Love

3 horror movies to scare away the rom-coms this Valentine's Day

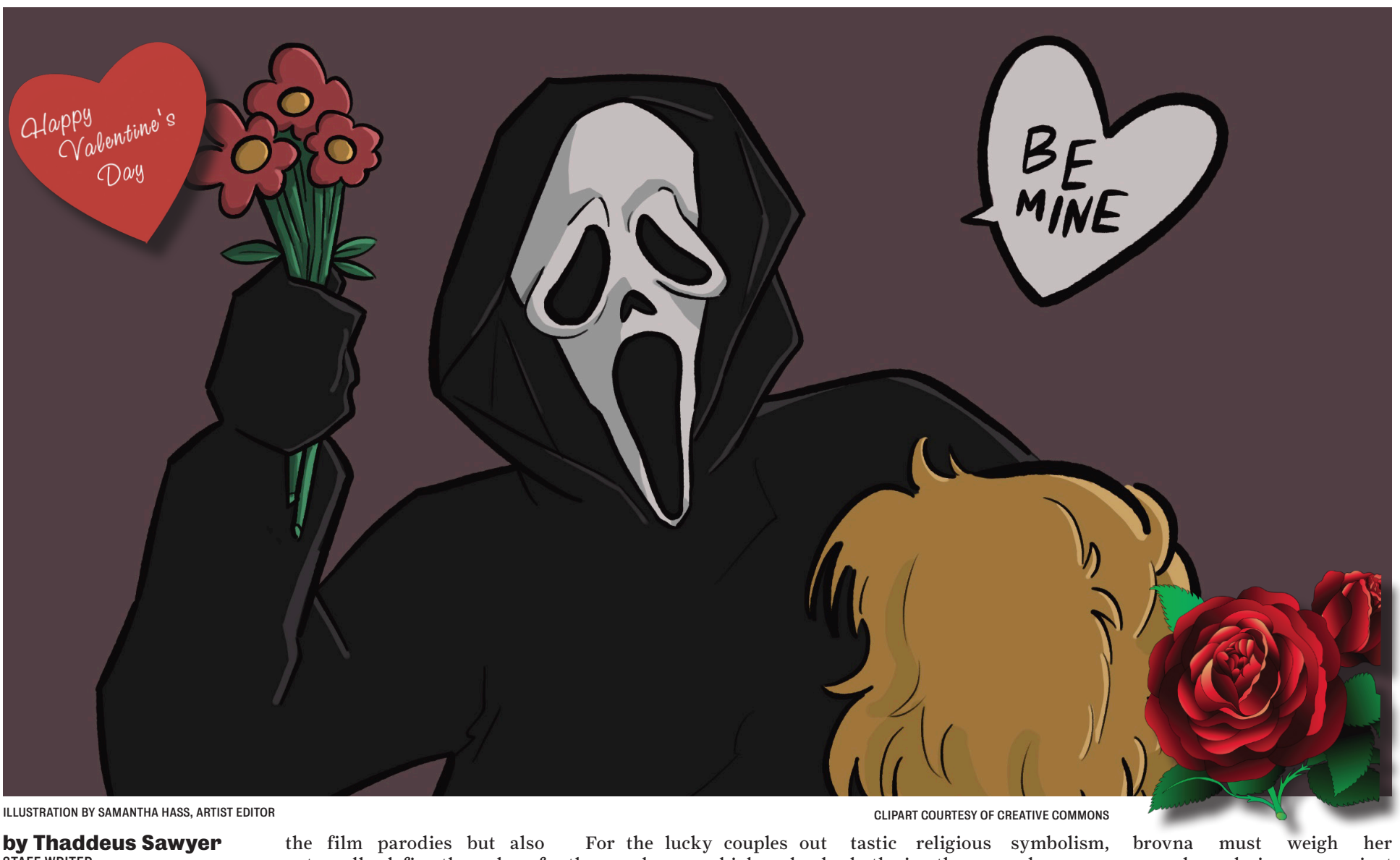

ILLUSTRATION BY SAMANTHA HASS, ARTIST EDITOR

CLIPART COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS

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Are you tired of watching rom-coms on repeat? Did the new "Wuthering Heights" adaptation force you into swearing off love stories? Do you swear that both Jack and Rose could've fit on the wood?

