

Teratology with Dr. W. Scott Poole

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's your friend who gets terrified trying to drive in a roundabout, Alie Ward, and ohhh, we've got a good one. Oh boy. Absolutely stellar, instant classic here. This guest is an author of many, many, many, *many* books and his writing is gorgeous; even the titles are top shelf like *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* and his latest book, *Dark Carnivals: Modern Horror and the Origins of American Empire*. Just every sentence is beautifully descriptive and heavy with vibes and his observations of human behavior; he has a deep reservoir of cultural knowledge, he's just ah! He's the perfect guest.

He got his PhD at the University of Mississippi, and he teaches courses such as Monsters in America, Horror, Narratives of Fear and Violence in American History, and Histories of Death: The Gothic and Social Revolution at Charleston College. My friend Max Oswald – hey Max – put us in touch. I was so jittery, I was so worried because he's so cool, that I would just blow the whole thing. The first half of this episode is a lot of monster theory and sociological causes and effects of monsters and then after the ad break, we get more into Patreon questions and more about specific monsters.

You can submit questions ahead of time if you want via [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://patreon.com/Ologies) for as little as a dollar a month and you can sport *Ologies* shirts and hats and totes via OlogiesMerch.com. You can also support the show for \$0, just by leaving us a review. I read all of them, such as this still-wet one from MFourur, whose therapist recommended the show and who wrote:

I particularly gravitate toward Ologies on darker days when I need a reminder that life is incredible and there is so much to appreciate.

I appreciate that MFourur and everyone who left reviews and everyone who just spreads the word and tells your friends and your enemies about the show.

Okay, teratology. [*deep breath*] Oooh, boy. This is a real word; it comes from the Greek for monster, and it is the study of monsters in folklore and fiction. It is also, horrifyingly, the term used to describe the study of physiological, developmental “abnormalities.” But obviously, I prefer the term that is applied to the study of the myths of monsters and fantastical creatures which, again, is another legit use in the literature. Teratology, scary movies, and monsters; the creatures are the what, Spooktober is the when. So, let's get into it.

Rise from your crypts, turn your ears on for Frankenstein, Frankenstein's monster, the Bride of Frankenstein's monster, zombies, Chupacabras, Bigfoots, werewolves, Babadooks, folk stories of helpful ghosts, monsters on various continents, horror versus monster movies, secret messages in scary movies, the director's cuts that your government may not have wanted you to see, how monsters mirror our fears, what to do if you suspect you have one under the bed, very tall ladies, sea snakes, Hollywood production secrets, special effects makeup and more with professor, acclaimed author, horror fan, monster expert, and teratologist, Dr. W. Scott Poole.

Scott: I'm glad that he recommended me because I was very excited to be able to talk with you. I've enjoyed your work as well.

Alie: Oh! Oh my gosh!

Scott: So, this is kind of a cool thing for me to get to do. So, I will try not to fanboy.

Alie: [*starts to laugh*] When I got the email back that you were in, I was trying not to fan. I was really nervous. [*laughs*] That's really funny.

Scott: Well see, now we don't have to be nervous. [*laughs*]

Alie: Now we're good friends. [*both laugh*]

Aside: Okay, we got our nerves out of the way so onto less scary stuff like body horror and monsters.

Scott: So, this is Scott Poole, he/him.

Alie: And Doctor...?

Scott: Dr. Poole or Professor Poole but I really love it when people call me Scott so, let's do that.

Alie: All right, sounds good, Dr. Poole. [*both laugh*] Now, Professor, you teach courses on monsters. [*laughs*]

Scott: Yes. I do. I teach monster courses. I absolutely do and it's the most fun thing, sort of, I guess *fun*, to say when people at parties find out I'm a history professor and they ask me what my topic is [*Alie laughs*] and I respond, not Civil War reconstruction or the American Revolution or Han China but monsters. [*Alie still laughing*] I do monsters and popular culture.

So yeah, they are history courses. What I kind of build my classes around is the idea that part of why monsters are so important to us is that they are ways that we talk about all kinds of other stuff that's really important to us; gender, politics, the way that we construct society, even economic inequality is an issue that comes up when you talk about monstrosity. I think this is true with the monstrous film tradition as well. Because monsters are quite literally "out there" they're beyond the margins, it's just crazy stuff, for that reason, it's like this little space that we can talk about things that, you know, it's difficult to talk about when it's done straight, when we're not using these kinds of very, very strong images.

Alie: Mm-hm. Are monsters, in one way, metaphor? Are they portals into these discussions?

Scott: They are definitely portals into the discussions. I think that they are something stronger than metaphors. What I mean by that is this: when you use a metaphor, you always know you're using it. You know that you're not talking about a real thing. And one of the things that I emphasize to students in my classes when we talk about these kinds of things is that for many people, not for me, and not for many of them, but for many people, different kinds of monsters are very real. And the kinds of anxieties that these kinds of monsters express are certainly very real.

So, for example, you can have a conversation with someone, and you end up talking about vampires and they say, "Well, of course I love vampires, but I don't believe in vampires." Then let's say the conversation turns to Bigfoot. Well, they're big Bigfoot believers, "If you don't believe in Bigfoot, you don't know what you're talking about," right? [*Alie laughs*] And this is true of so many of these things. One of the things I tell my students is that in the American context, because of the influence of religion, particularly evangelical religion, the idea of Satan and demonic forces, these are probably the monsters that are most widely believed in in the American context and yet they also show up in our horror films.

Alie: And going back in terms of historically, that's such a good point about religion and the stories that we have used to try to teach each other. How far back do monsters even go? And what's the difference between something that is posed as reality versus something that we know is story?

Scott: Mm-hm. I think that they are in many respects, and I think there's evidence that they are older than *Homo sapiens*, that our prehistoric ancestors 100,000 years ago had an experience of the

monstrous. The reason that I say that is that most scholars are pretty sure that the first experiences of religion were related to ceremonial burial. In fact, that may go back 300,000 years. So, like, leaving gifts for the dead. [*I got you something.*] This likely held meaning in terms of grief, in terms of community solidarity, politics probably entered into it, who gets a proper ceremonial burial, that kind of thing.

Aside: For more on these kinds of subjects, we linked in the show notes episodes on Thanatology about death and dying; Desairology about mortuary make-up; Taphology is about headstones and burial grounds and cemeteries; and of course, Vampirology.

Scott: But there's also this kind of ritual of terror that surrounded those prehistoric burials. The idea of, like, "What if they come back? And what if they're mad when they do?" [*Alie laughs*] So, there's a sense in which things like the leaving of gifts, the burial of people with gifts, there's these feelings of guilt and placation and maybe even kind of a search for absolution from these creatures and from our former kinfolk. Like, what will happen if they return? And I don't think that there's a lot of light between those truly, truly, truly ancient ideas and the idea of the monster.

Alie: What exactly is defined as a monster? What's a monster? What's a demon? What's a zombie? What's a cryptid? When it comes to the teratological, how do you define that as an expert in this?

Scott: [*takes a deep breath*] So, here's the thing about me that drives some of my other monsterologists crazy... [*Alie laughs*] I don't define [*laughs, Alie squeals*] the monster. Now, let me back up here...

Alie: I was going to say, I guess this interview is over. [*laughs*] It's been great talking to you.

Scott: [*laughs*] So, yeah, don't cut me off yet. I'm pretty sure I got something here.

Alie: Okay. [*laughs*]

Scott: So, hang in here with me. I think that the monster by its very nature is definition-defying. One of the things that when I first became interested really, especially in the academic study of monsters, thinking about them as a scholarly topic, is just the fact that it's kind of this category that completely ignores categories. And so, for example, you mentioned vampires. Okay, vampires, we count those as monsters. We also count Godzilla as a monster. [*Alie laughs*] We also throw serial killers in there in our spectrum of the monstrous.

And so, what do any of these different kinds of expressions of horror, chaos, what do they have really in common? And as I looked at it through time and as I looked at it as a historian, like, what's going on when people are afraid of these particular things? What I decided is that it's really the context itself, the political, the historical, the cultural context that defines the monster. One example of this would be that in the 19th century, for about 60 years, Americans – most Americans, certainly middle-class Americans – were obsessed with the idea of the sea serpent.

