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Blood of the Iron Woods: A Graphic Novel Exploration of the Modern Gothic Horror Experience

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Blood of the Iron Woods

A Graphic Novel Exploration of the Modern Gothic Horror Experience

By
Lauren Sundvall

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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source of inspiration for this project.

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Abstract

"Blood of the Iron Woods" is a creative thesis in which I explore not only my own fascination with the horror genre, but to also address the difficulties of familial relationships, and how characters evolve in situations where there is no right choice. While this project initially began as a fantasy novel, I quickly changed over to horror, where I felt as though I would be able to contribute to the overall academic discussion on the genre. A lot of time, hard work, frustration, excitement, and lessons learnt went in to this project, and I am proud of what I have been able to accomplish despite the difficulties I have faced in these past two years.

This project addresses the concept of visual communication within the Gothic horror genre as well as the deeper genre conventions and themes that make Gothic horror what it is. This research has resulted in a complete analysis of my creative inspirations, and full review of the current literature on this topic, a full narrative outline, and a partial storyboarding of the graphic novel over a two-year period. "Blood of the Iron Woods" is the tale of three sisters who travel into the woods to escape for a while after their father's death. This thesis will address all the core components of the horror genre, how we experience and enjoy horror, and why Gothic horror is so relevant to today's youth.

Genesis of Project

When I first began the creative process for this thesis, I had originally decided upon the fantasy genre. Obviously I have shifted the genre to horror; however, the core components of my original concept have mostly remained the same. The idea of a once great family falling on hard times, the trio of sisters as the main focus, as well as the overall sense of isolation and desperation are all things I have wanted to incorporate from the beginning. Over time, I soon realized that settling on the fantasy genre simply was not going to keep me as interested as I needed to be for the full duration of this project.

First and foremost, fantasy is simply too broad of a genre to have any meaningful conversations about it. It's been talked to death, and I sincerely doubt that I would have anything unique to add to the conversation. While fantasy is similar to horror in terms of subgenre diversity, I feel as though fantasy is already a genre that is well integrated into mainstream media, and therefore is in no need of defense or representation. Secondly, I also felt as though I would become too caught up in the genre conventions of fantasy to create something I felt was truly unique or even mine. This restriction is something I battled with in the first few weeks of working on my project proposal. I knew that in order to create something successful within such an established genre I would then have to mold whatever narrative I came up with around the guidelines of mainstream fantasy. Additionally, I did not feel as though I had the time to create an entire world from scratch, which is so often the case with fantasy. Instead, I turned to the relative creative freedom that can be found within horror.

I knew horror was going to be the perfect choice for this project the moment the genre popped into my head. There are enough basic conventions so that I would not have to come up with everything from scratch, and horror is also a genre that celebrates creative freedom. Barring a few common requirements (e.g. being scary), there was pretty much total creative control over the plot, characters, world, and believability of the topic. Horror is unique from

fantasy in that it does not need to be fully explained, and the audience frequently doesn't require explanations as to what is occurring. With all of that in mind, I went about turning what I had into a horror-appropriate outline. I kept many elements, some of which I have listed above, and this was especially helpful in speeding up an otherwise extremely time-consuming process of constructing a narrative. Once I had the basic elements all laid out before me, I knew it was time I turned to both creative and academic inspiration to further flesh out the core components of the narrative, such as symbols, character arcs, and even how I wanted to depict the monster.

Creative Inspirations

Books

***The Monstrumologist* Series by Rick Yancey**

To begin with, I will start with the books that really inspired the overall narrative tone I wanted for my story. Rick Yancey's *The Monstrumologist* series has been a constant source of inspiration to me throughout the duration of this entire project. Time and again, whenever I was in a creative block, I knew I could return to this series and the rereading of the first book alone would always be enough to rejuvenate me.

In terms of specific elements I found especially inspiring, it has everything to do with Yancy's ability to write compelling and complicated relationships while still being able to maintain a coherent and engaging plot. The main characters of this series, Dr. Warthrop and Will Henry, have a constant tension between them that is well established right from the very beginning. It's clear their relationship has history, and I decided that this was the relationship that I wanted to establish between the three sisters from the very beginning of my story. The push and pull between Yancey's main characters evolves throughout the series, with the power

dynamic between Will and Warthrop constantly cycling. Additionally, Yancey's ability to write profoundly disturbing scenes that still manage to capture and hold the audiences' attention is a skill that I can only aspire to. I took great inspiration from these scenes at the action climax of my graphic novel.

Welcome to Night Vale & It Devours! by Joseph Fink & Jeffrey Cranor

From the iconic podcast, these two books take an auditory horror experience, à la Lovecraft, and masterfully transform it into a written medium. Fink and Cranor's amazing ability to shift between mediums while still maintaining the core of the experience is something that I truly appreciate. None of my research directly references graphic novels in any substantive way, and so I looked to Fink and Cranor to see how I could translate information on tangentially related mediums and make it useful for my project. Their off-beat brand of horror is also something I took note of, and while I did not attempt to fully recreate this, it has still influenced how I've chosen to depict certain narrative beats.

Because both of these novels are heavily influenced by Lovecraftian horror, scary moments can be presented as an everyday occurrence, further alienating the audience, and therefore creating a sort of uncanny valley of horror. Fink and Cranor do not shrink away from the bizarre or the nonsensical, and this confidence helped me a lot in my own writing. There were times when I was afraid to incorporate a certain design or narrative element, worried that my audience might not fully believe the situation. When I thought back to Fink and Cranor, however, I remembered that confidence is a huge part of making an experience believable, and I knew that my audience would be able to sense my lack of surety and confidence in a given moment, and this perception would break their suspension of disbelief.

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson

Although this book has been transformed into a Netflix series, I am only referencing the novel, the original source material for the show. Jackson's mastery of the slow and insidious sort of horror is the kind that I really seek to incorporate into the decisions all my characters make at any given moment. Jackson's horror is the kind that doesn't seem scary until the very next day when you think back to her writing, and suddenly get chills. While this form of horror is a lot less popular today, and has fallen behind things like gore and jump scares, I still believe this type of horror writing is by far the most impressive.

Jackson is able to get under the skin of her audience, able to circumnavigate their defenses, and slip in undetected. By the time you finish reading her work, you're left wondering why you felt so deeply unsettled when the book itself wasn't 'scary'. While the horror in my novel takes a far more direct approach, I still wanted to have small moments inside the narrative that my audience will be able to look back in hindsight and shudder. Fun horror will scare you only for a moment, good horror will stick with you for a while.

Haunted Castles the Complete Gothic Stories by Ray Russel

This collection of short stories by Ray Russel was my very first introduction into true gothic horror. Russel makes such unique use of complex characters with hidden motivations to drive the story forward, and oftentimes the narrator is the passive, static character. Having such a compelling supporting cast is what makes Russel's works so easy to read, and it is something I took into consideration when I was designing my main characters and the choices they were going to make. While only one of my characters experiences real change, I didn't want the others to fade into the background, or become boring and dull to the reader. Motivations that are almost clear, and yet elude the reader, are what kept me reading Russel's works, and I hope I have managed to capture at least a small part of that in my writing.

Russel is also the source of inspiration for my decision to utilize isolation horror in my graphic novel. In many of his stories, Russel makes it a point to isolate his characters, either emotionally or physically, and I have found this to be a core component of horror in general. Aside from the general tropes of the gothic (i.e. innocent young women, bizarre monsters, and haunted locales), Russel added the dimension of character to these aspects, and created a really unique Gothic horror experience that I attempted to emulate.

Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer

Once again, I will only be referencing the book, and not the movie. Vandermeer is very similar to Fink and Cranor in that they all take inspiration from Lovecraft and Eldritch abominations. While I won't be utilizing this common thread, I really like the way Vandermeer's characters experienced this type of incomprehensible horror. The confusion and forced attempts to make sense of one's surroundings before ultimately giving up was something I was really interested in taking inspiration from. While I may not have taken the entire emotional journey over to my story, the main character of this novel, the Biologist, did serve as an amazing source of inspiration for the creation of the older sister, Caroline, in my graphic novel. The Biologist's desire for solitude and lack of ability to emotionally connect, and the conflicts these traits create, were the starting point for Caroline's entire design and character arc.

Movies

The Thing (1982) directed by John Carpenter

This was the first horror movie I ever watched, and it has profoundly changed my outlook on the horror genre since then. Although I was young when I first watched this movie, I was still at a young enough age for this experience to have lasting effects. At the time, I was still very much afraid of the dark, my closet, and the underside of my bed. This movie,

however, allowed me to confront this fear in a controlled environment, and allowed me to watch horror be overcome by ingenuity and intelligence. As its core, *The Thing* is a movie about the fear of the unknown and the unidentifiable. Being afraid of the things we don't know or can't understand is a common fear, but this move challenges that fear in an interesting way. Who are we, and what do we become when we face our darkest fears? Will we be consumed by the fear, and turn on those we love, or will we approach our lack of knowledge carefully, and with a desire to understand and overcome? These are the questions that are at the core of my entire story. And while I may not be able to fully answer these questions, I at least hope that the asking of them alone will be enough for my audience to reevaluate the source of their fears, and how they choose to approach horror.

In terms of the mise en scène of *The Thing*, the constant use of low angle shots creates a deep sense of unease in the audience. Typically, viewers are used to high angle or eye level shots, as this type of composition allows the viewer to feel as though they are an active participant, or that they have an advantage of sight over the characters within the film. With a low angle shot, however, suddenly the field of view is extremely limited. Now the audience can no longer see what the actors see, and this restriction of sight and loss of perceived advantage or control causes the audience to feel nervous or even afraid.

I decided that an entire graphic novel composed of nothing but low angle frames would be extremely boring, but I knew that I could use low angle and knee level shots in key scenes to further a sense of unease from the audience in a way that would be effective without becoming too disruptive to the narrative. Luckily, movies and graphic novels have a lot in common, aside from motion and sound. Shot composition, the mise en scène, and 'camera' angles are all things I was looking to take inspiration from as I watched this movie.

The Exorcist (1973) directed by William Friedkin

While this film is heavily steeped in religious iconography, there was still much I could take inspiration from in terms of visual storytelling and color palettes. Key points within this film contain a heavily desaturated and dreary appearance, in addition to limited lighting which helps conceal or deny information to the viewer. These moments are contrasted with areas of light and saturated color, such as the desert scenes. However, while some scenes are much lighter than others, the film maintains an overall limited color palette, and in many ways the surroundings seem to fade into the background by design.

