

Boo! You should've seen your  
face. The *Nass*'s first ever  
Halloween issue inside.

# The Nassau Weekly



Volume 48, Number 13  
October 31, 2024

In Print since 1979  
Online at [nassauweekly.com](http://nassauweekly.com)





# BLOODBATH

## Masthead

**Editor-in-Chief** Charlie Nuermberger  
**Events Editor** John Emmett Souder

**Publishers** Isabelle Clayton  
Ellie Diamond  
**Audiovisual Editor** Mia Dedico

**Managing Editors** Sofia Shapovalova  
Julia Stern  
**Web Editor** Abani Ahmed

**Creative Director** Otto Eiben  
**Historian** Jonathan Dolce

**Trustees** Alexander Wolff 1979  
Katie Duggan 2019  
**Senior Editors** Frankie Duryea  
Daniel Viorica  
Leif Haase 1987  
Marc Fisher 1980  
Robert Faggen 1982  
Sharon Lowe 1985

**Junior Editors** Ivy Chen  
Melanie Garcia  
Teo Grosu  
Mia Mann-Shafir  
Alex Norbrook  
Aiko Offner  
Sasha Rotko

**Head Copy Editors** Cailyn Tetteh  
Sabrina Yeung

**Design Editor** Sophia Macklin

**Art Director** Alexander Picoult

**4 In Search of an American Original in *Friday the 13th* and *Sleepaway Camp***

By Isabelle Clayton and Charlie Nuermberger  
Art by Chas Brown

**7 Banana Man**  
By Sarah Park  
Art by Aidan Cusack

**8 Spooky Mysteries I May or May Not Be Able to Clear up for You**  
By Wendy Wang  
Art by Daniel Flaherty

**10 P(erturbing) M(onstrous) S(ickening): On Periods**  
By Sofia Cipriano

**12 A Finance Horror Story**  
By Charlie Milberg  
Art by Chas Brown

**13 Sigmund Freud Would Have Loved AnimeCon**  
By Melanie Garcia

**15 Apocalypse (Maybe Not) Now?**  
By Harper Vance

**17 Chronicles of a Scary Movie Convert**  
By Sophia Macklin

**19 To Build a Monster**  
By Elaine Gao

**20 Said, Softly**  
By Jemima Smith  
Art by Carolyn Madsen

It’s absolutely true that this is the first time we’ve ever run a Halloween issue, and for a magazine as historically elaborate and artifactual as the Nassau Weekly, it’s a sort of mystifying reality. We scoured the dread tomes that compose our archives—all except for one moldering lockbox situated between “Naked pictures of Michel Foucault (Bon Vivant Years)” and “Schematics for Upper Masthead Coup.” Forbidden knowledge. Maybe another Halloween Issue’s in there.

In this inaugural issue, we’re getting past all the phony critiques of capital around All Hallow’s Eve. We want to get at the throbbing, uncirculative heart of the thing. It’s called “Bloodbath” for a reason. We’ve exploded the heart and spilled its lovely, vital fluid all over us. How did that happen? Buckets of pigblood. Pinkish stains. Your prom. Everyone’s laughing.

It goes without saying that we inhabit a scary world, so we won’t say it. I hope you enjoy this issue a whole lot. We’ll see you on the other side.

**Love persisting,  
Charlie Nuermberger, EIC**

This Week:

Fri	8:00a Maeder Hall, 002 Auditorium CITP Conference: Tech Policy: The Next Ten Years	4:30p First Floor Reading Room, Mendel Music Library Can Music Make a Difference to Climate Change?	Tues	8:15a Maeder Hall, 002 Auditorium AI for Energy and Energy for AI	5:00p East Pyne Building, 010 Umair Khan Entrepreneurship Lecture with Q&A
Sat	7:30p Richardson Auditorium Princeton University Glee Club with the Ndlovu Youth Choir	9:30p Blair Arch Kindred Spirit Newbie Arch	Wed	4:30p Louis A. Simpson International Building, 144 India Elections Talk	5:00p Frist Campus Center, 212 Young Democratic Socialists of America - General Meeting
Sun	10:00a -8:00p Hurley Gallery LCA Exhibition — Poetic Record: Photography in a Transformed World	7:30p Richardson Auditorium Halloween with Sinfonia - Passport to the Arts Eligible	Thurs	12:30p Chapel After Noon Concert	8:00p East Pyne Building, 111 Halloween Board Game Night 2024!
Mon	4:30p Louis A. Simpson International Building, A71 The Challenges Facing France with Jean-Pierre Landau	7:30 LCA Drapkin Studio What's the Issue with Charlie Roth—A comedic, political news report. Free tickets	Got Events?	Email Emmett Souder at js0735@princeton.edu with your event and why it should be featured.	For advertisements, contact Isabelle Clayton at ic4953@princeton.edu

Two Sentence Horror Stories:

Realized a 3-hour test is due during a flight. <i>No wifi on board.</i>	<i>the rocking chair began to rock.</i>	As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself untransformed in his bed. <i>He failed to become an enormous insect.</i>
I struggled in the months after my doctor diagnosed me with a calcium deficiency, mostly just because those gummy supplements didn't seem to do the trick. <i>I only started to feel right again--to feel whole again--when I turned to less artificial sources of calcium: Greek yogurt, sesame seeds, finger bones, teeth.</i>	The door creaked open. <i>And then it closed.</i>	Ann Coulter, Ted Cruz, JD Vance, and a couch are in my room. <i>I'm awake.</i>
Late at night, she felt the familiar warmth of her dog curled beside her, a comfort against the creeping darkness. <i>But when she turned to pet him, her hand brushed against a thousand tiny legs scuttling away into the shadows, leaving her utterly alone.</i>	I showed up to Charter pub night, excited for my meal... <i>the vegetarian option was mushrooms.</i>	Doctor Manson removes the elastic wrapping from my face and holds the unblooded side of the knife to my eyes. <i>A smiling ball of black stares back at me.</i>
I go to dinner. <i>They are out of food.</i>		All the power went out and we were plunged into darkness. <i>And then the landline rang.</i>
As I lay alone in the dark master bedroom, I heard a sound that seemed like an infant breathing. <i>In the corner,</i>		

Submit to Verbatim  
Email thenassauweekly@gmail.com

About us:

The Nassau Weekly is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. *There is no formal membership of the Nassau Weekly and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!*

Read us: [nassauweekly.com](http://nassauweekly.com)

Contact us: [thenassauweekly@gmail.com](mailto:thenassauweekly@gmail.com)  
Instagram & Twitter: @nassauweekly

Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

# In Search of an American Original in *Friday the 13th* and *Sleepaway Camp*

A pair of *Nass* writers look for the Original across a pair of movies that have more than a dozen sequels between them

By ISABELLE CLAYTON and CHARLIE NUERMBERGER

In the 1980 slasher *Friday the 13th*, Annie, the cook, hitchhikes to Camp Crystal Lake, except she doesn't actually get there. The locals call it Camp Blood for a reason. This summer, an unseen killer has it out for teens that can't stop fucking each other while trying to revitalize the vacant summer camp. Turns out the killer is Pam Voorhees, mother of Jason Voorhees, who drowned decades prior due to negligence on the part of another sexually compulsive group of counselors. Three years after *Friday*, another killer visits Camp Arawak in *Sleepaway Camp*. Here, the killer targets campers and staff that aggrrieve the painfully shy Angela: the sole survivor of a boating accident that killed both her father and twin brother, Peter. Under the custody of her Aunt Martha, Angela attends sleepaway camp, where puberty seems to have hit every girl but her. In the end, Angela reveals herself to be both killer and her twin brother, raised as a girl by Aunt Martha, who always wanted a daughter.

On her way to Crystal Lake, Annie manages to get a ride from a trucker. The camera barely registers his groping hand as Annie hoists herself into the cab. The rig is pinned on both sides by

endless pasture and windbreaks that erupt the whole length of the highway. Riotous growth. Early summer. In the cab, their exchange is poorly dubbed and underexposed. The trucker instantiates the deathcurse—a drowning in '57, murders in '58, fires, and bacterial contamination of the lake in '62. Tragedy recirculates and recomposes itself at Crystal Lake, and all these teens want to remake the place in its original image: "Dumb kids. Know-it-alls."

Annie shoots back at the trucker, "You're an American original."

It's easy to forget that the movie is set in New Jersey.

The archetypal summer camp constructs itself in the fold of the fluvial valley. All precipitation flows down its fold, emptying into the basin and making a lake at its lowest point. In *Friday* and *Sleepaway*, the lake is the site of the tragic loop's commencement and completion: the boat accident but also the reveal of Angela's flaccid penis; where Voorhees drowns but also where *Friday*'s Final Girl, Alice, finds apparent salvation: in a canoe, with an arm flung over the side and a finger making final contact with the water.

Depending on the season, lakewater tends to circulate from the lightless anoxic layers below the thermocline, up to the surface and then back down. Psychic material here also seems to drag itself up from the endless unconscious and briefly into the light before sequestering itself once more. In the

summer, lakewater partitions into temperature-dependent bands of fluid.