Alie: Okay! [*laughs*]

Scott: And when I say they were obsessed, I mean, they loved reading accounts of sightings, there were lots and lots of Americans that were absolutely sure that they had seen one. There was an incident in the 1830s in Gloucester, Massachusetts in which about 130 people claimed that a sea serpent showed up in Gloucester Harbor and they all saw it. There was even sheet music [*jingly upbeat music plays*] that you could play on the piano at home, it was called the Sea Serpent Polka [*Alie laughs*] and no, I can't play that for you Alie, if I could, I definitely would. [*music trails off*]

Aside: That was a clip from the 1850s banger, "Sea Serpent Polka" which was composed by Eastern European-born pianist Maurice Strakosch and covered by Jamie Winters via Soundcloud 170 years later. So, according to the 1887 *New York Times* obituary of Maurice Strakosch, he was a

musical prodigy and began making really good money performing concerts at the age of 11. But his parents disapproved so he got out of dodge like, "Later losers," he high-tailed it to Vienna at the age of 12 with about (reported by the *New York Times*) two bucks in his pocket. Which is like, how is this little man even going to eat? Then I realized that that was reported in 1887. So, I looked it up and adjusted for inflation. That's like two grand in today's money! So, this kid was loaded, like a little tiny Justin Bieber who got emancipated and wrote a polka about a sea serpent.

I was shocked to find that his obit and Wikipedia page both neglect to mention this composition so maybe it was a blip in his otherwise very noteworthy life. But also, I mean, come on, name a better song about a sea serpent... Name any song about a sea serpent.

Scott: Hopefully you know that where I'm going with this is, who is scared of sea serpents today? Nobody that I know. We're not watching films about them, we're not reading books about them et cetera, et cetera but in the 19th century, the sea serpent was it. [*Alie laughs*] The sea serpent was their vampire, was their zombie film, was all those things.

And when I really looked into it, one of the things that I discovered is that there's so much talk and so much interest in the possibility of these kinds of creatures because it's at a time when the nature of scientific evidence, there's a lot of discussion of the nature of scientific evidence and what counts as scientific evidence. The sea serpent became kind of a perfect forum to discuss those kinds of things. It became a forum to discuss Darwinism, it became a forum for scientists themselves to talk about what it meant to do professional science, like, the actual professionalization of the profession. So, sea serpents don't have a lot to do with vampires but they're both monsters. And so, I think it's in many respects the historical context that creates our monsters.

Alie: And did they ever figure out what that sea serpent was? Was it, like, an oarfish? Was it just a... One of those big wiggly ones?

Scott: I'm pretty sure that they were seeing a whale.

Alie: Okay. [*laughs*]

Scott: The oarfish has been suggested as for the, actually, kind of hundreds of worldwide sea serpent sightings. And there was actually a New England whaling ship, I believe this was in the 1840s, they claimed that close to the Antarctic Circle, they had managed to get their hands on the corpse of a sea serpent, and they were going to bring it back to New York City. Runners had come in advance, kind of announcing that this was happening so there were stories in the *New York Times*. And then they got back home, and they were like, "Sorry, we misplaced it."

Alie: [*laughs*] Wait, how do you misplace a sea serpent?

Scott: Well... [*stutters*] You know, you just lose stuff, right? [*both laugh*] And so, yeah. I think that shows you the level of fascination that, you know, has been lost to us. It's also a little bit like in a class that I teach on the 20th-century horror film, my students are pretty insistent to me that 1931's James Whale's *Frankenstein* is not scary at all, you know; Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* is not scary at all. Films are much scarier now. And you know, they were really terrifying in the 1930s. It's not that people in the 1930s were naïve or [*laughs*] that they were less smart than us or had less exposure to— I mean, these were people going through the Great Depression and about to face the Second World War so they're aware that the world is a challenging place. It's just that a part of it at least, part of it is that there were elements of the *Frankenstein* story that pushed certain kinds of buttons in the 1930s that it does not in quite the same way today. So, I do think that monsters are very much born out of the historical context and out of the culture that creates them.

Alie: What do you think that Frankenstein, or Frankenstein's monster, I don't know if you have thoughts on what we should call him, but what buttons do you think he was pushing at that time?

Scott: Well, I tell you, as a horror film fan and a historian, one of the most eye-opening moments that I really kind of ever had in doing this kind of work was watching a scene specifically in, actually, maybe my favorite classic horror film, *The Bride of Frankenstein* in 1935, just a wonderful fantasy horror film. There is, in that film, a moment in which the monster, you know, very famously, there's always the villagers with the pitchforks and torches and he's being chased...

[clip from the Bride of Frankenstein]

Angry Townsman: Get him alive if you can! But get him!

Crowd shouts and cheers with approval.

Angry Townsman: Search every ravine, every crevice, but the fiend must be found! Are you ready?

Crowd continues to shout.

[clip continues but fades as Scott carries on] Then he's actually tied up and raised up on this pole amid this really scary crowd that has gathered around him. And I realized, oh my god, this is the 1930s, this is the heart of the moment when African American men in particular were being lynched across the country. This is a lynching. *[Alie sighs]* And then next step, there are people who watched this film in 1935 who had participated in a lynching.

Alie: Oh my god.

Scott: Or consider this, who had had a family member who had been murdered by a white mob. And for a while, I thought, well, you know, the old thing of "You're reading too much into this." And then as I was looking at reviews of the film, actually when I was researching *Monsters in America* and wanting to write about it and see what reviewers said at the time, no comment about this in American papers but in the foreign press, *[Alie gasps softly]* specifically a review in a British paper, I believe in fact it was *The Times*, the London *Times*, noted that there was a scene in the film that will "Remind viewers of nothing so much as a Georgia lynching."

Alie: Oh my god.

Aside: For a very brief primer on this horrifying facet of America, you can visit the NAACP's article, "History of Lynching in America," which recounts that:

A typical lynching involved a criminal accusation, an arrest, and the assembly of a mob, followed by seizure, physical torment, and murder of the victim. Lynchings were often public spectacles attended by the white community in celebration of white supremacy. Photos of lynchings were often sold as souvenir postcards.

The atrocities were common, even in the early 20th century in the American South, and there was an anti-lynching bill posed to Congress in 1918, but it was defeated by a filibuster in the Senate. Lynchings finally started to decline toward the 1930s after the NAACP waged this campaign and persuaded Southern newspapers to publicly condemn lynchings. And then white businesses were boycotted in the South which changed some tides. So... In America, money talks the loudest.

Scott: So, you know, monsters can be great fun but part of the horror of the monster is that it can also become a way for us to experience the terror of the times in which we live in. I actually later learned that the director, James Whale – who directed both *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* – had become close friends, interestingly enough, with Paul Robeson, the musician, civil rights activist, very strong advocate on the American left in the '30s and '40s. He worked with him on the

film *Show Boat* a few years later, he's very famous for the song "Ol' Man River" in that pretty lavish Hollywood production. But Paul Robeson, who was really a true radical in the very best sense on these issues, probably did influence James Whale to think about that imagery. In part because that imagery is actually not in, at least in the same way, in Mary Shelley's 1818 and 1831 *Frankenstein*.

Alie: Have sociologists or historians looked into what the effect might have been on the public, either consciously or subconsciously, of that imagery being a mirror to what was happening in society at the time?

Scott: I have tried to find responses to it and not only actually in relation to those films or that particular issue but really just sort of how people responded to what we might call the politics of the horror film in earlier ages and even our own time. One thing I always like to tell people about this and that we always talk about in class is that we should never assume, this is true of anything, we should never assume that people are picking up what's being put down, right? [both chuckle] There are certainly plenty of people, I'm certain, who managed to watch the *Barbie* film without learning very much about fourth-wave feminism, right?

Alie: [through laughter] Yes.

Scott: They thought the color palette was great and the songs were fun and that was kind of it! They missed it. So certainly, even things that are much more implicit, it's really difficult to see.

Where I think it becomes more interesting is as we get closer to our own time, the 1960s specifically, and horror films become much more explicitly political. George Romero employing an African American male lead in *Night of Living Dead*, a protagonist, the hero really, of the piece. [through high-pitched hum, robotic voice speaks. "All persons who die during this crisis from whatever cause, will come back to life to seek human victims." Ben: "I'm telling you they can't get in here."] So, I think it becomes much more striking than often I found particularly in politically progressive horror in the '30s, '40s, and '50s. There's almost this feeling of it being kind of an in-joke for the people who get it and then everybody else kind of doesn't.

Aside: Going back to director James Whale. His Hollywood career started in 1930 with a film called *Journey's End* and then he directed *Frankenstein*, *Invisible Man*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*. I looked him up and he was also weirdly gorgeous, like David Bowie in sepia tones.

