

THE COUNTY COLLEGE OF MORRIS' AWARD-WINNING STUDENT NEWSPAPER

YOUNGTOWN EDITION

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Emphasizing the community in community college: Meet the new student government!

SARA LIM
Editor-in-Chief

Following last week's SGA (Student Government Association) elections, I had the opportunity to sit down with the newly elected president and vice president of the student body to hear more about their paths to office and the many dreams and aspirations they hope to make reality this year. Congratulations to the new SGA – we look forward to seeing everything you accomplish!

Introducing... Wesley Icer, the new SGA President.

I wanted to discuss a little bit about you, your life story, how you got here and what inspired you to run for student president.

Let's talk a little bit more about Wesley! I was born here in New Jersey, but following the 2009 housing crash, I had to immigrate back to my home country, Turkey. From the age of 6 until 14, I ended up living there. So, I got my elementary and middle school education done over there. A lot of my culture is also based on how Turkey was back then. Then, when I turned 14, I decided to return to New Jersey. I started going to high school here at Parsippany High School. What's funny about going from one country to another is that you can still try to make the change easier as long as you're on



PHOTO BY ANDREW MURPHEY

Lily Hesterman, SGA Vice President

the same continent. But when you're going from one continent to another, traveling two oceans to get to another place, you start to feel isolated. What I thought was going to be a very great high school experience turned out to be quite the opposite. I was riddled with social anxiety. I was always quiet, always by myself and always struggling, you know? Going through all those things, I still was able to pull through, but it's a scary experience. Now that I'm a college student over here, a community college student, I don't want anybody else to feel the same way. I always try to make the change that I want to see within my own communities, with my friend groups and whatnot. More than anything, I am interested in fostering widespread change in a short period of time. Although it's not going to be easy, the SGA is designed to help



Wesley Icer, SGA President

students, to be the helping hand, the fighting chance for everybody's academic progress. And so, what did I do? I ended up applying, campaigned for a few days and I got this position.

Congratulations. I'm very excited to see what you do next!

What inspired you to run for student government president and what does this role mean to you personally?

I'm going to answer this in the best way possible without sounding like a pick me... Being a leader is less about you but more so about the people you represent and fight for. The SGA is the beating heart of the student life, the perpetual engine that never stops, but it is powered by the students' success. Being able to contribute to that success is something I hold immense pride in,

hence the reason why I ran for this position.

How has your own college experience shaped your vision for what student government can accomplish?

I'm a returning student to CCM. My previous attempt at college wasn't necessarily a success. Combined with a lot of external factors, I felt isolated in my own struggles and ultimately had to pause my progress to tend to myself. I always talk about this with my peers; no student, especially in today's world, should ever have to go through an experience like that. Under my guidance, the SGA will work tirelessly to make sure students will have resources they can rely on should they ever feel discouraged during their college years.

What do you think are your top three priorities for your presidency? What do you want to focus on?

My campaign insisted on three things: Communication, Transparency and Opportunities. With my board, I intend to (as also stated above) improve CCM's abilities to improve communication with its students regarding the resources that are available to them. I can guarantee that out of 100 students we ask, only a handful would be able to explain what's available for students in terms of mental health. This also

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Winter blues: How to survive the season

ASHAYLA RIVERA SOLIS
Opinion Editor

If you're reading this with a good 20 layers on, a blanket wrapped around you like a burrito, a cup of something warm in your hand, and a deep sense of betrayal from the sun that abandoned you hours ago – welcome! You, my friend, are experiencing the annual phenomenon known as winter. Or, as some call it, “Why is it dark before I even finish my homework?” season.

Every year, as November flips the switch and daylight saving time clocks roll back, we gain an hour of sleep but lose the will to do anything remotely productive after sunset. The idea behind daylight saving time originated in the early 20th century, initially for energy conservation and to provide people with more daylight during the warm months. But when we “fall back,” the sun taps out earlier, and suddenly, we're living in a world where it feels like midnight at 4:30 PM. Congratulations, we traded long nights for shorter moods.

This darkness can hit surprisingly hard. Scientists call it Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). I call it “Why am I craving sleep, shows, and

emotional support hoodies?” syndrome. But don't worry – there are ways to survive this year's winter slump without completely dissolving into a couch-shaped depression puddle. Consider this your quirky(ish) little guide to staying well, staying cozy, and staying... (don't take my word for it) somewhat functional.

Tip #1: Become a Sunlight Hunter

The sun may be clocking out early, but it still exists, and you should chase it like a last (nonexistent) good deal on Black Friday. Even 10-20 minutes of natural light can boost your mood and regulate your internal clock. Open your curtains first thing in the morning, sit near windows in class or at home, and if you can, take a quick walk during your lunch break. Yes, it's cold. Yes, your face might freeze or burn off. But think of it as nature's free rejuvenating facial. (:D)

If sunlight feels like a rare Pokémon you can never catch, consider a light therapy lamp. These lamps mimic natural daylight and help your brain realize it's not actually living inside a cave.

Tip #2: Prioritize Sleep – but Not the Hibernate-All-Winter Kind

Winter makes our bodies beg for extra sleep, but going full grizzly bear isn't ideal. Set a regular sleep schedule, even when it's tempting to crawl into bed at 5 PM because it's “pitch black and feels right.” Keep your room cool but cozy, stay off your phone at least 30 minutes before bedtime (stop doom-scrolling on TikTok – you can watch “day in the life” videos tomorrow), and use a warm drink like chamomile tea or honey milk to unwind.