While my graphic novel will be in black and white, I still think I can take inspiration from the use of color in _The Exorcist_. Limiting lighting, variance in tone, and background complexity can be used within a graphic novel to further emphasize the characters within a given scene, or to pull attention away from perhaps frightening things until they become relevant. I plan on implementing these techniques in scenes where the monster is present.

The Conjuring (2013) directed by James Wan

This movie was especially interesting for me, as the primary location this movie takes place in is almost identical to the location my narrative takes place at. This allowed me to get a good sense of how Wan utilized visuals in such a limiting and narrow space, and how Wan took advantage of the architecture of the house to highlight particular scenes (most especially the exorcism scene at the end of the film). While Wan uses the low angle shot more sparingly, and tends to go for the wide angle shot whenever possible, his utilization of close ups to highlight certain moments or character decisions is really interesting.

Of particular note is the moment in which a possesses character begins to scream violently, causing a vial of holy water to drop to the ground. The camera cuts to the glass shattering for a split second, highlighting how the entire power dynamic of the scene has

shifted drastically in an extremely short amount of time. While I don't have the advantage of motion, I am able to manipulate frame size and shape, and can choose to downsize or downplay key moments to create a sense of time passing quickly in a worrying way.

Research

Introduction

For the purposes of my project, I focused all of my research into horror, Gothic horror, the horror experience, and other tangentially related topics. Due to the nature of the research, there was little content describing the specifics of the above stated subjects relating to graphic novels, and therefore I have chosen instead to group my findings on major themes that I will then relate back to the formatting and creation of my graphic novel. I will first begin by creating a working definition for horror before moving on to solidifying the version of Gothic horror I will be presenting within my graphic novel. Next, I will lay out the core concepts and ideas that have greatly influenced the narrative structure and content of my work. Finally, I will discuss what all of these findings mean in relation to the goal I am attempting to achieve regarding horror.

Defining Horror

In my search for a functional definition with which I could begin, I first turned towards the postmodern understanding of the horror experience. First and foremost, simply having the discussion regarding what horror is and what it means for us as a larger society, is the first sign that we are maturing as a culture and are becoming more able to tackle the taboo subjects we so often try to avoid (Scippacercola, 66). This confrontation is something that is essential to the core conversations evoked by Gothic horror specifically, as will be discussed in the section below. In the context of general horror however, this

deals more with the direct connection between horror and the confrontation of death, specifically that horror is the essence of our fear of death that we are only able to confront through the filter of fiction (Scippacercola, 70). This exercise of creating fiction that we then must confront and address through our sensation and experience of horror is merely our attempt to rationalize and give shape to our intense, and sometimes unaddressed, fear of death (Scippacercola, 70).

This attempt to rationalize was especially present in 19th century America. During this time, a lot of what was conceptualized as horror came from the experiences of those who lived during this time, and these 'horror' experiences usually centered around crime during this era (Mullins, 82). It is also, coincidentally, when the solid conception of horror that existed in decades prior first became to lose coherence. In 19th century America, the word 'horror' had been attached to such a wide variety of situations, and was often utilized in contradictory spaces, that not one, clear, situational application of 'horror' existed (Mullins, 82). This expanded use of the word 'horror' then necessitates a more general understanding of the concept, especially given the cultural context of 19th century America. This expansion is best addressed by switching the focus away from the situation, and shifting closer towards the actions of the individuals involved. As the 19th century progressed in America, horror slowly became more and more associated with humanity itself, and more specifically became identified as a core sense that we all share, and this sense would react "to extreme acts of violence" (Mullins, 83). This notion of where 'horror' lay slowly evolved into a way to separate those who are normal from those who are not. Those who are more human will react with horror to extreme acts of criminality, whereas those who do not react with horror are seen as something other. People who are classified as other are frequently identified as 'monsters', and are then dehumanized by having their motivations characterized as being

beyond comprehension (Mullins, 85). This application of the term 'horror' soon expanded even further, encompassing not only action and motivation, but also any moment, situation, or life circumstance that someone did not like or approve of (Mullins, 86). Given the wide range of uses the term 'horror' went through during the 19th century, it is important to acknowledge perhaps the most important lesson this evolution can show. While we often look to literature to identify the cultural undertones of a specific era, it is important to remember that before such undertones can be written down, they must first exist in the social consciousness of the people inhabiting said era (Mullins, 90). It is with this in mind that I chose 19th century America as the zeitgeist that inspired the overall setting of my graphic novel. Horror was very clearly a part of the everyday experience, something I find critical to the overall tone of a Gothic story.

Finally, I will be discussing the ultimate definition and concept of horror that I have chosen to implement as the core definition for the purposes of my project. Morgan states that their argument is "that horror – in a way entirely distinct from tragedy – represents the other side of the Comic coin, that it is the inverse of the comic spirit" (60). Horror elicits a cathartic sensation much in the same way a long, good laugh can. This sensation of release and elation as a result of horror will be discussed in greater depth in a section below, but it suffices to say that this idea of a horror catharsis is something that has greatly impacted the way that I formed my narrative structure. Horror is distinct from tragedy in the emotional form the catharsis takes. Where tragedy allows release through sadness and depression, horror allows release through the up close and personal confrontation with death. Furthermore, horror is meant to enhance the experience of one's physical being – this "proprioceptive awareness" we all have – and the awareness of how physically vulnerable we truly are (Morgan, 65). This heightened sense of awareness, of physical being, acts as a conduit for the emotional release of those who

experience it. It's like the itch you feel upon watching a thousand ants crawling one on top of the other on a sidewalk. As you walk away from what someone could call 'horrifying', you feel a heightened awareness of your own skin, and your inability to see all parts of yourself at once, and by extension, your inability to fully assess your own wellbeing at any given moment. This presents the dichotomy between horror and comic in the perfect way. Where a comedy invigorates one's sense of life, horror allows one to sense the "unlife" or "anti-life"; it moves our awareness from "wholesome" to the "unwholesome", and highlights our perception of the line between life and death (Morgan, 65). The concept that horror works to highlight the line between life and death has been central to the conceptualization of my graphic novel, as well as instrumental in guiding the overall narrative structure.

Defining Gothic Horror

To begin truly defining the hallmarks of the Gothic genre, it is important to start with the language of the genre itself. While many other genres are identifiable by virtue of commonly shared plot points, Gothic literature instead begins at a much more basic level. Gothic literature, and more specifically Gothic horror, relies heavily upon over-dramatized descriptions of otherwise normal activity. In a romance novel, a shaking hand may simply mean a character is nervous, but in a Gothic tale, shaking hands can mean so much more, and often the language surrounding the description of the action is what allows it to carry so much more significance. This "thick" level of description, best termed as melodramatic, is what heightens the overall sense of Gothic writing and separates it out from other literary genres (Aguirre, 297). This style of writing is what allows the Gothic to pass the barrier between reality and fantasy. The cold touch of a hand, or a lingering sensation of death? Gothic literature is obsessed with exploring this symbolic parallel experience. Beyond this, a deeper

syntax can reveal the crossing of a barrier for both reader and character – not only is a moment of melodrama a heightened way of experiencing the moment, it allows one to witness the crossing of the threshold between reality and fantasy (Aguirre, 304). What was before a mundane object is now open to the potential for producing horror once the metaphysical barrier has been crossed. Further, the motivations of characters are now open to contradictory melodrama (Aguirre, 304). We all know better than to wander down into an unlit basement with low growls coming from it, but the power of a Gothic compulsion, and the melodrama of morbid curiosity, will push a someone past their own wellbeing in order to better comprehend the new reality they now exist within.

This crossing and retreating from the threshold is what creates a sense of "cyclicality" within a Gothic story, and this constant loop creates a sense of impending doom and inevitability as the reader realizes progressing past this loop is impossible (Aguirre, 308). This cyclicality is what denies characters their ability to complete a character arc, even forcing some characters into a 'villain-hero' archetype. Where the protagonist may once have had altruistic intentions, the recurrence of plot and continued failure to advance will inevitably push them away from optimism, and force pessimism in its place. In Gothic literature the "fall" of the hero is inevitable, and it is a rule, not a possibility, that a proper Gothic protagonist will eventually become a villain (Aguirre, 309). The point of Gothic literature, however, is not to state that there is evil within us all. Rather, the point of the Gothic is to highlight that occasionally we will "fall" in our respective paths. "Gothic the does not constitute a case of failed rebellion but of successful challenge" (Aguirre, 311). We are inherently unstable and unpredictable creatures who cycle between both good and evil; and Gothic literature is simply meant to highlight that reality, not condemn it.

To further this point of cyclicality and thresholds, it is important to note that the Gothic does not apply this principle to just human characters, but also to plot elements and themes. Going back to the above observation that horror is the flip side of comedy, Gothic horror is especially concerned with representing the darker side of daily life. For the Gothic, the focus is not on "fertility, [but] upon withering; rather than on growth, it focuses on morbid deterioration" (Morgan, 65). This representation and forced confrontation with all things associated with death and decay is what helps evoke a sense of horror for the reader in a Gothic setting. This horror touches upon the deeply ingrained fear of what is not recognizable, not well defined (Morgan, 70). By playing upon the dichotomy of life and death, Gothic frequently places the monsters it contains in the spaces in between, and the confusion between categorization, and the horror of wanting to categorize something but being unable to is what Gothic horror is all about.

It is important to note, however, that there is some dissent to the idea that the Gothic is still influential in modern horror. Fred Botting argues that the term Gothic horror has been applied to so many things as an afterthought that it has begun to lose meaning (139). Botting believes this attempt at labelling is a belated way to categorize certain things that don't necessarily need categorization beyond simply 'horror'. These categorizations are unnecessary, and are only meant to try and remove some of the power the horror holds by putting it into a neat box (Botting, 139). Gothic horror has been a powerhouse for two centuries, but Botting claims that it has become so widely disseminated that it has lost a cohesive definition, and the use of the term Gothic has become unnecessary in many cases (141). Additionally, many of the famous monsters depicted in Gothic horror have moved past 'fantastical' into being completely unrealistic. Once upon a time, a vampire crawling in through the window was a common bogeyman for those who lied awake at night, but in modern times, with modern

science, security, and police, this fear is no longer based on anything remotely realistic or feasible (Botting, 144). Although I strongly disagree with Botting's assertion that Gothic horror no longer holds power in modern times, I will concede that monsters such as vampires and werewolves are unlikely to elicit the reaction they once did a century or two ago. That is not to say, however, that Gothic horror no longer has a place in modern society. I argue that these classic Gothic horror figures (the vampire and the werewolf) have been replaced by folkloric creatures such as the Mothman or Jersey Devil. To some, these modern approximations may not be equal in influence to past monsters, but I believe that no matter where you originate from, there will always be a folk tale or urban legend that will permeate the space between reality and fantasy, and creep its way into your nightmares.

