

October 23, 2021

News Section

Drafting the Baseline: Zupan

On September 30th 2021, I was able to interview President Mark Zupan about my previous article. Below is a summary of what we discussed for that half-hour.

It began simply, with Zupan telling me about how he had done a pizza dinner at the Link on Tuesday night.



“I got to hear from the students some of their challenges,” he said.

To him, this visit was instrumental in possibly getting included into the conversation that many of the students have been having without him.

In previous correspondence, Zupan had mentioned how he felt bad that the Link is without an elevator. With the promise of new donations and funding, however, he’s expressed

interest in implementing an elevator in either Moskowitz or Tefft.

It would have to be one or the other, as both are similar in expense, according to him. His plan is to consult RAs and RDs, along with other members of the student body, to find which building would have a maximized impact for disabled students.

Zupan has been aware of the challenges that disabled individuals face while on or around campus, citing a time where he had to improvise a ramp to allow for a wheelchair to enter his home. He expressed dismay that such improvisation is necessary, as it shouldn’t have to be.

A situation that has made the rounds is that of able-bodied drivers parking in handicap spots. Kristin Beck, a disability advocate on campus, had done her own research on the phenomena, and Zupan shared possible reasons and solutions surrounding it. He confessed that the fines are

low, and that Alfred doesn't enforce that law as much as it ought to, saying that there are plans to either increase the fines or to tow the cars, completely.

On Kristin Beck, Zupan expressed admiration for her saying, "She has been so immensely helpful."

He also understood that the handicap spots are quite slim, posing a problem for those in wheelchairs. There are floating plans to possibly repaint the lines. Another idea Zupan had was to maybe allow for shuttling near Alumni Hall, or to implement student-volunteer Ubers, so that disabled students have ease of transportation. The plans are, for all intents and purposes, still in infancy. There is significant work needed to be done to iron out all the details. However, the question remains how the timing would work, and how said students would be able to reach upper-floor classes.

Following an email he had sent Wednesday night about the Heritage Circle funding, I asked what Zupan would wish to use the funding for. He initially said that it was too early in the overall process to pinpoint precisely where he would put the money. However, after a few minutes, he went back to his previous idea of prioritizing mobility and handicap spaces for disabled students.

Zupan stated that, due to the university relying heavily on philanthropic support, renovations will not happen as quickly as people would like them to. He recalled when they were first doing renovations on Openhym, and the creation of the Link, and how he felt about the budget being overrun. To him, it didn't seem like a good time to ask for more funding to put in an elevator to the Link, but said, "We're going to start being more aggressive with donors."

The downfall, to him, was that they had failed to look at the campus when planning renovations. They didn't take into consideration the big picture, as it were. Some oversights that were caused by this are the walkways at Powell. Meant to be wheel-chair accessible, many of them had a lip that ruined the purpose. Fixing them was important, but it was a problem that they hadn't foreseen.

In the middle of the interview, Zupan posited a question to everyone, asking, "If someone were to give us \$100,000, what would be the best use for it?"

While responses to that question are more than welcome, there will most likely be a survey created and conducted in the near future to give him the answers he is looking for.

When asking about how many elevators require special access (such as keys), an answer wasn't adequately given. However, Dr. Tamara Kennedy, Dean of Student Wellbeing, alongside Liz Shea, Director of the Center for Academic Success, are reportedly working on creating a brochure (or something of a similar model) to show accessible spaces around campus.

Overall, these rough drafts of plans are merely that: rough drafts. It's heavily encouraged to have students and faculty make their voices and opinions heard, so that some change can take place. While there are disability advocates on campus that have already said these things that I'm now repeating within these past articles (and future ones), change is slow. We owe it to them to actually implement these plans and see how far they go—and take them even further.

By Sam Sage

Are You Alone in Your Room?

Last spring semester, the Honors seminar *A Dark and Stormy Night* created a short story anthology that strikes a little too close to home.

