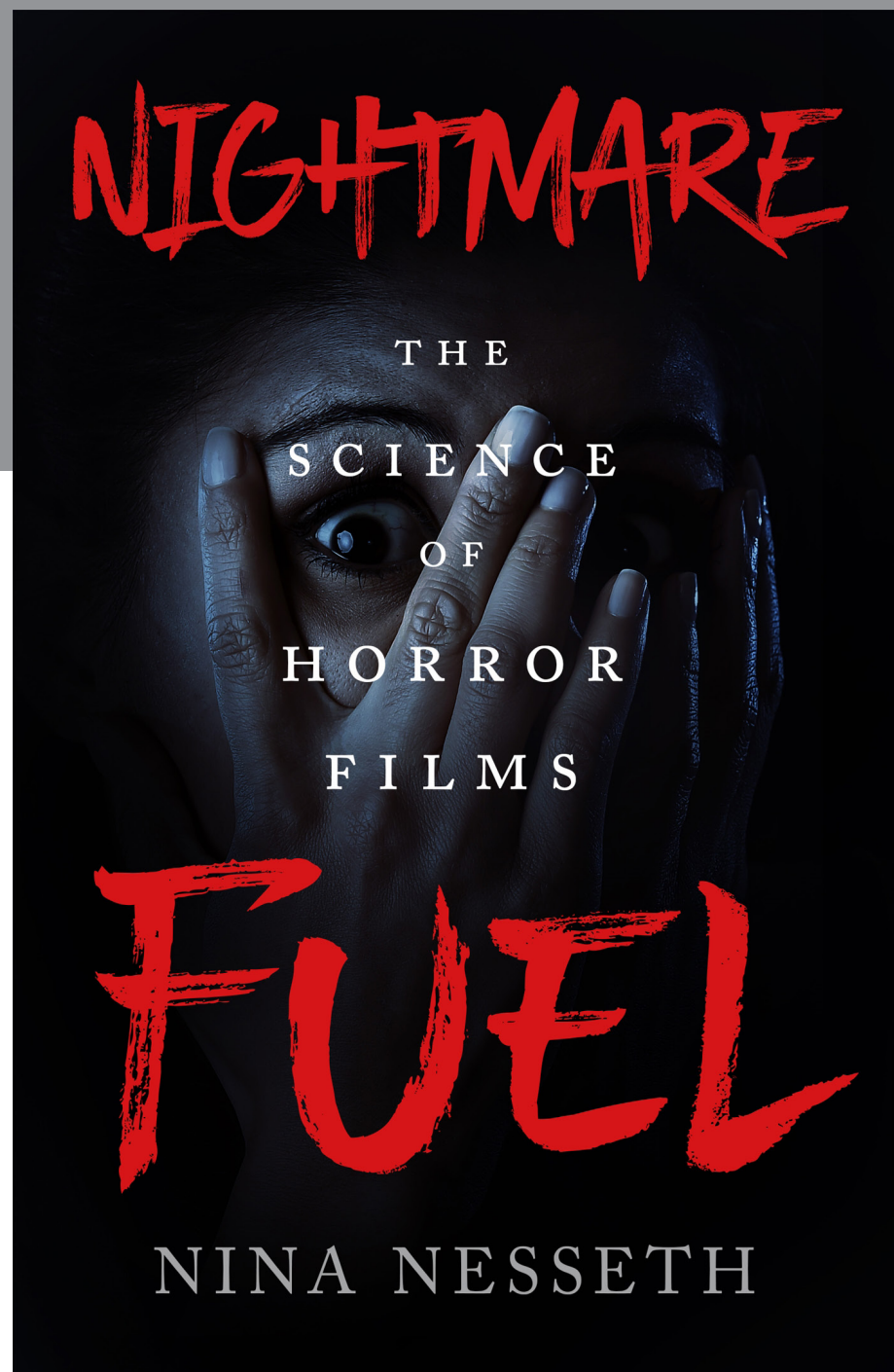


PLAY ▶

grim
No. 11 September 2022

REAL FAKE

Hex, Lies & Videotape



*What
are you so
afraid of?*

Nightmare Fuel by Nina Nesseth is a pop-science look at fear, how and why horror films get under our skin...and why we keep coming back for more.



Order your copy today. Visit:

tornightfire.com/catalog/nightmare-fuel-the-science-of-horror-films-nina-nesseth

REAL FAKE: Hex, Lies & Videotape

- 5** **Inspired by True Events** Why Found-Footage Horror is the Only Genre That Scares Me
by Erin Vaniski
- 8** **Cameras & Culpability** *Peeping Tom* as Found Footage Indictment
by Jessica Scott
- 11** **"Do You Think God is Here in This Place?"** History & Hauntings in *The Devil's Doorway*
by Jamie Alvey
- 16** **For Love of the Subgenre** *Archive 81* Bridges the Gap Between Footage & Reality
by Jenn Adams
- 19** **Forced Perspective** The Frightful Intimacy of First-Person Horrors
by Matt Donato
- 21** **Splitting at the Seams** The Double-Hauntedness of Analog Horror
by Charlotte Bloys
- 35** **Gone Girl** Tragedy at the Cecil Hotel
by Gena Radcliffe
- 37** **How Curse of Aurore Resurrects Aurore Gagnon** A Conversation with Liana Barron
by Cass Clarke
- 41** **"The Voice and Patterns of God"** Occult & the Right-Wing Conspiracy Circuit
by Miles Le

Plus:

- We're So Fucking Special** Narcissism in the Found-Footage Genre 18
- What Remains of Edith Finch** Walking Simulators & The Digital Gothic 26
- Dissecting *The Forbidden Body*** In Conversation with Douglas E. Cowan 28
- To Grind Your Skin** "Candle Cove" & *Local 58* as Essential Found-Footage Entries 31
- Family Ties** In Conversation with Rebecca McCallum 33
- Fiction** *Flames Don't Have Shadows* 44
- Invasion of the Pod People** *Bodies of Horror* 47
- Spirit Gum** Natural Beauty: The Stripped-Down Aesthetic of Found Footage 49
- Dear Countess** 50

grim

September 2022
No. 11

Staff
Executive Editor
Creative Director
Valeska Griffiths

Editor
Rebecca McCallum

Assistant Editor
Carling Kirby

Promotions Manager
Joe Lipsett

Contributors

Carling Kirby
Cass Clarke
Charlotte Bloys
Erin Brady
Erin Vaniski
Gena Radcliffe
Jamie Alvey
Jenn Adams
Jessica Scott
Jolie Toomajan
Lindsay Traves
Mackenzie Bartlett
Matt Donato
Miles Le
Rebecca McCallum

Cover Art

"Home is Where
The Haunt Is"
by CC Stapleton

Grim is a production
of *Anatomy of a Scream*.
anatomyofascream.com
twitter & Instagram: @aoas_xx
twitter: @thisisgrimmag

Special Thank You

Carling Kirby
Rebecca McCallum
Rebecca Booth
Ryan Todd
Jeff Nguyen

Grim No. 11
All rights reserved



COMING SOON

Brought to you by the publishers of *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film*, *Filtered Reality: The Progenitors and Evolution of Found Footage Horror* is a collection of sixteen essays from film historians and critics exploring the genesis, development, and resulting subgenres associated with the contemporary found footage horror film.

Join our mailing list to receive publishing updates.

HOLPUBLISHING.COM

Editor's Note

Welcome to the age of perpetual visibility. When the widespread use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) was proposed and eventually implemented as a method of crime control in the mid-twentieth century, there was fierce resistance from those who resented this infringement upon their privacy and civil liberties. In 1997, the English city of Brighton even organized direct action against the encroachment of nosy lenses into their public spaces, decorating camera poles with ribbons in an attempt to belittle the technology, disabling visibility by training lasers on the lenses, and obstructing the view of camera operators by performing street theatre in front of the devices (Davies, 1998). Despite protests, letters to the editor, and impassioned screeds posted on niche message boards, CCTV has become common, and even ubiquitous in some parts of the world. That the technology has evolved to incorporate video content analysis, including facial recognition and tracking functionality, has only added salt to this wound.

Even as many lament this loss of privacy, the meteoric rise of social media has further hastened its demise. Early apps like Foursquare allowed people to broadcast their location at will each time they visited a café (as well as their thoughts on the day's menu). Today, Snapchat's location feature allows people to spy on their acquaintances in real time, while Instagram and TikTok encourage and incentivize users to post new content as often as possible. We no longer record events or thoughts merely for posterity. We record them to entertain our (hopefully) ever-growing audiences. Privacy, once fiercely protected, is flirting with obsolescence as culture has shifted toward a digital consciousness and a state of being always-online—perpetually visible.

What does this mean for found-footage horror? The prevalence of CCTV systems (including wireless home security cameras) and our infatuation with smartphones, webcams, and the apps that utilize them have created fertile new territory for found-footage creators, in terms of both storytelling and production. Seeing our quotidian experiences with technology reflected onscreen serves to blur the line between real and fake, deepening our identification with the events unfolding before us.

While found-footage horror films have exploded in popularity over the past couple of decades, cinema is not the only medium that employs found footage as a potent storytelling device. Epistolary novels, such as Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) or Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), radio hoaxes like Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* (1938), and digital narratives including creepypastas all strive to create storytelling experiences imbued with varying levels of verisimilitude.

The upcoming House of Leaves release, *Filtered Reality: The Progenitors and Evolution of Found Footage Horror*, explores the past, present, and future of this subgenre. This edition of *Grim* may be considered a companion piece, dedicated to the book's contributors, supporters, and the brilliant and hardworking House of Leaves founders, Rebecca Booth and RF Todd.

Valeska Griffiths
@bitcraftTO

REFERENCES

Davis, S.G. (1998). CCTV: A New Battleground for Privacy. In C. Norris, J. Moran, & G. Armstrong (Eds.), *Surveillance, Closed Circuit Television and Social Control*. Routledge.

Thank you to everyone who's making sure that 'Print Is Undead' by supporting print horror at House of Leaves, Grim, and beyond!

We'd like to shout-out some members of the House of Leaves Book Club:

Dan Stout

Aaron Barnett

Megan Broadbent

Jayson Drury

Graham Blunt

Elizabeth Todd

Nina Nesseth

Jeff Nguyen

Robyn Todd

Rachel Reeves

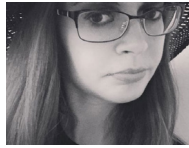
Rick Powell

Sean Coulborn

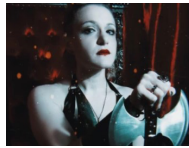
Ani Kuffel

Kevin Matthews

Lisa Rufus



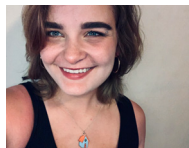
Carling Kirby is a freelance writer, media communications graduate, and horror junkie. Along with Anatomy of a Scream and *Grim*, they have contributed to *Rue Morgue* and are the co-host of the *LGBTerror* podcast. They have a fascination with psychology, the occult, and true crime. Upon asking their best friend to describe them, they were dubbed "Vincent Price and Paris Hilton stuffed into one body."



Cass Clarke is a Boston-based fiction writer, critic, podcaster, and martial artist. They currently write for *Slash Film*, *Rue Morgue*, and *Marvel.com*. Cass has been in love with horror since they first recorded *Jaws* on VHS. They co-host and produce a monthly podcast, *Horror Hangover*, exploring the genre's most tired tropes until they love them again. You can follow them on twitter @cass__clarke and their work at cassandraashclarke.com.



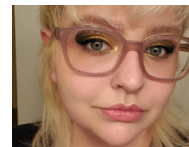
CC Stapleton is an artist and writer from Atlanta, GA. Having studied art history in college, specifically Renaissance-era devotional iconography, she can find—and rave at length about—the symbolism embedded into anything. She contributes to *Grim* and guests on podcasts in her free time. She welcomes you to get dark with her on twitter @callsinthenight.



Charlotte Bloys is a Literary and Cultural Studies M.A. student at Carnegie Mellon and a recent Pitt graduate with majors in English Writing and Film and Media Studies. Charlotte's current research interests include new media (especially web original fiction in all forms!), body genres, and fandom studies.



Erin Brady is a horror fanatic and entertainment critic. Currently a staff writer for */Film*, her genre-leaning work has been featured on such websites as *Vulture*, *Ebert Voices*, and *Little White Lies*. She can often be found cuddling with her dog Wes and watching movies for sickos.



Erin Vaniski is a horror enthusiast holed up in Washington state. They spend their days mainlining movies and caffeine, surrounded by their Funko Pop! collection. Erin is often cuddled up with their dilute calico Reid, and can be found rambling about queerness and pop culture at their twitter, @horrorwasfor_.



Gena Radcliffe is the co-host of the *Kill by Kill* podcast, recently featured as one of *Variety's* "10 Horror Podcasts to Make You Scream." She also writes about movies and television at *The Spool*. Spending far too much time on twitter under @genadoesthings, she lives in Brooklyn, NY with her family.



Jamie Alvey is a writer, educator, and actress often who waxes poetic about the works of Shirley Jackson and Daphne du Maurier. She is known for writing the screenplay *Bystanders* and intersectional feminist horror analysis.



Jenn Adams is a writer and podcaster from Nashville, TN. She co-hosts *Psychoanalysis: A Horror Therapy Podcast*, examining mental health topics through the lens of the horror genre, and *The Loser's Club: A Stephen King Podcast*, taking frequent deep dives into the work and adaptations of her favorite author. Jenn is a contributor and columnist for */Film*, *Bloody Disgusting*, *Rue Morgue Online*, *Dread Central*, and *Ghouls Magazine*. She is the creator and author of the *Strong Female Antagonist* blog.



Jessica Scott is an Arkansas-based writer whose work focuses on feminist and queer theory, pop culture studies, and mental health depictions in horror. She is a contributor for *Film Cred* and *Nightmarish Conjuring*s. You can find her on twitter and Instagram @WeWhoWalkHere and at her website WeWhoWalkHere.blog. Her podcast, *Monster Books*, is on the Anatomy of a Scream Pod Squad network.



Jolie Toomajan is a PhD candidate, writer, editor, and all-around creep. Her plan for the zombie apocalypse is to pour a bottle of hot sauce over her head. You can follow her on twitter @DrAsenathWaite, where she plays and reviews horror games.



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 on twitter @smashtraves.



Mackenzie Bartlett is a filmmaker and writer, living and working from her home (a haunted lighthouse off the coast of Maine). You can contact her by saying her name 3 times in a mirror, or on twitter @FormalSorcery.



Matt Donato is a Los Angeles-based film critic currently published on *IGN*, *Fangoria*, *Bloody Disgusting*, and anywhere else he's allowed to spread the gospel of *Demon Wind*. He is also a member of the *Critics Choice Association*. You can find Matt on twitter at @Donatobomb. Don't feed him after midnight.



Miles Le is a filmmaker and graphic designer operating out of the Seattle area. He is an avowed international film enthusiast and enjoys writing short form sci-fi and horror in his spare time. You can find him vomiting up content on Instagram @mileslikescats.



Rebecca McCallum is Assistant Editor at *Ghouls Magazine* and writes about horror and film analysis. In addition to having bylines with *Rue Morgue* and *Dread Central*, and work in print in *Hear Us Scream* and *Grim*, she also has a collection on the *Women of Hitchcock's* films with *Moving Pictures Film Club*. She is the author of the zine *Mums + Sons, An Examination of the Child/Parent Relationships in Psycho, The Babadook and Hereditary*. You can find her work on twitter and Instagram @PendlePumpkin.



Valeska Griffiths is the founder of *Anatomy of a Scream*, executive editor of *Grim*, co-founder of the *AOAS Pod Squad Network*, and co-editor of *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film* and the upcoming *Filtered Reality: The Progenitors and Evolution of Found Footage Horror* from *House of Leaves Publishing*. She serves on the jury for the *Ax Wound Film Festival* and has presented at *Frightmare in the Falls*, *Salem Horror Fest*, and *The Satanic Temple*. October is her natural habitat. Haunt her on twitter @bitcraftTO.

Inspired by True Events

Why Found-Footage Horror is the Only Genre that Scares Me

by Erin Vaniski

My imagination has always been robust.

An aspiring novelist since the tender age of eight, exploring the endless possibilities of fiction is my lifeblood. Getting lost in fantastical worlds is the strongest drug my mind can conceive of. This adoration of the fictitious was dutifully nurtured by my cinephile parents who spent my childhood showing me all the films they grew up loving, as most parents do, for better or worse.

One such movie was Joe Dante's *Gremlins* (1984), which utterly terrified my child self—much to my father's delight. He couldn't believe something as hokey as those toothy muppets could scare me to the brink of tears. I honestly thought gremlins were going to sneak into my room at night and feast on me (despite that never once happening in the film). The natural next step, in my father's mind, was to show me William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973).

If creatures as ridiculous as gremlins gave me nightmares, I'm sure you can imagine my reaction to *The Exorcist*.

Worrying about Chris Walas's puppets from hell was easy compared to realizing my bedroom held the entrance to our house's attic. Nothing has ever quite replicated the dread I felt during the attic scene of Friedkin's horror masterpiece. Of course, I still worried about gremlins; I now had the added terror of Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair). These movies blended with my overactive imagination, meaning it took a while for the trepidations to subside.

I had mostly moved on from gremlins and demonic little girls by the time I hit teenagerdom. I could finally start my own foray into cinema, rather than being subjected to my parents' favourites.

At thirteen, my imagination was still abundant, and movies grew to be more and more thrilling. My dreams of becoming a novelist expanded into screenwriting, acting, directing. One film that dazzled me instantly was *Cloverfield* (2008).

The beasts wreaking havoc on the city were as real to me as animals at the zoo.

Not only was Matt Reeves' sci-fi romp one of the first found-footage films I ever saw, it featured so many things I loved: creatures from space, New York City, and Lizzy Caplan. Despite knowing, logically, that New York was still standing, I was captivated. I took the notice at the beginning warning us against duplicating the footage as gospel. I believed in the relationships playing out on screen. The beasts wreaking havoc on the city were as real to me as animals at the zoo.

When it was released in 2008, *Cloverfield* was more than just a creature feature like any of the iterations of *Godzilla*, or a disaster flick like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). For me, it was a glimpse into a possible future: perhaps, someday, I could be the Hudson "Hud" Platt (TJ Miller) filming New York's destruction. This potential thrilled me, and with that thrill came fear. Because if I was Hud, then I was right in the midst of disaster; if I was Hud, then my footage would be the one confiscated by the government. If I was Hud, then I was in real danger.

That fear, more than the gargantuan beast or the mutant flies, has stuck with me nearly fifteen years later. The scariest part of *Cloverfield* isn't the monsters or the destruction, but the government. It's the hopelessness that's felt toward the end when we know Rob (Michael Stahl-David) and Beth (Odette Yustman) aren't

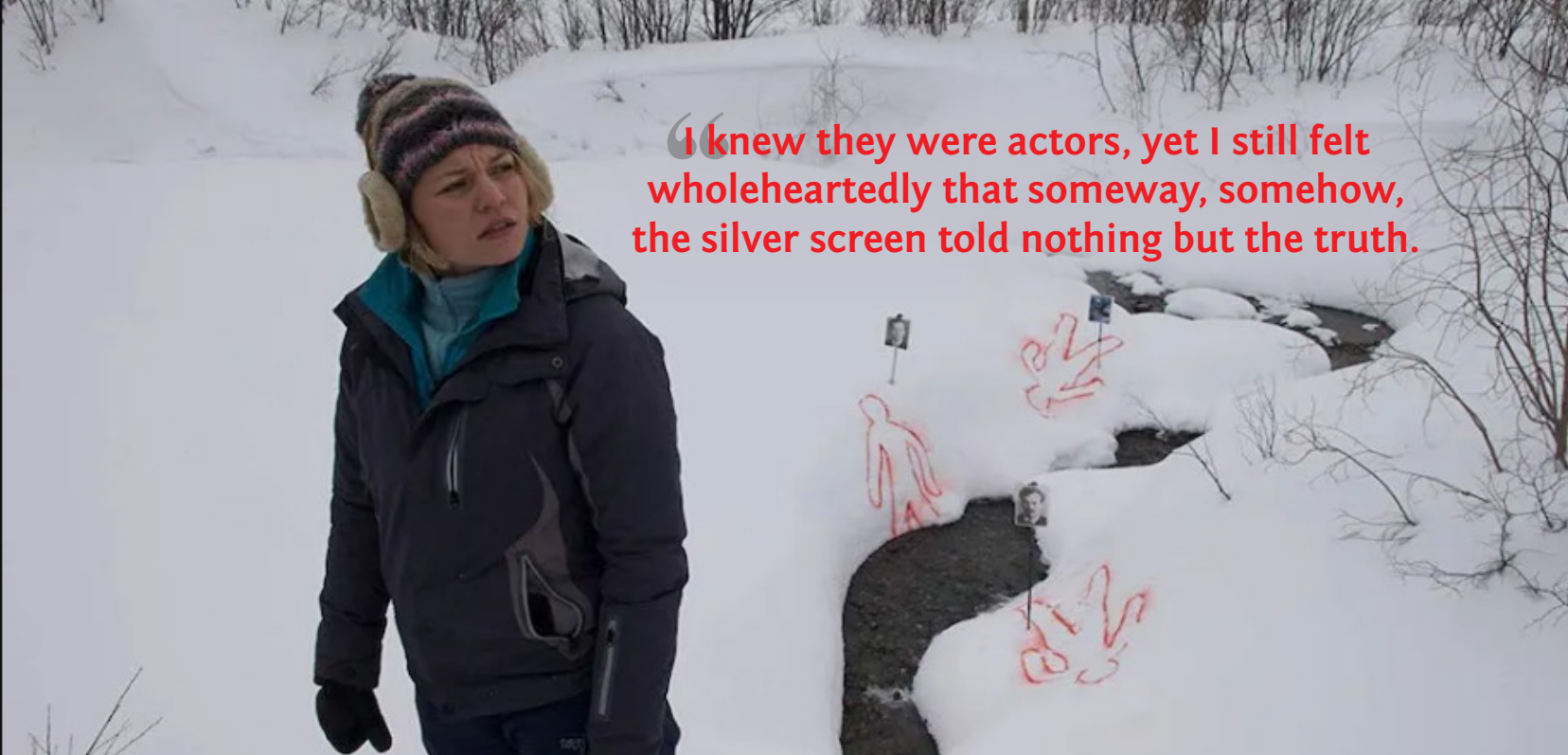
going to be saved. Beyond that, there's also the spine-chilling implication that the Department of Defence has possession of this vital footage and could just as easily choose to hide it, rather than share it with the world.

I didn't fully recognize it then, nascent and naïve as a teenager who thought little of government and politics. I was more enraptured by the creatures and dazzled by the idea of making my own movies. This infatuation eventually led me to join my high school's theatre department. In some ways, this was the beginning of the end.

Until my sophomore year of high school, I had steadfastly believed the movies I watched. I knew they were actors, yet I still felt wholeheartedly that someday, somehow, the silver screen told nothing but the truth. Even with the most insane plots, I figured there was always the chance for it to be true. But as I got into acting, the curtain drew back both literally and metaphorically: I had seen the hand pulling all the strings, and the magic of Hollywood started to lift.

The illusion that had diligently carried me since childhood—that which made gremlins so threatening, made me dread my attic, and made the *Cloverfield* beast seem so real—began to splinter. My imagination was irreparably changed. It left me feeling a little bittersweet, as growing up often does, but it also left me ravenous for the feeling I'd experienced before. By the time I graduated high school in 2013, I no longer worried about gremlins, Regan MacNeil, or the parasites from *Cloverfield*.