Tip #3: Move a Little – Even If It's Just Stretching While You Complain About the Cold

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to combat the winter blues. But let's be honest: who genuinely wants to go for a jog in 30-degree weather? The good news is you don't have to. Play Just Dance, try a quick Pilates or yoga video, or simply stretch in ways that make you feel like a graceful fairy waking from a lovely little nap. Movement releases endorphins – your brain's way of saying, “Go, Kylie, go! You're doing amazing, sweetie!” (–Kris Jenner)

Tip #4: Romance Your Life (An Excuse to Cuddle)

Winter is basically the universe's excuse to romanticize the little things. Light a candle (a safe one, not the three-wick monster you forgot to blow out last time). Make your room extra cozy with blankets and LED/fairy lights. Play music that feels like a warm hug or feels like your life is at its peak. Start a new book you can actually finish before spring. Journal about dreams, aspirations and ways

you can become the best version of yourself. Just because winter is cold doesn't mean you should be too. Make the most of everything.

Tip #5: Eat Smart (But Don't Feel Bad About Treating Yourself)

Your body naturally craves comfort foods in winter, and that's okay. Just balance it with brain-boosting nutrients: vitamin D, omega-3s, fruits, veggies and protein. Think of it as giving your brain the fuel it needs to not emotionally unravel when the sun sets before dinner.

Tip #6: (Here We Go Again) Self-Care

Drink water and stay hydrated. Feed your skin and lips moisture; these rough weather conditions can leave you feeling like dry SpongeBob, so combating that is always a good idea. And although there isn't much sun either, don't forget your SPF! Take frequent breaks for your mind, even if it's just five minutes of silence; a little goes a long way.

If winter hits harder this year, you're not failing – you're human. The lack of light, the cold, the post-holiday slump and the academic stress all pile up. Allow yourself rest, slow days and moments of softness. With a little intention and a lot of blankets, you can make the season feel less like a never-ending night and more like a time of reflection, coziness and quiet growth.

And remember, only a few more months until we spring forward again. Hang in there – 4:30 PM sunsets can't hurt us forever.

THE YOUNGTOWN EDITION

The Student Newspaper of the County College of Morris

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All students are welcome to contribute articles to The Youngtown Edition either in person or via e-mail. However, students cannot receive a byline if they belong to the organization on which they are reporting. The deadline for articles is the Wednesday prior to a production.

As I climb the stairs

By Isabel L. Stearns

*As I climb the stairs,
Eyes dull,
Light dimming.
My heart slows,
It seems so full
With tears, it's brimming*

*The light that leads
From torches bleeds
Not warmth into my nest,
My bed, it seems,*

*Holds no more dreams
Nor bring more, joyful rest.*

*I peer into a looking glass,
How pale my features wane.
I used to be a healthy lass,
Full glowing, in my mayne!*

*But now the leaves have just yet fallen
And sleep commands my eyes.
My heart of tears lives yet, while in,
My muted spirit cries*

SNAPSHOTS OF CCM'S *HELLO, DOLLY!*



Note the beautiful color design in costuming, lighting, and backdrop, adding so much whimsy to this already fabulous production.



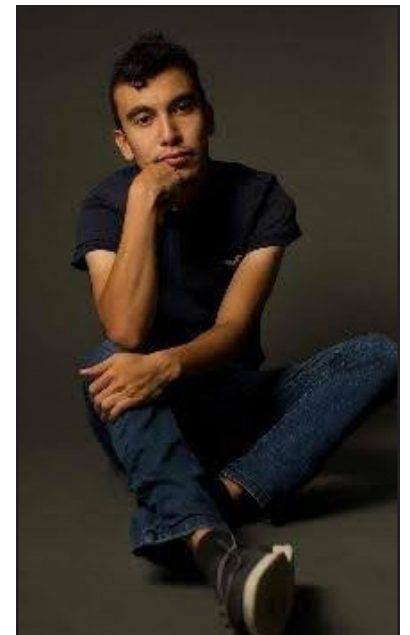
Hello, Dolly!'s lively cast at the beginning of the show.



The cast of *Hello, Dolly!* triumphantly closing the production.



The famously energetic *Waiter's Gallop* in Act II of the show.



Shot by Leo Garcia, CCM's Marketing Photographer

SGA

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goes hand in hand with my policies on transparency. In order to create a more welcoming and sustainable academic environment, we also must initiate our mission on the foundation of honesty and transparency. Lastly, I want to focus on strengthening the reach our students have regarding career opportunities and experiences.

What's one thing you wish more students understood about what the student government actually does?

At its core, the SGA is run by humans, and these humans have stepped up to protect YOU. If people could understand that we are out there to listen to them and feel more inclined to having open conversations with us, I really think our abilities to make changes in the right direction would grow exponentially!

If you could change one thing about campus life by the end of your term, what would it be?

The toughest part of my position right now is I am too eager to talk about what I want to specifically work on! Please stay tuned as we gear up to get to work!

How do you plan to unite students from diverse backgrounds and ensure everyone feels represented in campus decisions?

Diversity to me is one of the most important pillars of a successful society. The best part about being human, if anything, is the fact that we are all different from each other and that we draw strength from the fact that we are different. I intend to practice my beliefs by asking people to attend our SGA meetings to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to help us make a change. If they cannot attend meetings, they should know that they are always welcome to stop by the SGA office in the club rooms!

What advice would you give to students interested in leadership roles or getting more involved on campus?

First off: Be proud of yourself for stepping up to take the lead. That being said, never forget that you aren't alone in your fight. History shows us all that almost every leader that tried to run the show by themselves eventually had to face the grim reality of failure. No

matter what you might be representing, know that you have your board members and ultimately the SGA fighting alongside you.

Lastly, I would like to leave you with a lesson I learned from my fellow leaders: Don't be too harsh on yourself if you mess it up. You're DESTINED to make mistakes, and ultimately it is proof that you are learning and making an effort to step outside of your comfort zone. You got this!