Scott: Whale, who was an out gay man in Hollywood in the 1930s, also included a lot of in-jokes for his own community that very much went over the head of everybody that saw the film. Plenty of people who still see the film don't really see how it's clearly queer-coded in certain ways.

Aside: One such way is *The Bride of Frankenstein's* original plot point of Dr. Frankenstein bailing on his new wife on his wedding night to harvest a human heart... from his new bride and then working alongside another male doctor to create life. The Hays Code was this thing, they were content guidelines for entertainment and they were in place from the mid-'30s to the late-'60s and they forbade anything that would compromise "the sanctity of marriage." This is nearly 100 years ago but these discussions are still taking place, especially regionally in the United States.

Alie: I tend to have a pretty sensitive ear and it's really subtle, but I noticed that you might maybe be from the South.

Scott: Yes.

Alie: I know that you have a very subtle accent... [laughs] Just kidding. It's very obvious which is wonderful. [both chuckle] What's a little bit of your upbringing and your intersection with this? How long have you been a horror fan, too?

Scott: Oh, like since I was 6.

Alie: Oh my god. [laughs]

Scott: No, I really have. Here's the thing... Gosh, we have to talk about my accent and my age because here's the deal. So, when I was a little kid in the late 1970s, on Saturday afternoons my local rural South Carolina television station [dramatic spooky film music] had an afternoon film series that they called *Shock Theater*.

Alie: Oh my god, okay.

Scott: *Shock Theater* was actually something that went back to the 1950s because what had happened was that Universal Studios as well as some other studios, but mainly Universal, had sold a lot of their old archival films like the great *Monster Mash* films of the 1930s and '40s to local TV stations. So, especially as late as the '70s now, it was a really easy thing for a small station to throw together a double feature of the 1931 *Frankenstein* and the 1941 *Wolf Man*.

And so, for years, [both laughs] on Saturday afternoons I just was absolutely glued to the set. I saw everything from just incredible classic films like *The Bride of Frankenstein* to absolute garbage like *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, [both laugh] which I have to say is still a terribly guilty pleasure. ["*Attack of the 50-foot woman. Incredibly huge, with incredible desires for love and vengeance.*"]

Aside: The most grotesque monstrosity of all? A gorgeous and powerful woman breaks through the roof of a building. Did it have a glass ceiling, perhaps? Terrifying.

Scott: That was also the era, it wasn't really the golden age for this but magazines like *Famous Monsters of Filmland* were still around and so, when I could talk my mother into going and picking me up a comic book at the drugstore, there were also these wonderful monster magazines that all these photographs of films I had not been able to see and stories about the actors and stories about the directors. I just loved it. I actually think I loved it in part because I did live in a small, not very interesting, very conservative, and also very religious community. And so, the kind of just, like, wide open imaginative landscape that that kind of stuff opened up in that otherwise sort of dreary time and place was really wonderful.

Alie: How did your family feel about you, a tiny tot, being glued to horror films on Saturdays?

Scott: Not good. [Alie cackles] It was a real problem Alie, it was a real problem. There were at least several times that *Shock Theater* was banned. [Alie laughs] Several different times going into my teenage years, the comics and magazines were also banned. One of the most fun things about that side of it though is that in the 1980s, if you were a big horror film fan, by the '80s, it wasn't famous monsters, it was a magazine called *Fangoria*.

Alie: I remember that, I remember that.

Scott: And *Fangoria* is still with us. They had these really truly... Honestly, like I completely understand why my parents were so upset. The covers were just horrible; bloody, faces melting, all this stuff. So, of course, when my mom managed to find these, even though I did sequester them away and all that kind of stuff, she located them, and they were banned from the house.

Alie: I'm sure.

Scott: And looking back, I totally get it. I actually do kind of understand that. But here's the thing, fast forward to, let's see, about 2016 and *Fangoria* did a feature about my *Lovecraft* book and my mom was with her little old lady friends, she was like, "Oh my son, look at this. He's in this magazine, look. [Alie laughs] Yeah, that's a severed head on the cover but yeah, it's my..." [laughs]

Alie: I'm sure at the time though she was like, "Why can't he just be into *Playboys*? Can't I find a stash?"

Scott: It's funny you say that. I almost think they would have been a little bit more comfortable with that. [Alie laughs] I was always, if you can't tell, I already was kind of a weird kid so at least it's like a normal interest.

Alie: Right.

Scott: It's something... "We get what's going on there, but we don't know what all this is."

Alie: I'm sure in a parents' worst fantasies it's if you've got a magazine with limbs and blood, you think like, "Okay, he's training to be a homicidal person."

Scott: Right, right. Some kind of professional killer is the career goal.

Alie: So, I wonder, instead of being someone who put bodies in dumpsters, how did you become Professor Poole?

Scott: [laughs] Yeah, so there's a couple of things about that. One of the things that interests me from a scholarly perspective as well as from a personal one is how frequently people I know who love monsters, like I do, often, like me, turn out to be vegetarians, [Alie laughs] turn out to be quite nonviolent people, both politically and also in their personal lives. And although I do try to stay away from doing psychotherapy with monsters, I don't think of them as psychological phenomena primarily. But I do think it's true that having a space where the darkest parts of yourself but also the darkest parts of your culture, you can talk about those things. And I mean, with oneself and one's solitude as much as with other fans, that it does give you a different kind of perspective.

Aside: Heads up, we have a two-part scholarly episode examining the sociology of fandom with legit fanthropologist, Meredith Levine. And yes, we'll link it for you in the show notes.

Scott: You end up not, for example, glorifying violence in the way that films, say, a superhero film in which we witness the destruction of an entire city but there's no blood somehow, there's no bodies. The whole city has been flattened by a US-based superpowered individual and somehow there are no casualties that we see.

There's that level of violence that seems to have kind of mainstream appeal which interestingly has, I think, a connection to the way that we think about war in this country, the way that since the Persian Gulf War going back to the early 1990s, there's been this sense that it's something that lights up on CNN, it's something that happens on the screen, it's like watching a video game, we don't see any of the bodies, we don't see any of the casualties. It's something very different than watching a film in which there aren't mass casualties, there are maybe three or four characters that you've developed some kind of attachment to that suffer something really terrible. So, I think it gives you a different sensibility about violence and causes you to think about death as something that is not simply nameless and faceless.

Alie: You know, I've wondered before how there's an escalation almost of specifics, visual specifics, when we might look at Bela Lugosi's version of a vampire, not scary. But then our horror films get more and more suspenseful and more specific where we've then seen a wave of true crime being popular as the next horror genre.

Scott: You know, there's a really, really bright line for me between the horror film and true crime. I think they're doing very different things; I think they're often appealing to very different audiences. I actually can't abide true crime. I don't watch true crime documentaries and really the entire reason is that it is viewing the suffering of actual others as opposed to what is the imaginative experience of violence, grief, and human suffering? And so, it's interesting. I mean, in talking about how either my parents felt about the horror film, or the churches that they went to, or the community that we

lived in, there was always this discussion of becoming desensitized to violence. I sort of feel like the horror film and monsters in general kind of sensitized me to violence and what it means.

This is actually why true crime and the popularity of it disturbs me. I think that this is maybe what all of my elders were worried about when I was a kid, this is the being desensitized, this is the suffering of others being turned into coin. I actually find that trend deeply troubling and I think that it has a larger political meaning. I think that it's important that we ask questions like why are we consuming and binging hours and hours and hours of true crime in a country that imprisons a larger percentage of its population than any other country in the world? Is that essentially reinforcing some of our ideas about law and order? Reinforcing some of our ideas about dangerous others? Essentially, giving us real monsters, embodying monsters very often in people who are marginalized already. So, I do separate the love of and interest in monsters and horror film from true crime binging, for sure.

Aside: We did an episode called Victimology with Dr. Callie Rennison who discusses this and how victims of homicide in the US are overwhelmingly Black men but that's not reflected in most documentary crime entertainment. For more on victims' advocacy, you can see that episode linked in the show notes. But getting away from the actual suffering of real people and back to fiction.

Alie: Where do you think the line is between monsters and horror? I think of monsters, and I think of them being intact and then I think of horror, and I think of blood. [*laughs*] So, where's the line?