In fact, as I entered adulthood and worked at my family's video store, I barely experienced fear at all. Hollywood's finest could no longer scare me, despite



I knew they were actors, yet I still felt wholeheartedly that someday, somehow, the silver screen told nothing but the truth.

their best efforts. I knew anxiety well, and I never thought I was above danger. But films that had once made me afraid to turn out the lights mostly made me chortle. I didn't look over my shoulder anymore; I didn't race to bed worried that the Devil himself might be nipping at my heels.

Rather than accepting this change, I took it as a challenge. Compounded by how my dad still teased me about my fear of *Gremlins*, I threw myself into loving horror movies. I began to chase that elusive high called fear. As much as I hated being a terrified child, there was an undeniable wonderment in being horrified. I wanted to feel that wonderment again. Despite my best efforts, no horror movie could bring me back there. I loved the genre profoundly and still do, but none of its worthiest contenders scared me.

Save for one subgenre: found-footage horror. Where slashers like Michael Myers couldn't make my hair stand on end, the likes of *Afflicted* (2013) and *Grave Encounters* (2011) kept me up at night. Creature features delighted me, torture porn titillated me, but found-footage flicks ensnared me. The grainy filters and sickeningly unsteady angles captured my imagination once more, wholly and completely.

It took me a while to pinpoint exactly why, but looking back, it's incredibly obvious: where most movies coast on the power of unfailing imagination,

found footage is instead powered by reality. Found footage isn't beholden to how far a mind can stretch or how much an audience can suspend their disbelief. Instead, found footage forces the audience to confront terror while trapped in disclaimers like *based on a true story* or *inspired by true events*.

These horrors range far and wide, limited only by a screenwriter's imagination. There are so many movies I could extol; choosing a select few to address in this essay was probably the most challenging part of my pitch. As this is the only genre that truly gets to me, I have lovingly crafted a collection of these films that I hold near and dear. Some could not be more different, whether it's plot, budget, or purpose. Yet, at their core, they all function the same way: they are scary because they are real. (Or so they say.)

Brian Miller's *Apollo 18* (2011) explores exactly why we never returned to the moon after December 7, 1972, playing on similar anxieties featured in *Cloverfield*. Sure, moon spiders are terrifying, but that's not the *real* scare. It's not watching these space arachnids crawl around inside Commander Nathan Walker's (Lloyd Owen) spacesuit that freaks me out—it's believing that the government has this footage and is hiding it, even outright lying about it. Extraterrestrial spiders are unsettling, but the government is even more so.

This same conspiracy makes *Devil's Pass*

(2012) and *Alien Abduction* (2014) so petrifying to me as well.

Directed by Ryan Harlin, *Devil's Pass* takes real-life terror and warps it into an even more dreadful story. Where *Apollo 18* utilizes the space race for its setting, *Devil's Pass* co-opts the historic Dyatlov Pass incident. This historical mystery becomes grade-A science fiction tangled up in government conspiracy. The far-off setting of Russia only adds to this terror, making the whole ordeal seem like something far away—similar to *Apollo 18*'s '70s-era setting. It is just distant enough to give me room to believe.

Alien Abduction isn't quite so distant. Director Matty Beckerman tells the story of a family camping trip interrupted by aliens. Simple on the surface, this film is a masterclass of tension. Beckerman starts strong by revealing that the footage we're seeing is being used for Project Blue Book. He then ties it up in a neat bow with two men in Hazmat suits taking the camera away on behalf of the United States Air Force.

These three films and *Cloverfield* all exist on the same plane: the government will always have its nose in our business, whether we know about it or not. In this day and age of constant surveillance and disregard for human rights, it's a fear that ages like fine wine. These movies are scary, no matter when I first saw them or how many times I've seen them since. They are real and palpable, especially

V/H/S and its sequels are terrifying because they're already found in the real world, no conspiracy needed.



now that I'm an adult who can no longer afford to be ignorant of my government. That's not to say a found-footage film must be wrapped up in government conspiracies to scare me. Movies like *Creep* (2014) and *V/H/S* (2012) manage to frighten me precisely because they hit so much closer to home. *Alien Abduction* straddles this line, but *Creep* and *V/H/S* remove the government from the picture entirely, and I am left to deal with the terror that remains: humanity itself.

Created by Brad Miska, *V/H/S* retains the element of conspiracy that makes the aforementioned films so scary. Rather than the government keeping secrets, though, *V/H/S* is more of a modern-day creepypasta. I was always fond of creepypastas—horror-related legends shared around the internet—but this movie is better than anything cooked up on Reddit.

Each segment is unique, from the eerily realistic "Second Honeymoon" directed by Ti West to the quietly out-of-this-world "10/31/98" directed by Radio Silence. This film's most terrifying moments are thanks to Adam Wingard's frame narrative, "Tape 56." Following the criminal gang on their job to steal a VHS tape, it becomes readily apparent that not everything is as it seems.

The three follow-ups to *V/H/S* expand on this eeriness, in particular *V/H/S/2* (2013). The immediate sequel's frame narrative, "Tape 49," directed by Simon

Barrett, plunges us deeper into the lore behind these mysterious tapes. These aren't just an uncanny gathering of snuff films or unexplained phenomena—many are deliberately crafted in some sort of challenge.

The scariest horror movies are always the ones we can relate most deeply to, and it doesn't get more relatable than folks bumbling around with video cameras.

These frame narratives are where the genuine scares lie. The freaky old man in "Tape 56" and the conniving Kyle in "Tape 49" are the real villains. The game they're playing is scarier than anything on those tapes. Especially when people like the old man and Kyle exist in real life. Websites dedicated to prank videos are a dime a dozen, and (if you know where to look) so are the sites with cartel beheading videos and dash cam footage of tragedies. *V/H/S* and its sequels are terrifying because they're already found in the real world, no conspiracy needed.

Creep is similarly chilling—people like Josef (Mark Duplass) walk among us every day, and we are none the wiser. Patrick Brice's directorial debut forces the viewer into the same awkward position as cameraman Aaron (Patrick Brice). Alongside our main character,

I have to stomach Josef's lack of boundaries and unending obsession. *Creep* isn't just scary; it's downright uncomfortable. Duplass is a standout in the role, playing Josef with a fascinating blend of insanity and charisma.

Just as Aaron believes there is good in Josef toward the end, so too did I. Josef is more than a serial killer. He's my worst yet most mundane nightmare: a chatty stranger with no regard for personal space or other people's feelings. Where Josef is revolting, Aaron is relatable, which compounds the terror. As an adult in the current economic climate, taking a sketchy job for a thousand bucks is discomfoting in its familiarity. Even armed with all the stranger danger warnings of my youth, I can't say I'd have done anything differently than Aaron.

This is why *Creep*, the other movies I've mentioned here, and so many other found-footage films, are the pinnacle of horror for me. The scariest horror movies are always the ones we can relate to most deeply, and it doesn't get more relatable than folks bumbling around with video cameras. Anyone could be behind the camera rather than in the audience. It doesn't get more real than the government covering up secrets, people causing trouble for clout, and serial killers slipping into our lives undetected. We may be able to outrun Jason or wake up before Freddy gets us—but any one of us could be the inspiration for a "true story." *g*

Cameras & Culpability:

PEEPING TOM AS FOUND FOOTAGE INDICTMENT

by Jessica Scott

At its core, the found-footage subgenre is about truth. Viewers watch what is purportedly a real account of people's lives. Even when found footage deals with the paranormal—as it does in some of its most famous entries, like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007)—there is still an essential element of grounded truth-telling to the subgenre. The stories are usually presented within framing devices that claim that the footage is a document of real life, of a doomed person's last days.

Despite this repeated portrayal of people at their most vulnerable, few found-footage films interrogate what it means to consume such tragic "real-life" stories as entertainment. Even fewer do so as brilliantly as Michael Powell's masterpiece *Peeping Tom* (1960).

Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm) is an aspiring filmmaker working on a most curious documentary. He murders women and films their final moments. We see these final moments through his camera, with

the crosshairs marking the victims for death and Mark's footage serving as final witness to their lives. Incorporating many elements of what we now know as true crime and criminal profiling, Mark even films the police investigation surrounding his crimes. He wants to see the faces of the detectives who don't realize the killer is standing right in front of them, and he wants to see the fear on the face of a beautiful woman who finds the bloody body of his latest victim. Fear, after all, is what interests Mark.



WE ALL KNOW THAT A CAMERA CAN BE A WEAPON, BUT WE STOP SHORT OF THE TRUTH WHEN WE REFUSE TO SEE THAT WATCHING CAN BE JUST AS HARMFUL AN ACT AS RECORDING.



His father was an esteemed psychology professor who made Mark his life's work, subjecting him to horrific experiments as a child and filming every second of young Mark's life, all in the name of studying the effect of fear on children. It was a life of hideous trauma that left Mark the damaged killer we see today.

THE VISCERAL DISGUST THAT ACCOMPANIED THE RELEASE OF *PEEPING TOM* WAS LIKELY DUE LESS TO WHAT IT SHOWED VIEWERS THAN TO WHAT IT REVEALED TO VIEWERS ABOUT THEMSELVES.

Critics and audiences hated *Peeping Tom* at the time of its release, and the film became notorious for its violence and sexual content. While bold and unfiltered in its frank depiction of sex workers, there is barely any blood or nudity in the film. The visceral disgust that accompanied the release of *Peeping Tom* was likely due less to what it showed viewers than to what it revealed to viewers about themselves. *Peeping Tom* posits that filmmaking—and, by extension, film-watching—is in itself an act of violence. It points the finger at the audience and lays the blame for Mark's victims squarely at our feet. *Peeping Tom*

isn't shocking because of what Mark does; it's shocking because it doesn't let us off the hook for watching Mark do it.

The jarring extreme close-up of Mark's eye that serves as the film's first shot immediately puts us directly in his headspace. We are seeing the world through Mark's eyes, often quite literally. There's no psychological distance, no funhouse mirror distortion to the myriad reflections; we are watching the real world unfold through Mark's camera lens, just as Mark's father watched his young son's life unfold through his own camera lens. The frenetic jazz score and saturated colours make this a world of hyperreality. We can't escape its pointing finger by pretending it's all make-believe. Boehm's sensitive yet chilling performance keeps us in lockstep with the minute changes in Mark's psyche throughout the film. We track his emotional fluctuations just as keenly as we track the arc of his murder weapon. By making his killer so sympathetic and placing us—sometimes quite literally—in the director's chair, Powell puts the responsibility on the viewer. By engaging with this real-life story of women meeting grisly ends, by seeking these images out as entertainment, we are just as guilty as Mark is.

Powell adds fascinating metafictional dimensions to his film that only serve to sharpen the blade of culpability, Mark befriends a tenant of his, Helen Stephens

(Anna Massey), and she asks to watch some of his films. There's an astonishing early sequence where he plays some of his father's "home movies" for her. We watch Mark, as he watches Helen, as she watches Mark's father, as he watches young Mark through his camera lens. Ironically, the levels of distance between the audience as the ultimate voyeur and the telescoping list of subjects being watched make the trauma and violence *more* intimate, not less. We identify and empathize with every single person being watched, especially when we realize that our act of watching them is subjecting them to more violence. Adding to this mind-bending realization is the fact that Powell himself plays Mark's father, with Powell's son playing young Mark. Artifice melts away; all we are left with is an abused little boy who has grown up engaging with the world the only way he knows how: by capturing it with a camera.


WE IDENTIFY AND EMPATHIZE WITH EVERY SINGLE PERSON BEING WATCHED, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE REALIZE THAT OUR ACT OF WATCHING THEM IS SUBJECTING THEM TO MORE VIOLENCE.

In another incredible moment, Powell slices through any possible level of distance the audience may have created between ourselves and what we are watching. When Helen introduces Mark to her mother (Maxine Audley), Powell employs an audacious split-second transition to bring the audience's defences crashing down. Mrs. Stephens is a perspicacious woman who distrusts Mark immensely even before she has met him. Ever the peeping Tom, Mark often watches Helen and her mother through their window, which is shaded by a gauzy curtain. When he agrees to meet Mrs. Stephens, Mark looks directly into the camera for a brief moment, and then the film cuts to inside the Stephens' living room, where a gauzy curtain lifts up to allow the viewer to watch their meeting. It's the quickest of transitions, but it's a damning moment that allows the viewer no escape from Powell's judgment; we are voyeurs just as surely as Mark is, peeking in through curtains to watch the story unfold. The other characters are unaware of our presence, but when he makes eye contact with us, Mark sees us for who we are: kindred spirits who find pleasure in

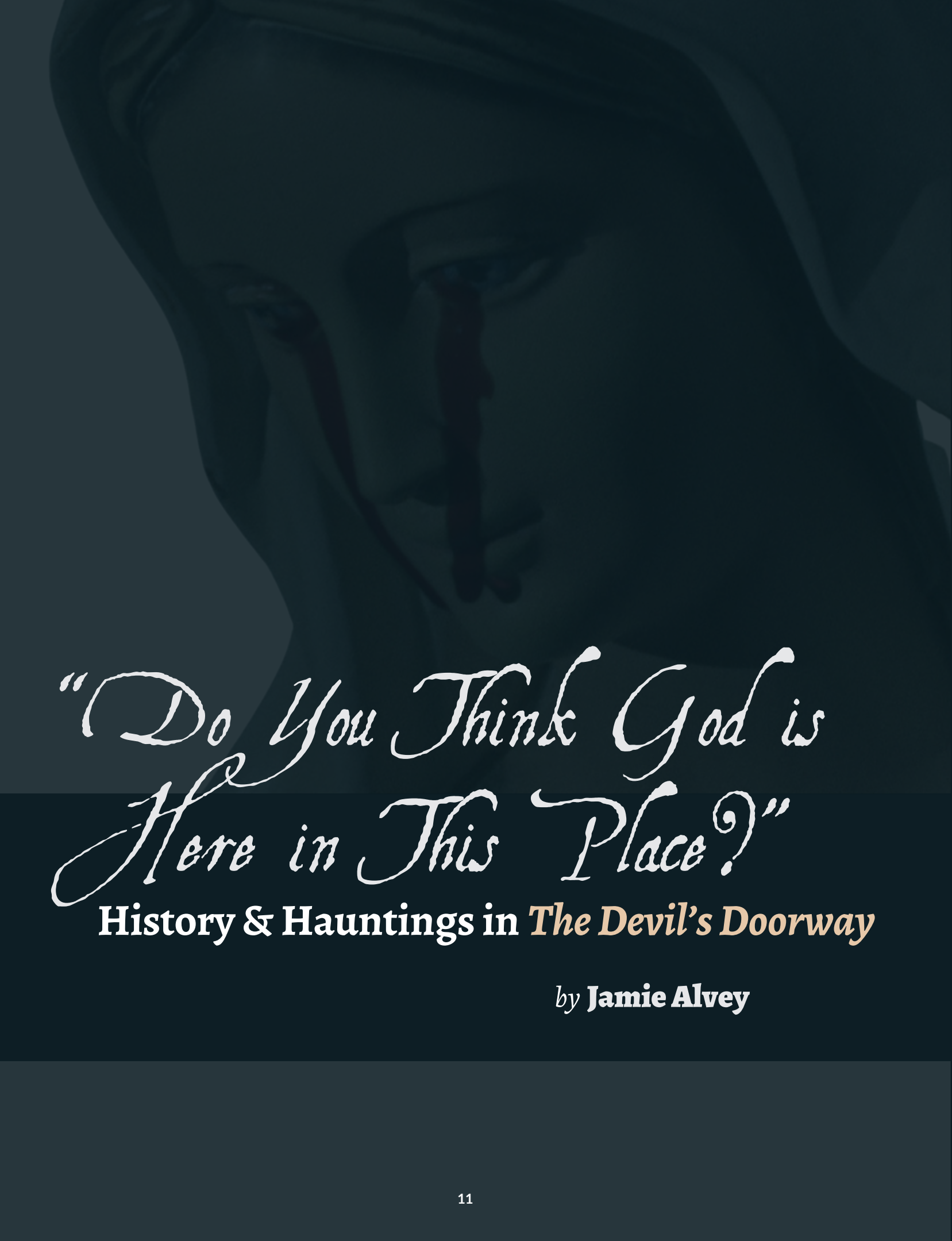
watching women die on screen.

The most shocking moment of all comes when Mark reveals to Helen exactly how he is killing his victims. He affixes a reflective attachment to his camera so that his victims can watch themselves die. Not only are they watching death approach them...they are watching themselves watch death approach them. The victims are seeing exactly what Mark sees—and exactly what we see. "I made them watch their own deaths. I made them see their own terror as the spike went in. And if death has a face, they saw that too." Death often feels like an abstract concept, a hypothetical; we all know intellectually that we will die one day, but for most people there's no sense of immediacy or concreteness to the idea. Mark obliterates this psychological distance, making the fear of death physical and inescapable; he literally shoves death in these women's faces in order to scare them as much as possible. Powell does the same thing to his audience: he shoves Mark's actions in our faces, refusing to let us look away or pretend that we don't have a hand in them. We see what Mark's

camera sees...in fact, we might as well be holding the camera ourselves.

In today's culture, where cell phones are more commonly used as video cameras than as telephones, the ethics of invading other people's privacy are constantly under debate. Those thorny ethical questions: what right do we have to record and watch other people? What is the line between information and entertainment? How much do we contribute to the violence of invading people's personal space by simply watching it happen?—are rarely addressed by a subgenre predicated on the concept of consuming people's real lives through a camera lens. What *Peeping Tom* does is ask all those questions and more, decades before such issues would become so pressing. More than 60 years after its release, the film still has not been surpassed, either as a cinematic masterpiece or a found-footage film that indicts the viewer as a co-conspirator. Living in 2022, we all know that a camera can be a weapon, but we stop short of the truth when we refuse to see that watching can be just as harmful an act as recording. 





“Do You Think God is
Here in This Place?”

History & Hauntings in *The Devil's Doorway*

by **Jamie Alvey**

This piece is dedicated to the lives of the 155 Maggies found buried in the mass grave at Sisters of Our Lady of Charity.

We will not go back.

Aislinn Clarke's 2018 found-footage film *The Devil's Doorway* opens up on a group shot of somber looking young women and stern nuns. Text cards inform the viewer who these young women are: "For over 200 years, the Catholic Church in Ireland held women in asylums called 'Magdalene Laundries.' They held prostitutes, orphans, the abused, the mentally disabled, and unmarried pregnant women." This added information makes the opening shot of the film eerie, grotesque even. The women are societal outcasts and disadvantaged, while the nuns are their minders, sequestering them. They were enslaved and expected to work, mostly doing laundry—hence the name—under the guise of learning a respectable trade, though they were brutalized, beaten, and abused. The newly born children of the pregnant women in the nuns' care were sold for profit and sometimes exported to America for adoption.

There are still women alive who were victims of these asylums, as the last one closed in 1996. The women—called Maggies—have received formal apologies and monetary compensation for the abuse they endured from the Irish government, but it's questionable whether it is enough to atone for the human rights violations that took place at Magdalene Laundries. The real-life horrors that these women faced were innumerable and, in 1993,

a mass grave site was discovered on the grounds of Sisters of Our Lady of Charity—a former Magdalene Laundry—that gave a glimpse into the terror the Maggies were subjected to. The Laundries are a perfect setting for a horror film which brings the urgent dread of systemic abuses and atrocities home, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere that screams across time and fashions a narrative that is dangerously prescient.

What makes the injustices portrayed in *The Devil's Doorway* all the more personal and powerful is how the story is told.

The film features a skeptical priest named Father Thomas (Lalor Roddy), who joins the priesthood to do good for others. His daily work sees him investigating purported miracles, and one such miracle has been reported at a Magdalene Laundry. Father Thomas finds the claims of the asylum's statue of the Virgin Mary crying tears of blood dubious, but he goes about his methodical detective work regardless. While Father Thomas is gathering evidence and making deductions, he bears witness to the abuses that the women interred in the asylum endure. They are made to work long hours, berated, physically accosted, and treated like chattel and broodmares. This does little to bolster the already broken faith of Father Thomas and brings him into conflict with the Mother Superior (Helena Bereen) who oversees the Laundry. After several vile revelations,

Father Thomas finds himself advocating for a pregnant and supposedly possessed teenage girl named Kathleen (Lauren Coe) who is being kept in the basement. Interestingly enough, the Mary statue cries tears of Kathleen's blood, leading to her discovery.

What makes the injustices portrayed in *The Devil's Doorway* all the more personal and powerful is how the story is told. Not many found-footage films are simultaneously period pieces and history lessons all in one. The film is framed as a real-life event that the Catholic Church has suppressed, which—given the oppressive nature of the Magdalene Laundries depicted in the film—makes for a solid narrative framework considering that any real-life horrors in the Laundries were actually kept secret to avoid scandal within the Church and government.

The character behind the camera is Father John—an optimistic young priest whose worldview has yet to be tainted. Choosing Father John as the film's lens is crucial to the story being told because he still sees religious institutions for how they *should* be, and not for what they truly *are*—organizations run by flawed people who will act in their own interest. Father John's naïveté contrasts with Father Thomas's world-weary viewpoint, creating characters that the audience will identify with wherever they are on their personal faith journey. The stylish first-person point-of-view techniques used to create an effectively eerie found-footage flick makes the history behind the film stark and brings the bleak reality to the forefront. Women like those depicted

really lived, were victims of the Church and the government, and were punished for their sexual autonomy.

As the plot of the film progresses, the priests find themselves in well-trodden yet beloved religious territory, including satanic nuns. Some viewers may think that having nuns in league with the devil is a cop-out, a way to work around truly criticizing the Church and bringing light to its wrongdoings. However, that's not entirely the case. By violating the human rights and autonomy of the women under their care, the nuns have simply aligned themselves with the very evil that they are supposed to be against. It's a simple metaphor, but it highlights how taking away the free will that God gives everyone and denying the love and care that Jesus instructed others to partake in makes a person evil and in direct opposition of the doctrine they claim to serve. It is not exonerating the Church's crimes, but rather damning the lack of true Christ-like love and the corruption within the Church and Church-run organizations. The nuns represent human evil, hypocrisy, and systemic abuses.

Bold, strikingly personal horror that reminds the world of its dark histories is crucial.

The film's decidedly downer ending mimics the loss of hope felt by society when faced with disillusionment and corruption in spaces that should be safe and welcoming. Father Thomas is unable to save Kathleen or her baby. Sadly, Father John dies, and eventually so too does Father Thomas. It is easy for people to feel like they are being eaten alive by the establishments that are there to either aid or protect them, and ironically enough, Father Thomas has his throat ripped out in the final

***The Devil's Doorway* is a vital mirror, melding horror and historicity together to show the world why it is dangerous to regress...**

moments of the film. He falls victim to the very system he entered to do good. Systemic corruption will consume those that will not fall to it.

In a world where the rights of marginalized identities are tenuous, many people recall what the Maggies faced around their sexual autonomy and how they were considered an embarrassment. With the Supreme Court decision regarding *Roe v. Wade* in America, many conservative figureheads on social networking sites are calling for "stronger support" of pregnant people, perhaps even religious homes that could accommodate these "wayward souls." They see this as a reasonable alternative to abortion, which is now being criminalized in heavily gerrymandered states that are held hostage by regressive ideals. However, they are subsequently advocating for the American version of the Irish Magdalene Laundries—a historical event of which not many Americans are knowledgeable.

Bold, strikingly personal horror that reminds the world of its dark histories is crucial. Yes, horror can entertain and does so, but, at its core, horror has always been a radical and political genre. *The Devil's Doorway* is a vital mirror, melding horror and historicity together to show the world why it is dangerous to regress, why people have a right to bodily autonomy, and how human hypocrisy and corruption can violate people's inalienable rights. On the surface, the demonic nuns cause the creeping terror in Clarke's masterful film, but it's the echoes of injustice and the real human suffering that inspired the tale that burrow beneath the skin and leave the audience chilled, long after the credits have rolled. [g](#)

"Do you believe in a world other than our own? ... A dimension separated from ours by the thinnest of veils. ... Where time is ever expanding and ever contracting. And if this other world exists, some believe it lies at the very center of ... the Circle."