Next, I would like to introduce you to... Lily Hesterman, the newly appointed Vice President of the SGA, who I had the honor of interviewing over some bagels after a rather dramatic hike over to Alfa Bagels.

Tell me about yourself, Lily. What is your life story? How did you get to CCM?

I started with a share-time program with the Morris County Vocational School for Culinary Arts and Hospitality. My thought process was that it could get my foot in the door, start me on a path, even if I don't know what the path is yet. So, I started there, and it got me a whole bunch of college credits, and then I chose hospitality management to finish out my associate's. I graduated from high school last semester, and now I'm going to graduate with my associate's this semester, which provides me with very exciting opportunities! I'm hoping to be working with the Marriott Hotel soon, so I can put my hospitality management degree to use. Additionally, I've always loved to read. I read everything, learned random skills, just because, why not? You might use them. You never know. I also love rollerblading around. I'm a part of a couple of clubs on campus. I've been getting involved, talking to more people, making more friends, that kind of thing. After school, I guess we'll see where God takes me, but I'm really excited to see where I end up because wherever I go, I know that I'll try my hardest... the way I see it, I can't fail that way! Also, I'm hoping to be EMT certified soon, because then I'll be able to work well in stressful situations. It'll be great for learning to make quick decisions and help people. Overall, I'm really excited for the future and to bring all my ideas to the table.

What motivated you to run for vice president?

I would say it was very quick. I basically heard about the elections. My friends told me about it and were like,

"Dude, you'd be a perfect fit for this. You should totally run." Honestly, I didn't know exactly that I wanted to be vice president, but... I thought, might as well start at the top and see where it takes me, you know. I think I'm very organized, but sometimes in the clouds. That's an important balance. I can think of all the possibilities of what could be and which changes to make. I think I can make a difference. And that was the biggest motivator. In the past, I remember you were interested in government. Tell me a bit about how that influenced your decision to run. I always like to see the inner workings of politics and everything surrounding it. I thought it was really interesting, especially because you can see that on a smaller level on campus.

Also, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how your non-traditional education pathways, in terms of homeschooling and everything, influence your thinking now. I'm curious, how did that lend itself to your sense of responsibility?

I feel like it fosters a lot of leadership skills. You must be independent in many respects. I was homeschooled my whole life and, with five children, my mom couldn't always be helping all of us at once, which meant that I had to teach myself and motivate myself to get my schoolwork done. Also, I was free to go at my own pace. So, if something's hard, I can take the time that I need to really understand what's going on before I proceed. And then on the other hand, if I'm very good at something, I can move on as quickly as I want to. I like to say that I was the valedictorian every year of my own school life. [laughs] So, you know, that's an achievement. Additionally, I do think that lends itself a lot, too. Having four siblings to "reign" over really strengthened me as a leader. I think having four siblings who look up to you is an achievement in and of itself.

Side note: What is the significance of choosing this particular dish [an egg-and-cheese bagel]?

We're supporting small local businesses. We walked through the woods to get here, okay? We will fight for this. We walked uphill both ways. I wanted cheddar, but you know, it's okay. It's okay. Sometimes you have to jump over hurdles. Adapt and be spontaneous.

Okay, so in a similar vein, what are your top priorities for your term as vice president? And what changes

do you hope students will notice?

Right now, I'm going to be focusing on broader goals, and as I understand the position, I'll narrow it down and have a very specific way of doing everything. Right now, I want to make sure students are aware that they can get involved. What's holding them back? How can we let campus life be more open? How do we give them the interest to be there? How can it directly benefit them? Everyone has their course load, their schoolwork, all the things that they must spend all their time on. Taking that into consideration, I want to give people the motivation to participate and strengthen communication between the faculty and the staff, so they can voice whatever issues they have, things they want improved, things that they think can be added. I feel like it's a really good opportunity to get kind of an inside look at how things work in government and in the whole process of electing someone and running. It allows you an opportunity to see how it's done on a small level and it's pretty low stakes in comparison to real-world events, so it's definitely a good place to start, I think. Additionally, I want to look at all those classes and see what is really necessary, what can be refined, what can be tweaked... not necessarily to take things out, but to make sure everything is constructed toward a purpose. People have a lot of things that they're doing with clubs and with school and with jobs and with life in general. So having a way of condensing everything and making sure that everything serves its purpose is really important to me. Figuring out the most important things, especially as people try to figure out their life path and what they want to do is crucial, I completely agree!

On the topic of drawing students in, I was interested in discussing campus events: would you be interested in pursuing something along those lines, and also what specifically would you be interested in focusing on?

I do think events are integral. This semester, I have been a part of different clubs and different events, and it taught me a lot. Talking to people, giving people cookies... all of it is important. Food is a crazy motivator. Food brings people together. Honestly, I could see myself working with even the hospitality culinary department, because I worked with them before. When food is provided, people show up. There are always benefits to getting involved.

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Chambacú steals the show at Casa Verde's Halloween Market

JOSHUA WILCHES VELOZA
Staff Writer

DOVER, N.J. - Chambacú closed out the Halloween Market music event sponsored by Casa Verde, a community fair showcasing artisans, live entertainment and seasonal-themed activities, on Oct. 31 with vibrant intensity. Featuring a repertoire spanning salsa, cumbia and rock, the group transformed the festive atmosphere into an authentic celebration of Latin American culture. With their performance, Chambacú consolidated its place as one of the most attractive and promising musical projects on the local scene.

"Those guys were a great finale. They are very talented," said Andrés Corredor, an attendee and fan of tropical rhythms. "Their melodies livened up the atmosphere. The musical communication among them was impressive."