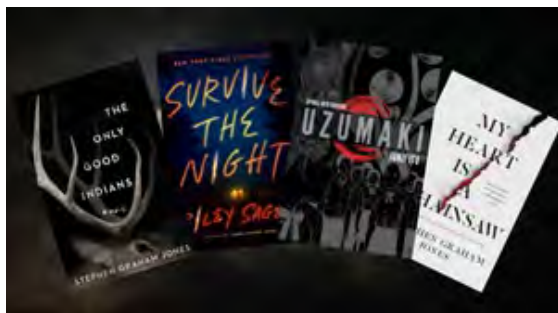
The anthology is called “The Alfred Book of Ghastly Tales: Volume Two”, edited by sophomore Monica Nowik, and published by Dr. Allen Grove. The book is a sequel for all intents and purposes but is a satisfying solitary read for anyone interested. Written by professors and students, the stories range from science projects to heartbreaking realizations—all the while shadowed by the looming presence of the ghosts of Alfred.

“My hope is that ‘The Alfred Book of Ghastly Tales: Volume Two’ will not only inspire fear within the reader but that it will forge a more secure connection between the individual and the Alfred community,” says Nowik, “We have been telling stories around the fire for generations; we shy away from the shadows to draw closer to that communal flame.”

At 206 pages, there's something for everyone. Featuring photographs taken around the village, and campus, it's hard not to feel a little unnerved that some of these stories are based on Alfred's strange (yet true) history.

By: Sam Sage

4 Horror Books for Those Strange, Late Nights



“The Only Good Indians” by Stephen Graham Jones

Summary:

Four American Indian men, and their families, are haunted by a disturbing, deadly event that took place in the men's youth. Several years later, they find themselves tracked by an entity bent on revenge, totally helpless as the culture and

traditions they left behind catch up to them in a violent, vengeful way.

[Page Count: 310; Release Date: July 14, 2020]

Review:

“The Only Good Indians” combines Blackfeet folklore and modern life to create a horrifying story of guilt, grief, and revenge. With a mythological and sympathetic antagonist, it’s impossible to put the book down. While it is a bit of a slow burn, compared to other modern horror, this is a story worth every minute. Multiple points of view help build out the characters and plot, and keep you engaged with each turn of the page.

“Survive the Night” by Riley Sager

Summary:

Charlie Jordan wants to leave her college life behind following the shocking murder of her best friend, the third victim of the man known as the Campus Killer. Josh Baxter is the stranger with whom she’ll be sharing the long drive home to Ohio with. The longer Charlie sits in the passenger seat, the more she grows suspicious of Josh. Could she be sharing a car with the Campus Killer? Or is this paranoia the result of her movie-fueled imagination?

[Page Count: 322; Release Date: June 29, 2021]

Review:

In “Survive the Night”, we follow a severely unreliable protagonist as we ride along with both Charlie and Josh. While the perspective switches with the occasional chapter, we’re always in Charlie’s head. With her “movie-fueled imagination,” it’s easy to get absorbed into her world and not as easy to escape it. Although the main conflict of the story surrounds a serial killer, many of the smaller problems can be relatable to the average college student. For anyone looking to read a movie, this is your book.

Uzumaki by Junji Ito

Summary:

Kurouzu-cho, a small fogbound town on the coast of Japan, is cursed. According to Shuichi Saito, the withdrawn boyfriend of teenager Kirie Goshima, their town is haunted not by a person or being but a pattern: UZUMAKI, the spiral—the hypnotic secret shape of the world.

[Page Count: 656; Release Date: January 12, 1998/October 16, 2018]

Review:

Usually referred to as a master of horror manga, Junji Ito’s “Uzumaki” is a wonderfully twisted introduction to his work. The 656-page count may seem daunting, but the pages turn quickly as the disturbing illustrations force you to confront the characters’ (and your) worst fears. The art-style and dialogue are engaging for even the most hesitant or disinterested of readers. A fast read for anyone looking to get a modern-classic in before Halloween, *Uzumaki* is worth the attention.

My Heart is a Chainsaw by Stephen Graham Jones

Summary:

Jade Daniels is an angry, half-Indian outcast with an abusive father, an absent mother, and an entire town that wants nothing to do with her. She lives in her own world, a world in which protection comes from an unusual source: horror movies...*especially* the ones where a masked killer seeks revenge on a world that wronged them. Narrating the quirky history of Proofrock as if it is one of those movies, we're pulled into Jade's encyclopedic mind. But when blood *actually* starts to spill into the waters of Indian Lake, she pulls us in and predicts exactly how the plot will unfold.