Scott: First of all, you're absolutely onto something. [*chuckles*] There is, I think, a tie between what we think of as gore and horror that is very particular to really the last hundred years of global history. My sense of it is that what we think of as the horror film is actually born in the aftermath of the Great War, of World War I. This is when you see the first usage of the term "horror film". Supernatural films that had come before that were of a different type, tended not to make use or make reference to gore, to the reanimated dead, to the literal supernatural.

And so, I think that what we think of as horror is a very 20th, 21st century experience. One of the things that happened with the World Wars and post-colonial conflicts that have followed is that essentially, there's the progress of combat medicine at the very same time that there are all these new terrible ways of killing and mutilating the human body. World War I is the early example of that.

Aside: World War I, side note, lasted from 1914 to 1918 and it marked the real shift from wars fought on the backs of horses to the birth of the modern military-industrial complex via innovations of weapons of mass destruction like the tank and chemical weapons, improved submarines and machine guns, and the Mk 2 pineapple-looking hand grenade. Weapons manufacturers are like, "Pff, what Great War?"

But if you're like, "Wait, what about that 2022 Taylor Swift bonus track on the album *Midnights* called "The Great War." Is this about military trenches?" The lyrics go:

*Your finger on my hairpin triggers
Soldier down on that icy ground
Looked up at me with honor and truth
Broken and blue
So I called off the troops...*

... and then some stuff about love. And this song, inspired by a World War, then inspired a course at the University of Ghent with Professor Elly McCausland titled "English Literature: Taylor's Version."

But yeah, the global rise of tearing up each other's bodies for money and land and resources and religions was the putrid shit that fertilized the growth of monster and horror genres as we know them now.

Scott: This continued all the way down to the present. I think it's actually not an accident that in the United States, it's in post-Vietnam America, a country that had become used to seeing the reality of gore, the reality of the mutilated human body, that you have the explosion of interest in the slasher film, films dealing with war and horror. And in fact, there's a very direct connection there. One of the great – many would argue, *the* great – makeup artist, sort of the star of *Fangoria* magazine, was Tom Savini who worked on films like George Romerm's *Dawn of the Dead*, the first *Friday the 13th* film, a number of the classics of the horror genre. He was a combat veteran of Vietnam...

Alie: Oh gosh.

Scott: ... and has spoken about this. Actually, he was very specifically a combat photographer and one of the ways that he dealt with that experience was while it was happening, he essentially imagined it as special effects. He just, sort of, called it special effects in order to endure seeing what was happening to his friends and to his comrades. And then, in certain respects, this was therapeutic for him in later years. But one of the real geniuses of gore effects in the modern horror film, he brought that with him from Vietnam. That was quite literally the war coming home.

Alie: Oh wow.

Aside: I found a 1984 clip of Tom Savini doing a show and tell of his ghoulish effects for one, David Letterman. And I've got to say, Tom saunters out with this jaunty *Saturday Night Fever* swagger; He's got tight jeans, a mustache, he's chewing gum, and just has this cool confidence of your older brother's friend letting you check out his Trans-Am. This man could get it. Even Letterman was clearly enamored.

[clip from Letterman Show]

Letterman: What is it?

Savini: Special makeup effects, it's called.

Letterman: I see. And when we go to a film, what of your work do we see?

Savini: Oh, well anytime somebody's head is blown off, or a cutthroat, or a little creature runs around, that's me. [audience laughs]

Letterman: Now, having a head blown off comes under makeup?

Savini: Special makeup effects, sure.

Letterman: Okay, let's take a look at some of the stuff.

Alie: I wonder if that was a way to deal, obviously, with the trauma, compartmentalize it.

Scott: I think so. I think it's mostly anecdotal evidence, I also just have a sense that that's why that generation is particularly interested in those films. The '70s and '80s, films today don't have the same amount of gore and blood et cetera as you would find in the era of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and the first *Halloween* and the *Friday the 13th* films, and the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films.

Aside: We've covered *Frankenstein*, *the Bride of Frankenstein*, *the Son of Frankenstein*, *Dawn of the Dead* zombies, *50 Foot Woman*, sea serpents, *Godzilla*, and *Friday the 13th*. So, it's never been a better time to explore more of the ghouls.

Alie: Halloween-monster connection, October monsters. Why is this such a good month for them?

Scott: Ahh, well you know it's interesting. I think that the answer to that is that dating back to the earliest Christian celebrations of All Hallows' Eve, of Halloween, the day before the feast of All Saints, it is a vigil day for the dead. It's always been a time for ghosts, it's always been a time for unquiet spirits. I mean, maybe going back to the third and fourth century of the Christian era. Now, it's interesting though because if, as some scholars do, you wanted to do a really strict taxonomy of monsters, are monsters and ghosts really the same thing?

Alie: I was wondering that! And how do hungry ghosts in some Asian cultures factor into that?

Scott: Right... Right. Well, and here's the thing... I think you could, if you wanted to draw a strict line, for whatever reason you were doing that, between unquiet spirits and monsters, maybe you could do that. Maybe you could say, well, a ghost, forever and always, we're talking about a human being, once alive, who isn't anymore, who now can't find rest. And a monster is, well, I guess, if we were doing this for reals, we would say, a monster is just anything else [*both laugh*] that's supernatural and scary. But I actually think that in the human experience and thinking about this in deep anthropological time, I do think that the ghost is in a lot of ways, the idea of the ghost, is at the root of our idea of the monstrous.

One of the places you actually see this is in China where there are these traditions that go back at least to the Han dynasty of the so-called hopping vampires, the jiāngshī, the hopping vampire. And these vampires are your kin, your loved ones, [*"Nice to see you again. How's the family?"*] who are going to return if they have been improperly buried, if you buried them in the wrong place, if their burial rites have been performed at the wrong time. There are a lot of ways to mess this up, in other words. And they're going to come back and they're going to be swollen with blood because they are blood drinkers. They're called hopping vampires because, well, they're actually the physically resurrected dead and they have kind of a calcium deficiency, their bones aren't what they're supposed to be so they can't walk like they did, and they're going to come after you! [*laughs*]

Alie: They're thirsty, right?

Scott: They are. And it does at a later moment, several centuries later, blend into the Buddhist tradition that then spreads into Korea and Japan of the idea of the hungry ghost, a reanimated loved one who, for a variety of different reasons, is still desiring something that they have lost in life. [*"So hungry."*]

So, the question is, you know, are we talking about ghosts or are we talking about monsters? Seems like they're kind of acting the same, they're both creatures that represent a kind of chaos, a kind of imbalance, our own fear of death, our fear of having a bad death. I think that's one of the more interesting things about the monstrous; we can say that they embody death, and they do, but none of us are able to escape that, we're all going to face death. But they tend to embody, sort of, the wrong death.

Alie: Right, the worst-case scenario death, right?

Scott: The worst-case scenario; death by violence, which is in some ways the very essence of what we think about when we think about the nature of evil, the use of violence to cut life short, to give someone a wrong death.

So, all that to say, I'm not really too interested in the distinctions between ghosts and monsters because I think they kind of root around in that same part of our subconscious and come from the same kind of needs that we have, to think about our own finite and often chaotic experience.

Alie: Mm! It's so interesting how the more we find out about life's mysteries, the more we can just say, "It's fine." Like, sea serpents, it's fine, don't worry about it. *[laughs]*

Scott: *[laughs]* Yeah, whatever.

Alie: It's fine, we're onto something else. Something else is scarier.

Can I ask you questions from listeners?

Scott: Yes, let's do that.

Alie: Oh, they're so excited.

Aside: And we're excited to make a donation in Dr. Poole, AKA Professor Poole, AKA Scott's name. this week he chose the International Rescue Committee, or IRC, which was founded at the call of Albert Einstein in 1933 and is now at work in over 50 crisis-affected countries helping, to date, nearly 33 million people and they provide healthcare, learning resources for children, they empower communities, and they're always seeking to address the inequity facing women and girls. So, you can find out more at [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org), and thanks to sponsors of the show for making that donation possible in Scott's name.

[Ad Break]

Okay, you can submit questions before the interviews by becoming a patron at [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://www.patreon.com/Ologies) for as little as a buck a month. I may say your name on the show, possibly correctly. Let's hear some of your questions, they were a scream.

Alie: Connor They Them had a great question: Can you talk about humanoid monsters versus non humanoid? Humanoid, like werewolves and zombies and mummies versus non humanoid, like dragons and the Kraken. They said: It seems like ancient societies tended to have more animalistic monsters while modern societies have more humanoid monsters. Is that true? Is there any psychology to explain that?