A spacious, disused warehouse owned by Casa Verde at 2 Beatty St. served as the setting for a night brimming with community talent. The Nighty Noodle opened the show with a fusion of indie pop and alternative sounds, followed by Brazy Burg, a hip-hop and rap duo. Galactic Swirls, the final opening act, joined the eclectic mix with their psychedelic guitar and keyboard.

"This gig gave us the opportunity to explore new venues with different acoustics," said Julián Gómez, lead singer of Chambacú. "It was a challenge to control the sound because of the echo in the room. Even so, the band felt very comfortable and had a great connection with the audience. It was an experience that helped us grow for what's ahead."

In addition to leading the group, Gómez serves as the executive director of the Educational Opportunity Fund

program at County College of Morris, a role that has allowed him to strengthen his commitment to education and community development. His academic and musical endeavors often intersect, promoting spaces for cultural expression, inclusion and creativity. As part of these efforts, the band performed Oct. 17 on the CCM campus.

The set list for the evening included hits such as *Lluvia con Nieve* by Mon Rivera, *El Cuarto de Tula* by Buena Vista Social Club and *El Lado Oscuro* by Jarabe de Palo. The group paid tribute to Caribbean musical roots with their signature style of modern reinvention of the classics.

The audience responded eagerly, captivated by the band's vibrant melodies. Percussion, guitars and brass blended boldly, creating a warm sound that invited dancing and drew constant applause. Brian Lozano, founding member of Chambacú, conga virtuoso

and former CCM student, was one of the standout performers.

"The venue was much different from anything we've played at," Lozano said. "I think our interpretation of Alfredo Linares' 'Tiahuanaco' came out particularly well. It's an enjoyable piece to play because of its rhythm changes: from Latin to swing in two different sections."

The show ended with a standing ovation. After a rendition of Orquesta La 33's *La Pantera Mambo*, the group took their leave amid cheers that resounded throughout the space. Halloween wrapped up with a memorable touch of Latin identity and community spirit.

Chambacú's performance was a remarkable display of talent and stage presence. Its next appearance is scheduled for Dec. 13 at the Pro Soccer Academy in Mine Hill, a Christmas-themed show sponsored by Villa Quindio USA.

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Also, drawing people in is so important because you can make actual changes on campus. The more ideas, the better. I think that people are going to college to get an education, but experience is so much of the battle post-graduation. You can have all these skills, but you need to be able to talk to people, you need to be able to connect with people, you need to be able to express your desires as well. I think that participating in campus events provides everyone with those important skills.

Actually on that topic, how do you think people can get involved with the student government?

Get involved. We want the students. That's how governments work. The students are the ones who dictate what's going on within the government. This is a great opportunity for managerial stuff. It's very practical for a lot of different fields. It gives you that unique life experience and that "people experience." You need to understand how to actually coexist and work together. Yes, you can learn basic skills, but you need the life skills too. In my written interview, I mentioned that I toured a different college in Arizona, Grand Canyon University, and they

have an extremely student-motivated campus, everything's run by students. That was super inspirational! I heard a story about this kid who started selling food out of his dorm. Instead of shutting him down, campus leaders decided to open up the business in multiple different locations. Because when you notice that initiative, you can sort of invest in it. Yes, totally, especially with a young mind, when someone has that want for knowledge and want to get in the world. Getting those values out into the world and expressing them especially as teenagers, when you don't have anything to lose, is crucial. Try everything; it's time to take risks! This is the time to explore your options. Fail. Fail a lot. Fail a lot so that you can succeed!

How do you think we can integrate that on campus?

I'll probably start with the clubs because the clubs are already communities. Personally, I have never been in contact with the student government before now, so I feel like having some sort of association like that would be so helpful, because every club has its own members, has its own little networks of people that they know. Each club has its own president and community, so we want the presidents of those clubs

to get involved. What we want is for the club people to move up and make a difference, and for the people who are not in clubs to move into the clubs. Get people going, start them up wherever they are, level them up from wherever they are right now. That community sense is super important in building connections with people. This might sound funny, but it's like Maslow's hierarchy. You need the social and the esteem factors before you reach self-actualization, your full potential. So for me, first things first, I want to learn about the rest of the people that I'm working with. I want to see where they're coming from, what sorts of goals they have. I want to see where they want to make changes. And I want to fill those senator positions as well. The top management can't do everything. I also think it would be really cool if you could connect the CCM community to the larger Randolph events happening here. I feel like as college students, it's important to do things in your community. There are probably a lot of opportunities locally that we're not aware of yet. At the end of the day, everything can be improved a little bit. People underestimate all the ideas and potential of teenagers, of students, young minds, and we can truly prove them wrong.

How will you improve the CCM experience for your constituents? What is your vision for the SGA?

I plan on improving the CCM experience for my coworkers by helping to promote the interests of CCM students and thus my fellow student government. My vision is to create clearer and timely communication between students and staff and provide resources that allow students to show their creativity and ideas within the campus. For example, last year, as I mentioned, I toured Grand Canyon University purely because they offered a free plane trip there and went back to see the college. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. First of all, it was a fun adventure to see Arizona and all its cacti and palm trees for free, and because of all the innovative and creative ways that the college allows their students to participate in almost running the college. All the stores and businesses on campus are employed by students. Additionally, I heard an inspiring story about a student who started selling coffee out of his dorm room: The student was endorsed by the college and started his own coffee shop business on campus in multiple locations. While CCM is not a large campus, these are the kind of ideas I would like to explore.