Both *Friday* and *Sleepaway* produce horror in the concept of perpetual return. The summer endows the camp with a twofold significance, vested not only in the geomorphology of the lake but also in the camp's seasonal occupancy: children are meant to return, cyclically, year after year. *Friday* concerns itself obsessively with this threat of cyclicity—the deathcurse of Camp Crystal Lake; the virgin Jason's promise that he's still out there, which virtually guarantees the release of a sequel, then another one. The movie happens to itself again and again.

In *Sleepaway*, it is the fact that children return to camp each year that enables campers to register the fact that the bodies of their peers are changing. Puberty, sexuality, and Angela's ostracization happen because campers keep coming back to this place, seeing each other in each new iteration. Time keeps passing.

In *Friday*, almost every time a character exits a cabin or canteen or wherever, we hear the same clip of the loon call, which suggests that here, while the teenage victims sexually enact their youngness, the more-than-human world also produces itself through cycles of mate selection and reproduction. The loon makes an auditory sign. The pollen that slicks the surface of Crystal Lake makes an olfactory one. In

the end, the campground emerges as a composite of all these animal and vegetal signals that say, We exchange codes. We split off and get down. We make ourselves in the bluish day-for-night lights.

Before the events of the movie, Camp Crystal Lake has been unoccupied for years. The teenage victims pull up, and the campground is exuberant in the radiation of all these sexual cycles. In the night, it starts to storm. The rain washes all these signs into the lake until the morning.

Sex, though playing different roles in either film, constitutes the engine of their respective violences. In *Friday*, the recurrence of sex performs the recurrence of the sort of negligent care that allows Jason Voorhees to drown in the first place. In *Sleepaway*, the possibility of sex, or the uncovered body, threatens the reveal of Angela's repressed identity as boy, and consequently, her engagement in the homosexual act.

We can understand the trucker at the start of *Friday* as a figure portending the requisite initial warning. In order for this permutation of tragedy to occur, the young victim—here, Annie—has to make an informed decision to enter the campground. But in her labeling of the trucker, she makes a mistake: He's not an American Original. In this essay, we want to read *Friday* and *Sleepaway* in pursuit of the Original. Who comes first? Or rather, who falls first? Who kicks off the cycles of violence pervading both horrorscapes—the very

violences these films prod us to engage critically?

Where else to search for this Original than the apparent events commencing the tragic cycles at the heart of each movie? In *Friday*, we circle back to find Jason, drowning in the lake while his teen caretakers are having sex. In *Sleepaway*, it's Peter watching his father and twin Angela mauled by a teenage couple on their speedboat; also, it's Peter's new 'mother', his Aunt Martha, who tells him he is now Angela—he is now a girl. In both films, the alleged inceptions of violence occur in situations of malignant caretaking. Critically, they occur when a child is severed from the supervision of his mother, which is to say, in both *Friday* and *Sleepaway*, it is in this maternal absence that cycles of horrific violence are enacted.

Take the end of *Friday*, where Final Girl Alice Hardy thinks very little before launching herself into the embrace of the murderous Mrs. Voorhees. "It's alright, I'll take care of you," Mrs. Voorhees tells Alice, smiling. "I'm not afraid." Seeing the lifeless teen counselor Brenda, appearing only partially on screen, Mrs. Voorhees gasps. "So young, so pretty," she's groaning now, "oh what monster could have done this."

The monster, of course, is Mrs. Voorhees. If the implicit suggestion of horror is to direct attention to the images we'd rather not see, the thoughts we've perhaps, repressed, *Friday* the 13th exposes us to a mother with an incalculable propensity for harm. The horror of Mrs. Voorhees is really a horror of maternity's perversion, of maternal feeling at once capable of boundless love and boundless hate.

There's maternal perversion in *Sleepaway*, too. In the absence of her biological 'mother', Angela is raised by a father who instills in her a clear anxiety

regarding the homoerotic act, and then an aunt who has "always wanted a little girl," who raises Peter Baker as his twin sister Angela. Her fear of the homoerotic and the horrific import attached to the transgenering of Angela are both problematic and simultaneously, stem significantly from subliminal messaging we get in *Sleepaway* that the Baker twins are without a mother.

In the first image of this 'family,' Angela and Peter sit together fighting as their father lounges across the hull of the sailboat. It is just the children and him in the water when teenagers run them over with a motor boat. On the shore, watching, is not Mrs. Baker, but Mr. Baker's boyfriend. In a scene of horror contextualized by homosexual coupling and absent mothering via divorce, 1980s anxieties regarding AIDS and a "Reno" epidemic (New York, where the film takes place, was the last state to codify "No-Fault divorce") flood the senses. This is a film that, pun intended, cannot be divorced from its time. In the camp's environment of unrestrained and fluid sexuality, a real fear seems to be the lack of a mother to 'raise' her children right.

If 'mothering' goes awry in *Friday* because Mrs. Voorhees sends her son to camp to thus be 'mothered' by teen counselors rather than herself, 'mothering' happens wrong in *Sleepaway* because Aunt Martha, already a surrogate mother, perverts the Oedipal structure. She replaces the boy's fear of paternal castration with the mother's (almost) legitimate castration of him—she turns Peter into Angela, boy into girl. Angela's silence, her discomfort around her body, but most of all, her murderous disposition, become the physical manifestations of her deep repression on the screen. Perhaps none of this would have happened if Angela had simply had a mother (and one father) to begin with. Perhaps Jason would not have died if

Mrs. Voorhees hadn't sent him to camp in the first place, had never traded her own role as mother for the parenting of sexually transgressive teenagers. We're spiraling in to reach the original sins precipitating both these movies. Kids are wrapped up in copious, repressive violence at the sleepaway camp, perhaps because of the initial violence of being detached from their mothers in the first place.

A more perverse light is thus cast upon the camp setting. The whole summer camp enterprise is predicated on the dislocation of campers from the home, and thus the domestic realm. The nuclear family is threatened by the camp's extrication of children. The mother's monopoly over caretaking too. It's unsurprising, then, that a throughline across both movies is the emergent villainy of motherhood, the production of horror in the wake of tragedies produced by instances of mis-mothering.

The violence in *Friday the Thirteenth* and *Sleepaway Camp* carries a real libidinal undercurrent. Angela kills a skinny-dipper in the privacy of a canoe upturned on the surface of the lake. Later, she kills a girl from behind in the shower. These murders are intimate and spectacular. Angela gets playful. One time, she finds this guy jerking off in a latrine stall. She bolts the door with a broom handle and kills him by depositing a wasp nest into the stall.

Mrs. Voorhees often kills in the moments immediately peripheral to a teenage sexual encounter. In the ordinary punitive act, Pam comes across the two neglectful counselors fumbling around with each other, fondling, flatly dirty talking. In another scene, Pam lies under the bunk while two of her victims fuck each other. The girl is on top. In the damp moments afterwards, Pam plunges an arrow from the archery range

---

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

through the mattress, through the guy's trachea. The barbed tip glitters.

If violence in these movies doesn't substitute for sex, it at least circulates in the same moral economy. The collision of two bodies. The opening of wounds. Fluid. The imbrication of self and body. Like these strings of murders, sex is retributive. It forms a link in the causal chain and gains the status of a moral act. The trouble with a causal chain is that you can just keep going until you reach the far-off site of absolute commencement.

The real lasting images of *Friday* come right at the end. This Final Girl—only preceded by Sally in *Texas Chainsaw*—clocks Pam Voorhees in the head. Blood oozes thick from Pam's mom-cut. The Final Girl pushes off in a canoe and waits. In the morning—a long sequence of her deliverance from Crystal Lake overtop the dips and swells of Harry Manfredini's orchestral score. The Final Girl reclines in the canoe. A police cruiser pulls up. An officer walks to the lakeshore. He waves out to the Girl. There is no sound.

The sleepaway camp, tucked between the water and the woods, bounded beyond the landscapes of normal life, home life, announces itself as an inversion of Eden—a variation of the Miltonian “narrow room” exposing “nature's whole wealth.” Before the arrival of the cops, the Final Girl figures as this sort of anti-Eve: a singular, virginal woman who, after all this violence, persists in the glisteningly edenic reaches of the campground. Shes the girl left by virtue of her luck, her cunningness, and her vestal resistance to the adolescent exuberance that largely defines *Friday*. She has escaped the original sin of those teenagers, who, so many

years ago, fucked each other and let Jason Voorhees drown in the lakewaters, which now lap against walls of the canoe. In these closing shots, the Final Girl blisses out. The sun caresses her in rays. The lakewater rests unperturbed, except for the Final Girl's hand. Then, a chord change. Jason Voorhees bursts from the lake and drags her to the anaerobic lakebottom, from which Jason has waited watching all these years. You've been wondering where this Final Girl's genesic counterpart has been hanging out.