Rebecca Sonnenshine's *Archive 81* is a love letter to the found-footage subgenre. Based on the groundbreaking podcast of the same name, the Netflix series follows Dan Turner (Mamoudou Athie), an archivist with a tragic past who takes a mysterious job restoring footage found in the 1994 fire at Lower Manhattan's Visser Building. Bankrolling the project is Virgil Davenport (Martin Donovan), a secretive businessman who will do anything to find out what really happened in the fire that killed his brother Samuel (Evan Jonigkeit). Dan is tasked with restoring the footage of Melody Pendras (Dina Shihabi), a graduate student conducting video interviews for an oral history of the Visser and its residents. While watching this found footage, Dan unfolds a decade-spanning mystery that provides a link between Melody's reality and his own. The connection he forges with the long-lost woman is a moving example of the unique power found footage has to pull us into another world. As his life begins to intertwine with Melody's, Dan finds a way to save them both based on the footage that connects them.

The series begins with Melody's desperate pleas for help. We don't know who she is or why she's in danger, but she looks directly into the camera and begs for someone to find her, to help her. It's the first time we see Melody speak directly to the audience, but it will not be the last. In his memoir *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000), Stephen King describes the act of writing as a sort of telepathy, a way for two people, the writer and the reader, to communicate with each other across space and time. Found footage is a similar sort of visual communication. An updated message in a bottle, Melody sends out a call for help in 1994 and Dan receives it in the present day. Her story has long since concluded, or so he believes, but her urgency is palpable. Dan is compelled to help her even if all he can do is find out the truth about her death.

Secretly hoping to locate her birth mother, Melody has moved into the Visser while conducting her research. She has brought with her Constance, a Sony camcorder she uses to record her interviews and to document her work. Constance becomes a confidant of sorts as Melody acclimates to her new surroundings. The camera

is a substitute for Melody's imagined audience and she begins to talk to its lens as if it's another character in the story. In addition to interviews, Melody records conversations with her friends and roommate. She takes Constance to the corner store and even asks the camera for advice on what she should wear on a first date. The anonymity of her audience gives Melody a sense of comfort and she feels free to be her authentic self. This honesty, in turn, creates a sense of intimacy that pulls Dan into her world. By devoting so much of his attention to her story, she becomes a part of his life as well.

"Stephen King describes the act of writing as a sort of telepathy, a way for two people, the writer and the reader, to communicate with each other across space and time. Found footage is a similar sort of visual communication."

Virgil describes Dan's restoration work as bringing "lost things back to people." His reasoning for commissioning the project is ostensibly to bring a sense of closure to the families of those who lost their lives at the Visser. As a recovered chronicle of the building's final days, Melody's footage has the power to do just that. But her tapes also prove to be a healing force in the lives of others. Dan's dedication to the mystery strengthens his bond with his best friend and provides key

information about a tragedy in his own life. At the remote compound that houses the tapes, a groundskeeper named Bobbi (Jacqueline Antaramian) happens to glimpse a bit of Melody's restored footage and becomes transfixed with the images. Unbeknownst to Dan, Bobbi is Melody's biological mother, having given her infant daughter up for the baby's protection. Bobbi watches the footage Dan has restored and sees the first images of her now adult daughter. He has brought her a connection she believed was forever lost.

Dan's work becomes a labour of love for Melody as he painstakingly pieces her story back together, trying to heal the wounds of the past by giving back her voice. He knows the power of the messages these tapes hold, having experienced this type of connection in his own life. Dan has fond childhood memories of watching stop-motion skeletons and old movies with his father Steven (Charlie Hudson III). For his son's eighth birthday, Steven has strung together the best of this footage into a sort of video collage. He precedes the compilation with a message to his young son, in which he tells Dan that now he can watch these beloved scenes whenever he wants without having to wait for his father to set up the projector. But the gift ends up becoming much more. Dan loses Steven and the rest of his family in a fire shortly after receiving the video, and this footage is now all he has left of his father.

In his message, Steven faces the camera and tells Dan how much he loves him. The intended audience is his young son, but it has been recovered by an adult Dan who desperately wants to reconnect with his father. When watching this message, Dan is transported back to the world of his childhood, a happier time when Steven is still alive.

As the series unfolds, we see the larger worlds of both Dan and Melody as he works to restore her footage in the future and she films it in the past. They begin to dream about each other, meeting in a metaphysical version of the Visser somewhere between their individual realities. Having made a loose date to share Pineapple Fantas at the corner store, Melody happens to be filming while shopping. She turns and speaks into the camera lens, talking to Dan as if he is standing in the store with her. And part of him is. With her camera, she has opened a doorway into her life in 1994. She is not staging a scene or acting in a movie, but by recording the events of her life, she invites the audience to accompany her on her journey.

Dan's words in these conversations have an effect on Melody as well. She carries his compliments into conversations with others and begins to repeat his phrases in her own footage. The fact that he has received her message strengthens



FOR LOVE OF THE SUBGENRE

Archive 81 Bridges the Gap Between Footage & Reality

by Jenn Adams



her conviction. He validates her actions and makes her feel seen, giving her the courage to carry on as the work becomes more frightening. In allowing the characters to communicate with each other, *Archive 81* stretches the boundaries of reality. Dan has the unique opportunity to tell Melody how her story has affected him and that he is trying to help. However much I may want to, I will never be able to tell Heather Donohue (of 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*) how much her story means to me, but Dan is able to convey a similar message to Melody. The connection he forges with her through her film is a touching metaphor for the capacity found in footage has to create empathy for fictional characters. We are passengers along with them on the adventures of their lives and their stories, in turn, can have a powerful effect on our own.

As it turns out, what actually causes the fire at the Visser is a disastrous attempt at an occult ritual designed to create a doorway between two worlds. Worshippers of a deity named Kaelego hope to pull the destructive entity into our world by capturing his presence on film as a way to manifest him in reality. Samuel and Virgil belong to an ancient order once led by a mystic named Iris (Georgina Haig), who attempted to open this door in the 1920s. Using early technology, they record their ceremony, a snuff film that comes to be known as *The Circle* and inspires a *Twilight Zone*-like series of the same name. During this ritual, Iris opens the Circle and finds herself trapped in the other world. She has become a living representation of found footage, calling to residents of the Visser through their dreams and their art. The host of *The Circle* describes the two worlds as separated by "the thinnest of veils," and that is what keeps Iris removed from our

reality. The only way to see her again is to play the footage of her final moments.

The fire that destroys the Visser is the result of Samuel's own attempt at this ritual in 1994. While trying to open the door between worlds, both he and Melody become trapped in the Circle as well. They are lost in an alternate dimension that can only be opened by replaying her footage. It is the key to the veil's mystical lock. Descending into the basement of the compound, Dan finds a multitude of monitors all playing footage of Melody, the spell that will open the portal's door. Immortalized within the Circle's dimension, Melody waits for someone to rescue her. Never changing, never growing old, longing for someone to open the door again. And what is this Circle but the lens of a camera? Once her footage has been captured, it will live forever, etched onto celluloid. The camera is the vessel through which she and Daniel can move between the worlds. Its lens has the power to join the past and the future, two people who've never met become intimately connected with the power of this footage.

“In allowing the characters to communicate with each other, *Archive 81* stretches the boundaries of reality.”

The camera also has the power to reveal the truth. Dan is surprised to find his own father, once Melody's therapist, in the footage and hopes her documentation can provide answers about the house fire that killed his family. He's been told that his father may be responsible for setting it. Virgil, in turn, believes that Melody is the cause of his brother's death by starting the fire at the Visser. Dan refuses to believe her capable of this, but Virgil

insists that he doesn't actually know her. He only knows a shadow, a faux persona recreated for an audience. But Dan has come to understand Melody through a painstaking devotion to footage of her life. He knows her better than nearly anyone else because she has allowed him access to her private world. He is certain she is not a murderer and her footage bears this truth out. Samuel and Virgil are responsible for both fires, murderous attempts to cover up their disastrous occult practices. In revealing the truth about his own family's demise, Melody's footage has given Dan a better understanding of his own life.

Dan gets a chance many of us would die for. By honouring the film she created, he gains the ability to tell Melody that he found her footage. She didn't throw a bottle into the ocean never to be seen again. It may have taken decades, but someone has seen her message, heard her pleas, and tried to help. Her story means something to someone else. Dan watches Melody's footage and it changes him. Not only does he learn more about her, he is able to learn more about his own past. How many of us have watched found footage in order to unlock some vital piece of ourselves? We're pulled to these stories because of the unique intimacy created by a character who breaks the fourth wall and seemingly speaks directly to us. The veil between worlds is indeed thin, but found footage has the power to connect us with those on the other side. Melody has pulled Dan into her world by courageously creating a record of her life. Dan has pulled her into his by honouring and sharing her story. He may have found Melody's footage, but they have found each other through the power of her story. **g**



● REC 00:00:00

FORCED PERSPECTIVE

THE FRIGHTFUL INTIMACY OF FIRST-PERSON HORRORS

BY MATT DONATO

When audiences of any tolerance watch standard point-of-view horror films, there is an element of safety because protective padding exists between the screen and the viewers. By adhering to traditional fly-on-the-wall techniques, filmmakers remind us that movies are, in fact, fabrications of imagination. Freddy and Chucky welcome us into haunting yet magical worlds miles away from realism while the camera's outsider focus reassures us that what's on-screen isn't real—but what happens when the camera flips? When supernatural villains replace criminal villains of society? When filmmakers no longer want to keep audiences safe and intend to make viewers complicit in their killers' actions?

That's when horror cinema transcends Friday night theatre entertainment and becomes something nastier, something far scarier, and something that doesn't provide its viewers with the barrier of Hollywood escapism. "Frightful Intimacy," we'll label it. It is often filmed through grainy tracking fuzz (like you'd see on home movies) to set the mood, with stress on technological authenticity, like watching something forbidden and obscene.

The first-person phenomenon of serial slasher participation exists at the intersection of true-crime dramatizations, footage evidence tapes, and ill-fated mockumentaries. It's a medium that dates

back as far as Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), where a voyeuristic filmmaker kills women with his knife-fitted 16mm camera as we watch through the crosshair-detailed viewfinder. It's the most intimate horror experience because viewers ride alongside deranged murderers as someone else's choices become our personal point-of-view or documentarians exploit immorality for fame. We're made to obey a maniac's manifesto, sometimes sympathize with their pre-existing traumas, and, under extreme duress, imagine ourselves washing innocent blood from our hands next to figures of impure evil.

It's the difference between William Lustig's *Maniac* (1980) and Frank Khalfoun's *Maniac* (2012). One is considered a sleazy grindhouse staple thanks to Tom Savini's gratuitous special effects, the other a diabolically invasive stalker flick steeped in participatory ick you want to wash away with iron-wire scrubbers. Khalfoun's remake implants the camera inside the head of Frank Zito—played mostly offscreen by Elijah Wood—and turns Frank's eyes into the lens. We can hear Frank's whimpery inner thoughts, see his hands strangulate almost like we're playing a snuff video game, and sympathize with Frank's traumatic childhood [*cringe*]. He's not just another pervy scumbag running the streets of New York City with a shotgun. We're asked to examine the human attributes

of Frank as he chases romantic relief, struggles with repressed hallucinations, and—dare I even recognize—so intimately translates extreme mamma-drama as we "understand" why Frank kills vulnerable women.

A movie like Adam Mason's *Hangman* (2015) corroborates this thesis. We're presented with a trespassing vacation-home squatter's view of his ongoing torments. Movies like *Housebound* (2014) and *Black Christmas* (1974) make easy villains of their attic lurkers in recognizable horror structures. *Hangman* feels grosser and more authentic as we watch recorded VHS videos of a masked intruder's despicable actions against an unknowing family. We're able to define an unwell person's psychology as the "Hangman" clues into decipherable mommy issues and infantile behaviors, making us evaluate—with the slightest empathy—how this otherwise evil person came to their current state. By emphasizing their killer's point of view, filmmakers aren't only interested in depicting thrills and terrorization by the plainest victimization terms—they want to magnify what drives a person to kill without mercy or reason. There are no boundaries.

It's the intimacy of it all that makes movies like John Erick Dowdle's *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007), Scott Glosserman's *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* (2006), *Maniac*, or Remy Belvaux, Benoît Poelvoorde, and André Bonzel's *Man Bites Dog* (1992) so unmistakably chilling. Whether real-time, found-footage, or mockumentary style, filmmakers use first-person to characterize abominable killers as people like your neighbour and accountant. Future slasher icon Leslie Vernon (Nathan Baesel) and reckless everyday murderer Ben (Benoît Poelvoorde) exist in their natural habitats. We hear how proud Leslie's retired mentor is of his protégé's professional accomplishments or sit around dinner tables with Ben's parents as they wax on about his gleefully charming demeanour. The horror becomes less about the sins they're committing and more about the chameleon act these despicable madmen can achieve. We spend time with them

on intimate levels, see them at their most candid and hear their sob stories, almost as an act of recontextualization—which is why these movies nest under our skin.

Why would (fake) documentarians platform such repugnant creatures? As stand-ins for common media trends, the answer is as simple as appealing to audiences' gravest curiosities. It's a commentary on the difference between educating viewers on past crimes versus profiteering on bad-faith adaptations—or worse, embellishments—of heinous events. Both *Behind The Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* and *Man Bites Dog* are about filmmakers who are complicit in recording senseless deaths, aiding killers, and possibly inspiring new generations—they are us, hungry for another *Friday the 13th* sequel. Humankind's curiosity is the source of unintentional horrors, especially when choosing these types of nefarious subjects to platform (in reality) despite many ignored heroes in our world. Who we platform matters. When you decide to empower violence—or vile, unconscionable hate-speak as a most recent found-footage example does—that matters.

It's all a study in the trickery of perception—how society's real monsters might see themselves as protagonists in the case of Adam Rifkin's *Director's Cut* (2016). Penn Jillette plays lunatic crowdfunder Herbert Blount, who kidnaps Missi Pyle and releases his own "improved" version of the movie he funded. It's the first "found commentary" experiment, as Jillette's psycho narrates the reason behind each of his "edits," revealing his guerilla process to capture an unconsenting Pyle or basement green screen sessions where a bound-and-gagged Pyle reads lines as a fearful captive. All the while, Jillette's character chuckles and talks

like a white knight who saved Pyle from hack studio presences, which disturbingly colours *Director's Cut* a comedy—totally off-base. Jillette's line delivery from a place of misguided self-heroism only makes scenes feel even more dreadful because he's the one telling the story; it's his "nice guy" perspective. Blount can control the tone and narrative because he's the only one talking, which contextualizes the ease with which unchallenged "best intentions" transgress into impulsive motivations.

WHO WE PLATFORM MATTERS. WHEN YOU DECIDE TO EMPOWER VIOLENCE—OR VILE, UNCONSCIONABLE HATE-SPEAK AS A MOST RECENT FOUND-FOOTAGE EXAMPLE DOES—THAT MATTERS.

These first-person films care more about how monsters are made and tragic aftermaths than horror entertainment, which becomes a commentary on the genre—but don't get me wrong. I'm not claiming horror filmmakers endorse fun-vibes slasher violence or don't care to reconcile consequences. I'm merely postulating that there will never be anything scarier than the psychology behind Ted Bundy or Jeffrey Dahmer. *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* understands this thesis because it's not just about law enforcement chasing a killer from the badged perspective. We become intimate with the "Water Street Butcher" and feel like we're allowing him to bludgeon young children or feed into his domination fetishes. There are moments that maybe in a *Saw* film we'd hoot and holler at because "torture porn" movies were all about butchering victims in the most excessively nauseating ways



possible—but now we're "operating" the camera. There's no longer that sensation of Hollywood fakeness. Victims have families who provide testimonials, lives lost have more meaning, and the act of unstoppable massacres has the opposite of buttered popcorn entertainment value.

As an adult, films like *Maniac* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* keep me awake at night. The art of frightful intimacy makes the found-footage and mockumentary subgenre one of horror's most underrated. Horror doesn't always have to be introspective and complex, but there's another level of unrest unlocked in films that force viewers to see things from the killer's point of view. Horror becomes less about the textbook slaying of teenagers to fulfil thematic structures. We're welcomed into a killer's vulnerable spaces, share beers over joke-fuelled meals, and shudder as we suddenly realize how easily these shapeshifters soften our guards. Chucky's a doll, Freddy's a dream-chaser, but Frank from *Maniac* is just a man corrupted by his mother's neglectful abuse...right? You almost feel bad for Frank's wounded soul, the one that leads Frank to scalp helpless women for his mannequin collection—and that, right there, is the bone-chilling power of first-person horror films that develop the pinnacle of terror: frightful intimacy. [g](#)

“...THERE'S ANOTHER LEVEL OF UNREST UNLOCKED IN FILMS THAT FORCE VIEWERS TO SEE THINGS FROM THE KILLER'S POINT OF VIEW.

We're So Fucking Special

Narcissism in the Found-Footage Genre

by Rebecca McCallum

A self-professed "artist" with an important message to share, a preacher with a congregation eating out of the palm of his hand, and an attention-seeker dancing in a wolf mask. Point a camera at a man, and instantly he thinks he is special. Narcissists pervade the found-footage subgenre as they exploit and engage in masquerade and exhibitionism. Julian Richard's hidden gem *The Last Horror Movie* (2003) focuses on the day-to-day life of a serial killer who deviates between filming weddings and documenting his murderous activities. Daniel Stamm's *The Last Exorcism* (2010) depicts the showmanship of Cotton Marcus (Patrick Fabian), a man who takes advantage of a family by declaring that he can heal their daughter, and in Patrick Brice's *Creep* (2014) we watch as Josef (Mark Duplass) hoodwinks an amateur filmmaker (played by director Brice) into making a documentary for his unborn child, claiming that he is suffering from a terminal illness. Categorizing themselves as superior beings who deserve uninterrupted glorification, these men are, in actuality, self-serving gaslighters and con artists, lacking empathy and nurturing a sense of entitlement that eclipses everything.

The Artist: *The Last Horror Movie*

Part-time wedding videographer, part-time serial killer, the first time we see Max (Kevin Howarth) he has the camera perfectly framed and positioned for his close-up. Instructing us and critiquing the horror genre; his inflated sense of self-importance cannot be overstated. While he chooses to call himself a performer of "art," what he in fact performs are murders. A social chameleon, Max utilizes his charisma and charm to ingratiate himself into any occasion or event—be it at dinner with friends or at the local pub. A component of the narcissistic personality often includes an ability to

prey on the vulnerable, something in which Max is skilled and proficient. Not only are his victims defenceless as they are attacked when they least expect it, but he also employs a homeless man with no family or friends as his cameraman, with full knowledge that if anything goes wrong, no one will come looking for him.

Narcissists pervade the found-footage subgenre as they exploit and engage in masquerade and exhibitionism.

Constantly hungry for admiration and attention, Max cannot stop talking to the camera as he vomits his thoughts in a twisted and arrogant stream of consciousness. His pretense for keeping this up is built on the notion that he is in dialogue with the audience, when reality proves this is just one long conversation

between him and the camera. Filming is not enough for Max, as he also collects the tapes of his pontifications and murderous acts in order to marvel at his own genius as he revisits the events, which he most likely does time and time again. Jealous, insecure, and a total control freak, he cannot bear it when his friend Petra (Antonia Beamish) gets a lead part in a local production of *The Jew of Malta*. Calling her "impossible," bemoaning her need for multiple takes, and complaining that he is not getting enough coverage; his pride is clearly dented and under threat.

A vessel of violence and egoism that is empty of empathy, Max always puts himself at the centre of any situation, including when he commits murder. On one such occasion, he declares how he isn't: "going to comment on the high street retailer" the victim works for because they are not paying him to do



so. Unable to live without validation and believing his documentary sits elevated above all other artistic endeavours, he expresses effrontery when a woman he butchers dies before he can explain the purpose of his project.

Always desperately insistent that people admire his mastery, he frequently leans towards the camera or beckons it to: “come closer.” In Max, *The Last Horror Movie* provides us with the presentation of a manipulator who isolates people from others and takes no responsibility for the desecration he leaves behind, while he uses the camera to feed his ego and to share his grotesque, grandiose, and quite frankly ridiculous hypothesis with the world.

The Master of Ceremonies: *The Last Exorcism*

Our introduction to Cotton Marcus, preacher and exorcist, reflects his dedication to the superficial and his desire to be noticed. Looking in a mirror whilst gazing into the camera, he satisfies all his narcissistic urges before he proceeds to iron a shirt, building an image which will be instrumental to the art of his deception. Later, while en route to the case which forms the heart of the film, he stops at a roadside bathroom to make the transformation from everyday American to a polished, preened conductor of exorcisms, declaring: “you can’t fight the Devil without armour”. Fixated on his appearance, a telling trait of narcissists, he will even pause to adjust his tie in a car window before approaching the Sweetzer family. For Cotton, presentation is everything.

A charmer in every respect, as a minister at his local church Cotton feeds off the applause and the attention of his congregation, perhaps even occasionally slipping into the belief that it is he they are worshipping, rather than God or Christ. The church becomes his stage and he becomes the ringmaster as he commands one spectacle after another. Like Max in *The Last Horror Movie*, one method of self-love is not enough, and he hires a team to film him on his latest quest—to expose the fakery of exorcisms. Between the camera and the congregation, Cotton never pauses for breath, always filling the empty space. With the ability to integrate himself into the church, the community, and, by extension, the families of those he claims to heal, he uses his charisma to win favour. Cotton’s reach even extends beyond this as he reveals he has a



website, a P.O. box, and a scrapbook that he whips out tactlessly for the camera—all signs of ego-basking.

“Cotton feeds off the applause and the attention of his congregation, perhaps even occasionally slipping into the belief that it is he they are worshipping, rather than God or Christ.”

His role as an exorcist means that families in pain put their trust and faith in him, which serves to embolden his arrogance. The strongest example of this can be found in Nell Sweetzer (Ashley Bell), a teenager who has recently lost her mother to cancer. Answering her father Lewis’s (Louis Hertham) letter of plea for help, Cotton drives up to meet with them. On the way, however, he probes and patronizes those he encounters in order to get the best reaction for the documentary, proving himself a manipulator whose focus is on, as he calls it: “making a movie.” Once at the property, in discussion with Lewis on the porch, he signals an ‘okay’ gesture to the camera, demonstrating that his first loyalty is to himself rather than to Nell.

While Cotton doesn’t demonstrate the tendency for violence that is present in Max and Josef, he meddles dishonestly in people’s lives with a saviour complex, all in the name of his documentary and personal plight. During his first exorcism

of Nell—before which we see him delight in showing all the tricks that will hoodwink the family—he casts himself as a martyr: “let me take the demon,” he begs. This need to put himself not only at the forefront of events but to victimize himself is fully indicative of narcissistic behaviour. When the exorcism backfires, Cotton’s cockiness fades and he displays symptoms of humility, but notably this is only when he loses control and fears risk of exposure.

Just when it appears that Cotton has repented for his destructive behaviour, we see him take a visit to Riche’s Café, where he discloses to a teenage boy named Logan (Logan Craig Reid) that Nell is pregnant, inquiring whether he is the father. This is not his information to share and, in violating Nell’s trust, he proves that his primary concern is capturing as much detail as he can for his documentary. Cotton may be on a crusade, but in essence he is a showman who moves from the circus of the church to the theatre of the house. These performance spaces enable him to satisfy his appetite for fame, but this also comes at a high cost as he ultimately becomes the *subject* of the ceremony, rather than the master.