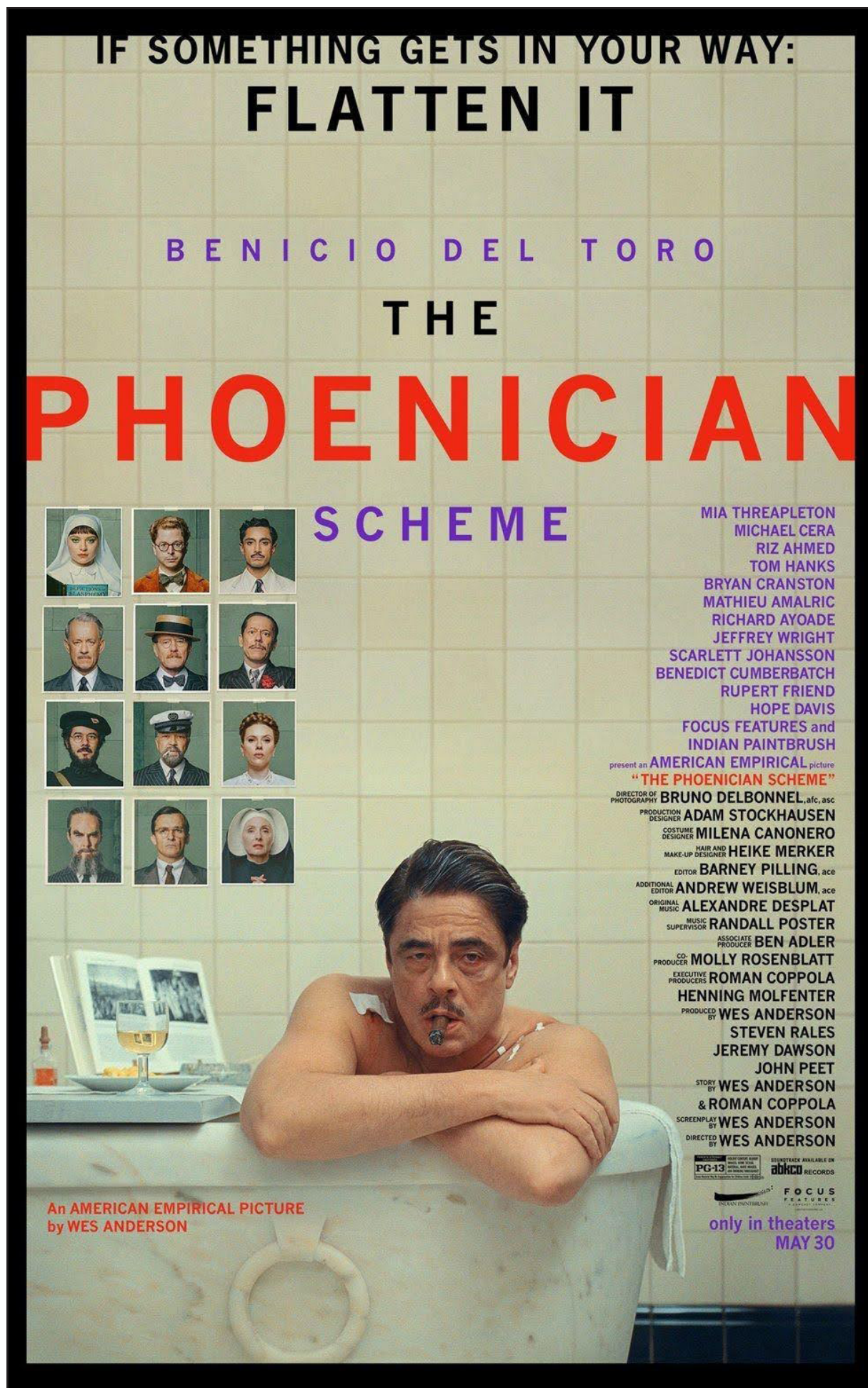
REVIEW: Trust, Treachery, and Trade: The Duplicity at the Heart of *The Phoenician's* Scheme

SARA LIM

Editor-in-Chief

Wes Anderson's *The Phoenician Scheme* unfurls as a cinematic reliquary, a meticulously crafted diorama where the ghosts of film history are not merely referenced but summoned, paraded, and gently lampooned with Anderson's signature blend of deadpan wit and visual fastidiousness. The film, set in an invented 1950s Middle Eastern fantasia, is less a straightforward homage than a baroque collage—each frame a cabinet of cinematic curiosities, each narrative a sly wink to the cinephile. In the tradition of many films before it, *The Phoenician Scheme* explores the dichotomy between person and person, between person and society, and, most curiously, between person and supreme being, counterposing the mundane with the transcendental and posing the question of redemption, both before family and before supernatural power. Beneath Anderson's signature palatial interiors, *trompe-l'oeil* backdrops, and a palette that seems to glow from within, the film is his most direct engagement yet with religious and interpersonal themes, exploring the possibility of moral transformation in a world shaped by greed and estrangement. The film deftly intertwines the personal and the political, the sacred and the profane, in a story that is as much about the search for redemption as it is about the machinations of power.

The film opens with a bang—literally—as Anatole “Zsa-Zsa” Korda, the notorious industrialist and arms dealer, survives yet another assassination attempt, this time a spectacular plane crash, underscoring his reputation as both a survivor and a target in the cutthroat world of international business. Korda, infamous for his ruthless dealings, orchestrated famines and rumored involvement in the deaths of his ex-wives, is facing mounting threats from all sides: shadowy rivals, government agents, and disgruntled former allies. Korda, alongside his estranged daughter Liesl and his entomologist and assistant Bjørn,



MIA THREAPLETON
MICHAEL CERA
RIZ AHMED
TOM HANKS
BRYAN CRANSTON
MATHIEU AMALRIC
RICHARD AYOADE
JEFFREY WRIGHT
SCARLETT JOHANSSON
BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH
RUPERT FRIEND
HOPE DAVIS
FOCUS FEATURES and
INDIAN PAINTBRUSH

present an AMERICAN EMPIRICAL picture
"THE PHOENICIAN SCHEME"

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY BRUNO DELBONNEL, a.c.e., a.s.c.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER ADAM STOCKHAUSEN

COSTUME DESIGNER MILENA CANONERO

HAIR AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER HEIKE MERKER

EDITOR BARNEY PILLING, a.c.e.