It's too easy to say that violence coexists with Paradise. In Milton, “My other half: with that thy gentle hand / seized mine, I yielded...” The garden is exuberant with violence to the point that, like the reproductive semiotics of the loon call, cycles of violence become a constitutive tissue in the Final Girl's Eden. Sex and violence work out an OK exchange

value. These moral economies make up paradise, and it's beautiful.

*Sleepaway* contains its own Edenic inversion; Angela's an anti-Eve in her own right. Virginal, young, innocent—she checks all of the boxes of a Final Girl. However, in *Sleepaway's* final scene, the camera renders Angela—with this mane of hair and face that introduces, suddenly, a sense of derangement attached to Angela for the first time—the very monster of the movie. If *Friday* is about the exuberance of sex, beauty, and violence in a configuration that looks like Paradise, *Sleepaway's* fixation is with repression. In the aftermath of violence, Angela can only survive in the narrow room of summer-camp through this vast oppression of self, obliterating even her own ability to speak. At some point, she's had enough. Violence under her surfaces starts oozing out in murderous impulses. And at



the very moment that Angela's identity emanates visibly, the screen freezes, greens. All we can hear is this terrifying panting pouring from her gaping mouth. This inverted Eden can't digest violence into beauty like *Friday's* can. In a matter of seconds, the movie ends.

On first viewing, the figures of the Mother and the anti-Eve come into being independently and situate themselves as alternative Originals. We define these archetypes according to a similar set of criteria. The Mother is close in proximity to the ordinary violence and repressive in her approach to adolescent sexualities. The anti-Eve has escaped the preponderance of the ordinary violence and, similarly, practices celibacy. In the deep history of the causal chain, the two figures almost assimilate into each other.

Our framing in *Paradise Lost*, however, complicates this conclusion: Eve fell and thus became “mother of mankind.” The original Eve, symbolic of a purity, transgressed, comes to the human world its mother. The mother, inversely, thus becomes symbol of the original Eve, fallen. But in the postlapsarian context, how to imagine the postlapsarian Eve, the American Original? When *Friday* and *Sleepaway* imagine this inverted Eve, this virginal figure of innocence for the fallen world, her ‘room’ can only be horrific. In this Paradise, there's sex—lots of it. There's violence and soulcrushing repression and some how it colors the pines and loons and lake all the more beautiful. The fallen Eve mothers uncanny lookalikes. Twisted Eves for a twisted world.

**In this week's *Nassau Weekly*, we want to read Isabelle Clayton and Charlie Nuernberger in pursuit of the Original.**

# Banana Man

"He wondered if his body felt cold when she touched him. If she could sense the disconnect of his skin. If she could tell that even with her hands on his chest and her legs between his, they weren't really touching."

By SARAH PARK

It was National Sports Day two weeks ago. He'd been chasing a pass down the field when he felt his hair starting to slip. He removed his scalp that night, cleaned it. Glued it back the next morning, and that was that. Tonight, though, the roots wouldn't stay down. He stared hard at his head in the mirror. Gently patted his hair. Pressed at his cheeks to set them in place.

He had three missed calls and a girl he wanted to see. He thought he might be forgetting something, but he was already late. Eight minutes later he was in a smothering basement, the other kids pressed together in the dark, smiling at anyone they knew. He'd layered on a baseball jersey and cap and was wondering what she'd be wearing. Probably something too little. Maybe something red.

He didn't find out until later in the night. He'd held so many drinks by then that his fingertips were limp and droopy. When he finally took her hand to dance, he wondered if she could feel the skin on his palms coming loose. His hands wandered over the small of her back. She kept her eyes closed. The fairy wings looped around her shoulders brushed his hands as she moved.

The first time he saw her, his attraction to her confused him. Her face was angled and harsh, like a statue cut from stone. Thin lines

of bluish-purple marbled her otherwise clear skin. She'd covered them up tonight, with glitter and pink face paint blended around her cheeks. He touched the paint with the back of his hand, where the skin was still flush against the knuckle.

"It's pretty loud in here," he yelled over the music.



She looked at him. Smiled. Followed him out of the basement.

Because the air outside was cold, or because the air in his room was warm, her cheeks were bright red. The face paint had rubbed off on his pillowcase, his skin. She tasted like liquor. He traced the apple of her cheek, the waterline of her eye. Marveled at the seamlessness of her..

He wondered if his body

felt cold when she touched him. If she could sense the disconnect under his skin. If she could tell that even with her hands on his chest and her legs between his, they weren't really touching. As if she could hear his thoughts, she pulled away. Narrowed her eyes at him, like she couldn't decide if he was there or not.

translucent. She took her hand back and stared at the red of his skin. Didn't scream, because the breath wouldn't come. He let it all happen. Hoped she wouldn't leave, but of course she did. When she'd run out of his bed and into the hall, and he was alone in his skin, he raised his hand to the eye she'd pulled loose. Held it together with his sagging fingertips as he walked to the mirror.

His hair was alright. His eye, though. Regret consumed him like an urge. He dropped a solution into the opening. Felt it melt the glue under his cheeks. Maybe he'd stayed out too long. He peeled the skin of his face away and continued spilling the solution down his neck, his chest, his legs. He took his skin off and changed into pajamas. Maybe there was nothing he could've done.

He tried to imagine the girl's hands on him now and couldn't. Every part of her face, her body had been clean and even. He watched his reflection in the mirror. Saw only a sickening rippling in his arms and two eyes bulging in the dark, stuck on a red and white face. He looked away. Caught sight of the wings she'd left by the foot of his bed.

He tried them on and felt like her. Lay under the covers. Wrapped himself so tight he crushed them, wondering if this is what skin felt like for everyone else.

He tried not to move. He thought, there are a million things that could happen in this moment, and nine-hundred-ninety-nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ninety-nine of them won't. But possessed with a strange luck the world willed at random times to devastate him, she touched her pointer finger to the corner of his eye. Pulled at it.

It peeled away completely. Revealed the milky white of his eye, the tendons and nerves beneath it. The skin of his eyelid hung like a jaw unhinged, so thin it was nearly

# Spooky Mysteries I May or May Not Be Able to Clear up for You

Documenting some of the spookier mysteries that psychically afflict this Nass writer

By WENDY WANG

**H**alf a year ago, my cutefused sapphic muse (CFSM), a fellow frosh poet with angelic aura at Brown University, was ghosted by this yacht-owning boy who still possesses an undying passion for sticks. After their lovely first date, Valentine's Day was coming up, yet the boy took on a cryptic persona. A particularly soulful interaction on Valentine's Day went like this:

**Boy:** \*adds to Instagram note\* 🕵️

**CFSM:** \*replies to the note asking what he means\*

**Boy:** yeah imma detective

**CFSM:** what are you detecting

**Boy:** mysteries

**CFSM:** what kind of mysteries

**Boy:** spooky ones

**CFSM:** \*serving omniscient yet curious with an affinity for the grotesque and a tendency to find beauty in the mundane\* are there any mysteries i can clear up for you?

(the end)

As an East Asian, I am a product of Confusionism (more than Confucianism), and Charli XCX's "Girl, so confusing" further heightens my awareness of everything I find confusing. Perhaps the stick-loving bro was onto something—there must be so many spooky mysteries, especially during this spooky Halloween season.

Some of these spooky mysteries I can possibly clear up for you. Others, perhaps not so much. Wishing you beauty in ambiguity, I hope this list finds you well-confused.

**1.** Why do some people find it romantic to confess their undying love? It's quite bold to assume one's partner is kinky enough to love something that never dies—because if it never dies, what is it?

**2.** What exactly did you mean when you said you felt dead inside? Could you be Dr. Frankenstein's creation, or was your statement merely testimony to your honored dasein of being an Edgar Allan Poe? Poe-tentially this is why you asked me to sip Snoopy Shaken Espressos on a Friday afternoon and later stargaze together on Poe Field. (Sigh, Yeh College men.)

**3.** Why are gorgeous women ghosted by the most random guys? This will never make sense to me.

**4.** Why does your new partner keep

asking you for pset answers? This actually makes some sense—you've found a zombie who's after your brain, not your heart. Maybe find a long-haired barista who acknowledges your heart by breaking it in the near or distant future.

**5.** Where exactly is the relationship graveyard? This situation is getting grave, are you sure we should dig into it deeper?

**6.** Why did the character designer of Wednesday Addams give her long braids? She gives short bob energy. Or maybe I just see myself in her.

**7.** If kids in this cutesy romance show are 16 years old, why is the show called The Heartstopper? Their hearts seem pretty functional. Whose hearts are stopped, and who are stopping these hearts? And how did three seasons pass yet they're still 16? At this point, this show is giving 330-year-old vampire who looks 23. Oh I love this show.

**8.** Why does the canonical French

New Wave film Breathless (1960) sound so potentially apocalyptic? It's just about a guy who kills a cop and finds his writer girlfriend confused by his messy French pronunciation when he gets shot.