[Page Count: 398; Release Date: August 31, 2021]

Review:

Combining horror and humor, “My Heart is a Chainsaw” is a relatable story for anyone who’s been bored of their small-town life. Jade’s obsession with horror movies carries the plot and refuses to let go, even when you feel your personal ideas melding into hers. Gentrification and wishful thinking go hand-in-hand as we follow Jade through Proofrock and wonder whether all these signs are mere coincidence—or if there really is a slasher loose in the streets. Jade’s narration and the oddity of the town is perfect for anyone looking for a quirky—and less horrifying—read for this spooky season.

By Sam Sage

Art Section

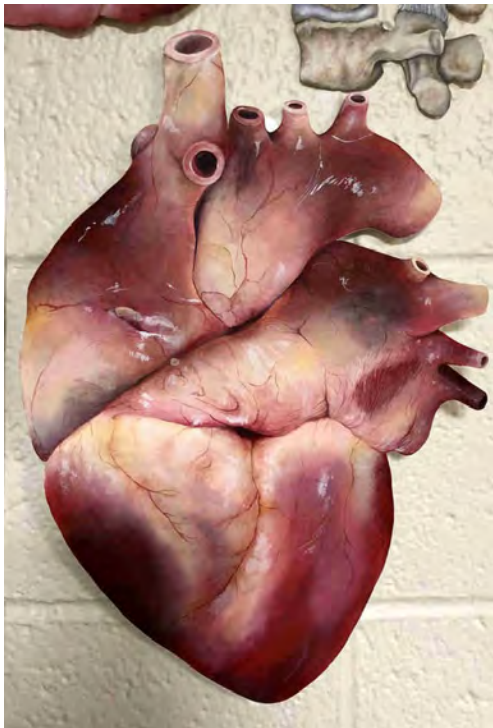
Echo Chapman



Skull



Albanism



Heart

Literature Section

The Ties That Bind Us



The moon is rising steadily in a star-dusted sky when Leona's fingers start to turn numb. The air is bitter cold despite her thick layers of wool, every breath emerging in a puff of vapor which temporarily obscures her vision. The wind screams like it wants to tear Leona from her perch, send her plummeting down to the forest floor below, and the icy branch refuses to grant her any semblance of a footing. Her pack is probably exacerbating the problem, but Leona would rather fall herself than relinquish it. She clings to the tree like it's a lifeline, her body pressed flat against the trunk and both arms wound tightly around its reassuringly solid weight. She's squeezing her staff tight enough to hurt—as if *that* could possibly keep her panic at bay. The rough bark scratches her cheek with every rise and fall of her chest, but that small discomfort is worth it for the way her heart skips a beat whenever her foot starts to slide.

She refuses to look down. It's a dizzying drop down to the ground, and Leona is beginning to think that perhaps she shouldn't have chosen the tallest, sturdiest tree she could find—no matter how necessary she knows it was.

It isn't all bad at least. From here, she can see the lights scouring the forest for her, weaving in and out of sight between the densely woven branches. They're not moving in a uniform scouting pattern, but the unpredictability just makes them far more dangerous. Back and forth, turning randomly and doubling back on their trail, she knows they are weaving a web to ensnare her.

Leona needs to wait until they're past her fully, until there's only an miniscule chance of discovery, but she'll freeze if she stays here any longer.

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. The wind is still screaming around her, a thousand discordant voices howling in unison as it tears viciously at her clothes. She reaches for it in her mind's eye, a succulent treat in one hand with a bridle hidden behind her back. It snatches at the offering immediately—and Leona *pulls*.

And the wind is bound.

She opens her eyes. The wind has faded away into a gentle murmur, but Leona can still feel it fighting against her, clawing and tearing away at the bond connecting them. It takes all she has to keep it from struggling free.

She'll have to do this quickly. Leona carefully disentangles herself from the tree, clutching her staff tightly to her chest. It's just her balancing on the branch now. No more handholds, no illusion of safety.