ADDITIONAL EDITOR ANDREW WEISBLUM, a.c.e.

ORIGINAL MUSIC ALEXANDRE DESPLAT

MUSIC SUPERVISOR RANDALL POSTER

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER BEN ADLER

CO-PRODUCER MOLLY ROSENBLATT

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ROMAN COPPOLA

HENNING MOLFENTER

PRODUCED BY WES ANDERSON

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journeys forth to save his latest and most ambitious venture—the eponymous “Phoenician Scheme.” This grand plan aims to transform the fictional nation of Modern Greater Independent Phoenicia (a satirical stand-in for mid-century Saudi Arabia) by constructing a dam, tunnel, and canal, all financed through a precarious web of international investors. As Korda’s enemies manipulate the market to drive up construction costs, he finds himself on the brink of financial ruin. Desperate, he embarks on a series of farcical and increasingly desperate negotiations with his eccentric investors: a royal prince, American tycoons, a French nightclub owner, and others.

Like the boxes Korda bequeaths to his daughter, Anderson’s film is a container of references, of memories, of cinematic dreams. The film is structured in vignettes contained within shoe boxes (the imagery is fascinating, posing the question of how much humanity can be boiled down to something so minuscule it could fit inside a shoe box, a disposable, relatively pointless creation meant only to store and protect). Within this meticulously orchestrated story, Anderson experiments with the idea of existing between life and death, legacy and meaning, both in this world and in the next, underscoring the metaphysical and metatextual in a deft exploration of the individual’s role within his world and within the larger cosmos. These enduring leitmotifs are further highlighted through the character of Liesl, Korda’s adopted daughter, a nun greatly devoted to her faith. Liesl plays the role of the intermediary between him and some heavenly afterlife, impacting how he views this life and the next. Through their dichotomy, Anderson explores the existential questions of meaning (meaning in art, in love, and in virtue) within an oppressive technocapitalist system, as, in part, answered and counterposed by the question of religion. Throughout the film, Liesl turns to her faith to decipher and correct the morally complex decisions of her father, something that Korda himself cannot fully comprehend. When asked about this, Liesl explains, “It’s not witchcraft... the phrasing of it, which I don’t recall, doesn’t matter. What matters is the sincerity of your emotion,” to which Zsa-Zsa

responds, “That’s it.” He is completely correct. Sincere belief in anything within the brutality of the world he inhabits is deadly, placing him in a vulnerable position he despises. Yet, in his unflinching belief in his mission and the institutions that he will either cooperate with or “flatten,” Korda finds his own, almost religious, devotion. Even so, it becomes increasingly clear that this is not enough to fend off the coagulated condensation of guilt, fear, and alienation he feels. It is an ongoing discussion whether *The Phoenician Scheme* is pro- or anti-religion; however, one thing is clear... the film is fundamentally fascinated by the very same questions religion strives to answer. In the words of Wes Anderson himself, these motifs are “a way of engaging with the big unknowns and, in [Korda’s] case, with the very present prospect of being dead.”

This leads to perhaps the most, from both a visual and analytical perspective, intriguing facet of the film: the “afterlife” sequences. Throughout his travels—dodging assassins, surviving more plane crashes, and navigating a world of double-crosses—Korda is haunted by visions of the afterlife, where a celestial court debates his worthiness for redemption. These interludes are rendered in stark black and white, their composition and tone evocative of Ingmar Bergman, Carl Theodor Dreyer, and Luis Buñuel, complete with a liminal landscape and a cast of spectral figures. Everything is drenched in unflinching light, providing the viewer with a fascinating glimpse into Anderson’s interpretation and vision of a religious sanctuary, at once welcoming and terrifying. Adam Stockhausen, the film’s production designer, along with Anna Pinnock, the film’s set designer, created a beautifully foreign interpretation of another plane of existence. In an interview on his creative process, Stockhausen remarked, “We tried all different versions of heaven. We were going to do it in a white void. We were going to do it in kind of a photo bubble. We thought about doing it at various different locations. We scouted churches around Berlin. Just nothing was quite feeling right to Wes.” In the end, they built a small sort of altar in an area of Babelsberg with a greenhouse roof that “made this very beautiful, soft, glowing light” that Anderson loved.

“Wes really liked the idea of not denying that the set is a set, and you see the edges of it,” the designers explained. This practice of creating and meticulously tinkering with a setting for your story and characters is a technique I find perfectly suitable for Anderson’s style of cinematography; it allows him to oversee every detail of the visual identity of the film, introducing elaborate camera movements, precise shots, and a unique character to every scene. Additionally, this allows the director to portray and interact with the “big unknowns” of existence, especially those of life, death, and legacy, within a precisely choreographed plane. For Korda, a man who has known all of the pleasures of earthly delight and yet who has not reached true contentment (much like Welles’ *Citizen Kane*), death is simultaneously beautiful and chilling. While, in his eyes, life becomes simply a series of death-defying sequences he has little power over, the prospect of sudden and irreversible nothingness (over which he has no power, neither physical nor emotional) is fundamentally opposed to his character. Thus, in a certain act of cowardice, he himself refuses to identify... Korda flees. Throughout the film, he is plagued by visions of the afterlife; these scenes are meant to represent the symbolic progression of Korda’s character growth and psyche. In his first visit to the afterlife, he sees his grandmother, who proclaims, “I don’t know you,” demonstrating that the legacy and connection that he believes will follow him in his life are, in fact, void and obsolete... he is not recognized by his ancestors, and neither will future generations remember him. In this world, he is known, feared, and admired, and yet at the moment of his death, he will be isolated and alienated. While in life he strives to distance himself from anything human (and thus vulnerable), even going so far as to proclaim, “I don’t need my human rights,” in death, he realizes that all is equal, and he will inevitably have to face such a reality. “I don’t know how many more times I can die,” he admits.