The Man-Child: *Creep*

Like the silhouette which graces the cover of the film’s promotional poster, the true identity of Josef in *Creep* remains concealed. Answering an advert to make a documentary film, Aaron arrives at the purposely chosen isolated cabin in the



woods. Rather than marking his entrance onscreen by being present, Josef draws attention to himself through his conspicuous absence. This is symptomatic of his need to always remain in control, to surprise, and, like a child, ensure that all eyes are fixed on him alone. When he does appear, it is (in a repeated motif) out of the blue and with the intention of shocking Aaron. Josef’s face fills the car window as he grins before disarming the filmmaker with a charm offensive of awkward, boundary-crossing hugs.

The star of his own film, Josef bombastically believes this endeavour is an achievement of greatness, when in fact it is nothing more than a nauseating ego-fest. As commonly displayed in narcissists, Josef casts himself as the victim, claiming that he has an inoperable tumour which will leave his wife and unborn son without a husband or father. In creating this false narrative, Josef reels in both Aaron and the audience who are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, heaping on lie after lie as part of his elaborate storytelling.

Within moments of meeting Aaron, Josef’s lack of boundaries becomes apparent as he strips naked and climbs into a bath. This obsession with appearance is extended through his insistence of completing multiple takes. Ever the performer, Josef transforms “tubby time”—ostensibly intended as a memory for his unborn son to look back on—into a showcase of his own ability to provoke and manipulate. As is the case with Max, there is only one person for


whom this film is being made—and that is Josef. His need for power and control is pervasive, as not only is he the star of the documentary, he also assumes the directorial role, issuing instructions and leading Aaron to and from locations at his will. In between displays of infancy and annoying demands to be noticed, he often runs away from Aaron, leaving him with no option but to follow.

“Josef reels in both Aaron and the audience who are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, heaping on lie after lie as part of his elaborate storytelling.”

Whenever Josef feels he is losing control, he becomes devious and duplicitous, such as when he tells Aaron that if he leaves after having a drink, he will be issued a DUI. He also employs a classic child-like technique of crying crocodile tears whilst homing in on Aaron’s financial vulnerability. As things escalate, Aaron doubts the credibility of his host and his attention subsides, with Josef responding to this by developing more bizarre methods to keep him in a state of shock and disorientation. This is never more striking than when he dons the wolfish Peachfuzz mask (dressing up acting as another link to childishness), changing his appearance to become a heightened and alternative version of himself. Furthermore, after Aaron is told to flee by Josef’s sister, he also uses the mask as a diversion tactic to regain

control over the narrative, knowing that he is close to being exposed.

With Aaron eventually escaping and returning to the safety of his home, Josef’s insatiable ego takes on darker notes as he sends videos and twisted gifts in the mail. He bombards Aaron with voice messages evocative of a toxic and abusive relationship. Perceiving himself to be the focal point of Aaron’s life, he is outraged when Aaron destroys a necklace he gave him: “I made it for you,” he whines, before detailing how this has hurt his feelings. Echoing the victim card he employs at the beginning of the film, Josef is both intense and compulsively manipulative. He even strays so far as to claim their friendship is “the best,” when, in truth, people are nothing more than disposable toys for him, as evidenced by the film’s ending when we see him calling another unsuspecting victim.

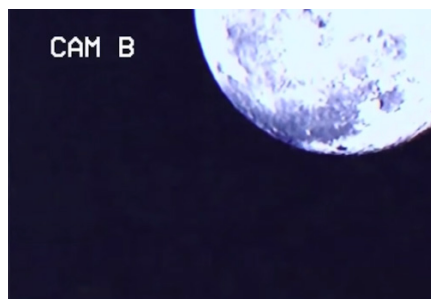
Murderers, leaders, and predators of the vulnerable; *The Last Horror Movie*, *The Last Exorcism*, and *Creep* explore how the found-footage genre is a breeding ground for narcissism. These men occupy positions in the open community of the church but can also be found in the dark corners of the internet and lurking unsuspected on our streets. However, while these films expose us to the invasive, oppressive, and scheming behaviours of narcissists who dominate both the audience and those who they come into contact with, the pedestal they place themselves upon will forever remain both undeniably fragile and deluded. 

On October 26th, 2015, a new, hyper-accessible subgenre of video horror was born. Kris Straub, a sci-fi web cartoonist and the mind behind the notorious "Candle Cove" creepypasta, released the first instalment of his horror anthology YouTube series *Local 58*, titled "Weather Service."

"Weather Service" establishes the fictional West Virginia public access channel of Local 58, taking place (based on context clues in later instalments and mass fan speculation) in roughly the late twentieth century. It begins with a standard broadcast schedule, which is interrupted by an EAS weather warning urging viewers not to look at the night sky due to a "meteorological event." After a brief return to the broadcast schedule (now reading "2:15 AM... Blood of t..." before it is cut off), there is another EAS interruption, this time a civil danger alert, set against a startling red backdrop. It emphatically urges viewers, again, not to look at the night sky. Then, the screen glitches and is interrupted by more text, emphatically urging viewers to look at the night sky. A tug-of-war of text ensues: "GO OUTSIDE NOW"; "LOOK AT THE MOON," which is revealed to be "DO NOT LOOK AT THE MOON" hidden by a large shadow; "STAY INSIDE / DON'T LOOK AT THE NIGHT SKY" and "FACE AWAY FROM ALL WINDOWS," then "AVOID MIRRORS" followed by "DO NOT LOOK UP." Moments later, the weather warning returns, bearing the cryptic message:

ITS IN THE LIGHT / THE MOON CAME IN / HE FOUND ME / THRU THE MIRROR / MOONLIGHT WHITE / WHITE LIKE EYES / NOT LIGHT BUT BLOOD / I DROWN IN HIM / IF YOU ARE AFRAID / WE WILL LOOK TOGETHER

This outside force (a cult? Aliens? The moon itself, or whatever lurks inside of it?) has prevailed. A clip of the moon in the night sky is shown. It glitches, becomes distorted, and the faint sound of screams can be heard.



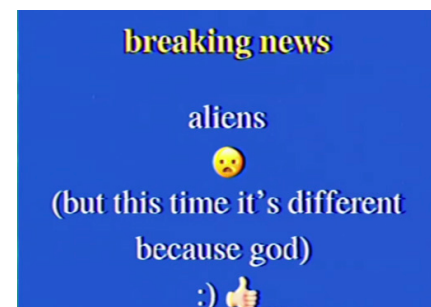
This grainy image of the moon is the only video camera footage in "Weather Service," and the rest of *Local 58* follows the same pattern of using mostly simple graphics and stock or public domain footage (along with text and visual distortion effects) to craft a narrative. The notable exceptions are the episodes "Show For Children," which is a short animated cartoon featuring Cadavre (a skeleton lad also present in Straub's webcomic *Broodhollow*), and "You Are On The Fastest Available Route," which is told through dashcam footage. *Local 58* is not a blockbuster project by any stretch of the imagination. The credits of "Weather Service" list only Christopher Huppertz as the source of its VHS glitch footage. The rest of the audio is public domain, with Straub alone writing, directing, editing, and producing.

Beyond Local 58

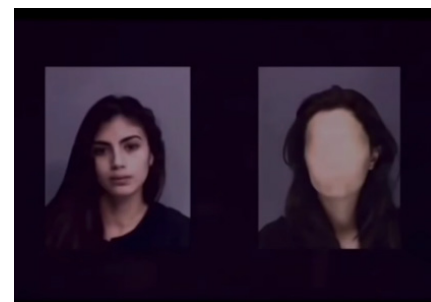
If you are familiar with the web phenomenon that has come to be known as 'analog horror,' you'll know that *Local 58* has countless imitators, and no episode is more often or more easily replicated than "Weather Service." I wouldn't dare suggest that this is because *Local 58* or "Weather Service" are unexceptional. On the contrary, *Local 58* codified analog horror, the lovechild of A) earlier, more 'traditional,' more visually robust found-footage cinema and B) pre-existing categories of web original horror fiction. *Local 58* has often been called a creepypasta (which it only is if you use creepypasta as an umbrella term for web horror) or an alternate-reality game (ARG) (which it wasn't until its most recent entry). The term analog horror exists to distinguish it from both. As a result, analog horror creators, many of whom are hobbyists due to the subgenre's low barrier to entry, look to *Local 58* (which, at the time I'm writing, is still less than seven years old) as a sort of how-to guide, a litmus test for which conventions are allowed, required, forbidden.

Alex Kister is the nineteen-year-old filmmaker behind analog horror series *The Mandela Catalogue* (2021-), which saw a meteoric rise to success thanks at least in part to the r/analog_horror subreddit and the attention of horror commentary YouTubers. A member of the budding community around analog horror, Kister also releases a series parodying the subgenre titled *The Scrimblo Catalogue*, wherein he self-consciously skewers his own *Mandela*

Catalogue (which in my opinion, is wholly competent and interesting) and lovingly ribs beginner analog horror auteurs for their over-reliance on the news alerts and distortion effects first popularized by "Weather Service."



The Mandela Catalogue consists of in-universe case files relevant to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Temporal Phenomena (USDTP) of a kind of demon called "alternates." When not killing victims directly, they induce M.A.D. (or metaphysical awareness disorder), instilling primal feelings of terror by adopting the physical features of targets and loved ones to one of three identifiable degrees of success; type one, doppelgängers, are undetectable to the naked eye; type two, detectables, will often have "physically impossible" characteristics, such as stretched eyes and Cheshire cat smiles (rendered by Kister in horrifying uncanny detail); type three, kept intentionally vague even in this official USDTP footage (this vagueness being another characteristic of the subgenre, to its detriment or to its benefit), might perhaps appear entirely faceless, or as smudged shadows capable of human-like movement. According to the instalment "Exhibition," the first season of *The Mandela Catalogue* takes place in the early '90s, hence the stylized VHS quality.



While much of *Local 58* takes place in the late twentieth century due to its now-defunct setting in a local access analog station, I start to wonder what motivates *The Mandela Catalogue* to be set in the 1990s—aside from the fact that good cameras are expensive and grainy VHS filters are often free.

Split/ting at the Seams

The Double-Hauntedness of Analog Horror

by Charlotte Bloys

The *Local 58* episode "Real Sleep," a training video from the fictional Though Research Initiative made to sublate the viewer's subconscious and prevent them from dreaming, uses a repeating distorted text-to-speech (TTS) recording of the phrase "there are no faces" over images pulled from the 2011 Flashed Face Distortion Effect experiment (Tangen, Murphy, and Thompson, 2011). Watching "Real Sleep" makes me feel like I'm exposing myself to a real-life SCP cognitohazard. Meanwhile, *The Mandela Catalogue's* Department of Temporal Phenomena uses TTS voices in its official government messaging for reasons that I don't quite grasp, from a narrative perspective; in the six years between "Weather Service" and TMC's "The Think Principle," TTS has just become taken for granted a staple of the subgenre. But *The Mandela Catalogue* is not one of those several hundred *Local 58* clones. Where *Local 58* grounds itself in cosmic horror, *The Mandela Catalogue* explores religious horror, pulling and distorting scenes from 1990s *Beginner's Bible* cartoons to craft a narrative where alternates have not only infiltrated this world, but the next one. Kister has warped the foundations of a creation story, and

destabilized his own assumed socio-religious origin.

Ghosts in the Machine

The simplistic visual style associated with analog horror often belies an extremely high-concept monster-figure, and these stylistic limitations will serve to make a potent source of terror even more potent. I'm reminded of the Japanese techno-horror of the late 1990s and early 2000s; *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998) head writer Chiaki Konaka, one of the central discursive voices of the J-horror movement at the time, suggested that "the ghost's voice is most scary when mediated through technology of mechanical reproduction, such as recording and broadcasting" (Kinoshita, 2009). This ethos is at the core of analog horror, and while Konaka was speaking about ghost stories, there is something to be said for how ephemeral many analog horror monster-figures are. As I mentioned, the subgenre has been criticized in web horror circles for being formulaic, overly-reliant on conventions set by its Ur-text of *Local 58*, and also, for having sources of terror so ill-defined that it calls into question whether or not their creators actually

know what they are.

Local 58 has no discernable characters in-universe, thus, it forces its viewer to assume the role of in-universe viewer (which could be why it was often called an ARG even before it had an associated ARG). Many of its imitators fail to have any kind of hook because of this, any source of narrative tension. But more competent analog horror adheres, perhaps unknowingly, to the so-called 'Konaka Theory' that "horror stories with clear causal explanations are not scary at all," and that "terror is absurd" (Kinoshita, 2009). *Local 58* is predicated upon a fraught coupling between an ill-defined (perhaps undefinable) threat in its monster-figure, and a weaponized folksy nostalgia in its framing.

The first episode of *Local 58* I ever watched was "Contingency," which is the second entry in the series. If "Weather Service" was the first fuzzy spring bud on the tree of *Local 58's* potential, "Contingency" was where it blossomed. I encountered it in the form of two gifs on Tumblr in late 2017, and I found the mere gifs so jarring that I had to know more. "Contingency" takes place in roughly 1969 or 1970. Over a

waving American flag and images of the 1969 moon landing, the station informs viewers that the broadcast day is concluded, wishing them a “great night.” Then, like “Weather Service,” there is an emergency interruption:

“CONTINGENCY MESSAGE REEL...TO BE USED ONLY IN THE EVENT OF UNITED STATES COMPLETE SURRENDER TO INSURMOUNTABLE ENEMY FORCES / PUBLIC BROADCAST ONLY UPON CONFIRMED CONDITION / TWELVE OMAHA SOLEMN CERTAINTY”



The contingency message begins, informing the viewer that the United States has been “forced to surrender.” Like the broadcast sign-off message, it plays over a waving American flag, now accompanied by patriotic music. The video and audio are distorted by the analog medium, and where that might have seemed like a warm reminder of a bygone era only moments ago, it’s another defamiliarizing force now, as the contingency reel calls upon all citizens of the United States (every “man, woman, and child”) to “ACT.” The president has already “TAKEN ACTION.” Johnson’s euphemistic preamble ends, “Even in defeat we claim VICTORY.”



The “ACTION” in question, the following slides (courtesy of the U.S. Department for the Preservation of American Dignity) reveal, is mandatory mass suicide. “ACT IMMEDIATELY...YOU TAKE AMERICA WITH YOU.” Over a haunting, barely intelligible rendition of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” the tape informs viewers that if they do not comply with the stated instructions, they will be forced to do so. It details how to

“act” most efficiently, and how to “tend to” children and pets first. It urges viewers, if there is time, to assume the “VICTORY POSITION...FRONT LAWN / FACE UP / FEET TOGETHER.” The music gradually slows, then ceases when the contingency reel is interrupted by a message with the same Department for the Preservation of American Dignity seal over a plain green background, with text that reads only “THE 51ST STATE IS NOT A PLACE.” Presumably, this refers to the moon, and this interruption was once again caused by the moon itself or whatever force lurks within it. At the end of “Contingency,” the station confirms that the contingency reel was played in error, and was in fact a hoax, apologizing for any “confusion” that may have arisen as a result.

The analog broadcast is itself a sort of ghost, already residual at the time of its representation.

Local 58's lack of POV character (forcing its audience to be the POV character) and obfuscation of said force dissolves standard diegetic boundaries; “Contingency” must be understood as a message directed at *you*, the viewer turned in-universe viewer, and the effect is stomach-turning. You are not watching someone encounter the ghost (so to speak) mediated through mechanical reproduction; *you* are encountering the ghost mediated through mechanical reproduction. *Local 58* is a work of fiction, and its viewers know that. But when I first saw those gifs of “Contingency” out of context on Tumblr (though keep in mind, I was a teenager with little exposure to horror media), I sincerely wondered if the contingency message was an actual declassified video, made by an actual Department for the Preservation of American Dignity.

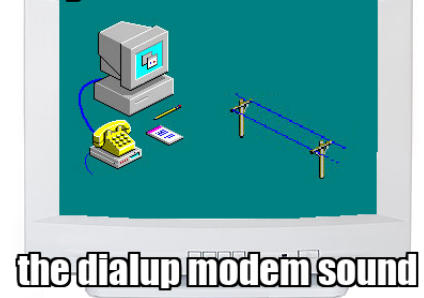
Local 58's mediating mechanical reproduction is also, crucially, not the dominant mechanical reproduction technology of its own moment; analog horror is a necessarily digital form that necessarily mediates through analog technology. Though I don’t interpret the moon-monster of *Local 58* as a ghost, it does *haunt*, acting as spectral energy upon the mediating technology, transforming the analog broadcast into the haunted space. But the broadcast is not merely a haunted space, rather, it is a *haunting object* to the *Local 58* viewer.

The analog broadcast is itself a sort of ghost, already residual at the time of its representation. When you watch *Local 58*, you are not merely watching a spectral force warp a space in a way that it isn’t meant to be warped. You are watching the mediating object itself return from obsolescence. This double-haunting, the phenomenon of the spectral figure which haunts the spectral object of mechanical reproduction, will always necessarily occur in analog horror.

Analog Nostalgia

Returning to Japanese techno-horror circa 2000 gives us another site of double-haunting (though here, it is typically unintentional). Take Kurosawa’s *Kairo* (or *Pulse*, 2001), the monster-figure of which is an overwhelming assemblage of nevertheless eternally isolated ghosts, who haunt computers, replicate themselves through emails, and say very little aside from their compulsive cries for help. They reach out, desperate for someone to free them from the “eternal loneliness” of death, but any outsider with whom they communicate will be damned to the same bleak afterlife. Witnessing these ghosts nearly always drives victims to suicide (much like the M.A.D.denying alternates of *The Mandela Catalogue*), and when it doesn’t, said victims will simply dissolve into ash, leaving only a pseudo-nuclear shadow behind. Psychologically harrowing, obviously, but you might be tempted to think that *Kairo's* now outdated mediating technology cheapens its horror. Emails as the new hottest form of casual communication? Dial-up internet; the same dial-up internet that seems so twee and defanged in a comedy like *PEN15*, where the main characters have to wait for the modem to dial up before they can log on to perfect their AIM profiles?

Only 90s kid will remember



But despite being visually inextricable from the era in which it was made, *Kairo* inspires very little cheery nostalgic

recognition. Instead, the dial-up noises become a haunting score, familiar and defamiliarized like “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” in “Contingency.” The ghosts in *Kairo* glitch and the tech they haunt mutilates itself, like the VHS-style footage of analog horror. The seams of our technology rarely show to such a degree anymore. In fact, the boundaries between ourselves and our technology seem to dissolve as the technocapitalist surveillance state becomes more totalizing, as we become ‘extremely online,’ as we’re implored to update our tech at increasing speed. Planned obsolescence towards the end of increased shareholder profits and at the expense of everything else always looms on the horizon.

The boundaries between ourselves and our technology seem to dissolve as the technocapitalist surveillance state becomes more totalizing...

The seams of old-tech horror represent, in my mind, not only what affectively should no longer be present—the ghostliness of the residual mediating tech, its equivalent of creaky stairs at the witching hour—they represent what has been lost to the aforementioned increasingly totalizing technocapitalist surveillance state. Isn’t it pushing us backwards, away from innovation, further into a box? Myspace, in its heyday, inspired its users to learn HTML and CSS so that they could edit their pages to be as gaudy and expressive as their hearts desired. Now, on most widely-used platforms, you can edit your banner (if that) and your profile picture (though on twitter you can, of course, make that an NFT if you’re willing to shell out a small fortune). I used to covet candy-colored flip phones as a child, and I swore that once I got one, I’d text that number they advertised in *Tiger Beat* and download all those cool ringtones.



Now, my phone is much better suited to browse the web (and track my every move), but it looks the same as everybody else’s, no matter the manufacturer, and it no longer has a headphone jack. I often wished that my old laptop had a built-in disk drive; my new laptop doesn’t even have a built-in USB port. Must “advancing” mean flattening everything out? Who benefits from this streamlining, besides the companies who can now sell me all these parts separately?

I’ve detailed how *Local 58* weaponizes and complicates its nostalgic imagery, but, in a sense, I’m still drawn to the imagery because of my nostalgia for the *unseamless* tech for which I used to yearn. The techno-horror I’ve mentioned did not set out to be double-haunted, but it became such as its tech inevitably became residual. What analog horror is able to do, as a subgenre that is always already double-haunted, is understand its own seams metatextually. “Weather Service” was released in 2015 for an audience that identified more strongly *with* and even as their technology and their digital persona than was possible in the year it was set.

It’s frightening, that our air-tight, frictionless technology cannot deter this primordial force, but it’s exhilarating, too...

I have mentioned the *Local 58* ARG a few times now; that ARG was announced through a ninth instalment to the series on Halloween, 2021, titled “Digital Transition.” In “Digital Transition,” the *Local 58* station is set to switch from analog to digital broadcast (“in accordance with FCC regulations”). As the switch occurs, the screen briefly displays an error message stating that the television is not configured for digital broadcast, before this is interrupted by the same cosmic force (or actors on its behalf) that has been targeting the station since the mid-twentieth century. Updating the tech, increasing security measures, and criminalizing the “unauthorized reception of analog frequencies formerly allocated to broadcast television” cannot deter this primordial force. It’s frightening, that our air-tight, frictionless technology cannot deter this primordial force, but it’s exhilarating, too: *Local 58*

invokes cold-war era fears (especially in “Contingency”) to remind its viewer that *something* is watching. However, as the series comes together, it seems possible that the *something* itself is fighting the surveillance imposed upon it by a hubristic humankind and an entitled United States of America high on manifest destiny. “There are no faces,” so stop looking for the man on the moon, because if he’s there, then it’s none of your business. “The 51st state is not a place,” keep away from this territory, just because you can capture its image with a satellite, doesn’t mean you can capture it. There are forces of nature you can’t control, and there is doom that will rise to meet you.

Loss in a Digital World

Still, tech increasingly complicates the inalienable truth of death itself. Andre Bazin suggested that the camera “embalms,” undermining the dependence of survival on “the continued existence of the corporeal body” (Bazin, 1945), enabling affective preservation even in the absence of the organic form. The web exists in this lineage, and it embalms ravenously and uncontrollably. A 2012 research study on bereavement in college students gathered detailed narrative reports from six undergraduates who had all lost at least one friend suddenly and unexpectedly between 2 to 20 months before the interview (Hieftje, 2012). The students discussed the role that social media played in their grieving process. Many of their responses suggested that viewing the Facebook profile of their deceased friend helped them reflect on their friend’s life, serving as both a digital gallery of their life and as a hub for friends and family to connect and remember the person they’d lost. In the ten years since this study, though, I’d suggest that the affective overlap between person and digital persona has grown, despite the decreasing mutability (customizability, jailbreakability) of the Web 2.0 social media landscape. I don’t view my friends’ Instagram profiles as galleries of their lives; try as I might not to, I view Instagram as a space where I meet with my friends, and their profiles as simply *them*, or at least a seamless extension of them.

Like the subjects of this study, I have lost a few loved ones suddenly in the past year or so and, since I have internalized their online profiles as *them*, I cannot

visit these profiles without feeling like some sort of reanimation is occurring. A friend of mine who passed in November co-moderated an Instagram meme page, and the other moderator (who I don't really know) is still alive, but that was *her* page, and so when the other moderator posts, I inevitably think for a split second, "oh, it's her!" Then, I realize, an unpleasant jolt to my system, that it isn't, and couldn't possibly be her. Then, sometimes, I visit the page, scroll back to what she posted when she was still here, try to reconstitute her in my head, try to wrap my head around the fact that this person whom I cared for, whose spectral energy continues to act upon this mediating technology, is *not* somewhere I can reach her. She never will be again. And some of the students in the bereavement study, even ten years ago, felt that same sense, when looking at the social media profiles, that their friends were still "there." One student explicitly described the experience as "eerie," saying that it made her feel like she was "facing...a ghost." This is another place where the double-haunting occurs. My friend haunts her Instagram profile: this digital space that is also herself. I always find myself looking through these archives of hers—which are also her—for longer than my grieving mind can truly handle. Here she is, preserved, here is the page, functioning as it did when she was alive.