Don't look down.

In her mind's eye, Leona is a vortex—pulling everything inward, sucking the wind into her body. And ever so slowly, a sense of weightlessness overcomes her. Leona can feel herself rising into the air, her boots just barely brushing the branch. Her hands clench her staff, knuckles turning bone-white, and her heart lodges in her throat. Then she drops like a stone.

The wind whirls around her on the way down, forcing the branches to part before her. Her eyes sting with the force of it and it's all she can do to keep her eyes open, rapidly

blinking away the reflexive tears. The ground is rushing up towards her and if she misses the right moment she'll be dead.

Then she *pulls*—the wind straining under her hand, screaming furiously—and for a brief second of calm, she is suspended in the air, illuminated under the pale light of the moon.

And then everything goes wrong.

The wind breaks free, their thin bond shattering, and for a moment Leona's terror is real as she falls with nothing to catch her. The ground rushes up to devour her whole and Leona squeezes her eyes shut.

The impact knocks her breath from her body.

Her head hurts.

But the fall wasn't high enough to kill her.

Slowly, Leona stirs on the ground, fingers digging into the earth, into the rotten leaves. Her vision is swimming. She can see her staff lying in front of her, but she can barely muster the strength to raise her arm.

There's a shout in the distance.

Leona's eyes fly wide. She forces her body to cooperate, clambering to her feet as her breath comes in short, ragged gasps. Every part of her aches, but she has to keep moving. She can't let them catch up to her.

Not until she's reached the river.

Interested in seeing more of this story? Then stay tuned...

By: Samantha Batt

Walden Farm's Pumpkin King

A banner, posted on the wooden archway gate, hung in faded glory over an abandoned farm.

"Walden Farm Pumpkin Patch: Mazes, Hayrides, and the Pumpkin King," it read. The font a faded orange upon a time-stained white background.

The Walden Patch was a county-wide event, and often lasted for several days. The pumpkin patches on the property were expansive, so as to always have at least one pumpkin for everyone that came.

But that was years ago, now. The Walden's vanished from the area, reportedly selling the property to a new owner and leaving everything to them. No one knows who owns it now.

The farm has begun to rot from pests and pestilence, reeking of the glory days and carries with it a dismal atmosphere. Becoming a spot for teenagers, with many coming to drink in secret or daring each other to walk through the corn fields at night, an obsession has spread throughout the county about a local item.

Near the corn field is the Pumpkin King Scarecrow. It is just as aged and eroded as the property, now standing there since the very first Patch. The Pumpkin King was almost a funny kind of honor. A child would be picked from a raffle to be crowned, and the Scarecrow would be created to resemble the child. A photograph and name of the child would be put in the Patchbook, which would be on display for all to look at during the Event. That book has long been misplaced, likely taken by the Waldens.

The head of the Scarecrow was always the largest pumpkin from the patch, hollowed out to be a sort of helmet over the hay that was stuffed inside to fill up the space. This was what, the Waldens would always joke, made the Scarecrow heavier than usual—often as they struggled to tie it to the post.

The King Scarecrow, named Joseph after the child who had been the last Pumpkin King, reaches its arms out as a welcome—or a warning. The hay that fills it, reeking of water rot and spoiled pumpkin, has now been dyed brown from the years.

I remember being a child and, with my brother, coming to the Patch. It was always fun, never boring. You get so turned around with the autumnal colors and the sweet cider, you lose track of time. Never did I realize this more than when--after my brother had been announced as the King--I went home without him.

When the police were called to the farm, the Waldens swore that they had seen Joseph leave. A week and a warrant later, an acrid smell brought us to find Joseph tied to the post near the corn field.

His body is buried, and yet...

There is still a Pumpkin King on the post.

By: Sam Sage

South Hall

“Raymond, I would like you to walk me through exactly what happened the night of November 6th.”

“I already filed the paperwork.”

“We’d like it on the record.”

“Meaning you think I’m crazy.”

The suit across from me shrugged, and I knew what that meant. Here in Alfred, craziness was a given. There was a sea of stories out here, and not one of them saner than the other. It wasn’t unusual, but as an officer, they had to make sure something hadn’t snapped.