In addition, there are many who still argue that Gothic literature and horror remains relevant today. Although there exists some stigma regarding the genre today, Gothic horror remains an especially important genre for young adults and teens (Crawford, 32). Crawford believes, and I agree, that Gothic horror is all about addressing the taboos of modern society, and opening up a frank and honest dialogue about them. Despite the many who would like to turn a blind eye to the fact that serial killers exist, Gothic horror still ensures that teens and young adults will have a place to explore this topic (Crawford, 33). Gothic horror is more than just haunted houses, naïve protagonists, monsters, and dreary castles; it is a genre where young adults and teens can watch deep philosophical questions about human nature play out in an engaging narrative (Crawford, 32-33). Gothic horror as a whole can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people, and the concept of it being a formative genre for younger people to come into and explore questions they may be too afraid to ask is something I worked hard to include into my graphic novel.

Control Over Experience

Throughout my time researching Gothic horror and other related topics, I came across an important theme that kept coming up: control. More specifically, the control a reader or viewer has over their horror experience, why this control matters, the reason we seek out an otherwise negative experience, and even the emotional and psychological benefits to doing so. While the viewing or reading of horror media is something that many people engage in for pure entertainment purposes, that doesn't mean that all horror is consumed equally. While generally speaking, most people are able to consume horror, those who are either unable to separate fiction from reality or those who cannot make logical sense of the emotions they are experiencing should not engage in horror fiction with any regularity (Keisner, 415). This inability to make sense or to separate out fiction from one's own reality is not something horror fiction will aid in; rather, horror fiction will only "alter the way the viewer perceives his or her current reality" (Kiesner, 415). While horror may not be for everyone, I fully believe that those who are able to view horror, and separate out this sensationalized fiction from objective reality, can greatly benefit from the emotional challenged horror can present.

While horror media can be difficult to engage with at times, one of the most important aspects of the genre is the agency of the viewer or reader. If things become too close to reality, or become too intense for the audience, we can simply "shut our eyes, or walk away, or put down the book" the moment it all becomes too much to handle (Bantinaki, 385). Instead of generating fear and anxiety due to a lack of control on the part of the experience, horror instead generates a sense of giddy fear. This fear is enjoyable because the viewer knows they can turn away from what they are experiencing, and yet they choose to continue with the experience. In many ways, the enjoyment one receives from engaging with horror media is the same morbid enjoyment some experience when slowing down on the highway to get a better

look at an accident or broken-down vehicle. While this may seem like an oversimplification, Bantinaki explains it best: "negative emotions are disagreeable at least in the sense and to the extent that we want to get rid of them, while positive emotions are agreeable at least in the sense and to the extent that we want their continuation" (388). If horror was truly an awful and unpleasant experience, the entire horror media industry would no longer exist, or at the very least those who enjoy horror media would be considered aberrant or abnormal with deeply negative connotations.

Furthermore, experiencing horror media can be used as a way to confront difficult topics or situations that would otherwise go undiscussed or unimagined. Experiencing horror is not simply a matter of enjoyment for some; instead, it ends up being a way for individuals to confront the limits of their fear tolerance, and "thus alter or reinforce our perception of self-efficacy and make us more fit in coping with fear in real-life risky situations" (Bantinaki, 390). If by simply watching a horror film one can feel more confident walking down a street at night, or even going down into their basement to retrieve something, then horror is clearly not an entirely negative or undesirable experience. Additionally, by exposing ourselves to uncomfortable or frightening situations voluntarily, and approaching these situations with a sense of humor, it can help ease the power that the real-life counterparts of horror hold over us (Bantinaki, 388). This method of 'practicing' one's fear response could potentially be extremely beneficial, most especially for those who experience anxiety in social situations. Asma explains it best in his 2014 article:

> And though we can't know for sure how we will face an enemy soldier or rapist, it doesn't stop us from imaginatively formulating responses. We use imagination in order to establish and guide our own *agency* in chaotic and uncontrollable situations. The horror story is probably a permanent player in the moral imagination because human

vulnerability is permanent. The monster is a beneficial foe, helping us to virtually represent obstacles that real life will surely send our way. (954)

By triggering the fear response and then working on ways to control or relieve the tension it causes, horror media can actually be a means of practicing stress tolerance for those individuals who may need it the most. Morbid imagination is a natural part of everyday life, and horror is a medium through which we can explore and learn to control our fear response in preparation to better respond to real life stressful or even traumatic situations.

Unique Perspectives

Throughout my research, I have also come across a wide variety of horror perspectives that I felt were important to mention. These perspectives were not widely held, nor was there any major consensus on them. However, I believe that by including these wider perspectives, it will demonstrate the wide variety of viewpoints so many people have in regard to horror and how it is created and used both in the past and today. Some have been deeply influential in the creation of my narrative, while others have given observations that I deeply disagree with, and have actively attempted to avoid.

One of the more interesting perspective was held by Kord. They posit that horror is more about guilt than it is about plain fear. Most specifically, this guilt comes in the form of "collective guilt," a type of guilt more connected with society than with individuals (Kord, 71). The point of this type of horror that Kord identifies is less about what individual actions the audience may have participated in, and more about the audiences' knowledge of cultural wrongdoings they feel partially guilty for. Furthermore, this type of horror is not meant to comfort the viewer through catharsis, but rather is designed to "hone in on universal sin or collective guilt, attacking the audience directly (Kord, 71). Horror can force the audience to

confront the misdeeds of past generations, such as burning witches, killing hundreds through the medical malpractice of times past, and even the use of the atomic bomb on innocent civilians.

Kord presses this version of guilty horror further when it is used to question the audiences' allegiance with good, and forces them to identify with evil. In certain genres of horror, such as a slasher movie, viewers frequently find themselves becoming less and less sympathetic to the victims of the killer as they are shown to continually make poor decisions (Kord, 78). This forces allegiance with evil in order to avoid being afraid via identification with the victims, and this allegiance allows the audience to feel more empowered, and less afraid, as all too often the side of 'good' loses in horror films (Kord, 76). This shifting of allegiance is what causes the sensation of guilt within the audience, and thereby forces the audience to confront their assumed alignment with good, and whether or not they are who they truly believe they are. As Kord puts it:

> Forcing us into the killer's perspective invites us to enjoy the violence – if we do – makes us feel guilty. In other words, horror film forces us to experience a guilt in particular (guilt for enjoying the destruction of another human being) that we should be feeling in general (e.g. guilt for destroying the environment). (80)

This statement has been especially relevant to the approach that I am taking to horror. As the most optimal place for uncomfortable confrontation, I believe that the horror genre is the ideal place for people to deal with and talk about taboos that are not openly discussed in open social spaces. Although this confrontation of guilt typically takes the form of killer vs. victim, in horror literature, it is most commonly represented via the monster vs. innocent protagonist trope.

The type of horror response that the horror audience will most frequently experience is best covered in Asma's article. Asma posits that most horror creatures are terrifying due to two core features. The first is the idea that the most successful monsters are those that are real-life composites of common fears (e.g. a combination between snake and spider), thereby increasing or even doubling the fear response of the audience (Asma, 946). The second is a furthering of the first – if an object exists as composite, with each part of indistinguishable origin, but a recognizable whole, then the fear response will be generated by a categorical mismatch of the object. This categorial mismatch results in the inability to correctly identify the object, as what lies before the viewer is something that should not exist (Asma, 948). While horror is meant to challenge perceptions of reality, as well as force ethical confrontation, it can also act a means of deterrence for the viewer.

This deterrence mostly takes place in horror films oriented around the adult vs. teenager conflict archetype. Keisner states that horror films featuring teenage protagonists are often used as a medium of deterrence, showing which actions will allow one to survive in a given horror scenario (419). Those who behave in accordance with what society views as 'virtuous' (e.g. not having sex before marriage, being honest, not engaging in illegal activity), are the ones who are more likely to survive until the end of the film, thereby rewarding their societally correct behavior. Those who deviate from societal norms, however, are punished, and often die in painful ways. While horror primarily serves as a medium to confront cultural fears, it also doubles as a way of showing what a particular society values at any given time, especially when framed in a coming-of-age horror based upon an adult vs. teenage conflict.

This conflict can also be taken farther than simply adult-teenage relations—it can also address the more complex societal taboos such as the point and power of religion. While I do not agree with Cowan and his assessment of the connection (or lack thereof) between religious

fate and horror scenario survivability, I also think it still warrants some discussion. Cowan asserts that religion, in part, exists to reassure us of the idea that we matter and that our lives have purpose, whereas horror exists as a reminder that not everything is always under control and that "luck plays an enormous part in escaping at the end of the movie" (Cowan, 133-34). This statement reinforces a belief that horror is presented to be, and enforces, a sort of anti-religion stance within its viewers. I, however, strongly believe that this is outright missing the point of horror. In many ways, horror is designed to inspire difficult conversations and showcase situations in which there is no right answer. Horror may tackle the question of faith, but any good piece of media within the genre will not simply ask the question and then present the answer. Gothic horror is especially more inclined to leave the question hanging, and to force the viewer to reconcile with what they have just seen as opposed to simply telling people what to think.

Conclusion

Throughout the duration of my research, I continually found in difficult to find any discussion regarding the specific use of Gothic horror within graphic novels. Therefore, while all of the research I have presented is related to horror and the convention held there within, I am unfortunately forced to translate many of the above points into a mixed-media format. Where the research relies upon the literary implications, I must then infer how those points could change when a visual element is added, and vice versa. This process of selection and translation has allowed me a great deal of freedom in how I structure my narrative as well as how I have chosen to construct the overall art design of my graphic novel.