My urge to preserve often overtakes me when I'm online; I want to hoard data, I want to find and restore digital artifacts from my own digital history, and I want to play little thought games that let me live in a world where my dead friends are alive. But I know they aren't alive. My tech and I are *not* a singularity to the degree that looking at an Instagram profile can undermine my very solid grasp of object permanence; I can almost trick my mind for a split-second before a fresh pang of sorrow rushes through me. My efforts to embalm are salt in my wounds. That sting is *something*, at least, but it mostly serves to remind me that this is not *really* reanimation. Mourning a person sucks hard enough without my inscribing a false promise of digital immortality onto an app that begs me to commodify every minute aspect of my life and won't let me type the word "kiss" on my story without shadowbanning me. Maybe the singularity we're approaching isn't

between person and machine, but between person and product. Maybe we're already there.

The Internet is Haunted

Analog horror exists because the internet is haunted. The internet has always been haunted, in the purest sense of the word. Everyone who uses it will one day die, and if it still exists then, we will have been preserved outside of our corporeal bodies. Yay! Beyond that, who hasn't received a chain email or read a comment about an avenging spirit desperate for likes and shares (or else the worst week of your life starts NOW)? The internet could just as well have been *made* for scary stories; it is a mediating object, it is a direct line. The ghosts of the internet will stay safely behind the screen, and also, they're so close, and also, are we behind the screen? Analog horror often blurs the boundary between nostalgia and trauma, saying: your mediating technology has never been safe from ghosts, because it shares the ontology of the photographic image, and it *is* and *is for* ghosts, embalming more and more indiscriminately, swallowing souls.

The internet has always been haunted, in the purest sense of the word.

Analog horror is also a labour of love (making esoteric YouTube miniseries is rarely the most lucrative creative endeavour), the centre of a vibrant community of horror fans and creatives, and an excellent way for beginner filmmakers and storytellers to learn how to build suspense with nothing more than their laptops' built-in video editing suite and some clip art. In a digital landscape that seems overrun with Elon Musk copycats, I honestly find Kris Straub copycats refreshing (even if every other post on r/analog_horror is basically "Weather Service" with a slightly different colour filter).

Local 58's most recent episode triangulates a warning that the security state will not protect us from impending disaster the way it tacitly promises (it might even make the disaster worse, and the disaster is already beyond human comprehension). Like the eternal and transmittable isolation of death in *Kairo*; like the alternates in *The Mandela Catalogue* capable of invading not merely the American

mythology of the halcyon good old days, but the culture's prevailing literal creation myths; the moon (or the force that dwells within it) in *Local 58* has been there long before us, will be there long after us, and is not a threat that we are equipped to face. Metatextually, though, "Digital Transition" feels hopeful, like an assertion that the series (the granddaddy and it-girl and Jedi master of all analog horror) will stay a labour of love. So will analog horror itself, for as long as it continues to be made, in all its fundamentally anachronistic, often formulaic, viscerally terrifying glory.

REFERENCES

Bazin, A. (. (1960). *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*. *Film Quarterly*, 13.4.

Hieftje, K. (2012). *The Role of Social Networking Sites in Memorialization of College Students*. In K. R. Gilbert, C. J. Sofka, & I. Noppe Cupit (Eds.), *Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe: For Counselors and Educators*. Springer.

Kinoshita, C. (2009). *The Mummy Complex: Kurosawa Kiyoshi's Loft and J-Horror*. In J. Choi, & M. Wada-Marciano (Eds.), *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*. Hong Kong University Press.

Tangen, J., Murphy, S., & Thompson, M. (2011). *Flashed Face Distortion Effect: Grotesque Faces from Relative Spaces*. *Perception*, 40. 8

What Remains of Edith Finch

Walking Simulators & the Digital Gothic

by Jolie Toomajan

Though a few games exist that very specifically deal with found footage as a game mechanic, strict found-footage convention is somewhat uncommon.

However, the function of found footage, of excavating the past into the present, is an artistic technique older than film. The unearthing of history via letters, journals, news articles, and so on was an essential part of Gothic novels, one of the birthplaces of modern horror. The theoretical function of "found footage" in Gothic novels is the uncanny task of bringing the past into the present to be relived and impossibly re-experienced as a terrifying reality. This is to say that the events witnessed by the characters are simultaneously over and presently occurring, the temporal unsteadiness unseats the idea that the past is over, behind us, can no longer hurt us.

This kind of found-footage, functional unearthing and uncanny repetition, is, in fact, one of the most common methods deployed by video games to give the player narrative context. It is especially popular in horror games, from the death letter in *Clock Tower* (Human Entertainment, 1985) to the audio diaries of *BioShock* (Irrational Games & 2K 2007) and the journal entries of *Darkest Dungeon* (Red Hook Studios, 2016/2022). The use of found artifacts is most striking in 'walking simulators' (or exploratory games) which privilege inspection, analysis, and narrative over other gameplay processes in ways unique to the genre. In exploratory games, this collection and re-experiencing of the past

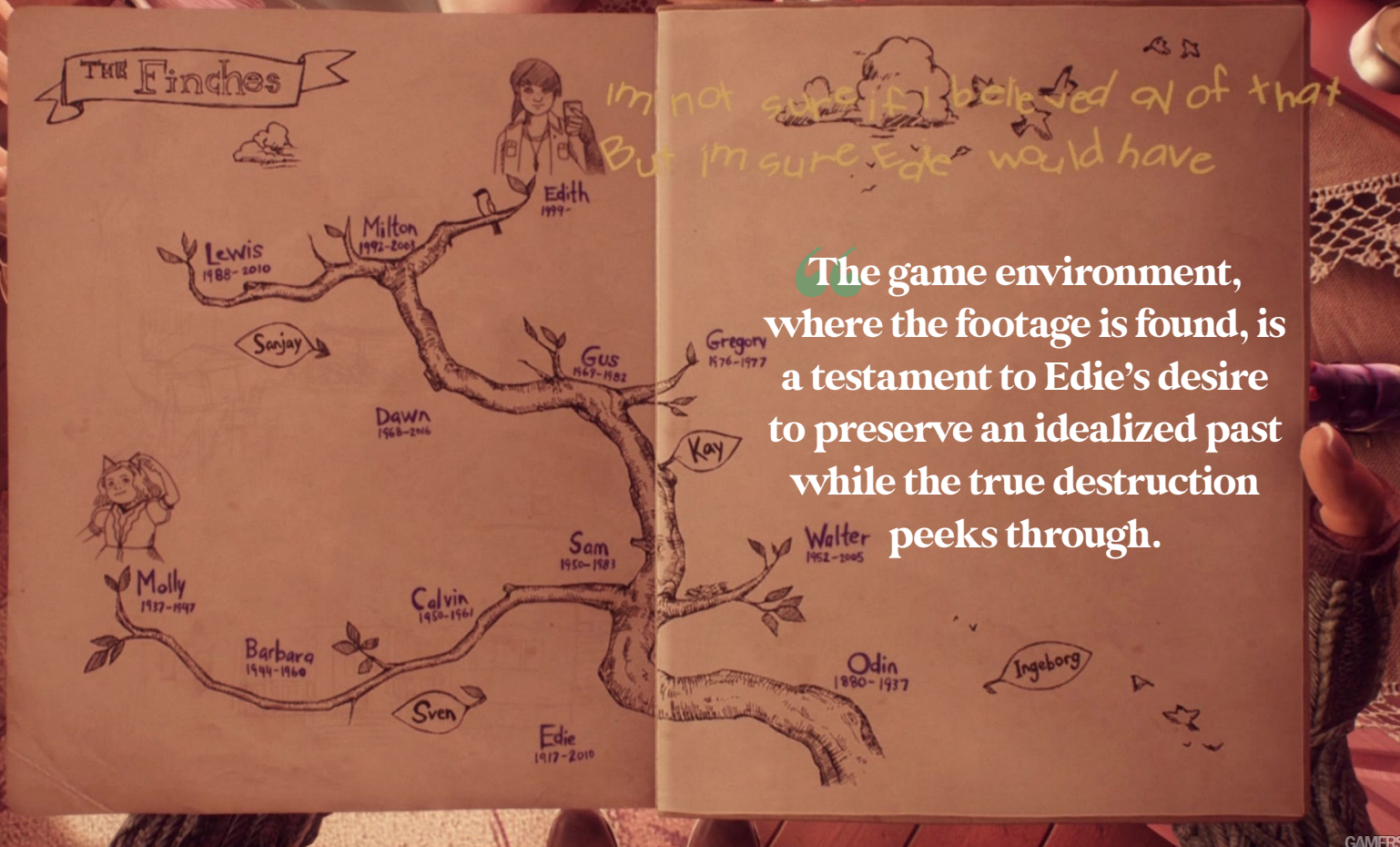
is the entire goal, as these do away with things like scores and win conditions. These games foreground narrative logics, including marking emotional engagement (instead of gameplay processes) as a kind of victory condition. *What Remains of Edith Finch* (Giant Sparrow & Annapurna Interactive, 2017) takes the incorporation of the past even further, using it to demonstrate the ways in which generational trauma and dysfunction continually interrupt the present.

In exploratory games, this collection and re-experiencing of the past is the entire goal, as these do away with things like scores and win conditions.

Edith Finch follows Edith Finch, great-granddaughter of family matriarch Edith "Edie" Finch. Upon discovering that she is pregnant, Edith returns to her family's abandoned estate to find out the truth about her strange upbringing, which included in-house mausoleums and talk of a family curse. Edith (and the player) move through each room of the house, examining the surroundings until locating a book, diary, comic book, and so on, detailing the gruesome death of a specific family member, usually as a child. For example, we begin with Molly's diary which details her death two days after her tenth birthday. After being locked in

her room without supper, Molly consumes gerbil food sitting in gerbil feces, a tube of toothpaste, and the holly berries decorating her windowsill, until she hallucinates herself as various predators and eventually dies in her bed. Moving through each of the rooms in order, the player controls the select family member through their doom before returning to Edith's journey, resurrecting the dead for a few moments via uncovering and not just witnessing, but living and experiencing the past.

The cumulative effect of *Edith Finch's* use of found documentation poisons an otherwise brightly colored and fantastical game, mirroring the way that the family's trauma continues to take centre stage, despite continually being pushed behind a curtain. Understanding the events of the past in a logical order leaves Grandma Edie looking more like a gothic tyrant than a kindly grandma. The player originally come upon Edie's room early in the gameplay, directly after Molly's room. On first playthrough, the player knows almost none of the family history, aside from the fact that there is a curse. Edie's bedroom is designed as a pass-through area with a few short quips of dialogue to obtain. It barely registers the first time, especially compared with the splendour and grief of experiences like Lewis' or Gregory's. Upon a second playthrough, Edie's machinations and setting become significantly more uncanny, more disturbing, because of the engagement with the found narrative objects.



The game environment, where the footage is found, is a testament to Edie's desire to preserve an idealized past while the true destruction peeks through.

Grandma Edie locked 10-year-old Molly in her room from the outside and refused to feed her. Grandma Edie built a swing on a cliffside and then forced her son Sam to live in his twin brother's room-turned-shrine when Calvin went flying off the cliff. Grandma Edie told the tabloids that a "mole man" lived under her house when she knew it was her traumatized son, Walter, who had witnessed the gruesome murder of his teenage sister (also Edie's daughter). Grandma Edie must have sculpted the crown (now a horribly gruesome icon) for Lewis' gravesite before he was even cold. Grandma Edie kept a framed photograph of *the moment of her husband's death* on her bedside table. Suddenly it makes sense as to why Walter would sledgehammer his way through a wall to end his solitude rather than walk upstairs. Edie can be read on a spectrum from negligent to selfish to outright malicious, and there are significant hints she finds these deaths and the traumatic aftermaths entertaining—she thinks they make neat little stories. Using found footage, through the excavation and reliving of the past, we see the ways in which Edie's stories depart from reality and the ways in which Edie has spent most of her life victimizing everyone around her. By saying Molly turned into a cat or blaming Calvin's death on his desire to "fly," Edie doesn't need to conceptualize herself as

the neglectful and abusive woman we can see her for.

It is also especially appropriate for a story about the ways in which our traumas follow us, no matter the efforts to bury, contain, or otherwise disengage with them. The game environment, where the footage is found, is a testament to Edie's desire to preserve an idealized past while the true destruction peeks through. The Finch Estate, which at first seems like a transfixing Wonderland-style invention, becomes more and more dangerous the deeper Edie goes. The house is a tower built precariously on top of an American foursquare that has undergone several bizarre, increasingly structurally unstable expansions over the years. Though the house stands in ruins—covered in garbage, art, photographs, half-packed belongings, with rooms that run from pristine shrines to absolute filth, and thousands of (the same) books—Edie intones that the house was exactly as she remembered it. Much in the same way Edie treated her family, she simply never bothered to fix her home, only expand it until the wretched thing reached into the sky like the Tower of Babel (and threatens to fall just as spectacularly).

Edie traumatized her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and attempted to rewrite the past as a

kind of fantastical trip, where child death is a romantic fairy tale. The events of the actual past, the deaths she mostly caused, the trauma and instability she inflicted on her descendants down to three generations, waits ready to pop up at any moment and pull Edie in. It is appropriate, too, that the only artifact available from Edie's room is a short, tellingly non-interactive detailing the Finch curse and the tragedy of Great-Great-Grandpa Odin. It's a strangely self-mythologizing piece where the Finches are presented as brave, frontier-discovering pioneers shipwrecked on an island, where they industriously build a home (even though it was probably around 1940 when the shipwreck occurred and they are located near barely off the coast of Washington state).

What Remains of Edith Finch uses found footage to both reveal the uncanny nature in which trauma clings to us and also the ways that this excavation is a necessary part of healing. Engaging with the past erases the veneer and the self-aggrandizement of an abusive, neglectful, narcissistic nightmare of a woman. By uncannily reliving the past, we discover that what remains of both the original Edie Finch and our Edie are the same thing—the abuse passed down through generations that refuses to be overwritten or silenced. *g*

Dissecting The Forbidden Body In Conversation with Douglas E. Cowan

by Valeska Griffiths

Professor Douglas E. Cowan has become known for his incisive, academic, yet deliciously accessible analyses of genre media, with a string of books focusing on science fiction, religious horror, and the works of Stephen King. His latest book, *The Forbidden Body: Sex, Horror, and the Religious Imagination* (2022, New York University Press), offers curious readers a far-ranging and thought-provoking exploration of the overlap between the scary, the sexy, and the sacred. Examining a dizzying array of texts, theories, and trends, the book touches upon sexualization, monstrous bodies, exploitation, fetishization, and the function of horror as a literary mode, among other topics.

I sat down with Professor Cowan to talk about his process, his approach, and how we may expand and enrich our understanding of horror storytelling.

Through *America's Dark Theologian: The Religious Imagination of Stephen King and Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*, and in your introduction to the book that I co-edited, *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion, and Worship in the Horror Film*, you revisit the rich intersections of horror, religion, pop culture, sexuality, and socialization. What drives you to explore these topics?

I think that there are a few things at work in this, especially since "religion and horror" is not at all where I started as a scholar, nor where I expected to end up. Not even close.

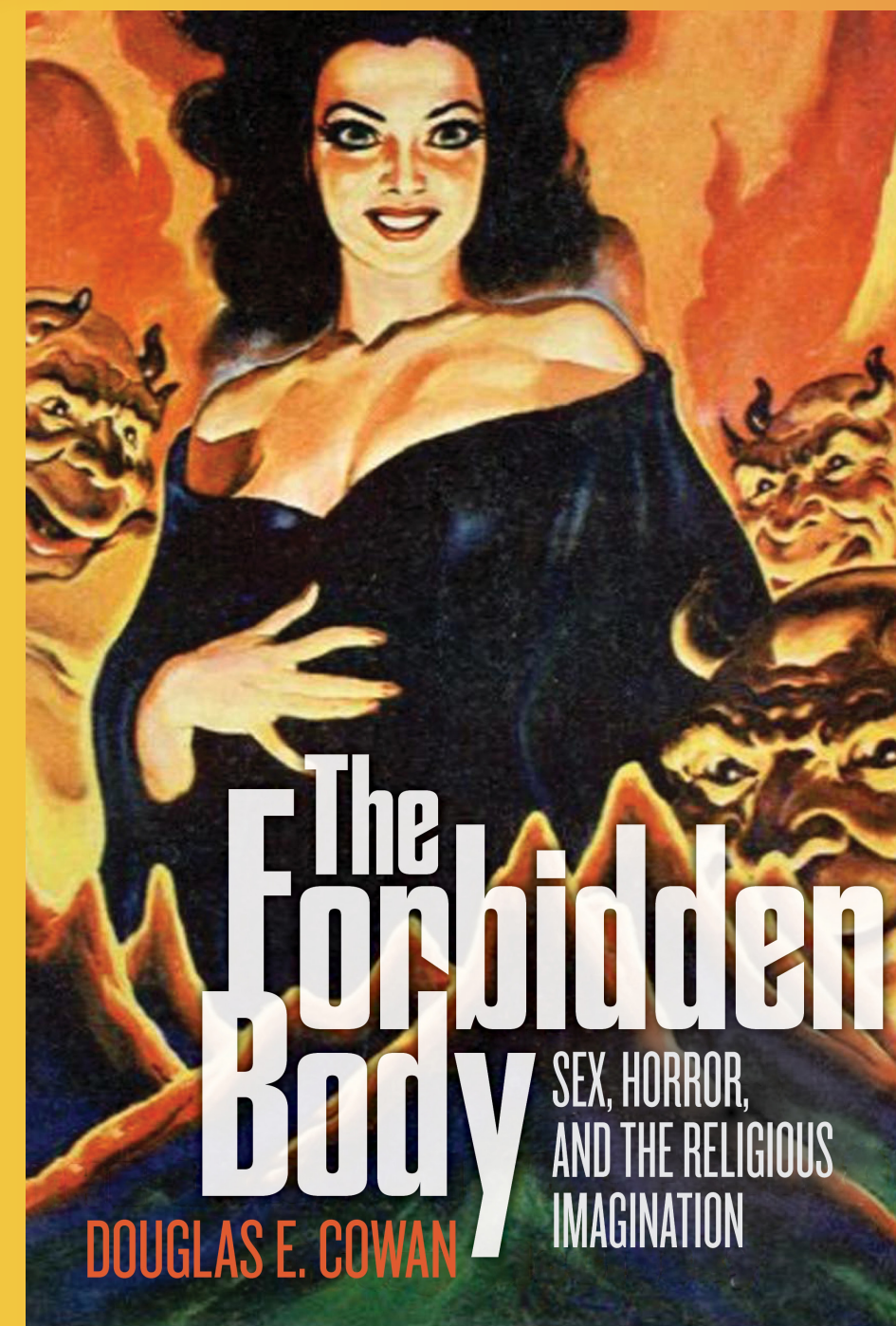
I suppose the main thing that keeps me coming back, though, is that they help me work out my own thinking about this ubiquitous, ambiguous, and profoundly weird human obsession we call *religion*. A lot of the time fear makes sense to me, faith not so much. And rather than overlay a particular intellectual or theological template onto scary stories, however

those are told, I look at all of my books as what my friend John Morehead calls an extended "thought experiment." I'm using them to figure things out, to think my way through particular questions that I find interesting or that I think are important. Indeed, I'm way more interested in exploring the common questions both religion and horror raise than I am in answering a particular intellectual riddle or proving some narrow theological point based on ideological fidelity to one faith tradition or the other.

I do this, I think, because much of the work I see on religion and horror is superficial in the sense that either it doesn't take the

religion in horror seriously (or religion as horror, and there's plenty of that around) or it doesn't take the horror in religion seriously (and thus misses the real depth of what's going on in the story). This happens in a couple of ways.

One version of this is the "Gospel According to *Insert-Pop-Culture-Product-Here*" approach. This usually means that scary movies, horror stories, whatever, are read through a particular theological lens for the express purpose of buttressing one's faith commitment. It's a way of "baptizing" horror (or science fiction or fantasy, for that matter) in the name of this god or that. Finding Christ-figures



in film or fiction is a good example of this, something I describe in the book as “an academic drinking game,” or making a superficial equation between a plot point and a scripture verse, whether that reading is actually supported by the text or not, and then claiming that’s the meaning of the text. This treats the text, again whatever it is, as a riddle to be solved rather than an enigma to be explored.

I see this as a problem in two ways. First because it continues to privilege religion as the principal arbiter of the quest for human meaning. It is important, certainly. Who could argue not? But religion is not the only way we ask and answer what I have taken to calling “properly human questions.” These are often called “religious questions”—What happens when we die? Is there a purpose to existence? Why is there suffering? and so forth—but these are only “religious” by convention. They belong to all of us by virtue of our humanity, not our participation in this or that community of faith.

Second, this more superficial approach treats horror (and anything considered “not-religion”) as a poor second cousin at best. I think this grossly underestimates the power of fiction in meaning-making, and the central place of scary stories in understanding our place in the universe. That is, religion is not “better than” or “more than” horror, nor are they competitors in the social arena. I think of them, rather, as cultural siblings precisely because they are so often concerned with exploring exactly the same kind of questions.

With your background as a sociologist, religious scholar, and former pastor, you’re able to draw on a breadth of different perspectives in your approach. What lens do you bring most often to your analyses of popular culture?

That’s a tough question, since each aspect informs different aspects of the work, and I’m not sure I can usefully parse them. But I’ll try. Being trained in theology and having worked in the church sensitizes me to certain things—I recognize when particular characters or situations feel “authentic,” for example, or when they are simply deployed as often poorly realized cultural cyphers. Theological training lets me spot the fallacies that are endemic in religious reasoning more easily. I guess it’s kind of like knowing how the sausage is made.

Approaching the topic as a sociologist prompts me to pose a different set of questions. Why does this group tell

this story in this particular way? What makes *The Wicker Man* a horror story, for example, when, except for the last five or so minutes, it’s almost an anthropological exercise in religious confrontation? What is the social effect of telling stories particular ways? When you see a witch onscreen, for example, what’s the social and cultural history informing that representation, and, as I point out in one chapter, what are the real-world consequences of fictional stories?

I think it’s important that people realize that both “theology” and “sociology” often seen to be technical terms, daunting for many, off-putting for many more. But, they’re actually pretty simple concepts. The one means “how we talk about the gods,” and that conversation isn’t limited to religious professionals of whatever stripe. That’s important to know. If you say, “I believe Jesus died for my sins” (to take just one example), you’re doing theology—albeit at a fairly rudimentary level, but theology nonetheless.

Taking a sociological approach—which means nothing more or less than asking a different set of questions—lets me step back from a faith commitment to ask, for example, what this or that scary story says about the nature of faith, the place of the gods, and the relationship between humankind and what William James called “the unseen order.” For those who care, my particular approach is called the “sociology of knowledge”—why different groups think about things the way they do. I don’t do surveys, for instance, which is what a lot of people associate with sociology, because they just don’t answer questions I think are interesting and they often lead to treating the subject as a puzzle to be solved rather than something to be explored.

The book is meticulously researched, with a wealth of diverse citations and references that span academic texts, cult films, classic television, flapper-era print adverts, and Georgian-era lithographs. How did you approach the research for this book and how long did that process take?

I appreciate the comment. And I guess I’m always kind of immersed in the process. I’m always sensitized to the kind of questions that interest me and always taking notes about this or that, no matter what I’m reading or watching. I’ve got binders full of notes I’m not sure I’ll ever use, at least specifically. One of my early-career mentors, Gary Ebersole, taught his students (and me) that “everything is grist for our mill,” and I’ve kind of adopted

that as my intellectual mantra. So, while the specific research and writing for this book took a year or so, the more general research for it and the thinking about it has been ongoing for years—if for no other reason than that this book builds on ideas in my previous work.