Whatever the reason may be, there's no shame in looking for an alternative to the typical Hallmark, meet-cute style movie this Valentine's Day. However, for those who may still crave a dash of romance, here are three horror movies that may fulfill that desire instead.

Starting off with one of the most famous horror franchises of all time, "Scream" features a plot essentially built on the mistrust of Sidney Prescott toward her boyfriend Billy Loomis.

Directed by Wes Craven, the film parodies but also outwardly defies the rules of slasher films such as "Halloween" and "Friday the 13th," such as the stipulation that the final girl must be a virgin.

The intrapersonal and relationship conflicts in this film are abundant, from Sidney and Billy's varying levels of trust throughout the film and their ultimate outcome, to Deputy Sheriff Dewey Riley's infatuation with reporter Gale Weathers.

The film was so popular that an additional five iterations have been made to date. In fact, "Scream 7" will come out later this month.

The commercialism of the franchise is right in line with the spirit of the holiday!

If you somehow get through all six currently released films and are still craving more high school drama, "Carrie" by director Brian De Palma may be right up your alley.

For the lucky couples out there who are high school sweethearts, why not take a chance to look back and reminisce about a high school prom or dance?

Popular yet empathetic jock Tommy Ross asking the sheltered and quiet Carrie White to prom has all the makings of a tried and true coming of age story. Carrie finds herself fitting in under the guidance of physical education teacher Miss Collins, while Tommy seems to slowly find himself becoming genuinely intrigued by the possibility of a relationship with Carrie.

The pair share a kiss on the dance floor and are even named prom king and queen.

Carrie then proceeds to go on a three-minute telekinetic rampage after being embarrassed while on stage receiving her crown by bully Chris Hargensen.

The movie features fantastic religious symbolism, both in the sexual repression of Carrie White and the final scene with Carrie's religiously fanatic mother.

The wonderful 70s synth-laden soundtrack is worth listening to on its own, and the early-career appearance of a pre-Saturday Night Fever John Travolta is an under the radar highlight of this Stephen King adaptation.

Just make sure there's no pig blood around.

Rounding out the list is a film reliant on sexual repression is "Cat People."

Produced in the era of the Hays Code, a self-imposed set of censorship rules in Hollywood from 1922-1945, studios had to find ways to scare audiences while avoiding gore and excessive sexual content.

Born from those rules was a film that perfectly encapsulates the show-don't-tell method.

Serbian-born Irena Dubrovna must weigh her sexual desires against her fear of what may happen if she leans into them.

Irena believes that she is the descendent of cat people and that sexual activity will cause her to transform.

When proposed to by Oliver Reed, Irena accepts but eventually refuses to consummate the marriage, fearful of what may happen.

As Oliver is pulled away from Irena by another woman, peculiar animal-like behavior begins to surround their lives.

When Irena is kissed by another man, the consequences of even the minor sexual awakening become clear.

Establishing some of horror's most iconic tropes, such as the Lewton Bus (named after director Val Lewton), the black and white film will be underwhelming for some but is one of the most influential films in the history of the genre.

What 'Alien Stage' says about unhealthy relationships in our world

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Content warning: sexual assault, suicide, mental illness. Major spoilers for "Alien Stage."

The Korean webseries "Alien Stage" has gripped and crushed the hearts of many — especially Gen Z — with its subtle and not-so-subtle visual, audio and written storytelling. It follows the lives of six fleshed-out characters who were forced to perform in a singing competition where the losers die.

As revealed in the first episode, all of the enslaved population of humans known to exist are held captive on an extraterrestrial planet by the alien race of Segyein. With this dystopian backdrop, "Alien Stage" focuses on the characters' battles with vices internally as well as romantically. I am of the opinion that "Alien Stage" can reflect the ugly side of something as sacred as love tainted by the abusive systems of exploitation even in our world — primarily, the dangerous pitfalls of how not to love.