The Narrative

Overall Plot Construction

As stated within my introduction, this project was initially designed to be a fantasy story. Although that has clearly changed, many of the core components of my original narrative remains. I chose to center the narrative around three sisters who have come from a once great family, with the central narrative question still being both a challenge to the reader and to the characters in the novel. How far would you go to protect your loved ones from physical and/or emotional pain? This question has been the basis for every single narrative decision that I have made. All of the sisters are in deep conflict with one another, but have yet to abandon one another out of a mutually recognized need for the others. This need to stay together, to stay put, is what places them into their soon-to-be deadly circumstances.

I began with the initial concept of being snowed into a hunting lodge in the hills far above a small town. This eventually became a mining town, and I decided that the sisters have come from a trading family that made its initially fortune off of the coal mining found within the town. Their great-grandfather purchased a mansion and hunting lodge far above the town not only as a show of financial power, but to serve as a reminder that the family would forever be looking out for the town. I knew that I could not keep the mansion as is, as that would simply be too difficult for me to fully design and consistently represent at my current artistic skill level. Instead, I decided that the mansion has already been burnt down to ashes, and as the sisters arrive, they soon realize their accommodations will not be as comfortable as once thought – another point of contention for the already tense sisterhood the girls share.

I knew that I had to manage the melodrama of the situation the girls were experiencing for fear of becoming more campy than gothic. While campy horror is a fascinating genre, I knew going overboard with the drama and horror would not mesh well with the characters I

had created. This led me to try and reduce the amount of time spent around the burnt mansion, and instead focus in on the claustrophobic nature of the hunting lodge itself. This is where I ran into one of my more problematic challenges. I knew I wanted the novel to be rather fast-paced, but it would break the audiences' suspension of disbelief if I brought out the monster within the first two chapters. Instead, I opted for the much more classic scare of identical dreams the first night a group of people sleep somewhere. This has the possibility of coming off as unbelievable to some, but I knew that it was impossible for me to completely avoid clichés in Gothic horror, which is arguably a genre built on trite clichés.

To really enhance the overall conflict, I had the oldest sister keep her younger sisters captive inside the home despite some disturbing events. The oldest sister had the most difficult character arc to master, and I decided that I needed to get the ball rolling on her insanity early on so that the change would not be too abrupt later on. By establishing the eldest sister as unstable and stubborn in times of extreme stress, it makes the coming plot twists much more believable, as well as adding a sense of foreboding. After further fleshing out the conflict between sisters, I knew it was time to get started on the climax of the plot, and work on bringing the overall narrative to a speedy spiral downwards.

This culminates in the middle sister breaking her leg after attempting to run away from a demon attempting to kill her. While the existence of this monster will be hinted at earlier on, this scene will be the full confirmation of existence. The audience will now come to realization that neither the oldest or youngest are in any way prepared to care for the now injured middle sister. This introduces another point of conflict immediately after the first point is emphasized. Now the audience not only knows that there is a creature near the home with murderous intent, there is now also a main character who is seriously injured and likely to die soon. I then decided that skipping quickly through the days it would take for a serious infection to fester

in the wound of the middle sister was the best choice. Personally speaking, I don't like it when stories pad for more content when it could otherwise have easily been cut down. Since a montage would communicate the same message to my readers as a more in-depth representation of the time passing would, I decided to simply cut out unnecessary content that did not serve to further the plot in any way.

This montage of time passing will also highlight both the physical deterioration of the middle sister and the psychological deterioration of the oldest sister. Instead of strategically setting up scenes where the oldest sister is clearly shown to being losing her grip on reality, I think that merely showing key frames related to this decline will be a much more effective way to communicate the same message. This montage will culminate in the action climax of the story: the oldest sister choosing to kill the middle sister in order to put her out of her misery. When the youngest sister finds out and flees into the middle of a white-out blizzard, the sudden fracturing of the family unit will become very clear to the audience.

From here things will begin to happen very quickly. The next section will focus entirely on the emotional journey of the eldest sister, rapidly culminating in her attempt to kill the demon that is hunting them. This instead leads to her death. The perspective then shifts to the last surviving member of the family. The youngest sister will be shown stumbling back into town, and collapsing in front of the bar. When she comes to, no one will believe her about the events that have transpired. This rapid down spiral of events is meant to mirror the disorientation and confusion the youngest sister feels as these events transpire. The story concludes with Maggie, all alone, with nothing left.

The point of this story is not to show how families can overcome adversity, or how family matters most. Instead, I wanted this to be a story of difficult decisions. I wanted everyone's decisions to make sense given their past character moments. Additionally, in order

to present a successful challenge to the presumed main character, the oldest sister, I wanted to ensure that her decisions were ones that many in the audience could sympathize with. No one wants to kill a loved one, but sometimes the alternative could be considered the worse end.

Overall, when I think of my story, I think about sisterhood, and about how it often does not feel as though our family always has our backs, especially in adolescence. The oldest sister represents the difficult decisions we sometimes must make for our loved ones, the middle sister shows how even a simple accident can take away those we love, and the youngest sister is an example of how even the young have an incredible capacity for self-efficacy.

Narrative Outline

This section is broken down by chapter. I list the top objectives and narrative beats for each chapter before fully outlining the plot of each section.

Chapter One

Objectives:

1. Sisters arrive in town

2. Sisters are escorted to the mansion

3. Sisters arrive at mansion and see that it is burned down

Outline:

The novel opens with the doctor leading the carriage and whistling. Inside the carriage, everyone is crabby from the long ride, and the sisters argue about the legitimacy of the plan, and the danger of the debtors chasing them.

When the sisters arrive in town, Caroline goes to the general store to stock up on supplies with the doctor, while Lydia and Maggie stop by the local tavern for some hot food.

Upon walking into the tavern, Lydia and Maggie recognize a photo of their father pasted to the wall by a large drawing of a mansion with the title declaring the mansion had burnt down. Lydia rips it from the wall and begins questioning the barkeep about the story. Maggie quickly becomes uncomfortable with Lydia confrontational attitude, and the two leave to go tell Caroline the news.

Caroline is furious, feeling like she has now sold the last of their property and thus ensured that the family is now destitute. The doctor (who is from the next town over, and therefore had no idea that the mansion had burned down) quickly steps in, reminding Caroline that there was once a hunting lodge not far from the old mansion, and that it's possible and likely more affordable to stock up and stay at the lodge over the winter than it would be to stock the mansion anyway. Caroline calms down, and quickly revises her shopping list for supplies, but Maggie immediately becomes uncomfortable with staying in a smaller (something about maybe needing to share a bedroom), and less well-kept place before being swiftly disciplined by Lydia for acting like a brat.

The sisters arrive at the mansion as it begins to darken, and as they cross a heavily wooded ridge, the burnt mansion appears. Not much is left of the mansion itself, and what still stands is only about a quarter of the first floor. It appears to almost still be smoldering, but as the carriage comes closer whatever smoke that appeared to have been there quickly disappears. Though the mansion had burnt down a long while ago, nothing has grown anywhere near the mansion, despite the richly dense woods surrounding it. As the sisters pass by the burnt remains, the horses pulling the carriage become very uneasy, and attempt to pull their reins in the opposite direction.

Maggie is the most visibly uncomfortable with the situation, holding her arms closely to her, and tapping her foot anxiously. Lydia misreads her anxiety as being uncomfortable with

her dirty surroundings, scolding her again, and Maggie looks out the window to try and hide her tears. Caroline seems largely unaffected by this all, and her only reaction to the sight of the burnt down mansion is to clench her fist tightly.

Chapter Two

Objectives:

1. Sisters settle into hunting lodge

2. First night everyone has awful nightmares of burning alive

3. Everyone explores the area

4. Caroline finds the family sword

5. Creepy things happen

Outline:

With no other option than to stay in the lodge, Caroline and the Doctor begin working on unloading the supplies and storing them in the cabin. Lydia leaves the still teary-eyed Maggie sitting on the steps of the carriage, and begins walking through the cabin to get a sense for the layout. Everything is coated in a thick layer of dust, and Lydia coughs and sneezes several times as she moves throughout the cabin. As she begins walking up the stairs to the second floor, she slips, scraping her shin and ripping her stockings. She makes note of how steep and shallow the steps are.

Eventually Maggie joins Lydia inside as Caroline says farewell to the doctor. This is when Caroline receives the Laudanum from the doctor, along with a small first aid box in case of emergencies. As Caroline watches the doctor ride off, she turns her attention back to the burnt-down remains of the mansion, and decides to explore the mess the following day. Time skip to a tense dinner, where everyone remains uncomfortably silent, and Caroline sits at the head of the table, oddly separated from her sisters.

That night, everyone has terrible nightmares constantly, leading to all three sisters waking up the following morning unusually early. Everyone is high-strung and grumpy, leading to Maggie holing herself up in her room, and Lydia in turn begins to stress-clean the home. Turning back to the house, Caroline watches Lydia smack the dirt out of a rug on the front porch, noting the similarities between Lydia and their mother. Caroline then calls out to Lydia that she's going to take a look at the remains of the old mansion, and in response Lydia tells her to be careful.

As Caroline approaches the ruins, the first thing she notices is how much hotter the area surrounding the rubble is, and how the acrid smell still somehow remains. As she draws closer to what was once the main entry, she sees a glimmer of something metallic within the rubble: the old family heirloom sword. It is rusted and covered in soot, but Caroline clings desperately to the sword nonetheless. She vows to repair the sword, cradling it as she slowly walks back to the house.

Cut to Maggie, who is sitting by the windowsill in her room, eyes red and puffy. She is staring out the window into the dense woods, sniffing loudly and drawing images into the fogging window. As she wipes away a small horse that she has drawn, something catches her eyes in the woods. As she peers out of the window, she catches the glimmer of eyes in the woods, and her face blanches. There are too many of them, and they seem to reflect red, even in the broad daylight. More tears spring to her eyes, and she flies downstairs, slipping and falling to a halt on the stairs. Lydia and Caroline come running, and while Lydia immediately tries to comfort Maggie, Caroline jumps into questioning.

Caroline quickly comes to the conclusion that it was simply a pack of wolves drawn in by the unusual activity at the lodge. They are common in the area, and Caroline says as long as they keep the doors locked to the kitchen, there shouldn't be anything to worry about.

Maggie argues that the eyes were far too close together to be anything other than a single animal, and Caroline dismisses her, stating that she only thinks that because she's afraid. Such things don't exist.