While other people will have a different process, for me perhaps the most important thing in terms of approach is to let the work grow organically. What I mean by that is that I treat research as though I am exploring an unknown landscape, rather than testing a particular route through it. And while I’m working I try to remain as uncommitted to a particular conclusion as I can. Sometimes that works, other times not.

For example, I find that when I start out with the kernel of an answer already in mind—or worse, a conclusion to which I am already committed—I often wind up getting into trouble. Deep trouble. This happened with *The Forbidden Body*. I’d already mapped out in my head what I thought was the answer to a particular issue in the early part of the book, but by the time I’d written several thousand words I found that I’d talked myself out of my own theory. So that had to be abandoned and I went back to the drawing board. In the unknown landscape metaphor, it’s like going up a box canyon without realizing it and having to backtrack. For me, though, I should say that that’s a big part of the fun of scholarship. I can’t think of anything less interesting than having the answer ahead of time and simply setting out to prove it. This also isn’t a bad thing—having to backtrack and rethink. We learn far more from these missteps and mistakes than from our successes and foregone conclusions. I know that sounds trite, but it has the virtue of being true.

Which concepts or texts did you find especially compelling or fruitful to explore?

There are a few things, I think. There’s the three “movements” that I discuss in the first couple of chapters: the movement from skepticism to realization, which is a standard part of horror storytelling in the West—there are no such things as ghosts, until there are—but which presents a far more interesting problem when horror is considered in cultural contexts where ghosts are, as it were, a natural part of the worldview. Next is the movement away from thinking about horror as a genre to a mode of storytelling that makes particular intellectual, emotional,



and visceral demands on the reader or viewer. As a genre, “horror” a function of marketing, but an awful lot of the scariest stories are not necessarily collected on the “Horror” shelves in a bookstore. Would you look for, say, *The Turn of the Screw*, in horror or literature? Thinking of horror as a mode of storytelling—rather than simply a genre—increases the pool of potential candidates immensely. It also complicates things, which I always find way more interesting.

Third is the movement away from thinking about “religion and horror” to “horror and the religious imagination”—hence the subtitle of the book. When we think about religion our brains automatically do a couple of things. First, they latch onto whatever images of religion are most easily available to us: the religious group to which we belong or in which we were raised, to take an obvious example. But, second, and more importantly, we immediately make this kind of bifurcation between “real” religion and religion in different forms of storytelling. “Real” religion versus “fictional” religion. This leads to another problem with a lot of scholarship on religion and horror: the fool’s errand of determining whether a particular religion has been represented correctly or faithfully, or judging religion in fiction by the standards of so-called real religion. More often than not, this is little more than an exercise in arguing for the superiority of one’s own religious commitment.

By thinking in terms of the “religious

imagination” we can avoid, or at least control for this impulse. Because, put simply, all real-world religion is the product of the religious imagination, but not all products of the religious imagination emerge or extrude into the real world as religions. Realizing this allows us to consider such modes of storytelling as horror, science fiction, and fantasy as examples of the religious imagination at work in real time, as it were.

Are there any additional texts or concepts that you wish you could have included in the book?

I would love to have been able to explore what I call the Sadeian imaginary in more depth. In fact, I have been planning a short book on the topic. That is, we’re not dealing with the Marquis de Sade, per se, but with “Sade,” the literary and cultural imaginary that has been built up over nearly 250 years. As it is with so much in life, I think that far more people are willing to condemn Sade on the basis of what they imagine “Sade” to be than are willing to do the (admittedly) really difficult work of reading him. I initially planned an entire chapter on Sade, especially comparing him with his contemporary, Matthew Lewis, but I simply ran out of space. I would also like to have devoted more time and space to queer horror, since this is one of the really important pathways forward in understanding the nature of fear and fearing.

Since we last spoke, we’ve experienced a pandemic that has politicized public health,

an attempted coup in the United States of America, the rise of the so-called Freedom Convoy in Canada, the accelerating effects of the climate crisis, and the fall of Roe v. Wade. We’re living in a time that is increasingly defined by the cultural war between leftist thought and right-wing christofascism. How do you see these circumstances influencing the horror genre?

Funny you should ask that. In the late nineties, I wrote an article for a local magazine arguing for the usefulness of the term, *christofascism*, based on a similar set of social and cultural circumstances. One of the things I try to avoid, though, is trying to tie current events too closely to particular horror stories. The problem is, for example, that a movie might take several years to produce or a novel to write and see publication, yet it appears in the wake of some specific social or political tension. Without understanding the timeline of creation and production—which may long predate the tension—we can be fooled into what is essentially a correlation fallacy: seeing causation where there is only correlation. Does that make sense?

This is not to say, of course, that social and political tensions do not fund the well of horror, as it were. Of course they do, and it would be absurd to claim otherwise. But I am cautious about making one a metaphor for the other. I’ve just written a chapter on monster theory for a handbook of biblical monsters that discusses precisely the problem of always making—or always being tempted to make—horror a metaphor for something else. Indeed, through the famous crucifix masturbation scene in *The Exorcist*, I begin *The Forbidden Body* with exactly this problem. For those committed to Freudian psychoanalysis, for example, since there are no such things as demons, Regan’s apparent possession must be about something else. Only the weirdest of these other things is Regan’s pre-adolescent desire to have sex with the Pope. (I’m not making that up!)

What would you most love for readers to take away from *The Forbidden Body*?

That’s easy: that this book is an invitation, not a conclusion. In fact, that’s the way I position all my books. You paid your money, you’re entitled to interpret things as you want. All I want to do is suggest a different way, a different approach to asking questions, one that is anchored, as it were, in ambiguity and is not committed to a single answer to any question. I hope that makes sense. §

The found-footage subgenre is almost exclusively associated with filmmaking, and not without good reason. Footage is in the name, after all. It is fair to argue that the found-footage subgenre only exists within the filmmaking sphere given its unique visual presentation.

That being said, common characteristics of found-footage films are not necessarily unique to filmmaking. Those involved in the story are usually unknown to mainstream audiences, the narrative is told in a first-person perspective, and there is an element of interactivity given to the audience as events unfold due to the intimacy of its presentation. While obviously not presented the same way, these important elements of the found-footage subgenre could, in theory, be replicated in other mediums, such as the written word. This type of prose is referred to as epistolary, describing a piece of written media that is told through correspondence such as letters, diary entries, or emails. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006) are two of many epistolary novels that have gained traction in genre spaces.

However, perhaps one of the best examples of epistolary prose is Kris Straub's 2009 creepypasta "Candle Cove". What immediately makes "Candle Cove" so unique from other famous creepypastas is its format. Instead of the standard first- or third-person perspective, the story is formatted as though copied and pasted from a message board. The fact that it is all typed like a message board, not made to be one using photoshopped message board templates, adds a level of eeriness. It is as though we are not supposed to read it and the last remnants of the board have been hastily archived so people can know the truth about what was discussed there.

In a way, this is similar to the hazy recollections of the four forum members: Skyshale033, mike_painter65, Jaren_2005, and kevin_hart (not that one). Skyshale033, referred to henceforth as Sky for brevity, only displays an elementary memory in their recollection, only asking if anyone remembered a children's television program called *Candle Cove* from their childhood in the early 1970s. Mike_painter65 (Mike) introduces the pirate aspect of the show, as well as the cave that will later become important. After the thread is resurrected by Jaren_2005 (Jaren), Sky and Mike are able to recall more details of the show:

To Grind Your Skin

"Candle Cove" & *Local 58* as Essential Found-Footage Entries

by Erin Brady

the pirates were on a boat called the Laughingstock, one pirate named Pirate Percy was pretty bad at his job, the show's score was made with a calliope, and the main character, a young girl named Janice, was imagining everything that was around her. With each post the trio makes, they recover more memories.

However, kevin_hart's (Kevin) introduction in the thread kicks off the recollection of more sinister memories about *Candle Cove*. He writes that he thought Pirate Percy was supposed to be the villain, only for Jaren to recall that the villain was the nefarious Skin-Taker. This is the point in the story where things take a devastating turn, as everyone in the thread discusses how horrifying the Skin-Taker was; after all, the marionette was seemingly supposed to be made out of children's skin. This villain was so evil, in fact, that his mere presence seemingly resulted in an entire episode where Janice and her pirate crew just scream, something that Sky believed was just a dream of theirs until Kevin recalled the same dream. The story ends with Mike returning to the forum to reveal that *Candle Cove* was apparently just static to outsiders, the thread getting locked immediately afterward.

Even ignoring the fact that a sinister children's television show exists, there is another extremely important piece of information held within the "Candle Cove" creepypasta. According to Jaren, the show ran on what they called Channel 58, a public broadcast channel that could be received in Ironton, Ohio. The exact name of this channel wasn't given at the time, but it certainly would be revived a few years later by Straub for a new project. *Local 58* is a web series and video-based

ARG, or alternate-reality game, that began in 2015 and gained traction in 2017. This series adheres more closely to the standard perception of found footage, being presented through VHS-recorded tapes of old channel broadcasts. Its uploads have been somewhat infrequent since its inception, with the last upload being posted to the platform in 2021. Still, the loosely-connected storyline both stands alone as its own weird story and connects well to the original "Candle Cove" creepypasta; WCLV-TV, the call sign for the channel, is headquartered somewhere in Mason County, West Virginia, approximately an hour northeast of the Ironton, Ohio setting of "Candle Cove". This makes it more than possible for the signal of the channel to reach across state lines, something that Straub has confirmed on several occasions.

What the moon is capable of doing is still unclear, and it's likely that a straightforward answer will never be uncovered.

As for the channel's actual story, it has yet to be fully explained, although there are several connecting elements between the videos. Perhaps the most important is the overarching message to avoid looking at the moon at night. In the first episode titled "Weather Service," a programming schedule broadcast on *Local 58* continuously gets interrupted with messages about an abnormal meteorological event taking place. However, conflicting messages soon pour onto the feed advising people that they should and should not go outside and look at the moon. The episode closes



with a view of the moon as people can be heard screaming in the background. The moon and its potential effects on the minds of those who look at it are also enforced in episodes titled "Show for Children" and "Skywatching." The former appears to be a riff on classic Mickey Mouse cartoons with a sinister twist, while the latter seems to be mimicking a live feed of a man succumbing to the influence of a brainwashing entity, heavily implied to be the moon.

What the moon is capable of doing is still unclear, and it's likely that a straightforward answer will never be uncovered. However, this should not be a cause for alarm or dismay, but rather a deeper analysis of how "Candle Cove" and *Local 58* are both representations of the found-footage subgenre. WCLV-TV's reach is able to extend from one area of West Virginia to another area of Ohio, which means quite a few people had access to the channel, including children. It also seems prone to frequent hackings and interrupting signals by an otherworldly presence, as displayed throughout the *Local 58* web series. In theory, if *Candle Cove* only appeared as static to outside viewers, the show could have potentially been something akin to the cartoon shown in "Show for Children"; something that has the appearance of a regular earthly program, but is actually a signal interception meant to corrupt the minds of youth in undisclosed ways.

This perhaps answers the biggest drawback to explicitly labeling "Candle Cove" as an offshoot of found-footage horror. It was not meant to be recorded or shared, simply watched in the moment by whatever children were unfortunate enough to watch it, although the effects it had upon them were unknown¹. What was able to be recovered, however, was the forum thread discussing it decades after it had aired. Compare this to the tape recordings used to document the story of *Local 58*. While the interceptions certainly were terrifying, they were able to be recorded and redistributed, at least if you were affiliated with an organization that could do such a thing. Still, watching them makes the viewer feel uneasy, uncomfortable, and even scared because of how it's presented. The videos are made in such a way that feels too real and intimate, almost like you weren't supposed to actually watch them.

Epistolary fiction and found-footage film, in this case, are two sides of the same coin, meaning that "Candle Cove" and *Local 58* are as well. Both stories are constructed in ways that feel familiar but are also corrupted by an unseen evil. People watch television and go on internet forums all the time, but these types of casual activities can easily be replicated, turned into tools for something more sinister to occur. That, at the end of it, is the terror of found-footage horror: the act of finding and viewing something that

looks so innocuous but its gruesome contents are depicted in a startlingly real manner. "Candle Cove" and *Local 58* achieve this to a near-perfect extent.

So where does this leave the found-footage subgenre as it currently stands? It's not entirely clear. There seems to be a fairly limited understanding of how the subgenre can be used to create a terrifying connected universe. Many prominent found footage movies, such as the *Paranormal Activity* (2007) franchise, build up their interconnected world through sequels, but often do not incorporate other mediums in the process. This is a strange departure from the worldbuilding of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), one of the films that put the found-footage subgenre on the map.

Epistolary fiction and found-footage filmmaking go hand-in-hand with each other, and the potential that this association can achieve could usher in a new era of the subgenre.

Given how it thrives off of using everyday activities and occurrences (ie making a home video or talking to friends online) to tell a terrifying story, it only seems logical that "Candle Cove" and *Local 58* be considered new-age examples of the found-footage subgenre. Epistolary fiction and found-footage filmmaking go hand-in-hand with each other, and the potential that this association can achieve could usher in a new era of the subgenre. "Candle Cove" and *Local 58* are undeniably pieces of found-footage media, and here's to hoping that this recognition will come sooner rather than later.

So, as WCLV-TV's on-air banners say, thank you for supporting community television.

¹ This differs from the adaptation of "Candle Cove" featured on *Channel Zero: Candle Cove*, an adaptation of the creepypasta that aired on Syfy in 2016. This adaptation was not included or referenced in the article due to its lack of connection to *Local 58*. It is important to note that *Candle Cove* in the series caused its viewers to be mind-controlled. ⁸

FAMILY TIES

In Conversation with Rebecca McCallum

by Valeska Griffiths

In *Mums and Sons*, *An Examination of the Child/Parent Relationships in Psycho*, *The Babadook* and *Hereditary* (published by Plastic Brain Press and available through their website), author Rebecca McCallum examines the tensions and intricacies of the ties that bind—specifically those between mothers and sons. In this conversation, Rebecca and I dive into her authorship journey, her commitment to inclusive representation, and her next steps.

Why did you choose the mother-son relationship as the subject of your study? What is it about these relationships that piqued your interest?

The arrival of the idea wasn't a conscious one at the time, but now I have some distance between myself and the writing process. I've realized that I have a leaning towards exploring mothers in horror. I've written about Wendy Torrance for *Evolution of Horror* and Marge Thompson in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* for *Ghouls Magazine* and *Moving Pictures Film Club*, as well as including a whole section on motherhood in my personal essay for *Hear Us Scream: A Horror Anthology Vol 1*. I had also identified that the mother/son relationship was not one that had been written about at length or discussed widely in the community and, with that in mind, it felt like I was tapping into something worth exploring.

Why did you choose *Hereditary*, *The Babadook*, and *Psycho* in particular to focus on?

Alongside my interest in horror, I am passionate about the works of Hitchcock. I had always known I wanted to write about his films (I have an ongoing series on the Women of Hitchcock's films with *Moving Pictures Film Club*) and, being a horror enthusiast, *Psycho* felt like the natural choice. Then I saw *Hereditary* and connected so deeply with the character of Annie. In particular, I found the spectrum of emotions she displayed freely onscreen to be incredibly liberating both as a woman and as a mother. I had already begun looking at the mother/son relationship in *Psycho* and this led me to continue my examination with *Hereditary*. Reviewing my thoughts and observations on the films, I saw that the two sons sat

in different age categories and the idea struck me to produce an analysis of three films that spanned three stages of life: boyhood, teenage years, and adulthood. This is where I settled on *The Babadook* to fulfill the first category and, from there, I mined the films for how they presented the mother/son relationship.

Were there any other films that almost made the cut?

I gravitated so strongly towards these three films that I knew, as a writer, I had to trust that and allow myself to explore. When I began taking the films apart, it quickly became apparent that they were perfect choices to sit together as they all reflect on what would become the seven pillars of *Mums and Sons*: family, outsider status, setting, doubling and duality, relationships and distance, repression, and the horror of motherhood.

What do you think is the most significant common thread between the relationships depicted in each of these films? And the most significant difference?

Mums and Sons is structured in such a way that it discusses all three films collectively rather than tackling them one by one. It was important to me to illustrate not just what sets these films apart but how they talk to one another (in *Psycho*'s case, across decades). Feedback on this structure has been really positive and one of the aspects I think readers enjoy most is being able to see how the films echo and reflect certain motifs. It's very difficult to narrow down a singular common thread but if pushed I would say that grief is a concurrent theme that sits within each of the seven headings I explore. Grief is behind so much in these films—the lack of connection, the inability to establish relationships, the pain of losing a loved one and how that leads to isolation, resentment, and feeling like an outsider.

In terms of the most significant difference, while it shares a great deal with *Hereditary* and *The Babadook*, *Psycho* also sits apart from these two works in that the mother is deceased and is out of the picture. I felt however, that this gave the analysis an interesting flavour and it helped me to build some fresh and exciting theories.

What does your writing process look like?

Agonizing, exhilarating, and emotional! The writing process is full of ups and downs and can test you to extremes. My approach to writing is interpretive and analytical—I am always assessing what is being shown, what is not being shown, and how themes, journeys, or psychological states are being represented onscreen. When I pick my subject, I go deep into a research mode where my obsession with the project in hand quickly develops into a temporary love affair. I spend a lot of time with the films as well as reading as much as I can about the subject to stimulate thoughts and ideas that are germinating. I usually begin the actual process of writing by listing observations—be they glaringly obvious or just passing thoughts that seem insignificant—nothing is irrelevant and everything makes it to the first draft! Even if I don't end up using a point, it might springboard to another more solid one I can use and take me down a path of discovery. I then look at themes and cross-reference them, drilling down often never-ending lists until I reach a place where I know all the points I am making are clear and concrete. It can be very draining and incredibly lonely, but the reward is in the journey and that journey with my writing is what keeps my passion alive.

How long did it take to write the book?

To begin with, I thought I was just writing an editorial on *Psycho*! Then once it expanded into *Mums and Sons* and became something more, I realized that it would be a longer process. It took me around six months to write the book and then a few months more to edit and hone. After that, it took me a while to decide what I wanted to do with it and it actually sat on my desk for a good few months, too! I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to my illustrator, Ken Wynne, who produced all the amazing artwork which compliments *Mums and Sons* beautifully and to Plastic Brain Press for publishing my work. It was important to me to work with independent creators and I am so proud to be able to say that *Mums and Sons* is a culmination

of three independents working together!

In addition to being an author, you're also an assistant editor at *Ghouls Magazine*, an online outlet that publishes female perspectives on horror entertainment. Why is this work so important?

Representation is incredibly important in all aspects of life and that goes for the world of horror, too—although more voices are being heard, there is still a way to go. At *Ghouls*, our commitment is to provide our writers with the opportunity to communicate their thoughts about horror through their perspective. In particular,

we are passionate about creating a space which supports writers to share their responses to horror through their own personal experiences and those intimate pieces can often be incredibly revealing and bring an awareness on a multitude of different topics to those who read them. We are really proud of the community we have created and we are forever grateful to everyone who has supported us.

Do you have plans for a companion book (or books) looking at the father-daughter, father-son, or mother-daughter relationship?

A lot of readers are demanding an extended version of *Mums and Sons* which I'd love to do—my initial goal (as this was my first feature-length publication) was to keep it humble and achievable, but now that I have set this foundation I am excited about what I will do next. A series on the different familial relationships in horror would be incredible and is certainly something I'd love to explore. Recently, as well as writing editorials solo, I've also been collaborating with other people on various projects which is so rewarding because the more voices I can work with, the more interesting and enriching I find the results to be. *g*



GONE GIRL

Tragedy at the Cecil Hotel

by Gena Radcliffe

Almost ten years later, and it still looks like a clip from a found-footage horror film. Elevator doors slide open, and a young woman in shorts and a red hoodie walks in, with purpose in her step. She pushes a button, and waits, and waits, far longer than it should take for the doors to shut.

As if hearing something, the young woman tentatively walks back to the elevator doors, quickly steps out to take a peek in the hallway, then jumps back in. The doors still don't shut and, after a few seconds, she presses herself against one of the walls, then steps over to one corner, where someone passing the elevator might not see that there's anyone in there. She returns to the doors, just standing there for several seconds, then jumps out so abruptly that you almost expect to hear her shout "Boo!"

She steps back in, then back out again, standing outside the elevator doors, which still, inexplicably, remain open for a while. She returns to the elevator, pushing every button on the panel. Again, she steps back out in the hallway, and begins making a series of bizarre hand gestures. At some points it looks like she's having a conversation with someone, at others like she's conducting an invisible orchestra, and at others like she's communicating in some sort of code. Eventually, her body language indicating resignation, she turns and slowly walks away, never to return. Nearly half a minute later—much longer than these things normally take—the elevator doors finally close, and it begins its descent. In a particularly eerie touch, because the young woman pressed every button, the elevator stops at every floor, its doors opening to empty hallway after empty hallway. We know that the young woman is

Elisa Lam, a 21 year-old Canadian student staying at the Cecil Hotel in Los Angeles, which had a reputation built upon its unusually high number of guest deaths, its Skid Row location, and for once being the lodging of choice for Richard "the Night Stalker" Ramirez. We know that, nearly three weeks after that strange few minutes she was caught on camera, she was found in a water tank on the hotel's roof, naked and drowned, her decomposing body poisoning the water supply.

What we don't know, and will likely never know, is what happened during the time between. It's a missing reel from a deeply unsettling film.

Few things are as exciting as an unsolved mystery, and the internet makes it possible for people (perhaps far too many) to deem themselves amateur detectives, poring over every aspect of an unsolved death and designating the tiniest details as a possible clue. The hope is that the end result will be similar to Michelle McNamara's *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*, despite not having the actual journalism experience and legitimate connections of McNamara. More often than not, this unchecked sleuthing results in a lot of dead ends and conspiracy theories, while in Elisa Lam's case, as depicted in a Netflix documentary about the case, amateur detective work led to the harassment of a death metal musician who wasn't even in the country when she disappeared.

Elisa Lam's death is a particularly tantalizing mystery to solve, because so much of the circumstances are beyond explanation. Her official cause of death is accidental drowning, but it seems to be mostly settled on rather than proven. What has yet to be explained is how

she got into the water tank, which was eight feet tall and on top of a concrete block, accessible only by ladder. Unless she had developed Spider-Man's ability to climb during the hours before her death, it would have been extremely unlikely that Elisa could have gotten into the tank by herself, and near impossible for someone else to put her in there. It would seem to be the classic scenario of "Only two people know the truth, and one of those people is dead," complicated by the fact that there's yet to be any evidence that another person even exists in this case.

What we don't know, and will likely never know, is what happened during the time between.

Further enhancing the horror movie feel is that, seemingly up to the point where she checked into the Cecil Hotel, Elisa had been on an enviable adventure. Though she struggled with bipolar disorder and depression, she had felt well enough to travel by herself from British Columbia to southern California, making the trip by both train and bus. Belying the belief that she simply took off without telling anyone, not intending to return, she posted photos of her trip online, and called her parents at least once a day, save for the day she disappeared. Even then, that day she was seen in a bookstore, buying souvenirs for her family and described as "cheerful" and "friendly." While it's true that people who commit suicide often seem normal, even upbeat, in their last days, from all indicators it appeared that Elisa fully expected and intended to return to Canada.

"Innocent person being in the wrong place at the wrong time" is its own genre in horror, resulting in such iconic films as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Evil Dead*. Friends and families light out on the road, looking for a brief change from the redundancy of their lives and, due solely to fate and coincidence, end up encountering unspeakable terror. And yet, up to that point, isn't that the dream, particularly for those of us who feel trapped in our jobs, schools, and everyday responsibilities? Just take off, ride the rails, see the world and everything in

it, feeling like we don't have a care in the world? That dream has only been more intense for many of us in the age of Instagram, where it emphasizes that a life without travel is no life at all. We aspire to be like those images of tanned legs against a calm seascape, or doing yoga as the sun rises. It seems exciting, and yet peaceful. More than anything else, it looks...free.