Scott: I do think that for many ancient peoples, there was often the sense that a monster embodied chaotic elements of the natural world. We can see this for example with a pop culture monster that has an ancient past, Pazuzu from *The Exorcist*.

[clip from The Exorcist]

Damien: Well then, let's introduce ourselves. I'm Damien Karras.

Pazuzu: And I'm the Devil. Now kindly undo these straps!

Damien: If you're the Devil then why not make the straps disappear?

Pazuzu: That's much too vulgar a display of power, Karras."

Before Pazuzu made his big screen debut back in 1973, he was an ancient Sumerian kind of demon god.

Aside: Okay, so Pazuzu was considered a son of God and also the reigning monarch of the demons of the wind so maybe he was also the king of farts. But in *The Exorcist*, a priest finds an old statue of Pazuzu on an archaeological dig and is like, "Cool. Hope this doesn't follow me and possess a girl in a nightgown who stabs herself in the crotch with a crucifix later on." How wrong he was. Pazuzu does not fuck around.

Scott: He was connected with sickness and also with desert winds, which are both chaotic in their own way but also were believed to bring sickness and to kind of bring a sort of impersonal death. So, one argument has been that as the world, post-scientific revolution 400 years ago and then

increasingly as our experience becomes kind of Google mapped and there are, sort of, no hidden corners out there anymore, we're turning more and more to more humanlike creatures. But I also find evidence of people of the distant past using their monsters in very sophisticated and very interesting ways. Can I tell you about a monster I really love that's a good example?

Alie: Yes. Yes!

Scott: Okay. So, in Tibetan Buddhism, there's this really scary guy named Yamantaka. He's quite horrifying. According to some accounts he has, I believe, 34 different hands, some said he has 36. Each one, he's got this razor-sharp dagger in them.

Alie: [*mutters*] Geez.

Scott: He wears a necklace of human heads [*"That's hot. That's hot. That's hot."*] which is not what you want to see.

Alie: Nope! Nope, nope.

Scott: Here's the thing though, he is actually a teacher of enlightenment.

Alie: Oh!

Scott: Yamantaka is actually the avatar of a particular bodhisattva, an enlightened being, whose goal is to free human beings from the terror of death. And so, the daggers and those many, many hands, however many he has, they are to cut through the ties to the ego that is keeping one from experiencing freedom and bound to the will of karma. The different heads actually represent different stages of one's life in which you've been destructive or in Buddhist terms, you've been unskillful when it comes to your own egocentric desires that have tied you to karma. So, he's absolutely terrifying but even his sort of physical manifestation is meant to turn you to a more spiritual path.

And you know, this is an idea that is many, many centuries old so it's a little hard for me to get completely on board with the idea that, well, at one time, monsters were just expressions of things we didn't get about... because thunderstorms scared us or whatever and now it's serial killers. I think ancient peoples, peoples of every area have been able to think in complex ways about their monsters.

Alie: That sounds like the scariest therapist ever but effective. They're like, "I'm going to help you get over your fear of death but I'm going to have a lot of hands with razors on them."

Scott: Right. Well, and just to be clear for all of your listeners, if your therapist is wearing a necklace of human heads, I would call that just a sea of red flags. So, I would move on.

Alie: [*laughs*] It's like, but they're covered in network.

Scott: Right. [*laughs*]

Alie: What am I going to do? We had so many questions from so many listeners, I will list them in an aside, about cryptids.

Aside: Okay, so quick definition. Cryptids are creatures that some cryptozoologists swear really exist such as the big, hairy Bigfoot of North America, the big, hairy Yeti of the Himalayan mountains, the winged-hooved dragon-looking Jersey Devil, which nearby Philly residents could probably take in a fight all while not spilling their beer, or the long-necked dinosaur-looking aquatic monster in Scotland's Loch Ness. I think my favorite might be something called the Mongolian death worm which is a two-foot-long poisonous alive sausage. Or this thing called the Loveland frog of Ohio which is a four-foot-tall humanoid frog man that scampered across roads

and just scared the swamp water out of local residents until a cop shot it and it turned out to be an old, escaped pet iguana that had lost its tail. It deserved better, to be honest.

But other patrons who had cryptid questions included Addie McBaddie, Jessica Fowler, Lily, Mykenzie King, Ellie Schaeffer, Splophie, Sarah Meaden, Connor They Them, The Ren You Know, Kayla Pilcher, Bethan Greer, Carsyn, and Britney Corrigan.

Alie: What is a cryptid? What's the difference between a cryptid and a monster? Meaghan Walsh Gerard wants to know: What is the best cryptid and why is it Mothman? [*Scott laughs*]

Aside: For plenty of Mothman discussion, please see the creepy crawlies episode AKA Forest Entomology with Dr. Kristen Wickert, linked in the show notes and we discuss his gleaming steel butt but anyway...

Alie: Do you believe in cryptids? Where does a cryptid come into all this?

Scott: Do I believe in cryptids...? Well, I've never... So, this is going to upset people, probably. I don't believe in anything that is not falsifiable. It's sort of not incumbent on us, on me, in this case, to believe in something that there's not evidence for. You don't even have to say well, maybe there is because, you know, of course, that's kind of a game we could play about everything, all day long. There's a jar of mayonnaise in my refrigerator that created the universe; prove me wrong. [*Alie laughs*] [*"On the night of June 27th, it became sentient."*] You know, how do you know that's not true? But I love cryptids, I do love the Mothman story, I love the Bigfoot story, I love one of our local cryptids, there's actually going to be a Hulu special coming up about the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp of South Carolina.

Aside: See the 2023 release, *The Legend of Lizard Man* which has *everything*; night shoots, teenagers in an old van. It's got claw marks, narrow escapes, and dubious reports of a green, wet-like 7-foot-tall reptilian man with three fingers, red eyes, and snake-like scales, according to an official witness report taken in 1988. You can still get commemorative T-shirts. You can and I might.

Scott: I love them because, to me, they are kind of just these expressions of... Kind of a hope for wonder in the world. And often, it's very explicit, almost kind of a religious impulse behind the desire for these things to be true. I, again, think that going back to part of our earlier discussion, in a world that does feel like there's not the edges of the map anymore that say, "Here be dragons," things like Bigfoot and the Lizard Man and the Mothman can kind of fulfill that role.

Seldom have I seen these kinds of beliefs as opposed to other beliefs circulating out there cause very much harm, you know? It seems to be just kind of a weird hobby for a lot of people, and you know, gods know I'm into weird hobbies, so I think it's fine, I think it's great. Let me also add that I would love it if it turned out that there was a Sasquatch or whatever. He could show up at my door and I'd be really excited about that but I just... So far, you know, we got nothing on that.

Aside: For those who asked about Bigfoot, looking at you Sharon Rietveld, Lindsay Mayer, Ed Matesevac, Cole Irwin, Annmarie Everhart, and Lily, you can see the Forensic Ecology Episode with Dr. Tiara Moore about her work in a Pacific Northwest forest sequencing DNA of a species of hominid that did not sequence as *Homo sapiens* but just from the genus *Homo*. She's known in her lab as the scientist who has found molecular Bigfoot evidence, but she said it's most definitely just degraded human DNA, like an old trail turd. But still, it's cool bragging rights.

Alie: I guess if nothing else, it's a good way for people to get out...

Scott: Get in some woods.

Alie: Yeah, get some low-impact cardio, you know, the polyphenols.

Scott: Yeah, get your steps in looking for... Yeah.

Alie: Yeah, get your steps in. [giggles]

Scott: Yeah, absolutely.

Alie: They're going to find that people who believe in bigfoot are among the most cardiovascularly healthy people in America. [laughs]

Scott: Yup. That's another thing and there is that whole argument that it's the practical effect of your beliefs that matter. So yeah, go Bigfoot hunting, sure. Yeah, do it. There are a lot of worse things people get up to so, you know, go for it.

Alie: Very true.

Aside: Which was my whole point in the Witchology episode but some of you took it too literally and you sucked the fun out of it. Not that I'm disappointed or bitter... Just disappointed and a little bitter.

But let's change the subject to happier things like a prehistoric reptile the size of a 35-storey building whose name means gorilla whale and is the reigning King of Monsters who would not flinch at squishing you like a rotting tomato.

Alie: BeckytheSassySeagrassScientist wants to know: Thoughts about Godzilla?