Chapter Three

Objectives

1. More creepy things go down

2. Family meeting about what exactly is happening to them

3. Caroline forces them all to stay, people begin feeling trapped

4. They are all snowed in

Outline

That night, Caroline and Lydia have nightmares. Caroline's nightmare is not shown, although she is the first one to wake up and go downstairs to begin making tea. As she is downstairs, staring out the window of the kitchen, she realizes that she can see the beginnings of snow out the window. She muses to herself about how they all ended up there, about there is a flashback to the massive falling out Caroline experienced with her Father prior to his death.

When Caroline returns to reality, she looks out the window once more, and sees the many eyes that Maggie had claimed to see when they first arrived. Caroline is startled and terrified, inching closer to the window to get a bit closer. In the darkness, she is able to barely make out the shape of the creature: it's definitely not a wolf. Caroline rubs the sweat off of her face, briefly blocking her eyes, and when she looks out the window, the creature is gone.

Suddenly, there is a low creaking noise behind Caroline. She freezes, not yet turning around, but slowly pulls a large knife out of the knife block beside her. Caroline then spins around aggressively wielding the knife. There is nothing there, but this time, the creaking noise is much closer. Caroline approaches the swinging kitchen door, and there the noise is just

beyond. Flinging open the swinging door, holding the knife high, and bellowing "begone", Caroline is met with the terrified scream of Lydia, who falls to the ground clutching her chest.

The scream wakes up Maggie, who flings herself from bed, and blindly begins searching for a weapon in the darkness. In the darkest corner of her room, just by the door, she finds an ax, likely left there by a previous tenant. Brandishing the dulled axe, Maggie flies down the stairs, only to find a crying Lydia being comforted by a flustered Caroline. When Caroline notices Maggie paused on the stairs, befuddled by the sight before her, Caroline quickly tells Maggie to lay down the ax, and demands to know where in the world she found such a thing inside the home.

Maggie refuses to lay down the ax, demanding to know where the scream came from. Caroline begins to explain, but she is interrupted by Lydia, who gasps, clutches Caroline, and points to the front door. The eyes are seen in the window at the very top of the door, and once everyone has seen the eyes, they slowly close. Lydia begins to cry once more, and demands that Maggie come to her, and they clutch one another as Caroline runs to the door, fumbles to unlock it, and flings it wide open, and wafts of snow blow inside before revealing what lies just outside the door: nothing.

An argument ensues, beginning with Lydia demanding that Caroline shut and lock the door, and that they should all begin packing to prepare to leave the following morning. Caroline turns around, furious, and refuses, on principle alone, to abandon what is left of their family name and return to the small town, pathetically destitute. Lydia argues that it is better they become destitute and live, rather than maintain a façade and die miserably. Maggie is in tears at this point; she doesn't want to die.

Caroline raises her voice even more, furious at the suggestion that the value of the Burkhe name is merely a façade. Maggie pipes in, albeit quietly, and begs Caroline to see

reason, to see that whatever is out there is no mere wolf, and clearly has ill-intent. Caroline puts her foot down: she is the head of the family, and what she says, goes. They will be staying there, and no mere "wolf" will scare her away from what is rightfully her namesake. Caroline pulls the key ring off the wall by the door, and stuffs the keys into her pocket. They are staying, and that's final.

Chapter Four

Objectives:

1. Lydia sees the demon for the first time and is terrified

2. Lydia breaks leg running down the stairs, everyone comes running

3. Demon escapes through window, but not before being seen by everyone

Outline:

The next day progresses as a slow montage of silence and discomfort. Things are especially passive aggressive between Lydia and Caroline: plates being put down instead of passed, bumping into one another purposefully, and general bad looks. Around lunchtime, Caroline approaches a crying Maggie, who is holding onto a book she managed to bring with her. Caroline tries to start up a conversation about what Maggie is reading before attempting to apologize for yelling the previous night. Her mannerisms mirror that of an anxious parent. Maggie quickly stands up and walks away, heading up the stairs to her room. Caroline looks over her shoulder and notices that Lydia is glaring at her. Caroline looks away and out of a window, trying to convince herself that she had made the right decision.

Later, when Lydia makes dinner, she simply leaves it outside of Maggie's room when she hears Maggie crying, and doesn't want to disturb her. This moment is followed by a silent dinner where Lydia and Caroline do not speak with one another at first. Then, when Caroline accidentally knocks over her glass of water, Lydia quickly moves to catch the glass before it

spills. She tells Caroline to be more considerate, clearly meaning more, and leaves her plate on the table as she heads upstairs. Caroline finishes her meal in silence and cleans up the plates in the kitchen. As she finishes, she hears howling in the distance. It's an echo off the mountain, she tells herself. It must be.

When Caroline makes it up the stairs, she sees that Maggie has left her food untouched. She approaches Maggie's door, and brings the food into the room with her. Maggie is asleep on the bed, and moonlight from the window is on Maggie's face. Caroline sets the food down on the bedside table, and strokes Maggie's hair. Caroline speaks quietly about only ever wanting the best for Maggie, and Maggie pretends to sleep. There are sounds of creaking and scraping coming from outside, and Caroline merely assumes it to be the sounds of tree branches breaking in the snow.

Just outside the room, Lydia awakens and begins to get up, needing a glass of water from the downstairs. As the opens her bedroom door, she feels a sudden burst of cold air, and shivers violently. Things begin happening in slow motion as she turns to face the source of the cold, and then she sees it.

The monster.

Lydia's mouth opens, but only a small sound comes out. She cannot speak. The monster takes a step towards her, mouth opening wide, and in this moment Lydia finally finds her strength. She turns away, and bolts towards the stairs. She can hear the shuffling behind her, and a faint "Lydia?" coming from Maggie's room. Lydia reaches for the stairway railing and misses, her hands shaking too much. She slams into the wall beside the stairs, and loses her footing on the top stair, beginning to fall face-first. Her arms spread wide, and she falls feet over head, her leg coming down hard on the stair in front of her before sliding into a gap on the stairwell bannister. She is sliding down too quickly, and the stairs are too steep for her

to catch herself, and the momentum carries her forwards. There is a loud snapping noise as her leg breaks, badly.

Lydia's scream of pain is mixed with a predatory cry from the monster at the smell of blood. Maggie's door flies open, and Caroline (carrying the axe) flies out of her room, rounding the corner above the stairs, to look down upon the figure of the monster hovering over Lydia, who is panting and crying in pain. Caroline screams loudly, both in fear and desperation, before throwing the ax at the monster, the force of the throw embedding the ax in the back of the monster despite the blade's dullness. The monster screams loudly, and the wind seems to howl in unison. It then flees from the house by busting through the front door, leaving a trail of splattered blood in its wake.

Maggie is left standing at the top of the stairs in shock as Caroline runs down. Caroline slips in the blood, and falls beside Lydia, quickly cradling her in her arms. Caroline yells for Maggie to get the first aid kid from the Kitchen, and Maggie carefully descends the stairs, shakily walking to the kitchen. Once the first aid kit has been given to Caroline, the two uninjured sisters begin first aid. Lydia begins to pass out from the pain and shock, and Caroline slaps Lydia to keep her awake. There is a lot of blood. Maggie is sobbing loudly as she tightens the tourniquet on Lydia's leg.

Chapter Five

Objectives:

1. Four days pass with Caroline and Maggie making barricades in the home, Lydia becomes progressively worse

2. Caroline, no longer in her right mind, decides to kill her sister to relieve her of her pain

3. Maggie finds out, fears for her life, and takes her chances by fleeing back to town in the snowstorm

Outline:

Four days pass by in a blur. They are labelled as such, day one through four, and each cycle shows the same routine, only getting progressively worse. It begins with Caroline sitting beside Lydia, refusing to sleep and demanding that she must be the one to keep watch. During the day, Maggie sits beside Lydia, giving her the laudanum, wiping sweat off her brow, and feeding Lydia. Caroline is shown barricading the home, repairing the sword she found, and pacing back and forth in paranoia. Her sleep deprivation is slowly becoming worse, and she is becoming more aggressive. Each day, Maggie notices that Lydia's wound is smelling worse and worse, with puss seeping out from the bandages. Lydia is also becoming more and more incoherent, fading in and out of consciousness.

On day four, Caroline is seen downstairs, rocking back and forth, trying to shut out Lydia's cries of pain from upstairs. She can't take the suffering anymore, and Caroline decides that Lydia will either die the slow and painful way, or Caroline can do something about it. On reflection, it is shown that Caroline found the ax once left in the monster just outside the cabin, and has been hiding it in her room for safekeeping. Caroline stands, calling Maggie downstairs to begin cooking lunch. As Maggie walks past Caroline, she comments on how Caroline needs to sleep at some point, and Caroline simply nods absently. Caroline almost staggers up the stairs, and Maggie watches from the kitchen doorway, suspicious.

Once Caroline reaches the upstairs, she tells Lydia she will be there to take care of her, and to just wait a moment. Lydia sobs a quiet 'okay'. Caroline is seen pulling the ax out from beneath her bed, and it has clearly been sharpened. As Caroline walks towards the bedside, she hears Lydia mention that she is quite cold, and that she's hoping Caroline could find a spare blanket to warm her. Caroline replies 'in a moment', and raises the ax before bringing it down in a spray of blood.

In the kitchen downstairs, Maggie is loudly chopping potatoes, unaware of what is taking place above her.

Back upstairs, and Caroline is draping a blanket over Lydia's mangles corpse. Slowly, Caroline stumbles down the stairs, mumbling about how there must have been a draft in Lydia's room. Caroline opens the front door, walks a bit, and then collapses in the snow outside, finally falling asleep.

Maggie looks out the kitchen doorway, and sees the trail of blood that Caroline has left behind. Maggie rushes outside and unsuccessfully attempts to wake up Caroline. As she is next to Caroline, Maggie sees the bloody ax in Caroline's hand. Immediately, Maggie runs upstairs to check on Lydia. When she gets to the room and opens the door, she is paralyzed by the blood covering the entire room. Slowly, Maggie approaches the cover placed over Lydia and lifts it, before immediately turning away and vomiting. Turning, Maggie slowly half-walks, half-crawls down the stairs towards the front door. Once she is finally there, she looks out to where Caroline has collapsed, ax in hand. Maggie puts two and two together, and fears for her life.

The snow is beginning to fall harder than before as Maggie pulls together what little she can from the kitchen and sneaks out the backdoor. In Maggie's mind, freezing or starving to death is better than being in a cabin with a murderer and her sister's body. She stumbles towards the old mansion, hoping to find the road from there, but not before draping Caroline in the thick quilt from her (Maggie's) bed, much in the same way Lydia was draped.