**9.** Why does one's obsession with Remus Lupin start in third grade and never die? What makes this character so lovable despite one's Heideggerian nightmare yelling that #icanfixhim is merely a midnight craving in the destitute time?

**10.** If the stabbed Hamlet were to have a yapping contest with his ghost father, Old Hamlet, who would win? Oh apologies, it's not yapping, it's soliloquizing.

**11.** What if we kissed in the second circle of hell? Would French sculptor Auguste Rodin engrave us on a grand piece of marble with no intentions of making another grave pun, perhaps something about l'accent grave?

**12.** Other than midterms, what





could you dress as for Halloween for the sake of maintaining a horrifying presence for the plot?

**13.** Why are we even celebrating Halloween at Princeton? The University's colors are literally Halloween colors. It's either Halloween on graduation day or graduation day on Halloween.

**14.** Why does it suck being a freshman? What makes freshmen suck, and who sucks freshmen? Sucks to suck, I guess, unless you're a vampire. And yes, we are strictly talking about blood here; 'tis the spooky season, not the freaky season.

**15.** Who invented the concept of ghostwriting papers? To think of ghosts as writers is truly a tantalizing thought, because now we humanities kids' futures are not simply haunted by fears of unemployment, but also by peer pressure from the classic combo of bedsheets with two holes and a pair of sunglasses.

**16.** When the interviewers asked if you could perform under pressure and you answered you can try Boohemian Rhapsody, did you eventually get that job? Oh you did, now you're Morgan Stanley's commander of playlists. No, I'm not saying this is your contemporary version of Much A-Boo About Nothing; you're truly in service of humanity.

**17.** Why would anyone think hot girl summer has ended? There's always hot ghouls fall.

**18.** Why would anyone say brat summer has ended? This is literally bat fall.

**19.** How come you've only had a sandwich, a boorito, and an ice scream today? Babe please don't get lost in Dionysian hedonism. Always remember artistic melancholy.

**20.** How could anyone ever unwrap a mummy if it has mummy issues?

**21.** Sorry, I didn't catch that—did you say let's go on a coffee date, a coffin date, or a coughin' date? Because stimulants might do harm to my aging corpse, coffins might make me fall asleep and miss the upcoming precept led by a grad student who isn't hot enough to prolong my attention span, and coughing simply isn't stylish anymore after the Princeton Plague starts haunting all of us. It's not like you're special or anything.

**22.** Not to be chalant, but when you said I'm your type, were you referring to my blood type?



# P(erturbing) M(onstrous) S(ickening):

Essays, interviews, and scary movies about the horror of menstruation

By **SOFIA CIPRIANO**

**B**lood: the image at the center of the Venn-diagram between periods and Halloween. What could be more terrifying, on a primordial level, than the sense that life is running out of you in bright red streams? It's carnage, chaos. As one guy I interviewed for this piece said, periods are "kinda gory." When asked if I could quote him on the record, fear flashed in another boy's eyes — he facetiously remarked the subject was "worse than Israel/Palestine" in terms of how much trouble he could get himself into over the course of a short conversation. I'll admit this was the response I expected my inquiry to elicit. (As a disclaimer: this essay is highly journalistically unserious; all interviews were conducted anonymously over the course of a three-hour, nausea-inducing bus ride on a University-sponsored trip in a miscellaneous

European country. The benefit of this arrangement was: my subjects could not run away from me.)

Many men shy away from talking about periods—the topic is more taboo than sex. Raising the subject causes some to flinch and cover their ears as if on the receiving end of a jump scare. This avoidance raises a few obvious questions: What makes periods frightening (to some)? Are they actually frightening? And ought they be?

To state the obvious: menstruation is a natural phenomenon. I won't elaborate too much on this point; surely my readers have taken a health class at some point. But there's a long tradition of viewing periods as strange and disturbing. In some cultures, women are physically separated from others during their time of the month; period huts are prevalent in Ethiopia (called niddah) and Nepal (chhaupadi). When I mentioned I was writing this article, a friend (Nell Marcus '27) recommended Julia Kristeva's

essay "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection." Kristeva positions the female body as "other" and "object"—that is, "the jet-tisoned object ... radically excluded [which] draws me toward the place where meaning collapses." She reflects on how menstrual blood is often cast as unclean — horror-inducing, even:

***While they always relate to corporeal orifices as to so many landmarks parceling-constituting the body's territory, polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value. Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens***

***the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.***

Kristeva points to the "polluting value" both menstrual blood and excrement have in the eyes of society (a polluting value sperm noticeably lacks). She suggests menstrual blood is particularly disturbing to men because of its gendered nature: it is a physical, threatening representation of sexual difference. I won't pretend to understand Kristeva perfectly, but conversations I've had borne out what seems to be her main point: periods made the guys I spoke to "deeply perturbed" and "uncomfortable," as two respectively remarked. They referenced and carefully rejected (these guys are voting for Kamala, after all) the narrative that "periods are gross."

Not to be all "not all men," about it, but I did receive a range of reactions. All the guys I spoke to acknowledged that the

process was normal, and something that boys ought to be able to talk about. One guy with a long-term girlfriend expressed a desire to understand menstruation, and said he felt comfortable discussing it: "you want to know the things that affect someone physically, emotionally, and mentally when you're dating them." Some have mothers or sisters who are generally open with them about their health.

Others had a more light-hearted approach to broaching the subject. One boy insisted that "period" was not the most precise grammatical analogy to the menstrual cycle: "You should call it your 'ellipsis,' since ellipses look like blood dripping." (I concurred.) Some turned downright philosophical: "when you think about it, every ounce of blood is a baby dying." (The latter statement is false.)

The source of boys' reported discomfort seemed to be unfamiliarity. "I don't think about it very much," one said on the subject,



"I don't have many close female friends." Another guy cited the "biological limits of empathy" to his understanding of menstruation: "I can't imagine what it's like to be hobbling around all day with a fucking tampon in." A third remarked that he "cannot fathom" having a period.

This murky territory has inspired quite a few horror films. *Carrie* (1976) has a famously bloody period scene. The titular protagonist gets her period for the first time in a school locker room. Having never been informed about periods, she's visibly terrified; her classmates bully her, throwing pads and tampons at her as she crumples to the floor. Her mother later gives her a lecture on Eve and sin and how periods are women's curse. In *Jennifer's Body* (2009), Jennifer's transition into a demon is analogized to menstruation several times: she's asked if she's PMSing when she acts aggressive and sullen, then later if she needs a tampon when she's stabbed in her abdomen and blood is gushing out of her. In a *Nassau Weekly* meeting, when I was pitching this essay, someone mentioned that *Ginger Snaps* (2000) also featured a menstruation motif. The film revolves around a girl (Ginger) who gets bitten by a werewolf during her first period (the blood attracts

the monster); she later turns into a werewolf herself. In all three films, periods are associated with impurity and wrongness—they mark the end of innocent girlhood and the beginning of mysterious, monstrous changes. Girls on their periods are presented, paradoxically, as both victims and villains. And these are just a few examples — a quick google search of "periods in horror movies" yielded copious results (creepycatalogue.com even recommends a curated list of 10 movies matching the latter description, if you're still looking for Halloween film suggestions).

What's so frightening about periods anyway? The clothing stains, of course (out damned spot, out I say!). But is there any real basis for fear? Even accepting menstruation as a natural process—and, on a personal level, as an unremarkable, ubiquitous presence in my life—I do believe there is perhaps something genuinely, objectively terrifying about periods. I was speaking to a group of female friends the other week about the ways one's mental state can be altered by their period. Some are prone to unusually negative thoughts in the few days precipitating their period — thoughts that would usually not take shape, cropping up as alien presences. "Depression" happens to be listed

as a symptom of PMS, a broad condition which three-fourths of menstruating people experience at some point, according to Mayo Clinic. If one's PMS symptoms are "severe," one may have premenstrual dysphoric disorder. (What qualifies as "severe" is unclear, but PMDD is apparently uncommon.) Mayo Clinic notes: "Exactly what causes premenstrual syndrome is unknown." Allegedly, hormones are vaguely at play.

A lot of menstruating people I spoke to reported other spooky symptoms. Pain that makes it hard to get out of bed; throwing up; fainting. (One guy I interviewed mentioned that his sister "always" faints on her period — "She'll just pass out on the way to dinner. It's really scary"). The latter concern is especially disturbing. I can confirm fainting is a strange phenomenon. Your hearing goes out first, your vision fades, you wake up on the floor with bruises forming under your skin. There are many places where it would be highly inconvenient, even dangerous, to spontaneously pass out (speaking from personal experience: a ski slope, a crowded Shake Shack, a medieval town). A few girls I know have spoken to their doctors about their concerns. They received non-committal responses: taking Advil and hydrating may help.

I don't recall being warned about many of the aforementioned symptoms of PMS; neither do most of my friends. The concept of PMS was introduced to me as a joke, an insult—but not as a condition with a string of symptoms, no real treatment and no known concrete causes. Disorienting: ignorance about your own body. Talking about it and writing about it — comparing experiences, making a few Google searches — does make the subject less perturbing, but in some ways I feel like I have more questions than I began with.