Scott: So, Godzilla is one of my favorite monsters, in part because *Gojira*, the original film that the Americanized version really ripped off, *Gojira* is one of the most political monster films of the 20th century. It came at a moment in Japan, right after the Second World War when, of course, they were still dealing with the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the survivors of those events were still very much a part of public life. And it's a film that's quite literally about a destructive horror that is raised by American atomic testing and it's very, very powerful. There's some imagery in the original Japanese film that actually borrows very directly from some of the more famous photographs of Hiroshima.

Aside: Just picture vistas of rubble, a panorama of unfathomable destruction, and the horrors of a giant city-smashing monster get pulled into pretty sharp focus.

Scott: I talked about this a lot in *Monsters in America*. It is interesting that a few years later, 1956 I believe, when a dubbed American version was released, much of that material was censored out, references to the atomic bomb, references to atomic testing. An American was made the main character even while much of the original footage was used. So, it's a deeply, deeply political film in its origins.

Alie: I did not know that about Zilla. I had no idea!

Scott: Yeah! Right? And it is interesting what American films have done with Godzilla subsequently. The generally accepted-as-terrible 1990s *Godzilla* film, this is Roland Emmerich, did this really interesting thing where, it was nuclear testing that raised Godzilla, but it wasn't us, it was the French. [laughs]

Alie: Okay! Sure.

Scott: It was their fault.

Alie: Frickin' French man. [laughs]

Scott: Right? [laughs] It's why we call them freedom fries, Godzilla.

Alie: Oh, we have so many good questions, I have a couple more from listeners, [*sings*] if that's okaaaay.

Scott: Yeah, I'm sorry I'm... You're going to have to edit me a lot.

Alie: Are you kidding? No, I love this!

Scott: Okay, good.

Alie: Nicole S and many others including Abbi Lawson...

Aside: Who else asked about monsters and horniness? Christine Wenzel, Kendall M, Dylan V are yearning to know...

Alie: In Abbi's words: What's the deal with horniness? Everyone is SO horny for monsters and let's be honest, [*Scott laughs*] I'm no exception. They want to know: Is there a psychological reason behind this?

Scott: Monsters are really sexy, [*Alie laughs*] your listeners are absolutely right about this. This has been true of the horror film going back to the 1920s. For anyone who thinks that it was either Bela Lugosi's Dracula or Pattinson's Edward that made vampires sexy, they can go have a very weird experience watching the 1922 film, *Nosferatu*.

Alie: Ohhh!

Scott: *Nosferatu*, of course, lots of people know about him from SpongeBob more than from a Weimar-era silent film.

Aside: Just a side note, Scott mentioned this as though it were an understandable pop cultural fact, but I was like, "Excuse me, I need to know how *Nosferatu* turned up in *SpongeBob SquarePants*. So, I found a 2022 article titled, "How 'Nosferatu turned up in *SpongeBob SquarePants*," and it explained to me that Jay Lender, a *SpongeBob* writer and storyboard artist, would read horror film magazines in his youth and a still image from the *Nosferatu* film just got burned in his brain so he added it in there. And with 15 million *SpongeBob* viewers every week the time of *Nosferatu*'s cameo flicking some lights off and on. [*upbeat music plays. "Nosferatu."*] It's possible that this pretty chance and random reference to the vampire is what's kept it so popular among younger generations. Also, Jay Lender knows that the ghoul's real name is Count Orlok, not *Nosferatu*, and he doesn't want to hear it from you. Okay? And yes, we talk more about *Nosferatu* and Count Orlok in the two-part *Vampirology* episode with Dr. Jeff Holdeman who teaches courses on vampires because he is cool.

Scott: You know, *Nosferatu* looks like a rat. He looks like an elderly rat, [*both laugh*] I think is the best way to describe his face, and has these talons, you know, and this absurdly distended frame and arms that just look like they're ten feet in length. And yet, [*laughs*] Ellen, the female protagonist of *Nosferatu* has a very, very clear fixation on him as he does her and, in fact, a fixation on him that exceeds her connection to her young husband. [*deep breathing begins*] She is not interested at all in what he's up to, but she's all about *Nosferatu*. [*deep breaths and quivering, sounds*]

Aside: Okay, quick story. So, recently Jarrett and our friend Jason were hanging out on the couch watching this 1979 version of *Nosferatu* while my friend Catherine and I were doing a puzzle at the kitchen table; it was a wild Saturday night. But Cat's back was turned and for a moment she earnestly thought that they had switched to watching porn... in our living room... together, while we did a puzzle ten feet away. Monsters have been putting the bones in boning for eons.

Scott: This turns up again and again. I mean, werewolf films the wonderful 1990s version of the film *Candyman* with the gorgeous Tony Todd playing the monster [*"I came for you."*] but is this very sexy monstrous figure.

And one suggestion that has been made, and this may be getting a little too theoretical, but I do feel like... You tell me after I say this because I do feel like there's something to this. In the monster film, kind of the two outgroups, the two marginal groups, are the women who are the victims and the monster that the male heroes are trying to kill.

Alie: Right. Yes.

Scott: And so, one theory – and it's not mine, and again, I'm not even sure it's true but I like it – one idea is that there's just kind of this natural alliance between the woman and the monster. Both of them are, kind of like, subject to the patriarchal violence that's going on in the film. Again, don't know, I think it's a really, really interesting idea.

Alie: I think so too, yeah.

Scott: Yeah, you throw in that too, Jennifer Kent's *Babadook*, where you have the queer-coded monster.

Aside: See a Tumblr post suggesting that the top-hatted, hollow-eyed monster silhouetted by his trench coat was a metaphor for the outsider status experienced by so many LGBTQIA+ folks. And suddenly, amid the sunny Pride Parade celebrations or Babadooks merrily marching along, director Jennifer Kent has said she thinks it's sweet and she's honored, which kind of is an understatement because being a queer icon, arguably more enviable than an Oscar. But okay, Jennifer.

Scott: Which also was, as I mentioned, a phenomenon with *Frankenstein* and I think that's part of the attraction as well. I think it's also tied into just the very fact that there is an element of the human psyche that kind of can't look away from what it's disgusted by. And so, yeah, there's a lot going on there, for sure.

Aside: Also, given that the very word teratology has been used and is still used, in some cases, rather horrifically, to describe people with physiological abnormalities and films like *Candyman* and its 2021 remake feature a villain with a sharp hook fashioned as a prosthetic, this next query submitted by Grace Robisheaux, Jeanette-o-saur, FondoDondo35, and Kathryn Bhend touches on an upcoming episode we have on disability sociology.

Alie: A few people actually asked about that intersectionality between disability and illness and monsters and how that's another marginalized group that's been kind of monstrified. I wondered like Kai Kishimoto wants to know: I'd love to hear a discussion of the intersection of monsters and disability. Do we find that that's changed over time at all?

Scott: Well, in some ways I think that it has, except going back to the 1920s, but then also really carrying forward into our monsters in the present, the idea of disfigurement of any kind as representative of the other. I think that that's still an unfortunate part of the horror tradition.

I would say on the more positive side though, the fact that not unlike folklore actually – so I don't think that this is new and some attempt to be progressive or something – I think the idea of the sympathetic monster has always been open to people, open for people who are looking for figures to identify with. We've talked a couple of times about *Fangoria* magazine. And actually, a few months ago, there was this really wonderful article by a frequent writer for *Fangoria*, who in dealing with cancer had found both solace and identification in David Cronenberg's body horror films as she began to experience her own body as alien to her. I think there's a lot in that that people can find solace in.

Aside: If you're looking to watch more body horror films by David Cronenberg, please enjoy hits such as *Shivers*, AKA *The Parasite Murderers* or *They Came from Within*, which features the barfing of a botfly larva-looking parasite. There's also *Rabid* featuring a woman who, according to your

friend Wikipedia, "Develops an orifice under one of her armpits that hides a phallic clitoral stinger she uses to feed on people's blood." But let's also not forget *Scanners* which originated the cinematic device of a human head exploding. Cronenberg also remade *The Fly* in which Jeff Goldblum's sexual magnetism is rather challenged by a tendency to vomit acid on people before eating them. So, maybe just skip the popcorn.

Let's venture outside to warmer climates at the behest of patrons, Shealyn Wippert, Connor They Them, and...

Alie: FondoDondo35 and a ton of other people, in FondoDondo's words: You have to ask about the Chupacabra – What up with that? Chupacabra, is it just a coyote with mange?