“Alright,” I said.

Near the Wellness Center stood the condemned South Hall. Boarded up, covered in moss and ivy, it became a rite of passage for students to break in.

The break-ins happened nearly every fall semester; it was such a common occurrence that everyone down at the station thought it was strange that Public Safety shouldered the responsibility onto us that night. We never got involved with it before.

The caller didn’t tell us why they wanted us, either. That should’ve been my first clue that something wasn’t quite right.

I had been one of the few officers left tying up loose-end paperwork that night, and I ended up pulling the short straw. Nobody else wanted to deal with drunk college kids, despite the crippling boredom we all felt in the department.

Taking over the call with Public Safety, I told them I'd investigate and escort the students out. Relations between us and them were usually met with the Alfred brand of hospitality, but this caller's responses were clipped. Single word responses, grunts, hums. Uncharacteristic, even on a Saturday night.

"When you arrived, did you carry weapons on your person?"

"I had my baton and taser. I left my holster in the station."

"That's not protocol."

"I didn't think it was necessary for a B&E."

With a grimace creasing his face, the suit motioned for me to continue.

Reaching South Hall, I didn't see any immediate evidence of a break-in. Besides my own, there were no flashlights. Moving closer to the side entrance—the one nearest to the Saxon Inn—I could see that someone had managed to jimmy open the boarded door. It was one of the easier ways to get in. All you would have needed is a screwdriver and hammer, if you didn't have a crowbar.

I entered South Hall and called out, "This is Alfred Police. If you're still here, come down to the first floor."

As I suspected, no one took the invitation and, after hearing nothing in the way of voices or movement, I decided to walk further into the building.

The interior of South Hall was graffitied to hell and back, with collapsing walls and stairways—all hiding asbestos, which completed the image of a dangerously popular locale. Due to the pandemic, we were already wearing masks, but I didn't want to stay here longer than necessary.

I was overly cautious in walking around, as even the first floor resembled a sinkhole, sporadically shouting, "My name is Officer Raymond, I'm with the Alfred Police. Public Safety called us to escort y'all out of here. You're not in any trouble."

For a time, all I heard was my own muffled voice echoing back at me, until I heard what sounded like a crash a few feet ahead of me. Shining my flashlight towards the sound, I was disturbed to find that the light barely peeked through the dark.

"Anyone in here, please carefully make your way towards me," I said.

And that was when I got an answer.

"Help me."

I brought my light down toward the sound of the voice. It shone on someone hunkered down in a corner, their back to me. As my light hit them, their head turned to face me. Their eyes were so wide, it almost seemed like they shouldn't have fit their face. Those eyes were full of something, and I thought it was fear.

“What happened?”

They didn't blink. “Please help me, I fell.”

The sound I heard suddenly made sense, and I moved toward them.

“Are you bleeding? Where does it hurt?” I aimed my light toward their legs, as I asked.

When they didn't answer, I flicked my light back to their face.

What it showed, it wasn't human. The face, all sinewy and white, lacked any skin or defining feature. Their eyes are what I can't get out of my head. They had seemed normal but now? Now they reflected the light like an animal, just orbs in their head.

I never jumped away from something so fast.

When I could breathe without hearing my lungs creak, I pointed my light back to the corner. They were gone. In my panic, I hadn't heard them move.

Though I sat alone on that broken floor, I still felt watched.

“Raymond, do you need to take a break?”

The suit's hand hovered over the recorder, itchy trigger finger over the pause button.

“What?”

“You're shaking.”

I pulled at the sleeves of my shirt. “It's the temperature. Cold.”

I didn't know what I thought I saw, but I still had evidence that someone broke in. At that point, for better or worse, I chalked the altercation up to a prank. With the kids still in the building, I decided to continue up to the second floor.

As I went up the stairs, I was aware that my hand took to hovering over my baton.

That feeling of being watched got a lot stronger when I reached the second floor, and the hand that held my flashlight was starting to cramp from holding it so tightly.