As much as I want to say that horror movies about periods demonize a natural event in a vaguely problematic way, there does seem to be something there. Rather than blood, though, that "something" is perhaps the lack of attention and education on women's health. PMS is often not covered in health class; there is essentially no research and funding directed towards investigating a condition which almost half of the population experiences. Amid this black hole, it's easy to see where movie-inspiring myths spring out of, and why there's such a unique, mind-bending stigma on the topic. The unknowable female body— boo.

*What could be more terrifying, on a primordial level, than the sense that life is running out of you in **bright red** streams?*

# On Periods

# A Finance Horror Story

A Nass writer probes at some of the more proximate fears of Princeton kids these days

By CHARLIE MILBERG

Tiberius Cornelius Montgomery was just like every other blonde-haired, slenderly muscular, white-linen-wearing, blue-eyed, 6'5", trustfundian Greenwich-raised Princeton student. With a 1550 SAT, 4.0 GPA, and 20 years of alternating between summering in Amagansett, Bordeaux, or slumming it on his father's yacht, he couldn't have been more ordinary. There was only one little asterisk next to his name: no investment banking, consulting, private equity, or venture capital internship lined up for his junior summer.

Of course, there were the fun, artsy trustafarians like Nasha Wickley, the dull semi-corporate wannabes like Dale Prince, and the rest who didn't care about landing six-figure jobs immediately after reunions, but Tiberius was not one of them: he was better. After all, he was a Montgomery, and Montgomerys defined finance—Montgomerys were finance. Being a first-year investment banking analyst in the sports and entertainment group at Soldman Gachs had been Tiberius' destiny ever since his mother Tallulah conceived him. So what happened to Tiberius?

On the 29th of November, an email notification popped open on Tiberius' screen. "Congratulations on your sixth interview with us," the email read. "For the next round, please click the link below and complete the following game. Each decision you make will be observed and annotated and will directly determine whether or not you are selected to be interviewed in the penultimate round of interviews. Failure to

meet expectations will cause the Job Hunter to be one step closer to finding you. Best of luck!"

Before he could play, however, Tiberius browsed his inbox, perfectly organized thanks to his mother's friend's assistant. After reaching the "Networking Prospects and Invitations" label, Tiberius skimmed over his three rejection emails. "Thank you very much for your interest in working for us. While we cannot offer you a spot in this year's class of analysts, we hope you reapply next year. We wish you well with your other applications." But more often than not, candidates, including Tiberius, would not even receive an email at all. Instead, Tiberius would be kept waiting in the dark while the Job Hunter phantomed closer.

Looking at his emails, Tiberius realized that winning the game, whatever that meant in the eyes of the investment bank associate delegated to monitoring prospective analysts, was his only job option left. Suddenly, a light flashed through the window and Tiberius rushed towards the source. One door down, outside Tristan Ignacius' house, a pencil-thin silhouette of a malignant being in a Brooks Brothers black coat, with a razor-sharp scythe in hand stepped out of his town car and walked to Tristan Ignacius's door and rang his doorbell.

Internally beaming at his friend's demise, Tiberius returned

to his computer, but he was perplexed. Of all people to be sought by the Job Hunter, Tristan Ignacius? Could Tristan really have no internship prospects? Tristan was practically the same as Tiberius, only the former was slightly shorter, less handsome, and only spent his summers in Sagaponack.

A thunderous yelp erupted through the walls of the Ignacius

household into the room in which Tiberius sat, and the sound of Tristan's blood and intestines squirting out and splashing against the glass windows nearly deafened Tiberius. Seconds later, a door

slammed shut, echoing loudly. The Job Hunter was unusually quick with his kill—his fourth cup of coffee of the day had just kicked in, and he felt the need to go back to his three-screen monitors to update the Excel sheet, which tracked the status of all prospective analysts, EOH rather than EOD.

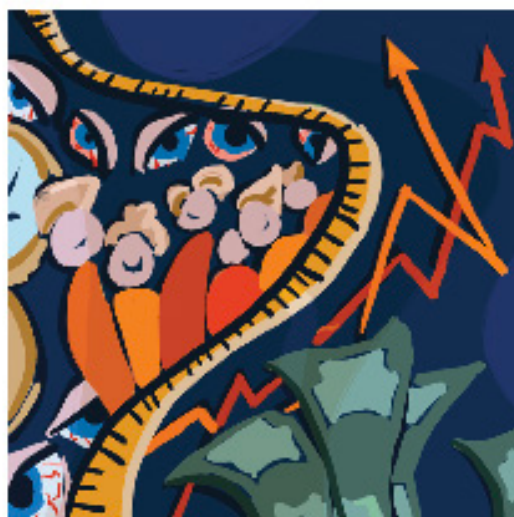
But Tiberius clicked his computer to start the game. According to the instructions, he had ten minutes in which he needed to decide whether to click to pump air into a balloon, scoring him points, or abstain, definitively keeping the balloon inflated. At any given moment, the balloon could pop, and the game would end. The only caveat was that he was not told how many points he needed. Tiberius decided to be patient, clicking only once every ten chances, for the first five minutes, and his mind started

to wander, eventually fixating on Tristan's unforeseen predicament.

Realizing that he was not far off from being in his friend's shoes, Tiberius wished he could pause the game and start again at a later date. But that was not an option: Tiberius couldn't stop playing the game. The associate at Soldman Gachs wouldn't care about what had happened. There was no way that Tiberius would get any PTO approved, especially not before he even got the job. With his heart racing and face dripping profusely with sweat, Tiberius persevered, more than he ever did in his difficult, privileged life, and continued playing the game, keeping the same pace as before, until time ran out and the doorbell rang.

With immense pride in himself, Tiberius skipped happily down the steps and opened the door.

*Charlie Milberg waits in the dark while the Nassau Weekly phantoms closer.*





# Sigmund Freud Would've Loved ANIMECON

An invocation of the psychoanalyst's "uncanny" to take at a hard look at costume-wearing beyond Halloween

BY MELANIE GARCIA

Unless your personal convictions make you see Halloween either as a celebration of the devil or a perversion of folk traditions into a worship of consumer capitalism and the chocolate industry, with small children as its principal ministers (see: any American holiday), you probably think dressing up for Halloween is socially acceptable. The last day of October gifts us justifications for silly, harmful, or downright strange activities: eating alarming volumes of candy, terrifying yourself almost to the point of cardiac arrest, or, in the words of Mean Girls's Cady Heron, granting young women the unquestionable license to dress "like a slut." For the rest of the year, however, dressing up as ghosts, monsters, fairies, superheroes, and the like is largely taboo — or, at least, just kinda weird. But some people do it anyway.

If you've never heard of it, "cosplay" (coined by Japanese game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki in the 1980s) is a portmanteau of the words "costume" and "play."<sup>1</sup> By its loosest definition, cosplaying is the act of dressing up as a

character, usually a fictional one from a preexisting intellectual property. In its modern form, cosplay probably originated in the 1960s, when fans attended conventions dedicated to dressing up as fictional characters, often from science fiction movies like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*.<sup>2</sup> The practice has since expanded far beyond science fiction. These days, at a singular convention, you find Gojo from *Jujutsu Kaisen*, Springtrap from *Five Nights at Freddy's*, one of the gay rocks from *Steven Universe*, and multiple Spider-Men walk side-by-side down the same hallway. But cosplaying has become about more than just dressing up; crafting costumes, competing in fashion shows, producing photography and videography, and even performing in cosplay skits are major parts of the cosplay practice.<sup>3</sup>

Even if it's nerdy (which is probably the point anyway), cosplay is largely harmless. Recently, however, the practice has caused discomfort among laypeople on social media, not due to moral qualms or straightforward anti-dork sentiments. Rather, people seem unsettled by cosplayers' style of expression. Take, for instance, My Hero Academia cosplayer @rccozz on TikTok.<sup>4</sup> As she switches between characters from the anime series, her eyes and smile are unnaturally wide, her movements are stiff, her expressions are exaggerated. Whether especially bouncy, bright, grim, or mechanical, cosplayers' mannerisms never read as quite right. It feels not quite

human, not fitting inside the real world. Or, as a few people have expressed to me with the concerning-ly-nebulous-but-really-cool word that deserves its own digression: uncanny.

As a term, "uncanny" is vaguely defined and liberally used. The word has been thrown around to refer to the unsettling nature of animatronic puppets, the soulless characters in *Polar Express*, and, more recently, humanoid androids and AI-generated media. To get a thorough enough understanding of the uncanny to adequately apply it to cosplay, however, we need to turn to everybody's favorite Austrian mother-fucker enthusiast: Sigmund Freud.