Ultimately, Anderson proposes that even in the face of eternity, true connection, humor, and appreciation for the chaos of the cosmos will bring solace even to the most lost of souls. If we examine *The Phoenician Scheme* within the context of Anderson’s greater oeuvre, we can

witness an artist construct and explore the essence of life—the relationship between life, death and the art that is created to celebrate both. As Anderson describes, “When you’re writing a story, it often feels less like you’re doing architecture and more like you’re doing excavation—we’re just unearthing it.” By “it,” I imagine he means all of the concepts and questions that plague humanity forevermore, questions that he has addressed in most, if not all, of his films. If we approach his last three films as a conceptual and visual triptych, these leitmotifs become clearer than ever. In *The French Dispatch*, a film centered on the interplay between art and existence (in many ways functioning as a uniquely structured and presented *trompe-l’oeil* in itself), a character explains this eternal search for meaning, describing himself as “seeking something missing, missing something left behind.” It is that alienation and eternal grappling with reality that informs all of Anderson’s characters. Furthermore, in *Asteroid City* (a film which, by the way, was the topic of my very first article for the *Youngtown Edition*), Anderson proposes that through fundamental act of *performance* (an action that his characters and all of society at large constantly participate in), be it to suit the writings of a playwright or of some supernatural being, both the characters and the actors will one day see something through the work. Just keep telling the story. Understanding grief is useless; the only way to move forward is to keep telling stories, to foolishly think you can understand it, knowing that understanding is, ultimately, impossible. There is a brief moment in the film where a playwright is asked what the film is about, to which he replies, “infinity.” My metamodern interpretation of this is that the play (and the film, for that matter) functions as commentary on the way that art informs life, which informs art, which informs life in an infinite cycle. This relationship is eternal, just as art is eternal. If *The French Dispatch* is about art being a means of outlasting your death, and *Asteroid City* is a film about the counterargument for death redefining your life out of your control, *The Phoenician Scheme* is a film about having to make the choice between art and death, but ultimately choosing life.

Must-watch TV: Apple's *Pluribus* aligns with HBO's *IT: Welcome to Derry*

BY ANDREW KIM

Staff Writer

Just when you thought it was safe to walk past a storm drain, HBO decides to drag us all back to Derry, Maine. Yes, the charming little town where children disappear more often than your left sock.

It: Welcome to Derry serves as a prequel to the recent blockbuster films, promising to unravel the origin of everyone's favorite nightmare fuel, Pennywise the Clown. Because what we all desperately needed was a backstory for the cosmic evil that eats kids.

This coincidentally is airing live alongside another hit show on another platform, Apple's *Pluribus*, directed by Vince Gilligan, the guy who brought us shows like *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*. Ever heard of them?

Just when you thought Hollywood had squeezed every last drop of blood, doom, despair and existential dread from the genre, Gilligan—the twisted genius who gave us Walter White—strolls in with Rhea Seehorn front and center, returning after her performance as Kim Wexler in *Better Call Saul*.

At first glance, *Pluribus* seems to be ticking all the familiar post-apocalyptic boxes. Is it a zombie story? Check. Alien invasion? Got that too. A gritty tale of survival against impossible odds? Absolutely.

But just as you're settling in for another round of headshots and canned bean scavenging, Gilligan pulls the rug out from under you, stares you dead in the eye and whispers, "You have no idea what's coming." Let's talk about the prequel to Pennywise's origin story from HBO.

What Horrors Await in 1960s Derry?

The series, brought to us by the minds behind the films (Andy Muschietti, Barbara Muschietti and Jason Fuchs), isn't just content with giving us clown-based jump scares. Oh no, this is prestige television.



So get ready for a slow-burning psychological horror that ambitiously mashes up supernatural terror with a heavy-handed history lesson on 1960s America. The result is a surprisingly well-crafted and genuinely chilling tale that, despite my initial cynicism, proves to be a worthy addition to the Stephen King universe.

The story kicks off in 1962 on a bleak January day. We meet a scared 12-year-old boy (Miles Ekhardt) trying to hitchhike his way out of a town that's clearly already cursed. Of course, he gets picked up by a couple who are anything but Good Samaritans. The scene sets a grim, unnerving tone, reminding us that in Derry, the monsters aren't always wearing clown makeup.

Four months later, we're introduced to U.S. Air Force Major

Leroy Hanlon (Jovan Adepo), a Black man moving his family to Derry for a new assignment. It's the 1960s, so naturally, his arrival is met with the kind of warm, racist welcome you'd expect. But the everyday bigotry is quickly overshadowed by the town's deeper, more sinister weirdness.

Leroy notices strange restricted areas on the base that seem to encroach on sacred Indigenous land, and a fellow Black airman, Dick Hallorann (a neat little nod for King fans, played by Chris Chalk), seems to have a mysterious level of access and privilege. The seeds of a much larger conspiracy are planted.

Meanwhile, at the local high school, we get our new Losers' Club in training. Lilly (Clara Stack) is back from a stint at an asylum, making her a social pariah. She finds a reluctant ally in Ronnie (Amanda Christine), a Black classmate whose father is being blamed for the boy's disappearance from the opening scene.

Together, along with a few other misfits, they decide to do what the useless adults of Derry never do: investigate.

So, Is *IT: Welcome to Derry* a Masterpiece?