“Funny prank, guys. But seriously, I need y’all to clear outta here. One thing to do this in the morning, but at night? Don’t think you’ll get a tuition settlement if y’all hurt yourselves here.” I tried to let the comment come across friendly, but there was a tar in my voice that made it mean.

Vaguely, I could hear walking nearby. Like any kid, they were likely hiding in odd corners, afraid of getting into too much trouble—or enjoying the situation more because of it. I’ll be honest, I don’t know why I did it, but I strobed my flashlight to order a response. “Stop.” The same voice from downstairs.

I obeyed. “It’s gonna be a long night if we keep this up. Let me escort you outta here.”

“No.”

Moving my flashlight around from where I stood, I couldn’t find any sign of them.

“Listen, it’s...what? Midnight? You could get hurt. You need to leave.”

Their voice echoed out of the dark, “Officer Raymond?”

“What?”

“I can’t leave.”

“You can. You got up here somehow.”

“I’m trapped.”

I squinted into the dark, wondering if the shapes I saw were real or fake. “I can lead you out. We’re not lost or trapped.”

“I can’t.”

“You can.” I moved from where I stood, illuminating blind spots and still finding no one.

“I’m scared.”

It was like they sat on my shoulder and whispered it, and I turned around at the sound. My light landed on the kid, with their too-big eyes, their pupils barely visible from constriction. They stood with their back to a large, boarded window, one of the flimsy plyboards that were always fraying in the storms.

I gestured for them to move away, to come toward me.

They didn’t.

I lowered my flashlight in frustration, and when I took a breath and brought it up again, they were gone. No sound of their shoes, or soles, across the concrete.

“Just come with me.” I stepped toward the window, shining the light on the graffitied board in vain.

Their voice again. “You can’t help me, can you?”

And I turned around to find their arms reaching for my chest.

“The last thing I saw was that sinewy, uncanny face—their animal eyes, like cataracts staring through me—before I woke up here at Jones, with a leg splint and a doctor telling me it was a miracle I’m still alive and I’ll make a full recovery.”

“Raymond, you wrote...” The suit studied my report like it was a counterfeit bill. “Well, that you believe you were accosted by a ghost.”

The memory of writing those words made me wince, something I knew I’d never live down back at the station. “Do you have a logical explanation for my account, sir?”

“It’s generally accepted that your ghost,” his eyebrows curled up at the word, “was nothing more than a student having a mental health crisis. They were going to either hurt themselves, or you, and impersonated a Public Safety officer as a way to get police help.”

“You can’t explain everything away with that.”

He ignored my comment, continuing, “There’s been no report on the kid, which would mean they’re fine, and you were the lucky pick. No one’s come forward about it, though. We’ve only got your version of the story.”

“Wasn’t there a follow-up investigation at South Hall?”

The suit looked at me like I was a child. “We’ve got a scene report, and your doctor’s notes. It really is a miracle you’re alive. Your head was an inch away from exposed brick.”

“One question, sir.”

He turned off the tape recorder.

“Did anything say how I managed to break through that boarded window?”

The suit’s shoulders tensed for the first time, new creases forming that I don’t think you could ever iron out. In the dead quiet room, I could hear the vague clicking of his tongue as he got ready to answer.

“That’s the one thing we don’t understand.”

By Sam Sage

The Dullahan

Don't go into the woods tonight, don't travel along the roads. The night is dark and black and cold; rain is drowning the moors.

Stay by the fire tonight, stay where there's joy and laughter. For a monster rides on the roads tonight and he'll steal you from the hereafter.

The deathless one, he rides without cease. A cursed soul forced to roam. The Dullahan, your end to meet on some cold dark lonely road.

When he calls your name, head clasped in his hands, your mortal soul this shell shall flee.

There is a howling on the moors tonight, stay safe at home with me.

Still you insist on leaving, still you say you must go. Then heed my warning, listen to my words one last time before you go.

Shining gold is his only aversion, it burns his skin like acid. Don't leave without your necklace tonight. Stay safe, come home to me.