It's fully projection on my part when I say that Elisa spent much of her trip giddy with excitement about seeing a new place, especially a place like Los Angeles. Like New York City, Los Angeles, despite its nearly ubiquitous setting in movies and TV, doesn't seem like a real place until you see it for yourself. Sure, we've all seen the Hollywood sign and the cylindrical Capitol Records building, thousands of times, but there's something a little overwhelming about realizing that they're real, that you can go and stand right near them if you want to. It's unclear what Elisa did in Los Angeles in the two days between when she arrived and when she checked into the hotel where her life ended, and possibly her last few minutes on Earth were documented forever. Maybe she wandered the city agog, seeing familiar landmarks, maybe looking for the footprints of actors she liked on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. It's what I did when I went to Los Angeles. It's what any of us would do.

And then, at some point, maybe even before she left on her trip, Elisa stopped taking the medications she needed to control her bipolar disorder. Such medications are known to cause drowsiness and fatigue, and the sense of feeling "like a zombie." Those aren't ideal conditions to be in when going on vacation, particularly when you're alone in an unfamiliar city. Much like everything else about Elisa's disappearance and subsequent death, it's unclear why she stopped taking her medications. Perhaps she just wanted to see the sights of Southern California as clear-eyed as possible, taking everything in with a brain that doesn't feel like it's mired in quicksand. Maybe she believed that if she had the courage to go on this trip by herself, then living a normal life might be within her grasp.

Maybe the trip was a beautiful dream to her, a dream of sunshine and movie stars, of seeing the Pacific Ocean, a sight that's truly like nothing else you've ever seen in the world.

And then, a shadow fell over her. The shadow that catches us when we least expect it, when we're just out trying to live our lives. When we're in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The true tragedy and horror of Elissa Lam's death is that, beyond the conspiracy theories and amateur detective work, she saw *something* in that hotel hallway. Maybe it wasn't real, but it was real enough to her. Something made

her hide in that elevator, made her jump out to see if perhaps she could catch it unaware. Her strange gestures were speaking, in some way, to whatever it was that she saw. Perhaps she was arguing with it, or pleading with it to leave her alone. Her slow turning away feels like an acceptance of some dark thing, or perhaps what she understood was coming. Then she steps out of the frame, and she's gone. 



How *Curse of Aurore* Resurrects Aurore Gagnon

A CONVERSATION WITH LLANA BARRON

by Cass Clarke

Since Dean Alioto tricked viewers into believing his film *The McPherson Tape* (1989) documented an authentic UFO abduction from a child's birthday party in 1983, the found-footage horror subgenre has flourished into one that delights in playing with the boundaries of truth. Each frame of found footage asks: Who knows more, the watcher or the watched? By design, found-footage films are voyeuristic, taunting their fictional characters—unaware of the nightmare to come—and the audience, who know horrors *will* arrive, but not *how* or *when*. Over time, found-footage films have blended more and more facts—historical locations, local legends, once-operating hospitals, and court documents—into their world of ghosts, demons, witches, and mythic monsters. Famously, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* upped the ante in 1999 by spending \$25 million on a marketing campaign, convincing the world that Elly Kedward truly haunts Maryland's woods.

Decades later, many still shiver at the Blair Witch's name, recalling the "real" artifacts on display in theaters during the film's premiere that made some viewers believe the film was a documentary.

Of course, it's fun to fall under the spell of a found-footage film that recreates terror so realistically that it gnaws at your mind with questions: *What if that shadow wasn't a special effect? How much of this is real versus staged to look real?* But it's also vital to ask: when someone's life and death are interwoven into fiction, at what point are they reduced to a fable? Memories are selective. Historical documents can only go so far in capturing someone, failing to depict precious details. Frustratingly, recreating urban legends—often seen in found-footage horror—can lead to ethical concerns. Jung Bum-Shik's *Gonjiam: Haunted Asylum* (2018) used Gonjiam Psychiatric Hospital as a setting for its exterior shots and borrowed its urban legend around murdered patients

to craft the blockbuster film's killer ghosts. In real life, the asylum never saw any bloodbaths. There were no "mad" doctors. The facility closed because the owner couldn't afford the water tanks that South Korea's Water Source Protection Act required. In a country that stigmatizes receiving healthcare for mental illness, did a hospital *need* to become a place to fear?

Sometimes, seductive sensationalism is tied to stitching together the real and unreal. When I saw that *Curse of Aurore* (2020) used one of Quebec's most tragic stories of 1920s child abuse as a vehicle for telling an investigative-style found-footage horror film, I had some questions to ask its co-writer and star, Llana Barron. Directed by Mehran C. Torgoley, *Curse of Aurore* follows three filmmakers, Lena (Llana Barron), Aaron (Lex Wilson), and Kevin (Jordan Kaplan), documenting Aurore Gagnon's traumatic life story and brutal death. Although the residents of Aurore's hometown, Fortierville, warn them to stay away, no one listens. Like several found-footage horror films that have come before, it works as a cautionary tale. "I think it's pretty clear that the decisions our characters are making get them further and further into trouble," Barron shared.

Most of the *Curse of Aurore* is filmed in Barron's ancestral home, located in Sainte-Sophie-de-Lévrard, a small parish

town in Quebec with a population of around 700 people, and near where Aurore Gagnon once lived. Barron enlisted the help of her family and the town throughout the film's production. Extras in the film were locals, including her aunt, Louise Paquin, who yells at Lena in Sainte-Sophie's local grocery store. Even the town's mayor, Jean-Guy Beaudet, volunteered to portray a cultist character in the film. "He was like, 'Can I hold the head?'" Barron recalled, laughing. "We were like, 'Yes, sir, Mr. Mayor, you can!'" Overall, Barron noted how "really stoked" the town was to help coordinate, star, and be featured in *Curse of Aurore*.

Setting *Curse of Aurore* within her family's home inadvertently fused Barron's family history into its runtime in several ways. Beyond the house itself, and her family's cameos, props were pulled from the home. Early in the film, Barron's Lena takes out a Bible from a closet that has a lock of hair inside. "That's my great-grandmother's hair," she said. "I don't know why the book was there. It's not sacred. It was just on a bookshelf collecting dust. I thought it was so strange to keep, so we brought it into the film. I'm a spiritual person, so before we shot the scene, I had a moment of reflection. I believe in respecting the dead and spirits. I put my hand on the Bible and said, 'This is really cool you're pitching in for the movie, Gram. Thank you.'"

That sense of receiving enthusiastic permission while being mindful of the murky waters of gaining consent from the dead also extended to how Barron and the crew approached Fortierville residents for permission to incorporate Aurore's story into *Curse of Aurore*. "That was her actual grave in the film," Barron noted. "Those were the actual toys that have been offered up to her. When I first saw her grave, that was one of the reasons I was like, 'We have to shoot something about this. This is so compelling—100 years later, people are still doing this.'" The crew got in touch with the church's event coordinator, who also runs a historical society about Aurore Gagnon's life. "It took a bit of convincing when we said *Curse of Aurore* is a horror movie, but we explained that Aurore wasn't 'evil' in it. They ended up being incredibly gracious and supportive. We wanted to make sure we didn't guerilla-film this. Having their blessing made the whole process feel more peaceful."

When asked how she personally approached filming a gravesite, she shared, "At night, we talked to her [grave] and we said, 'Hey, we're doing this thing. We really don't want to portray you as anything other than a kind of an angel, which is what you are, Aurore. I do believe in being respectful of the spirit world.'"

At the time of *Curse of Aurore's* release,

not everyone agreed that the film was depicting Aurore in a celestial-like way. Barron recalled, "When it premiered in Quebec, Canada, there was an initial onslaught of anger from some local folks, not those who lived in her region, but around Quebec who said, 'How dare these Americans turn Aurore, the martyred child, into a demon or evil spirit!' I don't think they realized that she's really not. Later in the film, it's very clear she's not the bad guy, but you can't spoil the film. It's unfortunate that some people will see it this way. Actually, the film was never supposed to be called *Curse of Aurore*—that makes it sound like it's a curse she caused. That was a suggestion from our distributor... Certainly, it was a cursed situation, what she went through, and that's how I like to see the title relate back to what the film covers."

For a horror film with Aurore in the name, I was surprised when the embodiment/spirit of her only showed up a handful of times during the film's tight 90-minute runtime. "One of the things I tell people is, if you look carefully, the times that she shows up are usually right before something bad happens," Barron said. "She's a warning. She's coming to tell the filmmakers, 'Don't go further.'" When I asked why she wasn't featured in the film more, Barron reflected, "A part of it is that her story has been told many times before and in many different ways. There was a beautiful



Photo: Taken by a member of the Paquin family.





Photo: Taken by a member of the Paquin family.

film done in 2005 from Montreal, *Aurore*, and that is a biopic. That's her story. It's very compelling, gut-wrenching, and violent. I'm French-Canadian through my family, but I'm an American, so I felt like it wasn't exactly my story to tell...That's where we said, 'Well, let's find what could be haunting from her story.' That's when we got the idea of essentially making it about a dramatic version of ourselves trying to come up with what our script would be, and, as we do so, some crazy shit starts happening to us."

However, Barron ensured that anything directly tied to Aurore was rooted in facts, saving the creative liberties for the film's horror elements. "Aurore's story is a true story," she said. "Before we started writing it, I did a lot of research about what actually happened, the long history of abuse in her family, the political and economic climate of the 1920s. What you had were a lot of people who had very little. They were loggers or farmers working in this really rural part of newly settled areas of Quebec, and they were having kids, more or less, to be farmworkers—not out of love. It was like, 'We're going to have kids, and they're not going to get educated, and they're going to work on a farm.' In some families, children were more like livestock. That was accepted, not in every family, but certainly in the farm families or the logging families. Aurore's real mother, Marie-Anne Caron, died of tuberculosis. When she died, her father, Téléphore Gagnon, remarried Marie-Anne Houde

[one week after Marie-Anne's death], a terrible woman. There are some interesting takes on what happened..."

Seeing the amber-tinged and decaying photographs of a child who died at the age of ten years old from parental abuse on-screen feels taboo. Then again, wouldn't it be a worse crime to have her story buried through the passage of time?

Certain court documents claimed that Marie-Anne Houde's abuse of Aurore developed only when she was pregnant. However, hospital records noted that Aurore was no stranger to receiving treatment for whippings, burns, and malnutrition. She'd contrive situations to punish Aurore for, such as removing Aurore's "bathroom bucket," so that she'd soil her clothes and then receive punishment for the mess with a beating. "Marie-Houde was wretched. As soon as she came into the family, she started abusing the children. And then, so did he. Eventually, Aurore died from the abuse. A neighbor came to visit because she hadn't seen the little girl, Aurore, in a long time. She discovered—well, we state how she was discovered in the film," Barron notes.

Aurore appears in the film in a wispy way. Blink, and you'll miss her misty apparition. Whenever her life story is discussed in *Curse of Aurore*, photos shown of her are

real. They're not recreations. Seeing the amber-tinged and decaying photographs of a child who died at the age of ten years old from parental abuse on-screen feels taboo. Then again, wouldn't it be a worse crime to have her story buried through the passage of time? Growing up in New England, I had no idea who Aurore Gagnon was before watching this film. After watching it, I sat with the dark irony of how her story was used. No one heard her in her time of need, and yet, this fictional iteration of her called out to help others. Even in a fictitious film, no one listened to Aurore.

"Aurore's story raised public awareness of child abuse in that era," Barron said. "It's sad that it had to be said, but it reminded people that if you neglect, mistreat, and abuse your children, they will end up dead, and you could go on trial for it. That started to catch on, and that's why it was written into a play, Léon Petitjean and Henri Rollin's *Aurore, L'Enfant Martyre*, and it was performed in schools so that children would know this is wrong. If someone's doing this to you, you need to tell the nuns or teachers...The court transcripts, which are translated into English from Old French, are really wild. If you ever get a chance, they're online, and you can read them. I would recommend it. There was also a class thing going on [during the trial of Aurore's parents]. The judge, who was from France, was treating all of the local Sainte-Sophie and Fortierville people like they were just idiots and didn't take

the case very seriously. They both were sentenced, but eventually got out, and Aurore's father returned to Fortierville. He went back to his house, living there until he died of old age."

Although *Curse of Aurore* keeps Aurore's presence fairly minimal, Barron revealed she's working on a sequel script. Ideally, the story would be a kind of crossover, explaining a bit more about why Aurore appeared to the filmmakers in *Curse of Aurore* and what her purpose is. However, Barron added a caveat, "When you are making horror movies, and you're using real history, I think you have to be able to have fun with it."

Admittedly, Aurore is a cursory character in *Curse of Aurore*. At times, it's hard not to wonder if her ghostly depiction in this found-footage film could have been filled in by any other fictional ghost. What we see of Aurore in this film is always fleeting—pigtails, the faint outlines of a school uniform, a reaching hand, a sullen face in the mirror, a set of harrowing eyes watching Lena, Kevin, and Aaron drink wine. We know these post-production special effects aren't the *real* Aurore.

But this recreation of her often appears minutes after we see archival photos of her or watch the filmmakers tread on the same land she once lived. This contrast skews reality enough that we wonder if some part of her *might* be there. We glimpse a small fraction of her world—her hometown, the fields she worked in, her grave—that we're compelled to look for her shadow in each frame.

The truer story is too much to bear. A child was killed by her parents.

Is it better to let the past—and trauma—of Aurore rest? Or is keeping the martyred child's story alive a way to give her memory a kind of visibility and preciousness that she never had the chance to feel in life?

Found-footage films that document the paranormal make ghost-hunting feel like a game. We wait and wait for that one shot, the one that makes us turn on all the lights in the house, just in case. *Curse of Aurore's* ghostly shots doesn't make us fear Aurore. Instead, we want to find her

first. We want to make her feel seen.

I still have questions. Is it better to let the past—and trauma—of Aurore rest? Or is keeping the martyred child's story alive a way to give her memory a kind of visibility and preciousness that she never had the chance to feel in life? Or is her memory resurrected so often to ease a town's guilt? While many knew of the abuse Aurore endured up until her death in 1920, not a soul stopped it. What can the dead do with stuffed animals?

The only person who can judge what degree of empathy or accuracy creators, like Llana Barron, have succeeded in telling Aurore's story is Aurore. While the film isn't technically about Aurore, it does sensitively evoke her memory to create its looming dread. In a certain light, there's an allure to seeing Aurore on-screen. While this film doesn't give her a voice, it opens up fruitful possibilities for radically reimagining her. What could the fictional Aurore do that we wish Aurore Gagnon could have experienced? What joys and horrors await her? Perhaps, like most historical fiction, *Curse of Aurore's* journey is worth it for the wonder it inspires. *g*



Photo: Taken by a member of the Paquin family.

“The Voice and Patterns of God”

Occult & the Right-Wing Conspiracy Circuit

by Miles Le

You don't just see things when you spend years monitoring the right-wing media ecosystem—you are forced to stare at the void of an American Christian Fascist movement that seeks to reproduce its ideology among an increasingly disillusioned viewership.

It never gets easier; even a year after leaving, I haven't stopped seeing the dog whistles, the tradcore credos that signify an online presence moulded by the same online circles doing the speaking circuit on Fox News. It is helpful to remember that such far-right talking points are deeply unpopular and their everyday presence is laundered into the American psyche by the mechanisms of mass media, but the hollowess remains, bolstered by the Kochs, the Mercers, and the Murdochs, with sundry organizations all jockeying to take the reins as power brokers for the American conservative movement. It is both a boon and a curse that they seem so hellbent on documenting their descent from fascist ideology into outright fascist violence. And all we can do with the media apparatus, like the cameras in found-footage movies, is passively watch and analyze as we catch up to their endgame.

Occult (2009), directed by Kôji Shiraishi, taps into a particular brand of horror that remains relevant in today's media-saturated ecosphere. When anyone can record a version of themselves to broadcast to a larger audience, there is always a digital trail—as with found footage, the ritual of constant filming/documenting becomes a secondary text. The camera's interpretive gaze

becomes the audience's stand-in. Whatever the camera portrays, the audience is meant to buy into—a textual tool used in *Occult* until its violent end.

In *Occult*, we are introduced to Eno (Shôhei Uno), the third victim of a seemingly random stabbing incident that claims the lives of two people. The viewer is meant to pity him, as in the interviews he gives, he mentions that he thinks the violence done to him was “done with God's guidance, so it didn't matter if [he] died,” and that “up until then, [he] was leading a crappy life anyways.” Director Shiraishi's (played by Shiraishi himself) and our own first impression is that of a man cast aside by polite Japanese society. He works temporary jobs which have been difficult to come by because of “the downsizing tendencies of Japanese corporations.” He spends his nights at manga cafés because he can shower there. He tells us that the scraps of vegetables that are perfunctorily included in ramen noodles are an important dietary supplement for him. Eno, through his interviews with Shiraishi, manages to portray himself (and the fictionalized director Shiraishi gleefully seems to agree) as a pitiable loser who believes that *somehow* god is sending him miracles because he was specifically chosen for something bigger. In *Occult*, the viewer is meant to look down on Eno while he points excitedly to a moving fast food wrapper as a sign of his sacred miracles. The low-key, lo-fi nature of the initial miracles (blurs and dark blobs that could be mistaken for dust spots) allows an out for Shiraishi—and

the unsavvy viewer—from taking Eno's bizarre ramblings and agenda seriously, all while we fall deeper into the rabbit hole of supernaturally decreed violence.

It is telling, then, that when Eno manages to obtain a rare win by finding a temporary full-time job offering five days a week for a whole month, he begins his celebratory dinner by berating Shinobu (Shinobu Kuribayashi playing a fictionalized version of herself), the only woman on the documentary crew, for not listening to the story he's telling about himself. Later, his apparent unintentional poverty is revealed to be intentional, as he squirrels away his earnings into a bomb-making fund. His avowed non-violence turns out to have been a front to ensure Shiraishi's compliance with his plans. His self-narrative begins to crack, revealing a mean streak that runs counter to his attempted self-portrayal as a sad, harmless man cast aside by polite society.

Eno is able to platform his agenda through Shiraishi, who quite literally becomes an accomplice to his conspiracy in the end.

There exists a tendency among right-wing media figures to claim themselves as men and women of the people. They use their supposed commonality (despite often being nepotistic, well-paid talking heads) to claim any deviation away from their ideology is that of “coastal elites” (an unsubtle dog whistle), and

that their fascist beliefs are actually commonplace and should be heard in the spirit of “balance.” This is how they manage to place their talking points into mainstream outlets, such as the piece filled with misinformation about the abortion process (“In a Post-Roe World, We Can Avoid Pitting Mothers Against Babies”) published by the *New York Times* shortly after the Supreme Court's overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, or the pro-Proud Boy article written by the wife of a Proud Boy leader, which portrayed them as “fathers, business owners, and veterans” and appeared in the *Herald Tribune*.

Right-wing discourse has become dependent on memes and simple imagery/slogans because they offer a framework to collapse complex people and beliefs into easy categories of good and evil.

The right wing's ability to promote self-narratives that distort or purposely hide important contextual information through mass media is an extremely effective tool in their culture war because it manufactures legitimacy for their viewpoint by platforming it. Likewise, Eno is able to platform his agenda through Shiraishi, who quite literally becomes an accomplice to his conspiracy in the end. Shiraishi's own need to document (and buy into) the story of a man touched by violence finds him stumbling, trying to keep up as Eno's suicide bombing plans move forward.

Occult taps into a particular brand of horror that remains relevant in today's media-saturated ecosphere.

barely registers as transgression, you can't be held accountable.

When Shiraishi finally attempts to stop Eno's suicide bombing ceremony, he tells him, “You're imposing your will onto people.” Eno only responds with “It's not my will. They won't know this world is just shit. The next one will be better.”

In the fictional world of *Occult*, Eno's act of violence affects only fictional characters. He is punished for his beliefs by ascending to another plane only to literally fall apart as the gods he so worshipped float on in the background. It's a thematically sound ending for a story about religious zealotry, but in the real world, spending the better parts of 2016 to 2021 monitoring right-wing media leaves a lurking feeling in the back of your head that something is about to go horribly, violently wrong. And it has—despite all the claims of First Amendment essentialism and being victims of “cancel culture,” the right still seeks to silence perspectives and voices deemed ungovernable. The conservative evangelical agenda, set underway by decades of right-wing movements, proves to be relentless. From anti-trans legislation, the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, and direct calls for violence against Black Lives Matter protests, to anti-critical race theory legislation targeting anything that doesn't support their outright jingoistic agenda, the opposition believes in a holy ordained righteousness that justifies violence because they alone, like Eno explains, are able to determine the voice and patterns of god. [g](#)

FLAMES DON'T HAVE SHADOWS

by Mackenzie Bartlett

[AgoraForum.net/room/LostAndFound [2:30pm, June 15th] [User: GemAndEye] Bulletin > "Old Scrapbook"]

The first time my sister found the scrapbook, we were playing tourist in the midcoast. The AC in the car was busted and we were in the middle of a heatwave (which is pretty unusual for June in Maine, no thanks to global warming).

>[attachment] jpg: a Google Earth screenshot of a stretch of highway from above. In between a vacant car lot and a dealership is a wide red barn.

As kids, we'd probably driven by this antique store a hundred times? You can't miss it if you're taking Route 1. It's the kind of place we always talked about stopping into, but never bothered. I was sick of driving, and figured they'd have AC so we stopped (I was wrong about the AC lol). As you know from my previous posts, I've got a bit of an obsession with old Avon bottles, so I was scouting those out for a bit when I realized that we were pushing daylight, and our luck with rush hour traffic. (Sundays in coastal maine...iykyk.)

I found Emily in the basement, sitting on the cold cement floor. When she told me she found a "creepy old scrapbook", I was expecting

some of those old family photos where one of the kids is dead but you can't tell unless you're really looking. (I would have preferred that tbh because of the resale value).

She "joked" about wanting to bring it home, but I shut it down immediately. I've been on this website long enough to know about people finding cursed objects in dusty old thrift stores.

So, we left, but on the way back home a week later, Em insisted we stop again. She said that if it was still there, then she was meant to have it. Much to my dismay, she found it almost immediately, even though this time it was on the opposite end of the basement. Now that I think about it, I don't know how she found it in there so easily, between the piles of old junk.

>[attachment] jpg: EMILY in the parking lot, holding a large black scrapbook above her head. In silver calligraphy the word "MEMORIES" is embossed into the old leather.

I made her put it in the trunk. She took a video of it the first time, in case we didn't come back for it I guess? I don't know if I should offer a disclaimer. So if you're a bit of a wimp

like me- !Warning! Spookiness Level: ...Goosebumps???

>[attachment] video: Phone footage of the scrapbook. A hand sweeps across the ornate cover, and lifts it gently. Fingers slip under the corners of the black pages, careful not to tear the delicate paper. They turn, heavy with paste and brightly colored greeting cards. Initially, they are unremarkable, and move languidly through the seasons. "Merry Christmas", "Happy New Year", "Will You Be My Valentine?", painting an almost perfectly linear portrait as the years go by. Then, pages and pages of "Wishing You A Speedy Recovery", "Feel Better Soon", "We Miss You". Easter comes, and then a joyful spread of Birthday Cards. Without warning, the cards are replaced with crudely pasted newspaper clippings. The Headline: "MOTHER AND DAUGHTER (5) GRAVELY INJURED IN EARLY MORNING HOUSE FIRE", The Headline: "OAK STREET YOUTH IN CRITICAL CONDITION", The Headline: "THE THIRD IN TRAGIC OAK HOUSE FIRE SUSTAINS SEVERE INJURIES". Then, almost comically, a small series of greeting cards, and a magazine clipping of the Pope in bright red robes.

