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# Vampires deliver horror, excitement

GUEST COMMENTARY

Ryan Nyburg

Summer, for some reason, seems to be the ideal time to get yourself good and frightened. Maybe making your blood run cold is a good way to combat the heat. Maybe people like to contrast all the brightness of the season with something dark and brooding. Whatever the reason, horror is at its height in the summer months, so here are a few reading suggestions.

"Frankenstein," by Mary Shelley, is a good place to start. The story of the book's creation is almost as famous as the book itself. One night, a newlywed Shelley had a nightmare that soon became the basis for the first true horror novel. It's a great piece of romantic fiction that has been adapted to more movies than one cares to remember.

Speaking of film adaptations, "Dracula," by Bram Stoker, stands next to anything by Shakespeare in terms of adaptations. At last count, the formidable Count Dracula had been brought to the screen more than 130 times, making him the most adapted literary character ever.

Adaptations aside, the book itself stands as a landmark of not only horror but of literature as a whole, with its scrapbook-style narrative built from the journals and letters of its characters. This did for vampires what "Frankenstein" did for mad scientists.

In 1917, journalist and short-story writer Ambrose Bierce left America for Mexico and was never heard from again. Thus was gone one of the most cynical, scathing writers in American history, as well as one of its best creators of short horror fiction.

Bierce's works stand as some of the most technically well done

short stories, and his almost nihilistic world view is one that permeates in horror fiction even today. "The Ghost and Horror Stories of Ambrose Bierce" is a good place for horror fanatics to start with this criminally unknown writer.

H.P. Lovecraft made a living publishing his bizarre stories in cheap pulp magazines through the 1920s and remained relatively unknown in his lifetime. Now he is widely considered to be the most influential horror writer of the century, and his stories have inspired countless other writers.

Lovecraft's stories are occasionally adapted to film, most famously as 1985's "Re-Animator." There are many collections of Lovecraft's fiction available, and almost any one of them will do.

"Hell House," by Richard Matheson, stands as one of the true classics of modern horror. Matheson's stories have always worked at reconciling classic horror tales — involving vampires and haunted houses — with more modern viewpoints and scientific explanations.

It never worked so well as here, with the granddaddy of all haunted house stories. This was adapted effectively to film in 1973 as the moody and atmospheric "The Legend of Hell House," which is worth seeing in its own right.

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance columnist. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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## Alternative stories educate, entertain

For those with a hunger to explore other cultures and perspectives from home — or from a homey bookstore like Mother Kali's — these semi-alternative picks will whet your reading pallet.

"The Complete Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist" is a charmingly violent comic book series built on the quick-witted political commentary of author Diane DiMassa.

In one of DiMassa's classic scenes, Hothead is speeding in her car with her cat, Chicken, with one hand on the wheel. She's leaning out the window, pointing a gun with a huge barrel at another car that isn't shown. Hothead, with her enormous eyes and manic grin, is saying: "I'm not your fuckin' spritzhead girlfriend."

"Hothead," along with a fine array of alternative reading, is available for hard-core fans of radical works or the newly curious at Mother Kali's Books, a feminist bookstore.

Hothead goes berserk after an overdose of television and caffeine and goes on a killing rampage, which climaxes and then plateaus as brief moments of lucidity smooth out her rage. Her cat (a vocal personality in the series), and her friend, Roz, often inspire Hothead to have calm moments, but the lull never lasts, which keeps fans happy.

For those who enjoy cartoon bombs or simply long to shatter the dominant paradigm, this is the perfect read.

For those who shudder away from even comic-book mayhem and killing, there is a plethora of other alternative reads at Mother Kali's. Mother Kali's includes well-stocked sections such as transgender, women and cancer, lesbian plays, tarot, as well as shelves full of women's Asian, African American, Latin and Jewish works.

Leslie Feinberg, a transgender icon, has a couple of books in stock, including the classic "Stone Butch Blues," a Bildungsroman for a strong-willed "tranny" writer.

Mother Kali's Asian section offers the much acclaimed "Tripmaster Monkey" by Maxine Hong Kingston, a literary work set in San Francisco in the 1960s about an Asian man who aims to defy stereotypes by exploring his most atypical identities.

The protagonist, Whitman Ag Sing, can adopt any one of his "72 personalities" simply by changing his clothes.

Sandra Cisneros' "The House On Mango Street," another literary delight, explores issues of race, class and gender, and is available in the Latina section at Mother Kali's.

For those whose tastes run to tarot, the feminist bookstore has a wall of books on the subject, including "Tarot of the Spirit," by Pamela Eakins, Ph.D.

Anyone with an appetite for psychic wanderings, other cultures or lifestyles will probably dig these tasty picks.

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