Scott: I mean probably.

Alie: Yeah. [*softly*] That's what I figured.

Scott: I wish that I could say that no, it's an ancient creature of Machika legend that Mayan ruins have images of. But my sense of it in terms of what is described that people are seeing, it either sounds like maybe it's a small dog with mange, or maybe more likely a coyote, yeah.

I do think, and this gets into a whole other area, but it is interesting that over the last 40 years or so, there's been kind of this interest in what we might call border horror, all the way back in the 1980s which became kind of the first decade of people losing their mind over immigration. There were urban legends that circulated about satanic circles that were operating just right over the border that some bodies that had been found, the so-called Matamoras slayings, that this was the work of a satanic cult, and to me, Chupacabra seems to kind of fit into some of that kind of monstrous language.

Aside: I had not heard of the slayings in Matamoras, Mexico, but they involved dozens of ritual homicides by a drug lord and similarly, when livestock started dying in parts of Puerto Rico, communities suspected either blood draining by a cult or possibly a large reptilian creature, hence the Chupacabra which means "goat sucker." In northern parts, in the United States, Chupacabra sightings tend to be described as more doglike and experts agree they're just free-range canines with a little bit of skin disease. They're like, "Get off my back, I have a fucking rash. And yeah, I will eat your goats." And who could blame them?

But moving along, or rather looping back to Frankenstein, as we mentioned in the Vampirology episode, in 1816 there was this volcanic eruption, and the resulting atmospheric effect led to a year without a summer. So, a bunch of hot goth writers holed up in an Italian villa, and among them were Mary Shelley and Lord Byron and they were like, "What if we have a ghost story writing competition between us?" And shablam! Lord Byron makes a vampire tale that changes pop culture, and Mary Shelley writes a book about a reanimated corpse.

Alie: I know we've touched on *Frankenstein* a bit. Susan C Lester and Verena Runstadler need to know: Definitively, Frankenstein or Frankenstein's Monster? What do you call it?

Scott: [*deep breath*] Well... [*Scott laughs, Alie sings Jeopardy theme song*] Here's the thing. No, so it's absolutely proper to say Frankenstein's Monster [*Alie laughs*] so I can definitively say that. However, [*chuckles*] I think it also has made certain kind of sense that the monster and the creator have kind of shared their name and this is actually referenced in some of the sequels to *Frankenstein*.

Many of your listeners probably haven't seen *Son of Frankenstein*. In *Son of Frankenstein*, which is think is 1939, there's actually this whole discussion that kind of lays it out like, "Hey, everybody says Frankenstein, but that's my dad's name. [*Alie laughs*] The monster was his monster." [*robotic*

voice says, "Doctor Frankenstein was my dad, please call me MC Frinkie Dink."] I think that it's almost more interesting to me that the creator that unleashed something that couldn't be controlled and then the monster that we're mostly sympathetic for, we use the same word, and everybody knows what we mean.

Alie: Mm-hm. Do you think that has anything to do with dysfunctional parenting and a father putting too much pressure on a son to carry on a lineage?

Scott: I think in the original version of the novel, not the one that she released in 1831 when she became a little older and a little more conservative, but the original version of the novel, my sense is that it's God and human beings; that Dr. Frankenstein is quite literally the creator that gives his creature, his creation, something that the creation never really asked for and then kind of said, "Well, you didn't turn out quite like I wanted so good luck. Go live in the woods." So yeah, I think that James Whale in the films is aware of that because there's a lot of interesting religious and actually, anti-religious imagery, speaking of things that I don't think people picked up on at the time.

Aside: See, for example, all the crosses in the cemetery, the Dr. Frankenstein's cocky attempt at creating life and resurrecting his monster who could be interpreted as kind of a blasphemous symbol of Jesus Christ. Also, the not-so-subtle appearance of Milton's epically long poem "Paradise Lost" which some people consider kind of like fanfic about Satan fallen from the graces of God and launching his own hell hotel of agony in the afterlife.

Also, did you know that the actor who played Frankenstein so wonderfully in James Whale's versions was actually born William Pratt, but he thought it sounded too boring, so he went by Boris Karloff, and he was *buh-roke* until he landed that role in his mid-40s and then became a famous Hollywood celeb. How about that? So, sometimes, the star power of a monster is just right under our noses.

But hey, what's under our beds? Patrons asked, such as Anna Thompson, Anna Easton, Sophie Philpott, Francesca Huggins, Eating Dog Hair for a Living, Pickles, Jenna Breiner, Ann Eby, Kieran, Average_pi, Steven Lee, Holly Cole, and Sarah Cork Henderson.

Alie: A lot of people wanted to know: Monsters under the bed. Have you ever had one under the bed? Why are they under the bed? And then, Christine Gilarski, first-time question-asker, said: I can't believe I'm asking this. When I was in the fourth grade, I had an experience with a monster that I cannot convince my brain was not real. I remember so many vivid details. I'm almost 40 and I still believe this was real. I know, it's weird. [Scott chuckles] And a ton of people wanted to know, BolognaShoes wants to know: What is the best way to explain to my very curious and mature 3-year-old that monsters are not real but the monsters we have are stories? So, are they under the bed? What happens if you think one is real? And what do you tell your kids?

Scott: So, I saw monsters when I was a little kid. [Alie exclaims and gasps] I used to see... Again, I'm consuming all those horror films from the '30s and '40s so I had these experiences where I thought I was seeing things and sometimes it terrified me, most of the time it terrified me, occasionally it kind of delighted me. But actually, one thing I would say to your listener, this is going to be really counterintuitive and maybe they could simply chalk this up to I'm not actually a parent so maybe this is bad advice [Alie laughs] but don't tell your kids that monsters aren't real yet.

Aside: The opinions expressed by the ologist are those of the ologist, don't write me letters.

Scott: They're probably going to have nightmares because my understanding is that children do that and guess what? They're also going to have nightmares when they're 50. Like, you're not going to make that go away; their bodies and brains, *our* bodies and brains, are doing something that's important

when that's happening. I don't think, as much as I, myself, am not a believer in the supernatural, I don't think we need to do the disenchantment of the universe for a three-year-old or whatever. [Alie laughs] They're going to figure out themselves that the really scary things are not under the bed and in the closet. So, let them have the scariness and the wonder of that... I mean, but I'm just talking out of my hat, I don't have kids. I'm not the one who has to deal with the screaming in the middle of the night [Alie laughs] so I can say anything I want to about this.

Alie: I don't have kids either, but I have a dog that sometimes goes [*small, squeaky voice*] "Woof, woof, woof." So, I let her dream about whatever she wants to. [laughs]

Scott: Well see, and actually, our dogs, we're not really clear if they're having a nightmare or if they're engaged in some kind of merry chase. And honestly, I think that might tell us something about dreaming and nightmares and those kinds of experiences in general for humans. I think we need to be able to have those kinds of things to make sense of the world.

Aside: Clearly, we do not know how to parent. Do not take our advice. But you know who might know how? Is authors of the 2020 study, "Monsters at bedtime: managing fear in bedtime picture books for children," which cites a 1996 study saying that "the monster always signifies something other than itself," while a 2014 study poses that "monsters have a distinct function as psychological tools to help children cope with problems and anxieties." Okay, but what do you *do* about them?

It depends on how old the kiddo is. There was a 2009 study called, "Scaring the monster away: what children know about managing fears of real and imaginary creatures," and it found that younger kids, like, under 7, don't do well with reality affirmation saying, "There is no monster," but rather it helps to reframe things like, "Sure, maybe there is a monster drooling under your bed. But she's tired, just like you, and eats dust bunnies, not people." Older than around 7 responds better to, "Nope, nope. Monsters are not real. Unless they're Gila monsters which are cool lizards that will chomp your arm so hard, you'll wish you were never born. All right, love you. Night, night." Also, for more on dreaming and nightmares see the Oneirology two-parter from January.

And if you're still like, "Okay, but who decides monsters were under anyone's bed?" The answer is your ancestors who used these folkloric scare tactics to get kids to bed at an earlier time. Although in Japan, where it's more common to sleep with a mat and mattress on the floor, maybe you have to tell kids that the boogie man is chilling in the hamper, being like, "Get some shut-eye, sweetie peetie. Oooh, ooooh, I smell like socks," which sounds honestly like more friend than foe.