By: Laura Johnson

Entertainment Section

The Sci-Fi and Fantasy Arms Race

Ever since the enormous success of *Game of Thrones*, everyone's been trying to find the next big fantasy TV series. It's constant and kinda annoying, but here we are. However, I think we've been drawing the wrong conclusion. It's very unlikely that any show will reach the heights of *Game of Thrones*, even with the catastrophic last season. What *Game of Thrones* proved is that there is a large demand for sci-fi and fantasy entertainment. Don't believe me? Well, *The Witcher* season 1 is number 3 on Netflix's "Most Viewed Series" in the first 28 days.

This is just a list of upcoming shows, some have already come out while the rest will come out by the end of 2021.

Star Wars Visions: This is an animated anthology series set in the *Star Wars* universe, created by several anime studios. Since its release on September 22nd, it has created a lot of buzz for a good reason. The animation is fantastic and unique in a lot of ways. While I think the storytelling is somewhat lacking in some episodes, I think the attempt to tell stories with a smaller scope is a promising new direction for the franchise. There is something just right about anime and *Star Wars* finally coming together. There are so many elements of Japanese culture that influenced George Lucas' original vision for the *Star Wars* universe. Chief amongst them was renowned Japanese filmmaker, Akira Kurosawa.

Foundation: Based on the renowned Isaac Asimov series, *Foundation* chronicles the fall of a galactic empire and a group of exiles doing everything they can to save humanity. This is basically the space opera that defined all the others and it has finally been adapted. Visually, the first two episodes showcase how ambitious the producers are. It's gorgeous. I just wish the writing was just as compelling. It has enormous potential but it's hard to connect with any of the characters. Maybe that will get better with more episodes.

Dune: *Dune* is the story of Paul Atreides and his journey to fulfill his destiny. When his family is forced to take up the stewardship of a planet called Arrakis, they are put in mortal peril over a substance native to the planet called *mélange*. If early reviews are anything to go by, this might be one of the best sci-fi films to come out in quite some time. The first part of the film is set to release on October 22th, and I can't lie, I'm excited. If director Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* is anything to go by then, *Dune* will be just as mind-blowing.



Wheel of Time: One of the pillars of epic fantasy, this series by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson, spanning 14 volumes, premieres on November 19th. Moraine arrives at a village and leaves with five young people on an adventure. She believes one of them is the chosen one, “the Dragon Reborn.” This world is even bigger than *Game of Thrones* with loads more characters so the writing will make or break this show.

Cowboy Bebop: We all know the history of live-action anime adaptations. Spoiler, it's not great. Nevertheless, Netflix will attempt to succeed where countless others have failed. I will say, the actual anime is not as difficult to bring to live-action like *Dragon Ball Z*. *Cowboy Bebop* is a classic anime and beloved so at least if this new show doesn't work out fans have that to fall back on. It premieres on November 19th.

The Witcher Season 2: After the enormous success of the first season, *The Witcher* is back on December 17th. There was a lot to like about the first season: the characters, the worldbuilding, and the non-linear storytelling, but it wasn't perfect. It felt very rushed at times, with noticeably bad CGI in some episodes. While I enjoyed the non-linear storylines, it was very confusing for

many viewers unfamiliar with the source material by Andrzej Sapkowski. Season two continues the saga of Geralt and Ciri, with some new characters, monsters, and locations.

By Alpha Bah

Horror Films for Non-Horror Fans

It's spooky season and that means horror films. The only problem is that some of us don't enjoy horror for numerous reasons. However, the genre is very broad and has a lot to offer.

Trick R' Treat:



Get into the spirit of Halloween with *Trick R' Treat*. This film is a series of interwoven stories that occur in the fictional town of Warren Valley, Ohio. It's funny, thrilling, and somewhat scary. However, it's harmless fun that pays homage to the horror genre and the Halloween tradition of trick or treating.

Midsommar:



Midsommar is a 2019 folk horror film by director Ari Aster and it's not that scary. There are some unsettling scenes but for the most part, it's pretty much a drama. The main character struggles with grief while on a trip with her friends to an idyllic Swedish commune. Crazy things ensue.

Alternate pick: **The Lighthouse**

Get Out:



Maybe you're in the mood for something with a message. *Get Out* explores the black experience and the constant anxiety that comes with it. The gradual tensions that build to a very unsettling revelation makes the horror more atmospheric. It's a testament to what this genre has to offer.