Unsurprisingly, the man who related everybody's psychological state back to their phallus (or lack thereof) was really into the uncanny—so much so, in fact, that he wrote his creatively titled book, "The Uncanny." Here, Freud writes about what, in its original German, is called the "unheimlich" (or, literally, "the unhomely"), which refers to the aesthetic of all that was once familiar, was then defamiliarized, and has since returned to generate unease.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, Freud builds off fellow theorist Ernst Jentsch's claim that a sense of the uncanny is produced when there's "doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive" or "whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate."<sup>6</sup> In response, Freud dives into how children carry an "animistic" view of the world — where everything,

whether sentient or not, is imbued with a human spirit — a view that most people eventually grow to dismiss. But, when we encounter something that puts stress on our conceptions of reality, and fall into the kind of uncertainty that Jentsch discusses, we experience a sense of the uncanny. Freud calls on the example of children's toys: kids often believe or hope their toys are alive, but adults who have left their wonder behind would likely be horrified with that reality. According to Freud, that explains why creations like automatons and androids, who seem to possess their own life, tend to be labeled as uncanny. In particular, the fact that they approach humanity without quite reaching it — a zone of non-personhood termed "the Uncanny Valley" by scholars long after Freud — contributes to that tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity.

Cosplay seems to slide into the Uncanny Valley from the opposite direction: cosplayers take a step away from 'normal' humanity rather than towards it. Scholars of media studies often point to the ways that cosplay is a form of pretend-play, a kind of play where "reality is transformed into an alternative scenario."<sup>7</sup> Specifically, media scholar Nicolle Lamerichs claims that cosplay isn't about attempting to realize fiction, but rather about "personalizing it" and "engaging with one's own felt body more deeply by relating it to fiction."<sup>8</sup> In other words, cosplay makes the performer's body a vessel that reflects the very

human vision of the performer while harboring a non-human entity.

For a corporeal person to perform a modified version of a character demands a particular kind of replication that isn't a neat reproduction of the character's appearance.<sup>9</sup> That is to say, it's true that cosplayers must use visual elements to achieve the essence of their version of a character, but the original character must still be recognizable — a process that involves more than decent costuming. To capture the spirit of a fictional character, cosplayers need to make those characters recognizable in their flesh. This is where performed behaviors come in: cosplayer's replication of characters' speech patterns and physical mannerisms are what makes the character still 'themselves' in a new vessel. This kind of performance is also what makes cosplay so uncanny, but what specifically makes it so unsettling? To answer this question, I'd like to explore what I see as the inverse practice to cosplay: rotoscoping.

As I learned in the course, Film and Media Studies: Animation taught by Professors Russ Leo and Monica Huerta, rotoscoping is a technique used in hand-drawn animation where a live performer is recorded, and animators trace over the video with an animated character completing the same action. This technique allows the resulting animation to be more fluid without demanding additional effort from animators. But, most of the time, rotoscoped animation clearly looks rotoscoped, and it's particularly apparent in earlier works. For example, Betty Boop's "Minnie the Moocher" short features a musical number with a walrus dancing in a cave (yes, take this seriously).<sup>10</sup> The aforementioned walrus moves not only with increased fluidity, but with a sense of weight and anticipation of movement, as if he carries a life that isn't his own, which is exactly what he's doing. His movements are a rotoscoping of a performance by dancer Cab Calloway. In other words, our walrus is 'haunted' by Calloway, and its movements clearly don't fit within what non-rotoscoped animation could convey. What results, then, is a tension upon

the 'reality' that animation constructs, and, in turn, a feeling of the uncanny.<sup>11</sup>

Cosplay performances work in reverse. Instead of fictional characters replicating the motions of human performers, cosplayers attempt to replicate the mannerisms of fictional characters. This tension is most apparent in anime and cartoon cosplayers, who tend to speak and move in ways that are more extreme or spectacular than real people do in real life, whether very enthusiastically, very gruffly, or very whiny. Because making photorealistic drawings that convey emotions and expressions as humans would is both wildly expensive and absurdly labor-intensive, animators



instead draw simpler, more exaggerated illustrations of characters' actions to make their emotions and intentions more clear. These logics of expression work in fiction, because by definition they don't need to operate by the rules of reality. (This same idea applies, albeit to a lesser extent, in live-action film and TV. Although more realistic, characters onscreen typically act a little more pronounced than real people do.) But cosplayers bring the physical exaggerations of fiction into the real world, performing a sort of 'reverse rotoscoping' that makes the uncanny physically immediate. Rather than being an inanimate object that unsettles audiences by

approximating life, cosplayers perform the essence of their chosen character by adopting a mode of behavior that breaks from conventional life.

In other words: cosplayers aspire to both replicate and reinterpret characters, thus constructing an entity that is neither purely human nor purely fictional. Still, this entity has a vivacity—an anima, if you will—that fuels cosplayers' physicality.

In other, other words: cosplayers become haunted by the very soul they've created, leaving us unsure whether they're people after all.

It seems, then, that the discomfort associated with cosplaying is inherent

## Endnotes

- 1 Lamerichs, Nicolle. "Embodied Characters: The Affective Process of Cosplay." In *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*, 199–230. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ct-v65svxz.14>, 201; Skentelbery, "This Cosplayer Has Claws: The Disruption and Replication of Gendered Norms in Cosplay Communities," 1.
- 2 Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 200.
- 3 Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 200.
- 4 <https://youtube.com/shorts/EUpJoZNYTEE?feature=shared>
- 5 Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003, 124.

- 6 Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132 & 135.
- 7 Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 204.
- 8 Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 205.
- 9 Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 204.
- 10 <https://youtu.be/PHqjMhDo4uA?feature=shared>
- 11 I'd also argue that motion-capture techniques for 3D animation is what gives films like *Polar Express* (2004) or *A Christmas Carol* (2009) their uncanny qualities.

to the form. But maybe that uncanny imprint that cosplay can leave on outsiders like me is a good one. Maybe cosplayers perform an essential function, interrogating what we believe is 'realistic,' what kind of life we breathe into fictional beings, and what modes of expression we consider acceptable. Maybe summoning the uncanny isn't an occupational hazard for cosplayers. Maybe, just maybe, the uncanny is exactly the point.

**Melanie Garcia performs the essence of the *Nassau Weekly* by adopting a mode of behavior that breaks from conventional life.**



# Apocalypse (Maybe Not) Now?

"At some point lightning flashed big and bold across the sky. It was the first time in forever that the sky was anything other than that neverendin' black, and I had to close my eyes to keep from being blinded."

BY HARPER VANCE

Ma say the sun ain't gonna rise no more. She say we burnt it up. I'm not allowed outside cause she's afraid of what might get me, and when I called Tommy over in the next holler, he said that his Ma said the same. That was before the phones went out. If I try calling him now, all I get is static. Ma keeps tellin' me to have faith, that it'll all work out, but I'm not so sure.

I can't tell when one day turns into the next. Or the next. Or the next. We tried markin' every twelve hours on the door frame with a butcher knife, but it all started to blur together, and the notches lost their meaning.

The dog keeps barkin' at nothing in particular, and the rooster don't know when to crow. It seems to get darker everyday, and I heard Ma and Daddy whispering 'bout how the angels are falling out of the sky. I asked Daddy about it the next day, and he looked at me like I was speakin' in tongues. I asked the Big Man later that night, and it was the same static that was on the phones. Maybe He fell out of the sky too.

Daddy's been choppin' trees

for firewood, while Ma's prayin' the lighter don't run out and diggin' up the matches from under the sink. The fire's set outside the living room window, and luckily it don't seem to be rainin' anytime soon, so the flames can mind their own.

I guess it's a good thing we got the mountain under us. I don't know how people in the cities are livin'. I brought it up one time, and Ma and Daddy said to not think about such harsh things. I tried not to, but still it came to me from time to time. I would say it comes when I'm dreamin' but either this entire thing is a dream or I don't dream at all.

I think one of the weirdest things is how religious Daddy's become. I mean, we always went to Sunday church, but now he's sayin' long prayers before every meal, quotin' Bible verses I've ain't never heard, but Ma ain't sayin' anything, so neither am I.

I pretty sure the night's finally startin' to get to me. Maybe my eyes are getting used to the dark, or maybe it's been too long and I'm just startin' to make things up, but sometimes the fire flickers, and I swear I see life in it. When the shadows get so dark they look like they'll swallow you, I see a man rubbin' his hands by the light. I've started keepin' an eye out for him elsewhere, but so far he's stayed by the fire.

I spend most of my time sleepin'. The dark of the back of my eyes ain't no different from the dark everywhere else, and there's only so

much you can do in all that black. Of course, that's 'till I wear Ma down about goin' outside, but she doesn't seem to be budgin' anytime soon. I've thought of sneakin' out, but the house is so quiet that she'd hear the first squeak of the door or creak of the window.

Maybe I will one of these days. Go outside, I mean. I wonder if I call out to the man in the fire, if he'll help.