Alie: Well, Margot Louis, Dianna, and Daniel Gill all wanted to know, in Margot's words: Are there monsters who are not scary at all and might even be cute? And another patron asked about Pokémon "Pocket monsters." So, any lore on benevolent monsters?

Scott: I have one that I really like. One example of this would be our friend with the human head necklace, Yamantaka. Now I don't know that we would necessarily call him cute, but he's definitely good.

There is kind of this sweet monster called a Leshy. This is Siberian folklore, their name means something like "The tree people" and they're often portrayed as being kind of scary, not kind of, real scary when you see them but also weirdly sweet. They actually help shepherds and cow herds; they protect sheep from wolves. And if you hear noises in the trees, it's a Leshy that's weeping because one of their favorite trees was cut down.

Alie: Aww.

Scott: So, that's kind of nice. Now, on the other hand, they are cloven-hoofed and covered in long, tangled, black hair and occasionally steal children [*stifled laughter from Alie*] and also can turn you to stone

if they get angry with you. So, there is that. [Alie continues laughing] But their emotional intelligence seems to be really high, is what I'm saying.

Alie: I still don't want to match with them on Tinder though, you know? [laughs]

Scott: Well no. I don't know that that would work out. Oh, and here's the thing. I guess when you said Tinder this made me think of this. So, if you make them mad, if they don't turn you to stone, one of the other things they might do is they might tickle you until you die. [Alie laughs] I'm not kidding. This is part of the lore, [Alie still laughing] going back hundreds of years. And yeah, I don't think it's actually possible to tickle someone to death but that's what the Leshy do.

Alie: [still laughing] I guess also... The last app a tree would be on is Tinder, probably.

Scott: Right, right. ["Is something burning?"]

Alie: Not okay. [laughs] That's such a good one.

You know, the last questions I always ask guests is the hardest thing about your job and the easiest but I'm going to take a pivot and ask, what monster just makes you give an exasperated sigh? Just like, "Not this one again?" Which one do you hate the most?

Scott: I still can't take *Twilight*. [Alie laughs] So, okay, just real quick... So, a number of my students of this particular generation are kind of part of the *Twilight* fan community that has tried to do reparative work on that and find something empowering in it. So, a few have kind of made it their task to educate me on this and to particularly try to reclaim the films. You know, I entertained it for a while and I'm also glad that people have found things in it that are empowering but I just really still think it's just reactionary garbage. Everything from making the vampires toothless, or at least fangless to, you know, using an actual First Nations mythological system and changing it around, and turning them into werewolves. I mean, to the point that tourists apparently want to talk to them about their werewolf mythology and that's just something that Meyer came up with. Obviously, the general portrayal of a very patriarchal romance and a very weird power dynamic with the whole, what do we say? May-December romance? [Alie laughs] It's something more than that, right, because he's like 200 and she's like 19 or whatever.

Alie: And it's got a kind of pro-chastity message as well, right?

Scott: It does, it does. There's a very famous feminist essay on *Twilight* that referred to it as chastity porn. It actually first appeared in the midst of the so-called purity movement among evangelicals, the "true love waits" stuff, and it very definitely I think has a gendered politic. So, more power to students of this generation that are finding queer coding and feminist messages, but this is... I am one unconvinced old lefty that still thinks it's just garbage, I can't do it.

Alie: Well, maybe that makes it the scariest monster movie of all in different ways. [laughs]

Scott: It is scary, and I have— You know, I read the books and watched one of the films. I couldn't get past... The films are better than the books.

Alie: What about your favorite monster? There's got to be one that if you had to... If you were going to buy a monster T-shirt, this would be the one. If you have a Halloween costume you had to decide on forever every year, this would be the one. Which one is it?

Scott: I love, and I mean in a weird way, *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

Alie: Augh, that's great.

Scott: The film but also her. In fact, I'm wearing a *Bride of Frankenstein* T-shirt.

Alie: No! [laughs]

Scott: Yeah, so that was an easy one. Again, playing off of some of the religious undertones of that story, she's sort of Eve that said no to the plan for her. She doesn't want to be anybody's helpmate; she turns that down pretty strongly. And also, just the impact that Elsa Lanchester's portrayal of her had on the iconography of monsters. I mean, just like Frankenstein, if I say "Bride of Frankenstein," you see that hair and you see that extraordinary art-deco design of her, and she's only in the film like, five minutes at the end.

Alie: Oh! I didn't realize that.

Scott: It's some of the best five minutes of film in the whole horror tradition, you know? [*melancholic music*. "Friend?... Friend?" "She ate me."] Anyway, Bride of Frankenstein for sure.

Alie: I'll have to send you a picture, I went as her for Halloween. I have very curly, voluminous hair, you might say. I've got to send you a picture.

Scott: Please do. I actually have a collection of friends that have done the Bride of Frankenstein and so I have quite a collection because people have always gotten me Bride of Frank- I almost have too much at this point. But can you have too much of her? I don't think so.

Alie: Apparently not.

Scott: No, she's extraordinary.

Alie: And my friend Catherine taught me that if you have long enough hair, you can put a liter bottle on top of your head and put a ponytail on top.

Scott: Ohh! How smart.

Alie: Yeah. So, you're just kind of, you just nestle the bottle on a ponytail on the very top of your head and you're halfway there, all you need is some baby powder or something.

Scott: So, Jack Pierce, who did the makeup for Elsa Lanchester in '35, he actually used a part of a bird cage.

Alie: [*gasps*] Did he?

Scott: Yes. And I guess like with you Alie, it was her hair, that was Elsa Lanchester's hair.

Alie: That was her actual- I always would have thought that was like an appliance.

Scott: Yes. It is not any kind of appliance. That is her hair, just partially dyed. You can't tell this in the film, but it's actually dyed red so that it would have some texture kind of on black and white film and also so that the white kind of lightning streaks would show off to advantage.

Alie: They need to do some sort of comedy mash-up like *The Bridesmaids of Frankenstein*, I think that would be a great one. [*both laugh*] Just a spin-off.

Scott: Right. and they're angry at how much they had to pay for their lab garments.

Alie: [*laughing*] Exactly.

Scott: Their burial shrouds were so expensive that they had to take out a student loan.

Alie: They're like, "I'll never wear this shroud again. How dare she?"

Scott: Right. [*laughs*] Right.

Alie: [*laughing*] Oh my god, this has been such a joy, I cannot tell you.

Scott: For me too, Alie. I really enjoyed it.

So, ask smart people spooky questions and enjoy Dr. Scott Poole's latest book, *Dark Carnivals: Modern Horror and the Origins of American Empire*. He also authored *Monsters in America*, *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror*, and *In the Mountains of Madness: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of HP Lovecraft*. All are linked in the show notes so get them on your reading list. Again, gorgeous writing, so much knowledge. Thank you so much for being on Scott, and again a donation was made to Rescue.org in his name, which is also linked in the show notes. Our webpage for this episode is AlieWard.com/Ologies/Teratology is linked in the show notes. It has tons of links to clips and research as well.

We're @Ologies on Twitter and Instagram, I'm @AlieWard on both. Erin Talbert admin's the *Ologies* Podcast Facebook group, Noel Dilworth is our scheduling producer. Emily White of The Wordary makes our professional transcripts. Susan Hale is our managing director and did a ton of producing on this as well. We also have *Smologies* episodes available for the kiddos in your life; they are shorter, clean classroom-safe versions of classic episodes. Thank you to Mercedes Maitland of Maitland Audio and Zeke Rodrigues Thomas and Jarrett Sleeper of Mindjam Media for working on those. Kelly R. Dwyer makes our website and can make yours too. Thanks to the electrifyingly wonderful lead editor, Mercedes Maitland of Maitland Audio for the hard work in assembling and bringing this to life. Nick Thorburn of the band Islands made our theme music.

If you stick around until the end of the episode, I tell you a secret. This week it's that I've been drinking a lot of chai tea. I've told you before, spicy chai, add a little cayenne, add a little black pepper in there. So good. Yesterday, I was writing this episode and I microwaved the same cup of tea no fewer than six times; I just kept microwaving it, walking away, forgetting, and I kept redoing it. Anyway, I'm about to hop on a flight back to California, I've been in Connecticut, I went to an apple orchard, we carved pumpkins, I curled up by a fire. I've been having a real falliday but now I'm back to LA where I think it's about 90 degrees. Okay, *[hushed spooky voice]* see you next week for our final Spooktober. Okay, berbye.

Transcribed by Aveline Malek at TheWordary.com

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