Director of "Alien Stage," VIVINOS, has a track record of portraying toxic relationships in her animations for the sake of horror. Most of her works prior to "Alien Stage" were short films, but this series has the longest runtime — and highest popularity — of all the creations under her belt.

The four main characters of "Alien Stage" meet up and develop relationships together as kids at the music education prison Anakt Garden to train and become professional singers. The first two characters introduced are the shy, lonely and studious Sua and the seemingly confident and bold Mizi. The next two characters are the sensitive and artistic Till and the over-enthusiastic yet somewhat stoic Ivan (whose adoption day is Valentine's Day).

Sua and Mizi were inseparable growing up ever since Mizi initiated conversation with her. One could say they had become extremely codependent. In a world where their lives were entirely commodified and thus left without comfort nor education on how to take care of their social-emotional health, they felt no other choice but to cling onto each other.

Anxious attachment styles and codependency permeate into relationships mainly from complexities like past experiences, especially in childhood. The need to be loved and paid attention to can develop into an unhealthy or even toxic relationship. "Alien Stage" highlights this well.

In Sua's case, she was incredibly obsessive and intense about her love for Mizi. This culminated into sacrificing herself in her match with Mizi: a planned and calculated duty she burdened herself with and rehearsed constantly. Mizi eventually revealed that she knew about Sua's plan the entire time, and although it hurt her to know this, she didn't do anything to stop Sua.

In Ivan's case, he would go at any length to get Till's attention. He would get himself beaten up by Till and enjoy it because Till was paying attention to him.

Furthermore, Ivan forces his love onto Till in his final moments through his own sacrifice, so he will die without regrets. He forcefully kisses and, in order to get shot and killed by security, strangles Till.

Losing people you know in your life— especially people close to you — is extremely hard to cope with. Mizi develops an intense self-loathing and makes her problems everyone else's. This is emphasized by how she sabotaged the revolutionaries' mission in "KARMA" to shoot at rocket in the sky to find help and physically hurt other people.

Till hallucinated Ivan in the webcomics "Scars" and "Remember Everything" in part due to the weight of the forceful kiss and ultimate sacrifice by Ivan. Unlike Mizi, however, Till comes to terms with these facts and decides to forgive Ivan for what he did.

What "Alien Stage" is trying to convey to the audience is that unhealthy coping mechanisms and relationships can ruin lives even if they feel good to do in the moment. Unhealthy relationships are, at best, not talked about enough, but at worst, glorified such as in the media. College students are not exempt from this. Most pieces of media only show the pretty parts, but "Alien Stage" also doesn't shy away from the macabre.

It can be extremely dangerous to glorify things that are unhealthy within ourselves or our relationships, but I would like to tell a story about how I got into "Alien Stage." Please bear with me.



ILLUSTRATION BY RAYFORD BROMLEY, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST

At the Rainbow Center last semester, I met someone and we celebrated our favorite media together. I asked him about the Ivan plush and he recommended that I should watch "Alien Stage."

After watching the "Alien Stage" YouTube videos, I realized how much Sua's character comforts me with my own flaws as a friend, girlfriend and person. If anything, Sua inspires me to be better than she was and not fall into the same traps as she did.

When I told my friend this, he told me he really related to Ivan not only because he's very talkative but also because of his need for attention. I realized that we're a lot alike, uniting under these systems and pasts outside of our control. But unlike these characters, we process and cope with them together.

The purpose of art is to share and inspire, changing our worldviews and mobilizing us to change things across the board. Having art you can relate to — and share with others — can be of immense comfort, especially when we're surrounded by it. "Alien Stage" may be an extremely depressing piece of media, but it helps us connect with others who also resonate with the themes and, hopefully, strive to be socially healthier and self-aware inside these oppressive systems we find ourselves in. Hopefully we can change more than only ourselves.