Chapter Six

Objectives:

1. Caroline thinks the demon has killed Maggie

2. Caroline baits the demon with Lydia

3. Caroline confronts the demon at the well before falling in with the demon and dealing a seemingly fatal blow

4. Caroline is eaten alive by the demon

Outline:

Caroline wakes up, disoriented and confused. It takes a moment for her to fully come to, and in the moment, she worries immediately about how long she has been asleep for, and that she's left Lydia alone for too long. Reality quickly sets in, and soon Caroline is throwing off the quilt and stumbling back into the cabin. She starts calling out for Maggie, frantically trying to find her. She runs through the entire cabin, eventually ending up in Lydia's room. Here, she is forced to confront the reality of her actions.

Caroline slowly approaches the bed, and pulls back the covers. The audience will not see what Caroline sees, and Caroline herself cannot stand to look for long. She gently pulls the covers back over Lydia's face, and sits down in the chair next to the bed. Lydia's hand is draped off of the bed, dangling. Caroline hold her sister's hand, and begins to cry. Caroline knows at this point that she cannot do the only thing she has ever tried to do – protect her family.

Once Caroline has shed a few tears, she slowly wanders back downstairs, and comes to rest on one of the chairs. As she looks over the room, she sees the kitchen door open, and immediately thinks that must be where Maggie has gone. Instead, when Caroline opens the door, she sees an overboiling pot with a pile of chopped vegetables and a half-chopped potato left on the counter. A knife is on the floor, and the room has clearly been abandoned in a hurry. Caroline immediately concludes that Maggie has fled from the demon, and she runs to the front door of the cabin, but because of the blizzard, all footprints are gone. Caroline begins to catastrophize, and comes to believe that Maggie has been killed by the demon.

With nothing left to lose, Caroline, in a fury, has decided to kill the demon no matter what. It has taken everything from her, and she wants at least some revenge. Fueled by anger, Caroline returns to Lydia's room, and although Caroline truly believes Lydia would agree with what Caroline is about to do, apologizes for it anyway. Caroline lifts Lydia from the bed slowly, and leaves the room. This scene will have close shots, with no gratuitous blood or gore shown.

Cut to the outside of the cabin, with Caroline leaving Lydia's body out in the snow. Caroline slowly walks back inside, grabs the sword from her room, and pulls a chair over to the front door, staring out of the window to watch over Lydia's body. This quickly turns to nightfall, and with no candles lit inside the cabin, Caroline is impossible to see from the outside. It begins with twigs snapping in the distance, slowly growing louder. Then, the eyes. So many eyes. The hulking mass of the demon lurks around the edges of the forest, huffing loudly. The demon then quickly rushes to Lydia's body, and opens its mouth. As Caroline sees this, she opens the front door to the cabin, and slowly sneaks up close to the monster.

Once Caroline is within arm's reach, the demon suddenly notices her, and quickly turns around. Dodging a swipe from it, Caroline slices wildly at the demon with the sword, cutting a large gash that spews blood into the demon's neck and the beast howls wildly. This, however, is apparently not enough to stop the demon, and its mouth opens to double the original size before latching onto Caroline and eating her alive. As Caroline dies, she looks to Lydia, and closes her eyes peacefully, fully believing she can now be with her family again.

Chapter Seven

Objectives:

1. Maggie barely makes it back to town

2. No one believes Maggie about the mansion

Outline:

Open with Maggie, still daylight, stumbling through the snow. This is occurring at the same time that Caroline is waking up. Her fingers are stiff, not able to move well, and the furs she is wearing are stiff and heavy with ice. Maggie is shivering violently, trudging through snow drifts, terrified of the obvious trail she is leaving. Tears have frozen in place on her face from crying, and Maggie has gone numb both physically and emotionally.

Maggie has begun to lose track of time, and feels as though she has been walking for weeks, becoming more and more disheartened as the sun sets into night. In the distance, Maggie hears the loud scream of the demon, and this spurs her onward in fear. Time soon begins to move very quickly, with Maggie collapsing at various points along the road, at different times of day. This sequence of events will resemble a fever dream, and Maggie's nose and fingers will slowly become more and more purple/blue. She begins to think about her childhood, and the relationship she has with her sisters. These memories will slowly focus in on Lydia, and how Maggie had always thought of her as 'mom', but had been far too embarrassed to ever tell her. Maggie wonders at where Lydia might be now, and if she's no longer in pain.

This line of thought will then transition into Caroline. Maggie thinks back to Caroline's behavior on the carriage ride into town, before the start of the story. Caroline had looked anxious and afraid, which was an expression Maggie had never seen Caroline make before. Maggie once again starts to cry, and sits down next to a tree. Things seem totally lost, and Maggie is convinced she will die here, and she's sad that Caroline will be all alone in the cabin now. Maggie hopes that Caroline will find a way to burry Lydia, despite the frozen ground. Maggie begins to feel tired, and starts to feel warm, like a blanket being wrapped around her.

Slowly, Maggie leans against the tree, planning to fall asleep. As she looks above the tree line, however, Maggie sees several columns of smoke about three miles away. This spurs

Maggie back into action, and she slowly pulls herself away from the tree, and begins stumbling towards the smoke, fully leaving the road in order to do so. Speed will pick up here, and Maggie seems to run through the forest, becoming more and more desperate with every second.

Finally, Maggie emerges from the forest, facing the edge of town. She falls to her knees and screams, both in agony and relief. Several townspeople come running, including the doctor. As Maggie is surrounded, she begins to cry about demons, her sister, and how there was just so much blood. The mention of a demon scares the townspeople, but the doctor reassures them that Maggie has been through a lot, and is dying of the cold. He explains that Maggie has temporarily lost control of herself from exposure to the elements, and the townspeople calm down, but continue to whisper.

Closes with Maggie staring back towards the woods, in the direction of the cabin, crying.

Chapter Eight

Objectives:

1. Maggie is kept with the doctor until the Spring

2. A group of miners travel up to the lodge once the snow has melted, and are never heard from again

3. Late at night, after hearing about the miners going missing, as Maggie is looking outside her bedroom window, she can hear howling in the distance. She pulls the covers around herself, rocking back and forth, praying the sound comes no closer

4. The End.

Outline:

A lot of time has passed. This will be shown through the snow melting off of the trees, and the birds returning for the new spring. Maggie will then be seen through a window,

watching these changes happen, and slowly becoming more frail and sickly. It then transitions into the room, with the doctor entering. He briefly asks how Maggie has been doing, and lets Maggie know that some miners have come around asking to see Maggie. She obliges, and heads downstairs into the clinic to meet with the men.

Once Maggie is there, the miners all remove their hats, and one of them steps forward. He gestures for Maggie to sit down, and once she does, the rest of the men leave the room, save for the man who stepped forward. He sits down across from Maggie and hesitates a few times before finally speaking. Eventually he informs Maggie that a group of hunters were sent up to the hunting lodge after the first big snow melt, and have not returned since. Maggie can't look at the man, and instead looks out the window. The man continues to talk about how another group is going to be sent up today to check on the first group, and the man wants to know if there's anything Maggie thinks they should know.

Maggie then turns and stares at the man for a while. Eventually, she speaks: "There are wolves out there. So many eyes…" and trails off staring out the window again. When it's clear the man will get nothing else out of Maggie, gets up, and comments to the doctor that Maggie truly must be a lost cause. The doctor simply nods before leading Maggie back upstairs to her room with some bread and a pot of tea.

Maggie returns to her seat inside the room, before standing up again, and pulling the chair to get a different view out of the window. From this angle, Maggie can now see the road leading up to the hunting lodge. She sits there, waiting, until she sees the men heading up the road with hunting equipment, and recognizes the man who spoke to her amongst the hunters. At the sight of this, Maggie leans backward and drinks her now cold tea. As they move out of sight, Maggie lays down on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Maggie is lying on top of the quilt,

with one arm draped off the bed. There is a knock on the door, but Maggie does not move. The doctor walks in, and takes away the tea and half eaten bread.

Maggie closes her eyes as he leaves, and when she opens them, it is now the middle of the night. She sits up, and walks to the window. As she peers outside, she begins to hear the howling. As the sounds seem to come closer and closer, Maggie's hands begin to shake, then her legs, and finally her whole body. Once she can take it no longer, Maggie rushes back to bed, and pulls the covers around herself and tries to cover her ears with the pillow, trying to block out the howling. She begins to cry, and realizes the howling sounds like it's right outside her door. Maggie then begins to pray for deliverance as she hears the door open.

<div align="center">Fin.</div>

Character Design

Caroline (22)

For the oldest sister, I decided that emblems, a family sword, and a tendency towards more masculine traits would be best. She is incredibly driven and focused on the success and former power of the family. She carries a rusted sword that she carefully restores and maintains throughout the narrative, with its presence is especially salient in key narrative scenes. She is also going to be in the constant presence of the family crest, and these

objects will also be the first things she cleans when they arrive. Lastly, I decided that in order to fit with her assumed paternal figure persona, I wanted her to be more closely tied to the masculine activities within the household such as chopping wood and standing as the authority figure within the household.
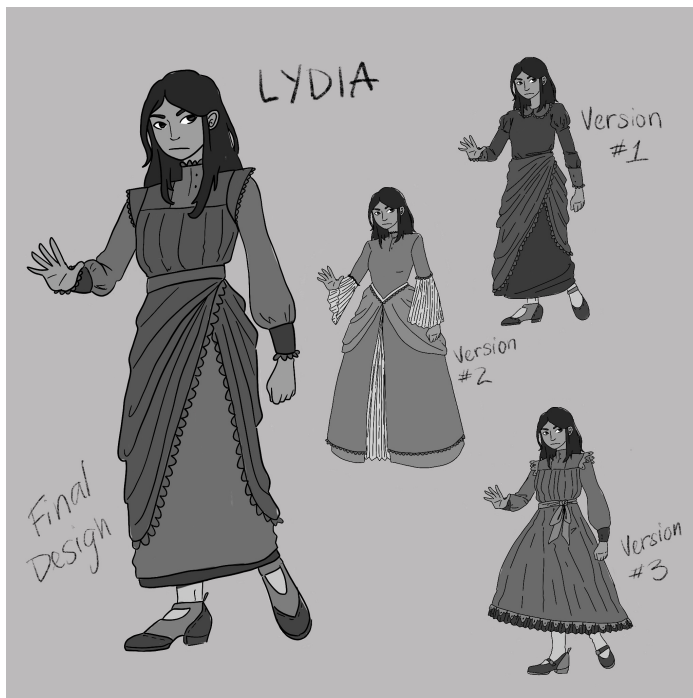
In terms of visual design, I wanted to concentrate on making Caroline much more masculine than her sisters. Caroline, right from the very beginning, was going to be fulfilling the paternal role of the family dynamic, and given the 19th century time frame of the graphic novel, I knew that this would present some challenges. To begin, I focused on deviating from traditionally feminine colors, silhouettes, and fabrics. No lace, no pink, and no defined waistline. From there, I decided that a ponytail would best suit her. Caroline still has her long hair, a holdover from her more feminine youth, but wearing one's hair tied back in a ponytail was a much more masculine hairstyle during this rough time frame.