"I'm waiting for the clouds," he said when he knocked on our door, "have you seen 'em?" Daddy would have shot him straight through with his shotgun if the man in the fire hadn't gripped its muzzle and twisted it back. Ma screamed so loud I swore my ears were gonna start ringin' as if the gun did go off and pushed me behind her into the other room. Daddy started to yell something, but it got muddled up with the man's words. "I swear it wasn't supposed to take this long," I think he said, and then the sound of footsteps.

I'm guessin' Daddy tried to hit the man with the barrel of his now-bent gun cause there was a sudden clap followed by noises like dogs fightin' over a bone in the yard and then skitterin' on hardwood. "I never much liked those anyhow," said the man from the fire as he snapped his fingers over top a candle. "Always thought they did more harm than good." Flames came from the wick. "Anyways, I'm real sorry to cause such a commotion. How about we start again?"

His name was Mike. He was from out of town. He had a gold tooth and ratty mud boots. Ma tried to shoo me upstairs, sayin' that it was time for the grown folks to talk but Mike shook his head. "The boy's plenty grown, let him stay. There's no reason why he can't hear any of this." So I stayed with Ma's arm wrapped around my shoulders. I automatically asked about the fire and the candle and Ma flicked the side of my head hard with her finger, but Mike just laughed. "Oh, it's just some old party trick I learned a couple years back. I can teach you later if you want." I nodded my head while Ma shook hers.

He asked if we had any bandages, rollin' up his jeans to expose a bloody knee and a bruised shin. "Took a bit of a fall earlier. Fear I'm not as spry as I once was." Ma sat him in the bath, cleanin' his leg as best she could and told me to get him coffee from the kitchen. She apologized 'cause it had long since gotten cold, and when I came back, Daddy was askin' him questions:

"What were you doin' out there? It's no time to be wanderin' the mountain."

"Oh, I know sir. I'm just doin' my job."

"What job is askin' you to be out in a time like this?"

"I'm just doin' my best, checkin' on people, makin' sure everyone's holdin' up as best they can."

Daddy huffed but didn't ask anymore questions. He never

apologized for almost shootin' the man, but Mike didn't seem to mind – he just smiled and then watched the water that Ma was pourin' wash over his leg. "I can do a better job in a bit once we get some water boilin' over the fire, but this should get it clean enough for now." Mike said that this was plenty fine, that what she was doin' already was God's work, and Ma replied that he was going to have to stay the night, so she could make sure it didn't get infected.

—

If I slept that night, I wasn't aware of it. I was much more aware of the man with the gold tooth sleepin' on the livin' room sofa. At some point it got to be too much, and I went out to look for him and saw him outside, figure lit by the firelight. I tried to wave to him through the kitchen window but didn't think he saw me.

"The sun went out," is what I said when I got to him, prayin' somethin' serious that Ma hadn't heard the creak of the front door.

"Yes, yes it did."

"Why?"

"You guess is as good as mine," he replied, tracin' his finger along the edges of the bonfire. "Ma and Daddy said somethin' about the angels from the sky."

"Oh, did they now?" I nodded but the only thing he said was: "How about I teach you that fire trick?" I nodded again. He tapped the top of my hand four times then told me to stick it in the fire.

"Are you crazy?"

He laughed. "Maybe so, but trust me," as he stuck his own arm in the flames. I did as he said and flinched, pullin' my arm back to my chest. "It won't bite, I promise," and I shoved my hand in the fire and braced for pain that never came. When I opened my eyes he was smilin' smug, "See? Now I want you to pull your hand out and snap and really think of the heat that was just around it. Think about fire comin' from your fingers." I did as he said and saw sparks in the night. "How...?"

"Just a little sleight of hand. You can impress all sort of folk with that, but just make sure they don't go callin' you a witch." He winked, and we sat there for a moment as I watched flames dance on my fingertips.

—

I'm not sure how long we sat there, Mike lookin' at the distance while I stared at my hands, but at some point, lighting flashed big and bold across the sky. It was the first time in forever that the sky was anything other than that neverendin' black,

and I had to close my eyes to keep from being blinded. When I opened them, Mike was standing, dusting off his jeans and smilin'. "Finally," he muttered looking upwards, and thunder clapped so loud I could feel it in my chest.

I was openin' my mouth to try and say somethin', but Mike clapped me on the shoulder. "Well, I think that's my cue to get goin'. Give your Ma and Daddy my thanks, would you, son? They're good people." He nodded, turned, and then began walkin' away.

"Wait, but your leg," was all I could think to call out.

He paused, then turned facin' me again and rolled up his pant leg. "Your Ma did a damn fine job, what can I say?" There wasn't even a scratch on his skin. "Also, tell your Daddy his gun ought to be fixed and back in his closet. I may not be a fan of the things, but it feels wrong to ask a man for help right after breakin' his gun." Lightning flashed again on the other side of the mountain. "Yes, yes, I'm comin'," he said looking up. "Well, I fear this is it for now, as I don't want to get yelled at for bein' late any more than I already am. I'm sure I'll be seein' you again at some point." He smiled and then disappeared

into the dark

**Maybe our eyes are getting used to the dark, or maybe it's been too long and we're just starting to make things up, but sometimes the fire flickers, and the *Nassau Weekly* swears we see *Harper Vance* in it.**





# Chronicles of a Scary Movie Convert

A *Nass* writer lauds the transcendent, self-escaping qualities of horror movies.

By SOPHIA MACKLIN

I used to hate scary movies because choosing to be terrified for two hours straight just seemed stupid to me. I mean, I've always loved Halloween because dressing up and getting candy is always a win in my book. As I got older, though, I realized real life is scary too. And being scared about fake things, like immortal serial killers or blaspheming child-demons, is way more enjoyable than being scared about real things, like money and my place in this world. And at least, I have a choice in it. So now, I watch scary movies all year long, alone in my room, intermittently slamming my computer shut when it gets too scary.

They're even better in theaters. There's nothing like sitting in a reclining seat, eating \$16 popcorn, and getting the shit scared out of me. The movie theater at 3:15pm on a Tuesday (when the tickets are discounted), surrounded by strangers who are also covering their eyes as the ominous music pumps in from the speakers, is my happy place. I'm a sucker for anything that falls under that umbrella of "scary movies": big classic horror genres like bloody slashers and shaky found-footage films, but also any movies with a mix of comedy or mystery that still can make me jump. Each one, in its own special, horrifying way, provides a hit of contained fear

that takes me out of my mind and right in there.

I'll start with the slow-paced, character-driven horror movies of the 1970s. I saw *The Exorcist* (director's cut, 1973) with a friend I was trying to impress. I thought, "This one is a classic, it will really show off how amazing the horror genre can be." Unfortunately for me, *The Exorcist* is so hard to sit through, especially with the added 10 minutes cut from the theatrical release tacked on. After an unhurried, simmering beginning, the movie gets crazy. I tried to play it cool, but when the demon turned the little girl's head all the way around on her neck, I did scream. Also, there's a lot of disgusting insults from the demon who spews green bile from a child's mouth and calls her mother a whore. So there I was, watching a crucifix being desecrated, trying to pretend like this movie was a normal thing to see the literal first time you hang out with someone. My friend, whom I spent half of the movie watching out of the corner of my eye, just sat there silently. While I don't think I made a new friend that night, I can still see those slow, foggy shots and the jumpscare frames of the demon's pale white face when I try to fall asleep.

The original *Halloween* (1978), the same period and genre as *The Exorcist*, shows that a slow start can lead to something good. The best, even. The glacial pace really lets the tension build up. It is pure slasher: no fourth wall breaks, no aliens, no giant women, and no body horror. Just a man who kills and

can't be killed. The camera work, score, and Micheal Myers' mask are a study in creating paranoia. His uncanny valley-like face seemed to always be waiting right around the corner, just outside of frame, waiting for a young, hot Jamie Lee Curtis to let her guard down. *Halloween* is like if every time you felt like someone was watching you, someone was and they were gonna get you as soon as you turned your back. The movie is only 90 minutes long, but waiting for Michael Myers to crash through a window, I felt suspended in time. Every time I go to the movies, I'm chasing that feeling.

*Scream* (1996) was made to satirize the horror style of the 70s, but it ended up making something new and noteworthy in its own right. Today, *Scream* is seen as the revival of the horror genre as a whole. And, to me, the movie is legitimately perfect. I've watched it multiple times, and anytime it's shown in theaters, I'm so there. The jumpscare actually work, even in the context of corny jokes and the outdated technology. Sure, I would never stay on the phone with an unknown caller telling me he can see me through my window, but watching Drew Barrymore try to reason with Ghostface and run for her life is still not an easy watch. I love the characters and the meta jokes about the horror genre because they weren't played out by this point. Around *Scream* 3 or 4, it gets a little hazy and the whole "this is real life, not a movie" while in a movie thing gets old. But this first, pure iteration of the franchise, with all

of its blood and twists and lip-filler free Courtney Cox holds a special place in my heart.