Alternate pick: **Us**

The Thing:



A research team in Antarctica is terrorized by a shapeshifting alien. Fair warning, the monster is revolting but only appears a handful of times. What makes this film astonishing is how it explores the fear of the unknown, a concept that goes far beyond the monster to what makes us human.

Alternate pick: **Alien**

What We Do In The Shadows:



What if you don't want to be scared at all? Well, that's where horror comedy comes in. *What We Do In The Shadows* follows four vampires who live together in an old house and their daily lives in the 21st century.

Alternate pick: **Gremlins**

By Alpha Bah

The Thing: Horror At Its Finest



The Thing opens with a man shooting at a dog. As the men in the helicopter dive lower in the harsh Antarctic winds to get a better shot, the sled dog stays one step ahead. It's bizarre, especially the urgency of the violent pursuit. Something's wrong here, and it's clearly not the dog, right? It's this false sense of security that makes the next revelation truly shocking. The husky is no ordinary dog. It's a grotesque abomination, a withering mass of tentacles, heads, eyes, and alien appendages. By the time the men in U.S Outpost 31 have time to process this, the intruder has already made its first move.

The Monster

The monster in John Carpenters' 1982 classic is a shape-shifting parasite, able to absorb any organism and mimic it perfectly. This alien lifeform has probably assimilated millions of lifeforms throughout the galaxy before crash-landing in Antarctica 20,000 years ago. Compared to an iconic monster like the Xenomorph, the thing is not a sleek predator nor does it inspire that kind of fear. It wins by disguising itself and being one step ahead of its prey. And while the brilliant special effects work by Rob Bottin makes you feel sick to your stomach, there is something mundane about the monster. The thing is essentially a virus, a deadly pandemic waiting to unleash itself on the entire world. This means that for the majority of the film, the monster makes a handful of appearances. All are terrifying on their own but the real horror comes from the crew's reaction to the monster.

Isolation

One of the consequences of *The Thing* making itself at home in Outpost 31 is that each crew member becomes more isolated. The Thing's shapeshifting abilities make it impossible for the crew to work together. While there is strength in numbers, the likelihood of being in the presence of *The Thing* dramatically increases when all the men are in the same place. Splitting up reduces the odds of being in contact with the thing but it's easier for the monster to attack. What's more, no crew member can be sure who is infected, so killing anyone acting suspicious means living with the odds of taking an innocent life. This is not like a zombie film where the protagonist can kill zombies indiscriminately because they are not human anymore. What ensues is the total collapse of trust between the men. Blaire, a scientist, destroys all communications and the last chopper to prevent the spread of the thing from infecting the entire world.

Paranoia

A certain kind of paranoia begins to set in as each member is assimilated. No one is sure at any given moment who the thing is. The monster is always one step ahead, sabotaging every attempt to devise a means of detecting it. Only when MacReady, the most paranoid and brazen of the bunch, takes over do things tilt in their favor. He ties up every crew member and tests their blood with a heated copper wire. Nothing happens until Palmer's blood unexpectedly jumps from the petri dish with a shriek. None of them expected it to be Palmer, and neither do we. This cosmic game of cat and mouse plays out until MacReady blows up the thing and the entire base. MacReady is the last man standing until Childs shows up after disappearing moments before the explosion. Is Childs the Thing? The survivors, as well as the audience, are left with doubt. Paranoia and a total breakdown of trust have led to this moment.

Impact

The most obvious connection you can draw from *The Thing* is the pandemic. We all remember the isolation during quarantine, the fear of catching covid, and the shock of discovering asymptomatic individuals. Audiences back in the day would have made a connection to the Cold War. The reason why this film has stood the test of time is that it continues to speak to every generation in this way. Whether it's post 9/11 America, the worsening climate crisis, or the fraying trust in institutions, one could argue that we are more afraid now than we have ever been before. *The Thing* is horror at its finest because unlike any other film it delves deep into the fear of the unknown and the human reaction to that fear in the forms of isolation, paranoia, mistrust, and assimilation.

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