Additionally, I decided that I wanted to give Caroline a much more muted and dark color palette. This created an overall quieter visual appearance, and I designed it to make her stand out less than her sisters, further emphasizing masculinity. This also helped prevent Caroline from immediately being viewed as the main character. Several of her design elements (e.g. hairstyle, height, clothes) all made her really stand out. The more muted color palette allows Caroline to melt back into formation with her three sisters instead of standing too far out.

Narratively speaking, Caroline is a character who values family above all else. There are times, however, when Caroline's idea of what family means doesn't exactly match up with a given situation. She is driven, strong, and very stubborn. When her father realized he had no son, and his wife had died giving birth to Maggie, he decided to finish off Caroline's education with what the 19th century considered a more masculine schooling. Caroline learned a lot about

accounting, business, trade, and property management. As she got older, Caroline slowly took over the family trading business. This was a slower process of uncovering the unsavory businesses her father was actually involved in as he slowly got sicker and sicker. Eventually, once Caroline's father had passed away, she realized that her only means of escaping the mounting threat of violent debt collectors was to take her sisters to a nondescript town and lay low for a while. Her story truly begins on the ride into town.

Lydia (19)

In regard to the middle sister, I wanted her characterization to revolve around maternal objects and time. Clocks and pocket watches are important objects for this character. While most of her dialogue and most of her actions will communicate a more maternal demeanor, I also wanted to ensure that it was well represented in her surroundings as well. Overall, Lydia is generally more connected emotionally with her sisters, even though she may frequently misread body language. Although Lydia is the middle sister, she essentially fulfills the role of older sister: being able to challenge authority (Caroline), sheltering her younger sibling (Maggie), and even going so far as to fulfill the role of mother now that the sisters are orphaned.

These characteristics translated into her visual design quite well. I focused on more mid-tones, in an effort to avoid a harsh difference between Caroline's darker palette and Maggie's lighter design. Her overall look was inspired primarily from those who have been caretakers in the past. Her dress and pinafore resemble an older maid/nurse outfit from the 19th century. Since I am not strongly adhering to the time period, that allowed me some additional creative freedom with her design. Since Lydia has not married, and knows it's very unlikely she ever will, she keeps her hair shorter than her sisters. While she does enjoy more feminine things, she has never really liked her hair to be too long.

In terms of her narrative presentation, it's clear she is currently experiencing a lot of familial tension. After her father passed away, and the once hidden family debts are revealed, her betrothed retracted his proposal. This caused Lydia a great deal of public humiliation, and is very upset with Caroline for mentioning the family debt publicly at their father's funeral. Lydia is also at odds with Maggie, who she is attempting to raise. Maggie has never viewed Lydia as an authority figure, and so the two are constantly bickering over what constitutes 'appropriate' behavior. Ashamed, and with her reputation in shambles, Lydia's story starts on the carriage leading into town.

Maggie (14)

For the youngest member of the family, I knew that she was likely to have the least amount of symbolism around her. Maggie doesn't have as much life experience as her sisters do, and has gone through much less strife as a result. I did decide, however, to associate Maggie closely with books, flowers, and furs. Her age is a very large part of her character, and she went as far as to smuggle some books in her trunk of belongings. Caroline had intended to sell all the books for some extra money, but Maggie takes pride in her sticky hands.

When it comes to Maggie's visual design, I wanted to keep everything very youthful for her. She is not extremely feminine, but since Lydia picks out her clothes, she is left with little choice in her wardrobe aside from lighter colors. This also ended up serving the overall gradient tone of the sisters from oldest to youngest. Maggie's hair is also the longest, although the most unkempt. Her outfit consists of several separate pieces as opposed to one complex dress. This was to make Maggie easier to draw, and was more of a concern for her as the actual main character. Because Lydia is only present in the story for so long, her clothes were less of a concern, and therefore much more complicated. This also means that Maggie is much more mobile than Lydia, and frequently attempts to mimic Caroline's style.

For the narrative, Maggie is a very stubborn teenager. She is very hardheaded, causing a lot of conflict between herself and Caroline. Both frequently think they've got the

right idea, but only Caroline has the age and authority to have the final say. Their mother died giving birth to Maggie, so the only parental figures she's ever had have been Lydia and their father. She is very used to living a comfortable life without any needs, so when Caroline announced they were leaving, Maggie threw a huge fit over it. Her story begins as her sadness sets in on the carriage into town.
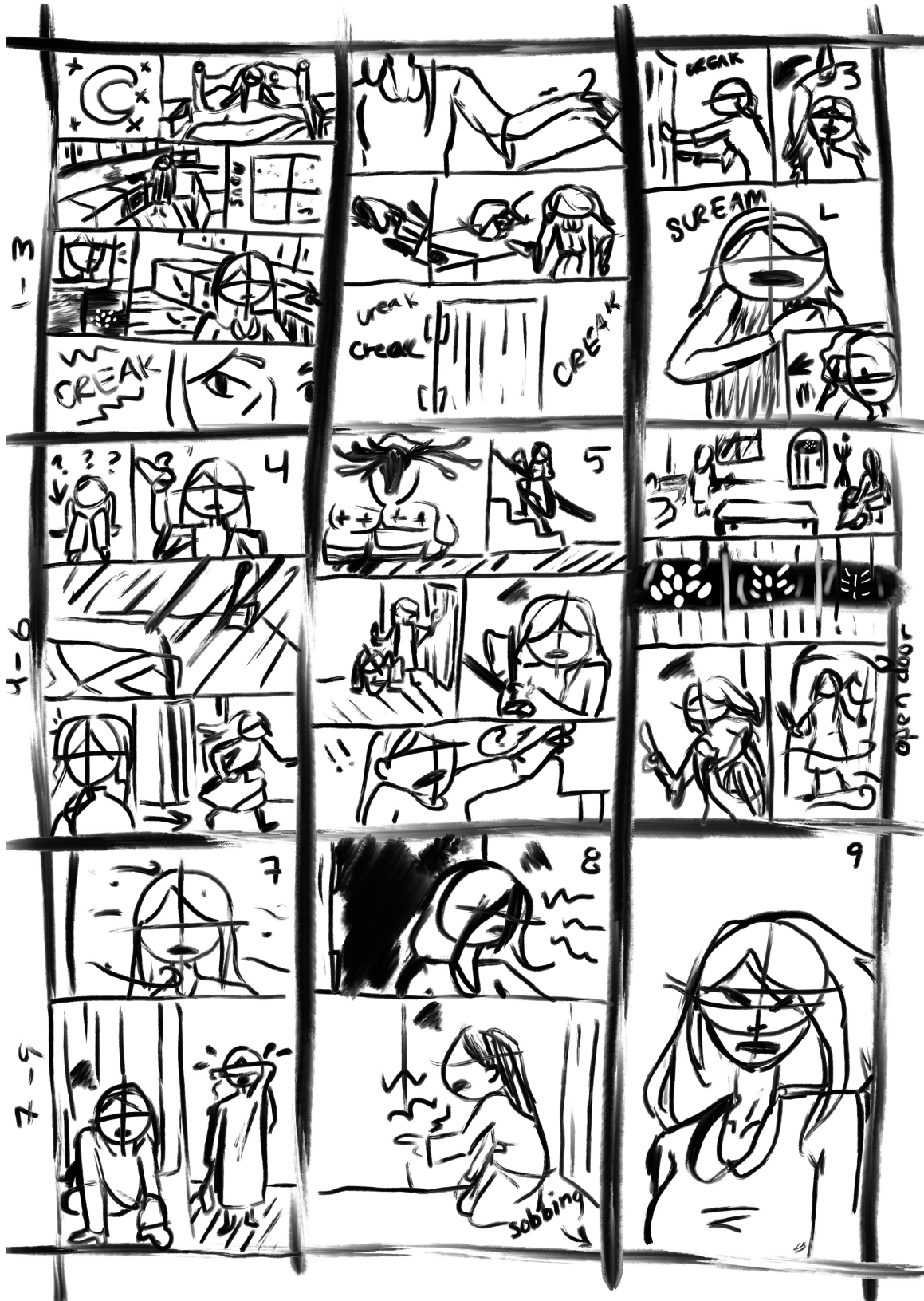
Storyboarding

My methods of storyboarding are quite loose, and I am prone to frequent changes and rearrangements. What I have shown below is where the visual portion of my project is currently at, but is subject to change from the moment of submission. I plan on continuing to work on the visual portion of this project past the date of official 'completion'. Additionally, due to the constant changing nature of wanting to alter framing, composition, and other visual factors, at this time I have only completed the final version of the first three chapters. The reasons for this are discussed in detail within the sections Project Timeline and Concluding Analysis.

My style of storyboarding mostly revolves around the appropriate placement of characters relative to their surroundings, as well as shot composition, the general emotion a particular frame is meant to show, and the facial expressions of the characters. Storyboards are meant to be extremely rough, as they are subject to constant change, and there is no point spending hours on something that is likely to change anyway. I have also condensed down nine pages into a single A4 size page for ease of transfer across platforms (e.g. from iPad to laptop). These storyboards are also condensed, hitting only on the major narrative beats covered within the general outline of the story.

Chapter One (12 Pages)

Chapter Two (9 Pages)

Chapter Three (9 Pages)

Artist Statement

Project Timeline

This project took place over the course of two years, starting from the moment I first conceptualized this project and wrote my proposal. Over the course of my project, and as various life issues came up, I ended up completely deviating from my original timeline. I still believe that proposing a specific timeline as important, even if there are some who will completely disregard it. The initial timeline really helped my figure out how I wanted to approach this project and in what order I wanted to adhere to as I worked on this over time.