I bought a couple of good Avon bottles BTW! A cologne bottle shaped like a teapot and one that I think is an aftershave shaped like an old rotary phone? (Actually, I made Em buy them for me, because it was our birthday and she forgot to get me something) I'll post pics of those next time :)

[Comment, User: PandaPanda]: if this is one of those things where I'm gonna die in 7 days I'm gonna be sooooo pissed lol

[CHAT LOG, PRIVATE]

G: Well people are loving your freaky little book video

E: Heheheh

>[attachment] jpg: the scrapbook, laid out on a coffee table, artfully askew atop a pile of magazines.

G: ew whyyyy?

E: It's a conversation piece duh :-)

G: I'm hiding it next time I come over!!!

[/CHAT ENDED]

[AGORAFORIUM SEARCH LOG]:

> How to tell how old a newspaper clipping is? >How to identify a newspaper with no dates?

[AGORAFORIUM SEARCH LOG]:

>fire, Oak Street, 1950. >midcoast maine fire 50's, 60's, 70's, >Oak Street fatal house fire 1950-1970?s> Oak Street, house fire, 1950's >Towns In Maine with an Oak Street > Owls Head Gazette, tragic house fire, archival?

[Discussion/bulletin/old_scrapbook/] [8:30pm, June 18th]

[Comment, User BlackFawn66]: ok but did she find out anything about the fire because you can't just leave us hanging like this...????

[Comment, User GemAndEye]: Idk! She's pretty obsessed with the idea of going to the library and using one of those big scan machine thingies that lets you look at old newspapers? Idk if those are real or just in movies tho.

[Comment, User CrimexHag]: Sorry for butting in, but I couldn't help myself. Is this something, maybe????? Here:

https://camdensentinel.org/archive/CRHS/Alumni/Graduation_Announcement_1962/

[PDF: page 4 of a regional newspaper]

The Wallace family congratulates their youngest daughter Edith on her graduation from Camden Regional High School with honors. Edith transferred to CRHS on scholarship to pursue a concentration in the visual arts. In a speech on awards night, Edith dedicated her concentration to her older brother, Ellery, who lost his life in a tragic house fire four years ago.

[Comment, User GemAndEye]: Idk, maybe. @Emma8675937 can you take over PLEASE T__T

[Comment, User BlackFawn66]: I mean "Edith" does sound like the name of someone who would commit arson for her own twisted agenda.

[AgoraForum.net/room/LostAndFound] [9:36am, June 20th] [User: GemAndEye] Bulletin > "Old Scrapbook"]

Hey y'all, I really wasn't expecting this to blow up? You keep asking me for a "part 2" but there isn't one! I'm back home. We both caught a bug after the trip and have just been laying low. I'll let you know if we find anything worth sharing.

[AGORAFORIUM SEARCH LOG]:

>Dream meanings, doors > what does it mean when you dream about a door> Doors, symbolism? > white door, no walls, mist? > recurring nightmares, door won't open? >meaning behind dreams, banging on door>

[Discussion/bulletin/old_scrapbook/] [7:45am, June 21st]

[Comment, User GemAndEye] Do we have any dream experts in the building???

[Comment, Moderator ModApatow] This comment has been removed due to violating /LostAndFound guidelines. This room is

intended specifically for the sharing and discussing of strange and unusual objects. If you would like to continue your discussion, please consider posting in /DreamDetective or /TroubleSleeping.

[CHAT LOG, PRIVATE]

G: hey, how ya feeling?

E: like trash!!!!!! U?

G: fine honestly. A lot better than yesterday. I couldn't sleep last night but I'm somehow feeling ~refreshed~

E: soooooo did you?

G: Is that a complete question?

E: dream about the door?

G: yeah but only because it's all you ever talk to me about.

G: also mine was different than yours.

E: wow, fancy. do tell

G: I could open it

[/CHAT ENDED]

[AgoraForum.net/room/LostAndFound] [2:45am, June 23rd] [User: Emily 8675937] > LIVE BULLETIN!]

[VIDEOFEEED]: Emily is sitting in front of her webcam. The footage is dark and grainy. She rubs her eyes to adjust to the glow of the laptop screen, and lifts her hand to show the camera. Her palms are rubbed raw, hot pink and glistening with something clear and sticky. She pulls out gauze and begins to wrap her wounds with an already bandaged hand. Emily gets back into bed, the camera still on, and appears to fall back asleep.

[/THIS LIVE-FEED HAS BEEN ENDED BY THE AUTHOR, BUT WILL BE ARCHIVED IN THEIR ROOM]

[AGORAFORIUM SEARCH LOG]: >best medicine for dry cough, >body sweating and cough, symptoms >flu

symptoms, dry eyes and cough > best humidifiers >cheap humidifiers

—
[AgoraForium.net/room/LostAndFound] [11:23pm, June 23rd] [User: Emily8675937] Bulletin > "Untitled"]

there is so much fog and there is a door and it is getting harder to see it burns my eyes when I can get close I hear voices but they sound so far away I bang and bang and bang when I try to open the door my hand screams I wake up every time and I cannot breathe

—
[Comment, Moderator: ModFellows] This post has been removed due to violating /LostAndFound guidelines. This room is intended specifically for the sharing and discussing of strange and unusual objects. If you would like to continue your story, please consider posting in /NightmareFuel or /CampfireTales.

—
[Discussion/bulletin/untitled_DELETED/] [10:06 am, June 24th]

[Comment, User FlipFlopGirl]: so fake lol

[Comment, User CrimexHag]: ??? Idk what you mean "so fake". Nothing is even happening so what's the lie?

[Comment, User FlipFlopGirl]: I mean yeah i guess its just an extra boring lie. There isn't even an antique store on route 1 anymore, it's a restaurant now.

[Comment, User CrimexHag]: *Shrug* I don't really care if they're telling a story retroactively.

[Comment: User GemAndEye]: You guys are so lame. Literally not faking, here:

>[attachment] video: Gemma's face is close to the camera, jostling with her phone. She props it up on the trunk of her car and walks to the middle of the parking lot. The antique store with its relevant signage is clearly visible in the background. Gemma and Emily laugh and

strike a series of awkward poses. The late afternoon sun is beating down on them. Gemma shields her eyes with one hand and throws a peace sign up with the other. Emily copies her, shoving the scrapbook underneath the crux of her arm. Gemma walks back to the driver's seat. Muffled, you can hear her say "Oh shit, can you grab my phone?". Emily lingers for a beat, and does.

[Comment, User BlackFawn66]: Okay but aren't you like her sister? Shouldn't you be helping her instead of lurking the comment section on her weird manic episode?

—
[AgoraForium.net/room/LostAndFound] [5:02am, June 28th] [User: Emily8675937] Bulletin > "the door is open now"]

The first time i found the scrapbook i was so happy because i thought i had lost it :)

[Comment, User: BlackFawn66]: lol okay girlie, what about the second time?

[Comment, User: Emily8675937]: the second time, it was so happy because it thought it had lost me :')

—
[Discussion/bulletin/old_scrapbook/] [3:30pm, June 30th]

[Comment, User: CrimexHag]: Presented without context, but I am nothing if not a nosey over-achiever. I was watching the video again, and I found this bit that I thought was really sad. Maybe it could help us narrow the search down?

>[attachment] jpg: a screenshot of Emily's original video of the scrapbook. The image is cropped to focus on a light blue greeting card on the second to last page. The card is taped open, and the printed copy reads "We Are Deeply Sorry For Your Immeasurable Loss". On the left, a handwritten note in pencil: "Nothing gold can stay. She will live on always in our hearts, and most of all through June Bug, who we know must be so lonely."

Do we think "June" is a nickname or? :(

[Comment, User BlackFawn66]: Omg why does this seem so ominous? Lol. Anyway, while we're grasping at straws - does this seem weird to you?

>[attachment] jpg: A screenshot of Gemma and Emily's selfie video in the parking lot of the antique barn. Gemma is covering her eyes and making a peace sign. Emily's face is blurred mid-turn, and seems almost distorted.

It kind of seems like she's screaming right?

[Comment, user PandaPanda]: I mean sure, you picked the weirdest frame of a video where she's opening her mouth and probably turning at the same time. It's a reach...

[Comment, user CrimexHag]: That's not what's weird though

>[attachment] jpg: a cropped version of the above screenshot, highlighting the pavement behind where Gemma and Emily stand. Crudely edited with the mark-up tool is a red circle around the long shadow of Gemma's outstretched arm and peace sign.

[Comment, user PandaPanda]: ??? okkkk its a shadow of Gemma

[Comment, user CrimexHag]: Yeah exactly. Only of Gemma.

>[attachment] jpg: A screenshot of Emily, standing alone in the parking lot, looking up at the sun. The mark-up tool circles the empty pavement behind her.

[Comment, User BlackFawn66]: uhhhh i do not claim this energy lol

[Comment, User PandaPanda]: Wow Detective Genius, you've discovered the concept of Clouds

[Comment, User FlipFlopGirl]: Fake

[THIS /THREAD HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR DISCUSSION BY THE AUTHOR. IT WILL BE ARCHIVED IN THEIR ROOM]

— g

CC Stapleton



INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

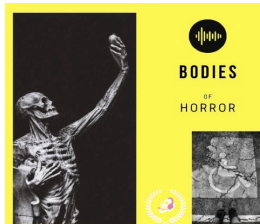
Horror Podcast Showcase

by Carling Kirby

When we're not enjoying spooky things, we're listening to women talk about them! This month, we're spotlighting Nichole Goble of *Bodies of Horror*!

Listen: aospodsquad.podbean.com

As a horror fiend with disabilities of their own, I was so excited when I discovered your show! The treatment of disability in horror is an issue as old as time and something I feel very strongly about. To hear a fellow disabled person speak so passionately on the subject means the world to me. What inspired you to take the leap and create this podcast?



Nichole: A couple of different things, honestly. Growing up as a disabled horror fan, I used horror movies as a language to describe my experiences to my non-disabled friends. I mean, this was a group of us at a slumber party so I only had a captive audience—despite what their actual interest was in what I had to say—as I used *Dr. Giggles* to talk about my heart condition and why I had to be connected to heart monitor from time to time. Fast forward a number of decades and I am listening to every horror podcast I can get my hands on, and listening to really amazing, thoughtful hosts talk about canonically disabled characters without even mentioning their disability at all. I also realized that there wasn't a slew of them talking about disability, so frustration and inspiration came together when I saw that *Anatomy of a Scream* was welcoming applications for folks wanting to start a podcast.

Something that you've touched on in *Bodies of Horror* is the treatment—and demonization—of horror villains with disabilities, such as Jason Voorhees and Leatherface. However, you've also mentioned how these characters have sometimes been portrayed in a sympathetic light and are not always unjustified in lashing

out. Representation has come a long way since the '70s and '80s; how do you personally think these characters should be handled by writers and directors going forward?

N: Don't rely on the disability to make a character sympathetic or villainous.

One of the first episodes I listened to was your perspective on Nica Pierce's character from the *Chucky* franchise. A lot has happened to Nica since your upload that's sparked controversy within the horror community—particularly, her fate in the season finale of the television series. I've seen some fans claim that the franchise took an exploitative turn, while others insist that because *Chucky* is a horror series, we should expect horrific things to happen to people, including those who are disabled. What is your stance on this?

N: Disabled characters in horror films are characters in a horror film, so yes—more than likely, something pretty awful will happen to them. I definitely agree with that. The character of Nica and that ending is so interesting, though, because—at least for me—I think it only plays out the way it does because she can walk when possessed or taken over by *Chucky*. It is an aspect of the character and narrative that has always annoyed me and I see how her fate being so connected to her disability is just kind of a lazy move.

In your first episode, you mention that horror is a special genre because it offers a variety of painful topics that act as a form of catharsis for the audience. Given the state of the world right now, how do you personally see the genre continuing to evolve?

N: I hope that horror will continue to grow as a welcoming and inclusive space for us to explore our fears as a community. When you see a horror movie that speaks to a personal experience or fear you have, you suddenly feel less alone and maybe even validated. Horror as a genre is in unique position to help us feel connected to others when so many of us feel isolated and alone, and we can find new levels of compassion in other's experiences.

The three genres you cover on the show are "classic, camp, and cringe." Something you're very good at is finding redeeming elements in films that are not always the most tasteful. At which point does a film become "cringe" and why? Have you ever seen a horror film you would consider truly irredeemable in terms of how it handled disability?

N: "Cringe" is kind of a hard thing to define because the things that make us cringe are all unique. For me, it comes down to intent and if the cringe-factor is intended (and hopefully with a reason that will somehow land) or is just cruelty and/or ignorance?

I find Mike Flanagan's *Hush* irredeemable because the main character's deafness is handled in such a way that it is apparent that not even attempts at accuracy, depth, and nuance were made.

There are some horror villains discussed on your show who have committed some very cruel and egregious actions. Despite this, I notice you always manage to approach them from a place of compassion and understanding. How far do you have to reach inside yourself to find that understanding? Is this something you find difficult?

N: I don't find it difficult. I can understand a million factors that may contribute to a character doing something vile without negating the vile act and its impact.

Another topic you've mentioned on your show is that while disabled actors are becoming more prominent in horror (rightfully so!), we still aren't seeing a lot of stories told by disabled horror creators. Are there any you can promote off the top of your head?

N: This is always a tricky question because disabilities aren't always visible or apparent, and lots of folks don't feel comfortable talking about or disclosing their disabilities. And many consider disability a part of life—either through illness, accident, or the act of aging.

But one person I recently had an opportunity to chat with on the pod is Ariel Baska. She's a filmmaker with a short film currently playing festivals and it was wonderful talking with her about how her experience as someone with disability was at the heart of the film.

Is writing or directing something that interests you personally? If so, what kind of stories would you like to tell?

N: Absolutely! I got a camcorder as a gift when I was in high school and my group of friends and I would get together and make little movies using whatever we had on hand. I loved every second of it, but I hope that those tapes are lost forever. I want to tell stories that normalize disabilities without



Nichole Goble

sanitizing the experience of being disabled—the horrors and sometimes joy of it all.

From one disabled podcast host to another—I am the co-host of *LGBTerror*—what is your number one piece of advice in terms of running a successful show and overcoming challenges?

N: Time management. When scheduling, assume things like editing, research, and writing out a script or notes will take you at least twice as long as you think it will. And your worst enemy is perfectionism.

Are there any other horror podcasts you'd like to shout out? I'm always looking for new voices to listen to, especially from those of us whose voices aren't always given the representation we deserve in the media!

N: I listen to an embarrassingly large number of horror podcasts, but I have to give a special shout out to both *Horror Queers* and *Psychoanalysis: A Horror Therapy Podcast*. They were instrumental in me starting *Bodies of Horror* because they showed me that there was a space to talk about these films we love (or hate) in a personal way.

Freaks and Psychos is a podcast that talks about horror movies with a disability perspective. The host, Andrew, is legally blind and really delves into the way disability and disabled folks have (and continue to) shape horror. I've had Andrew on my show and he is incredible. It's been a minute since a new episode has come out, but still tons to listen to and it is all great.

There are some really exceptional horror podcasts hosted by BIPOC that I cannot recommend enough. I love, love, love both *Nightmare on 5th Street* and *Nightmare on Fierce Street*, and *Girl, That's Scary*. And *Bloody Blunts Cinema Club* is a must-listen.

Spirit Gum

by Lindsay Traves

Named for a popular cosmetic adhesive, Spirit Gum explores the intersection of horror and beauty. Painterly people often go from well-shaped lips to well-placed blood drips. Here, we examine those of us who are always red-handed!

Natural Beauty: The Stripped Down Aesthetic of Found Footage

There's something endlessly special about found-footage horror, and it lies somewhere in its ability to convince you that it just may be real. Dating back to the '80s and becoming popularized in 1999 by *The Blair Witch Project*, the genre succeeds by upping the ante of realism. Sometime in 2007 or so, I wandered into my basement to stumble across my brother halfway through Oren Peli's *Paranormal Activity*, and he just about convinced me I was watching real raw footage. It took a few of the biggest spooks to shake me out of that belief, but there was a reason it looked so convincing: everyone looked normal.

IMDb lists only one artist for the makeup department of *Paranormal Activity*: "Crystal Cartwright - special effects makeup artist (uncredited)." Found footage allowed for the peeling off of some of the major expenses of crafting cinema. No need for lighting, for multiple camera setups, or even fancy recording equipment. The entire ordeal could be put together with a camcorder, and that's what made it work.

Astute and industrious filmmakers have created genre game changers that arose from a limited budget. Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981) created "shaky cam" out of the need to avoid expensive camera equipment. James Wan's *Saw* (2004) removed frames due to a limited special effects budget, a technique that's since been reused to create a sense of frantic energy. Found-footage filmmakers trimmed back their budgets and, in doing so, created something beautiful. Part of that meant skimming the dollars usually spent on makeup artists, and thus, created an increasing sense of realism that held the genre together.

This is certainly not to celebrate the lack of makeup artists working on films. This column celebrates them. But it's

intriguing to see how that budget trim changed the genre, especially in a time where new camera technology and growing audiences continue to create new challenges for artists to make their work undetectable.

Audiences are familiar with the old tropes—women awakening after a night of sex already donning flawless mascara and a perfected lip line. But just like characters hanging up without saying goodbye, or waving obviously empty coffee cups, these are things audiences buy into because it's the movies and that's just what movies look like. Flawless makeup in movies is acceptable, but it will always call your attention to the fact that this is a fantasy story, and not real life. But by necessity, the found-footage genre never wants you to suspend your disbelief merely for movie magic—they want you to suspend the belief that it's a movie at all. Their very design is meant to make you think that just maybe...they might be real.



In *Paranormal Activity*, Katie (whose character uses actress Katie Featherston's real name) looks like a regular person. Not because of any lack of beauty, but because of the baggy t-shirt she wears to bed, paired with her clean face. It's the small details, like her tee, bad lighting, and going to bed looking just like we all might, that makes you think that these shots just might be real. By contrast, Matt Reeves's *Cloverfield* (2008) lists a makeup department of over a dozen people. Though within the same genre, *Cloverfield* boasts polished cinematic shots and near-impossible angles that make the ordeal feel much more like a motion picture gag than an enveloping realistic event. Then there's Olatunde Osunsanmi's *The Fourth Kind* (2009) which showcased cinematic footage as against found footage to capitalize off of the stark contrast between them, and to assure you that the found footage was real.

Found-footage cinema wasn't necessarily borne of a method to trim the budget, but its ability to use a slimmed-down ledger and create movie magic is part of what catapulted it into the mainstream, making many horror darlings. Like its horror cohorts that created longstanding techniques, the need to save money necessitated innovation. The creators of these frights innovated, placing cameras in the hands of their characters, and washing off the veneer of Hollywood cinematic polish. In turn, they added to their guise of realism in an increasingly effective way, now done with purpose and not just to save money. While it feels counterintuitive to celebrate the lack of something this column is all about, it's near impossible not to admire the tenacity of the genre's creators, which led to my own experience of watching a fresh-faced Katie battle an invisible monster and screaming "OH MY F***, WAS THAT REAL?". g

Dear Countess

The Countess 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.

Five months in, my work-from-home job is insisting I start coming into the office. I'm a vampire and can't leave my basement apartment during the day, what can I do?

How annoying and inconsiderate that so many employers are performing this bait-and-switch! Unfortunately, businesses *do* have the ability to insist upon unnecessary commutes that waste time and contribute to environmental pollution.

Tell me: how have you performed in the role thus far? Are you aware of your key performance indicators? If you've been meeting (or exceeding) your targets, gather up some data and request a meeting with your manager. It's possible that, with enough evidence and passion, you may be able to argue your way into a permanent WFH situation. If not, outline the accommodations you'll require in order to safely comply with their demands. If they won't work with you, you'll need to seek out new opportunities—luckily, the job market is hot right now!

Have a question for the Countess? Need advice about the spookier side of life? Submit your queries via the contact form at anatomyofascream.com.

My older neighbour installed a Ring camera, captured footage of a cryptid, and has been sharing it on Nextdoor non-stop. The problem? I'm the cryptid. How can I protect my privacy and make him stop?

My condolences—having a busybody neighbour can be quite a trial, especially when they choose to share other peoples' business on social media. I'm assuming this is footage of you simply living your life on your own property and the sidewalk.

In many cases, knocking on the door and politely requesting that they refrain from uploading the offending footage in the future may do the trick. However, if the neighbour is especially entitled or aggressive, you may need to escalate. Consider hiring a local witch to cast a glamour spell that changes your appearance to that of your pesky neighbour, then performing some embarrassing acts in front of their camera. They may be so freaked out by the footage that they toss out the Ring altogether!

CLASSIFIEDS

Commercial & Residential Real Estate

Insulated, furnished attic room available Nov 1 for single tenant. Cosy but not cramped. Kitchen and bathroom shared with owners, who reside on main floor. Basement off-limits. Garage DEFINITELY off-limits. Hallway contains locked chest that absolutely MUST NOT be opened for any reason. Earplugs or headphones recommended after dark. No snitches!! Inquire through Kamaka: (666) 832-6010.

Services - Offering

You haven't had a real exorcism until you've had one from me! I'm the best there is, baby! Lemme come through & expel that spirit! M: (666) 541-0700.

Create a splash with your next sacrifice! Starving artist specializing in spatter. You say "bloodletting," I say "stunning visual storytelling!" Yui: (666) 779-3264.

Experienced theremin player available to perform anywhere in the tri-city area. Make your next party, séance, or alien autopsy 100% spookier! Contact Ji-yeon at (666) 828-6289.

Services - Seeking

Need opera-trained singer to assist in totally normal, not-at-all-cursed ritual the evening of the full moon. Must be able to hit an A above high C & sustain for 7 seconds. Text (666) 745-3434.

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

Jobs

OUT OF WORK? Hiring third-shift for fast-paced & dynamic laboratory environment. We treat our team like family! Must have blood type O-or B-. No experience necessary. Call Scout: (666) 223-1469 after midnight.

Buying & Selling

FOR SALE: Intricately carved vintage cigar box, whispers dire warnings in Icelandic each night at 3:33 am. I don't speak Icelandic. Jeff: (666) 683-3578.

Selling 15 litres of genuine ectoplasm, freshly extracted from local phantoms (the wailing kind, not the scream kind). Call Dio (666) 537-8635.

Romantic Encounters



Just an ambitious guy with big dreams seeking a partner with whom to create something really special. I enjoy redecorating, grandiose planning, and light stalking. Hopefully you're open to relocating. Must like bats. Message VH1: (666) 663-3529.

Humans for Humans

I saw you first on a Tuesday, 6 or 7 months ago. We made eye contact across the circle as our sisters chanted the incantation & the candles flickered violently. You had a soft brown buzzcut & a mole by the right corner of your mouth. Since then, you've appeared in my dreams most nights. Should we maybe get coffee? Ki: (666) 946-7344.

Place your free 'Humans For Humans' ad via the contact form at anatomyofascream.com.



What do you hunger for?

The AOAS Pod Squad Network is a multi-show podcast feed made up of delicious bite-sized, limited series horror pods by creators identifying as women, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and members of the disability community! Featuring analysis, narrative, review, academic, and conversational podcasts, we have shows to suit any spooky palate.

Visit regularly and subscribe to the feed—we release new episodes and introduce new shows on an ongoing basis!

grim



To find our digital and back issues, visit anatomyofascream.com



anatomyofascream.com

*reviews, essays, festival coverage,
analyses, interviews, podcasts + videos.*

apple podcasts, spotify, audible: [anatomy of a scream pod squad](#)
youtube: [anatomy of a scream](#)

haunt us:

twitter & instagram: [@aoas_xx](#)
facebook.com/anatomyofascream