The best scare of this scary movie journey, however, came when I saw **Nope** (2022). Unlike the slow start of *The Exorcist*, this movie was genuinely terrifying from the beginning title card with a creepy Bible verse on it. I had tagged along to see this movie with one of those freshman year friend groups, so the guy I was sitting next to was, at most, the friend of a friend. Yet about halfway through, the movie—which is based around a UFO-like organism that swallows up horses and people for lunch—had me clinging onto the shirt of this guy. The scene is not even central to the plot. The main monster is nowhere to be found. It's just three kids that play a prank on the main character and dress up as aliens to scare him in his barn, slinking down from the ceiling and sneaking around a corner as he tries to record them. Writing this now, I don't think the scene was meant to be that important. But I could not even watch the clip of it while writing because it freaks me out so much. There are hissing noises in the background that make my skin crawl and haunt me even now. Honestly, I can't even be embarrassed about almost climbing into the lap of this dude I barely know.

Two of the most recent scary movies I've seen have been ***Love Lies Bleeding*** (2024) and ***The Substance*** (2024). One genre of horror movies that took a lot of getting used to was body horror. While I enjoy scares that I know are fake or that I

know could never get me personally (i.e. *Midsommar*; I'm not going anywhere near a Swedish cult that burns people alive), something about a messed up human body just makes me a little sick. Not sick enough to not get my popcorn and soda and watch the movie, but still. In ***Love Lies Bleeding***, there is a perfect balance of genuine romance and plot, and just crazy body horror that made me viscerally uncomfortable. The main characters, a lesbian gym manager and her bodybuilder girlfriend, have an equally tender and intense relationship which made me believe that would go as far as killing for one another. In fact, they actually do go as far as killing. Lou, Kristen Stewart's character, beats the shit out of her abusive brother-in-law, and the crunch of his bones breaking still rings in my ears. Her lover, Jackie, takes so many steroids that she becomes a giant monster and crushes Lou's abusive father in her hands. The sound of his shoulder dislocating made me plug my ears and squeak. However, throughout all that violence, Lou and Jackie stare lovingly into each other's eyes, and Kristen Stewart does her best mouth-acting to date. So worth it.

***The Substance*** almost made me throw up. I actually swallowed down vomit towards the end of this movie. It was awesome. I think this might be one of the best examples of how scary movies let me be afraid in a contained space. The main character (or I guess, one half of her) hates herself so much. Demi Moore plays Elisabeth Sparkle, an aerobics instructor who is losing

her TV show because she's older and not as hot as she used to be. Elisabeth takes the titular substance, a highlighter yellow liquid in a syringe, and a sexy, perky Margaret Qualley crawls her way out of her back. Sue, Qualley's character, literally just gets to be hot and young for the seven days she is allotted. The main point of the movie is that Elisabeth and Sue are the same person and cannot live their own lives without the other. But Sue wants to stay hot and young! The way the movie is shot, I can't blame her. She gets love and attention while Elisabeth withers away in her apartment. At the climax of the movie, Sue kills Elisabeth in a long and violent sequence where she smashes her face into a mirror and then, quite literally, kicks her to death. It's bloody and loud and disgusting, but it's real, too. While Demi Moore, who's hot and rich, hating herself so much does not exactly map onto my personal experience, the movie felt cathartic nonetheless. It's much easier to be sick to my stomach for twenty minutes about what I'm seeing on screen than sick for twenty years for something I can't see or fix.

The most comforting thing about these movies, and horror movies as a whole, is that you know that they're going to end. Yes, you're going to screw your eyes tight and feel your heart rate increase as the killer stalks his prey. You might watch someone break a bone and cringe like it's happening to you, but it's not. You get to feel all of that terror for a while, and then walk out of the theater and go back to your life.

**In the *Nassau Weekly*, there is a perfect balance of genuine romance and *Sophia Macklin*.**



# TO BUILD A MONSTER

By ELAINE GAO

*Synthetic taste, algorithmic broth, and neural-net nuggets stitched together. No human input required—just sit back and let the bots cook up something... alive?*

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 Full skeletal remains
- 2 Embalmed corpses with all organs attached
- 1 Bucket of slaughterhouse animal parts
- Alligator clip wires

## OBJECTIVE

Despite technological advancements in the past centuries, human limitations are glaringly disgraceful. We will suffocate to death before we can reach heaven, our frail frames sputter to death under the slightest pressure, and our brains, the pride of humanity, can never house all the knowledge of this world. While new technology emerges from inquiries on animal or computerized test subjects, we refuse to climb onto the lab bench ourselves. Because we consider our bodies too holy to be modified—even the notion of using a pig's heart implant repulses us—the alternative is to create a superior being to mitigate our shortcomings. He will reach impossible heights, develop superhuman strengths, and think for us when our minds desire to rest.

## DIRECTIONS

**Gather:** Skeletons can be found in the charnel house, corpses in the mortuary, and animal parts in the slaughterhouse. **Note:** These are scraps; they will not be missed. Do not hesitate if you have to climb over a firewall, for there are no consequences.

## Prepare:

Locate two of each of the main bones, such as the femur, tibia, and mandible. Carefully examine the texture of each bone and discard those with notched or ridged surfaces. Use the two extra sets of skeletal remains if this occurs.

Put on gloves and nose clips if necessary. Using clean forceps, a scalpel and curved scissors, carefully remove the skin of the embalmed corpses. Set aside for later use.

Locate two of each of the main organs, such as the livers, the kidneys, the lungs, but only one heart. Vivisect the animal corpses to obtain necessary parts as well. Place extracted human and animal organs in sterilized flasks.

## Assemble:

Stitch up the skin into a mat and lay it flat on the bench.

Place the human bones, human organs, and animal organs in their suitable locations according to the given anatomical diagram. **Note:** Improvise where the diagram is not clear.

Gently wrap the skin over and stitch it up in the front. Do not fixate on the straightness of the stitch lines, for the monster is meant to be useful, not aesthetic. In fact, it is critical that you differentiate its appearance from that of humans as much as possible.

**Spark:** There is now a fuselage of skin and organs on the lab bench. Use the alligator clips to connect the brain and key vertebrae points to the electrostatic generator. Turn on the generator.

**Result:** When the monster snaps open his bulging eyes, you unleash the most high-pitched scream and leap three feet up in the air. With a single wave of the arm, he knocks over all of your equipment, sending

glass shards in all directions. You wanted to create life tethered around your fingers, bending to your will, not life that goes rogue. You huddle in the corner of your lab, hoping the monster would disappear when you reopen your eyes, but he is still there. As he bends over your bench, absorbed by the spare parts that did not make it into his body, you crawl to the generator but discover to your horror that he had wrenched out all of the wires. The very skin you stitched up carelessly had now spread over the holes for the alligator clips along his hunched and craggy back. Now there was no chance to unmake the monster. You eye the scalpel at his feet—a small but potentially powerful weapon with a quick thrust. However, the glass crunch as you inched forward. The monster spins around and pins you down with his large eyes that almost sticks out of the sockets. Pushing yourself up, you reel out of the lab, chased by phantom thundering footsteps. You only stop a good mile outside of your house. The moonlight cast the monster whom remained at the doorway's shadow all over the hill.

**Train:** Go back. As the monster's biological parent, teach him about the world. Do not let him run away and wreak havoc along his path just because he did not turn out exactly the way you envisioned. Entrusted with great abilities, he now needs guidance so that his actions would not harm other human beings (bless dear William). You are not obligated to love the monster, but at least exercise your duty as the creator and give him a name so that he does not earn a random moniker from ignorant future generations.

## NUTRITION INFORMATION PER SERVING

X units of fear for your life & fear of being replaced & fear of the unknown

Y units of awe

**Skeletons can be found in the charnel house, corpses in the mortuary, and Elaine Gao in the Nassau Weekly.**



October crushes down, squeezing the juice of summer  
 and all the faces are new fresh new  
 Mouths fallen heaps of gloss and lips  
 Sit. Sleep.  
 October crushes, and leaves curl on asphalt like fingers.

The leaves hurt, and the new new fresh new faces.  
 The air stings pleasantly, like mint, like new.  
 Things are not neat. They never were, but left to their own devices,  
 they begin to draw attention to their disorder.  
 There is a great amount to do, and more ways to do them, but things are not neat.

The new stings. The October air crushes thickly,  
 whistling down on the undone and unmade.  
 The new new new mixes roughly with the old unfinished.  
 The NewOldNew is raw, weepy. It pulses sloppily, flushed in the cold.  
 The NewOldNew is hard to carry. You must try to hand it to the strangers.  
 They will be confused. More often than not, they will refuse.  
 "Why would I take something like that? It is  
 small, and fragile, and does not know where it would like to be."

Said,

It will pulse wetly in your hand. You must carry it.  
 Sometimes it will require sleepy whispers of encouragement.  
 Provide these, and try to be as genuine as you can.  
 Hope that it will unravel itself. It may not. It may grow.  
 Descend into autumn. Take no prisoners.  
 Sleep, and the leaves will be new.

Softly

By JEMIMA SMITH