For the first six months of my thesis, I spent a lot of time doing research, finding relevant information, and compiling historical information that I then loosely adapted to into my project. This process took much longer than I had initially anticipated, mostly due to the fact that I was planning a wedding at the same time. Overall, this was the most difficult portion of the process, one that I put off finishing until the end of the project.

I then worked on creating the narrative for four months. This involved writing a variety of story outlines and then scrapping or combining the ones that didn't work for what I wanted to accomplish. I used a basic skeleton of traditional Gothic horror that I built upon to ensure I was being true to the genre. It took me a very long time, but I eventually settled on a mish-mash of past ideas, and worked on smoothing out the inconsistencies for the last month of this time period.

It only took me about two months to fully explore all of my creative inspiration for this project. This was much less time than I expected, and I was relieved that I would have more time for research. During this time period, I watched movies and reread all the books

that have inspired me throughout this process. I kept track of these assessments in a small notebook that was exceptionally helpful for the next portion of the project.

At the one-year mark of this project, I unfortunately had a variety of personal and family medical issues that took precedence over this project. By the time I was in a position to resume this project, around five months had past, leaving me with seven months to complete the research, script, and visual designs for this project. At this point, I considered extending my timeline, given that I was returning from an unanticipated series of emergencies. Eventually, I decided to shoot for the original completion date, and if I needed more time, I would extend the project at that point.

This was also the time that I began to work on everything at once. Where I originally had a strong plan, I ended up doing only what was necessary for one in order to advance another, and this cycle has continued up until the completion of this project. It began with me writing the script as I was designing the characters. In order to write fully fleshed out characters, it's important to me to visualize the character in their entirety, causing me to bounce between the script and character design. This then came to a head when I wanted to incorporate some of the tropes I was learning about in my character design and script, furthering this cycle of jumping between things.

Towards the end, I was running out of time, and had fewer opportunities to work on the storyboard than I would have liked. I tend to not like writing out a storyboard until a full script has been written, and so for the purposes of having something to show, I went ahead and created a finalized version of the first chapter. The first chapter has been done in terms of writing for quite a while, and so it was fairly straightforward in terms of shot composition. I'm disappointed that I was unable to provide at least a half-completed story board, but given my current health, I don't think it would be wise to push myself and cause undue stress.

Nonetheless, I'm very happy that I have worked so hard to be where I am now, especially given the difficult circumstances I experienced. In the future, I would like to say that this sprint to the finish line won't happen, but life is unpredictable, and the only way I could anticipate this in the future is to attempt to do the bulk of the project at the very beginning. I underestimated the rigor of the path I had laid out for myself, and what I have accomplished here is exactly the amount that ended up being realistic given my circumstances.

Personal Experience

Overall, this project has absolutely been one of the most difficult things I've ever done. For the past two years, I have worked slowly and steadily on this project, leading to where I am today. As I have crafted the narrative, designed the characters, done the research, and put things together piece by piece, the magnitude of this project became more and more apparent to me. I will discuss the advice I have for future students below, but suffice it to say, there is no way I could ever recommend another student try this project. When things rain, they pour. These past two years of my life have been both amazing and heart wrenching, and the arc of my project over time has evolved accordingly. From family medical emergencies, to getting married, then experiencing my own medical issues and so much more, I truly feel as though this project is the best reflection of life thus far.

In terms of what has been the easiest portion to complete, I can confidently say that writing the narrative and designing the characters has consistently been the parts that I have truly enjoyed the most. While there were some rough patches when I had to reign it in to prevent myself from creating something beyond my capacity to illustrate, it was still exciting to work bit by bit on what I viewed as the final product. Playing with color, shape, and personality has always been my favorite part of the creative process of character creation.

The most difficult portion of this project has been finding, compiling, analyzing, and then synthesizing all of the research I used for this project. Unfortunately, graphic novels have not been widely/extensively covered by academic literature, let alone Gothic horror graphic novels. Instead, I had to search elsewhere for tangentially related topics that were related to my project despite the lack of a direct connection. The difficulty finding research eventually bled over into my 'lit review' section, and prevented me from completing that section of my thesis in a timely manner. It ended up being the very last section I worked on throughout this process, and even causing a delay in my ideal timeline for this project.

Advice & Lessons

Taking the above into consideration, I would advise no other students attempt to put together both a graphic novel and a fully fleshes out written thesis. This is simply too much work to do in only two years. The entire process of creating a graphic novel involves not only writing an entire narrative outline, but also scripting out the written text and direction notes for the actual creation of the project. Additionally, all of the art direction, location inspiration, character design, color palette choices, and action shot composition is all also done by only one person. I made the mistake of overcommitting when I added the academic portion of this project.

In conjunction with the creative aspect of the project, I was also researching movies, books, music, art, and other inspirations. I had to break all of these down in terms of what I liked or didn't like, what I wanted to incorporate, the tools the creators were using that I could implement and so on. Beyond that, I was also working on compiling academic research in an underrepresented genre and field. Gothic horror is not well researched in the modern day, and many of my sources are older, creating the potential for it to be irrelevant now.

There were also a few other contributing factors that led to this project being so difficult. I had no solid advising on the creation of a graphic novel, as none of my past teachers had any experience in doing something similar. Additionally, it was believed that creating a graphic novel alone was not sufficient proof of being academically rigorous, and so I added on doing additional research to fit that requirement. Now, at the end of my project, I have come to believe that creative theses need some other form of evaluation, separate from academic or project-oriented theses. The amount of work I ended up doing went far beyond the initial scope of the project. Secondly, if someone is very passionate about pursuing the creation of an original graphic novel, I would recommend more than one advisor: a creative writing advisor as well as an art advisor. This project is simply too broad to only have one advisor overseeing the entirety of this project.

Overall, I am extremely proud of what I have been able to accomplish. While it may not have been the fully complete graphic novel I had originally envisioned, given what I have learned about the reality of graphic novel creation, what I am now presenting as my 'complete' thesis is what I feel is truly the best outcome given the issues I have faced. In the future, I hope more people pursue a creative thesis, but I would strongly recommend that there be some unique rubric of assessment for those who need it. This unique rubric should be decided upon with the submission of the project proposal, as well as an explanation as to why a given project has a need for alternative assessment, as well as proving the academic rigor of the project.

Concluding Analysis

If success is solely defines as having perfectly completing the plan I had originally laid out before me, then this project has not succeeded insofar as no final product was produced. Many unforeseen issues got in my way – family emergencies, my own medical issues, and a

lack of informed advising (both from peers and mentors) about how intensive of a project I was getting involved in. What I do have, however, is a full literature review of an understudied topic, a creative analysis of all my inspirations, a fully completed narrative outline that proves an intent to complete this project at a later date, as well as a visual analysis of the work that I have done so far. In order to get where I am, I have taught myself how to fully utilize a tablet art program called ProCreate, a program designed to function on iPads, a platform I had minimal experience with. I also advocated for myself and sought out the help that I needed when I struggled with my narrative and research. My fully completed narrative outline shows my ability to construct a narrative from beginning to end, a core component of the English/Writing major I have been in for the past four years.

I do believe, however, that I have fully succeeded in answering the questions I initially sought out to answer. I have laid out all the various ways in which horror can be constructed, facilitated, experienced, and enjoyed, staying true to the core goal of this project. While this project may not have succeeded on the creative front, academically, I can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that I succeeded. Given the lack of academic discussion surrounding the modern context of Gothic horror, I truly believe that I have contributed to an ongoing discussion that is very close to my heart. Although I am an undergraduate, I am proud that I was able to carry on a conversation that, at times, went beyond what I had studied, and I have worked hard to prove that I fully comprehend this material.

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        This paper helps form my definition of horror that is fundamental to the

formation of my narrative arc and approach to the plot and writing of my graphic

novel. The main thesis of this article is that horror is "the inverse of the comic spirit",

and that comedy and horror are two sides of the same coin. Morgan throws a wide net

over the definition of Gothic horror and makes a point to include Lovecraft within his

definition of horror, stating that 'weird tales' such as Lovecraft's works are merely

variations or subgenres of Gothic horror. It is made clear that horror is as fundamental

to human nature as comedy is, and that horror literature is putting an ancient human

instinct into words.

        In this paper, the Gothic is portrayed as a form of horror that prominently

features the fragility and frailty of the human body, and the core of Gothic horror

surrounds the mortality of human life. The Gothic focuses on "withering; rather than

on growth". Death, not life, is the main theme of traditional Gothic horror. By focusing on the fragility of the human body, the Gothic ignores the concept of a 'gentle death' and instead highlights the horror of decay, deterioration, and the unwinding and deconstruction of the whole. Horror plays on primeval fears, and in doing so forces us to confront the sometimes-terrifying realities of mortality.

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This paper is fundamental to the understanding of what a Byronic hero is, how they function, and what their values and motivations tend to be. Their name hails from a writer named Lord Byron, whose male characters were famous for behaving in a manner traditional to that of the now-named 'Byronic Hero'. Byronic heroes are always rebels who enter into constant struggles with authority in order to assert and exercise their ideals freely. Typically, Byronic heroes tend to be both romanticized and demonized, portrayed as powerful and often heroic but frequently toe the line between what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. For example, a Byronic hero might be fighting against crime to help protect the innocent, but in doing so they may be committing serious crimes such as murder or arson themselves. If a Byronic hero does fall down the

slippery slope into becoming a villain, they never repent or feel guilty for the actions that have led them to where they are.

All Byronic heroes have a strong code of honor and morals that they never stray from, though the specific of their code may not outwardly appear to be morally good. The highest value of the Byronic hero is traditionally love, though the love can be either romantic or familial in nature, and the Byronic will usually idealize this love to the point of being out-of-touch with reality. They possess superior willpower and leadership qualities, often drawing other characters to them, and frequently dragging those who were once good down a darker path with them. Because of these leadership qualities, Byronic heroes are extremely active characters, and more often than not they are one of the primary driving factors behind the plot moving forward in the story.

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The Thing. Directed by John Carpenter, Universal Studios, 1982. Film.

    This movie has been so deeply influential for me in so many ways. The portrayal of horror in this film is second to none for me. From the camera angles to the colorization, from character motivation to intense scenes of conflict, this film really has it all in terms of horror. I am interested in implementing this method of angled shots and close ups to help inform to visual horror of my graphic novel.

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