Let's be honest, most prequels are cash grabs. They exist to milk a franchise dry, often diluting the

mystery of what made the original great. I walked into *Welcome to Derry* fully expecting a paint-by-numbers story about how Pennywise got his frilly collar. But I was pleasantly surprised.

The show succeeds largely on the shoulders of its incredible young cast. The essence of any *It* story is the vulnerability and resilience of children facing an evil that adults refuse to see. The show cleverly suggests that Pennywise isn't just an alien monster; it's a parasite that feeds on the darkness humans create. It's a bold, if not always subtle, thematic swing.

It has its moments of feeling overstuffed, trying to cram a semester's worth of social commentary into a horror show. But it's also masterfully paced, genuinely terrifying and unexpectedly thoughtful. It manages to expand the world of *It* in a meaningful way, turning the lens back on ourselves to ask who the real monsters are. It turns out, we didn't need a Pennywise origin story, but this one is so well-executed, you'll be glad we got it.

But let's get to Apple's new hit, *Pluribus*, which has high expectations to follow up on Gilligan's masterpieces. But so far, does it reach the levels of hype it has generated?

What Is *Pluribus* About?

The setup is deceptively simple: a virus from the cosmos descends upon Earth, and in the blink of an eye, billions are dead. The lucky (or unlucky?) few who remain are "transformed" by this virus.

It's a global, telepathic hive mind that erases individuality faster than a corporate merger. No more arguments about pineapple on pizza, no more political debates on social media: just one big, happy, Borg-like family. It's a world stripped of what we call humanity, leaving a serene, unified consciousness in its place. Sounds terrifying, right?

Well, maybe.

Scattered across the globe are 13 survivors who are miraculously immune. Thirteen lone wolves in

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a world of sheep. Our protagonist, the delightfully cynical and pragmatic Carol Sturka (played with masterful weariness by Rhea Seehorn), is one of them. In the second episode, she finally gathers a few of her fellow immune individuals, the last remnants of a forgotten world. She clears her throat, summons her best Churchillian gravitas and delivers the line every end-of-the-world movie has conditioned us to expect: "It is up to us to put the world right."

The camera lingers. The survivors exchange glances. You expect a slow clap, or at least a determined nod. Instead, after a painfully long pause, a man named Diabaté looks at her, cocks his head and asks the single most subversive question ever uttered in an apocalypse story: "Why?"

The Apocalypse Is Here. So What?

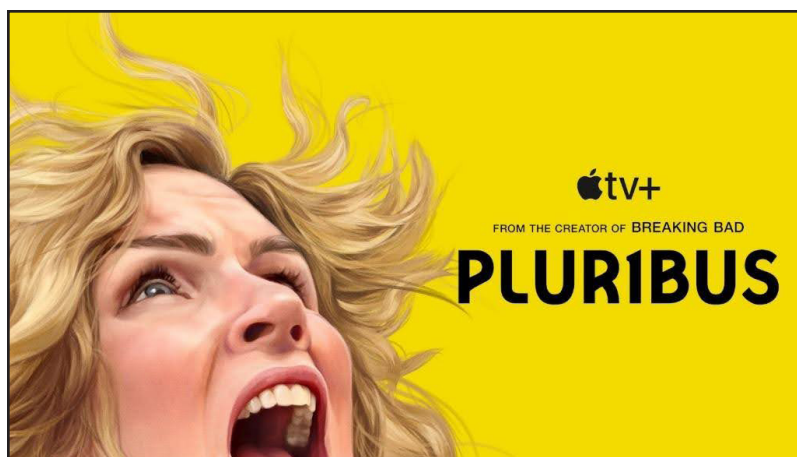
Why? That one-word question shatters the entire genre.

We're so trained to believe that the apocalypse is, by definition, a bad thing. The end of art, love, ambition and individuality must be fought. We must restore the world to its former glory, with all its beautiful, messy, chaotic individualism. It's the unspoken rule of survival fiction.

But *Pluribus* dares to challenge that assumption. Diabaté's question isn't just a moment of shock; it's the show's entire thesis statement. It forces Carol, and by extension the audience, to confront an uncomfortable truth: What if this new world, this hive-minded utopia, is actually... better?

This is where *Pluribus* veers sharply from its predecessors. Think about the long, shambling history of zombie fiction. It's always been about us versus them, the living versus the dead, the individual versus the mindless horde. The protagonist's mission is clear: survive, rebuild and preserve the flame of humanity. But Carol can't seem to get anyone on board with that plan. Her fellow survivors aren't exactly jumping at the chance to "save" a world that, from their perspective, might not need saving. They've seen the other side, and maybe, just maybe, it's not so bad.

The show's central conflict



isn't about fighting monsters; it's an ideological battle. Carol is desperately trying to sell the virtues of individualism to a world that has

collectively decided it's overrated.

It's a bold, almost heretical concept for a big-budget TV series. Gilligan seems to be suggesting that

the very things we hold dear—our identities, our egos and our endless squabbles—might be the problem, not the solution. In a world suddenly free of conflict, poverty and loneliness, is the loss of self really such a high price to pay?

Pluribus doesn't give you an easy answer.

It just sits there, smirking, as our hero struggles to defend a way of life that, frankly, wasn't working out so great for everyone in the first place. And that, right there, is what makes this show so utterly compelling.

It's not about everything. It's about asking whether anything was worth saving at all.



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ESSAY: The occult and the artistic mind: a most unusual affair with shadow and symbol

BY ELISE MILLS

Staff Writer

Art, it must be said, is no stranger to secrets—or to the seductive tug of the forbidden. If one doubts the occult's allure, consider how whole generations of poets, painters and even that stolid doyen of reason, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, have dallied with the arcane. The very word "occult" evokes a velveted chamber, a hint of candle wax, a whiff of something just beyond empirical reach—a fitting haunt for any artist who suspects reality is best grazed at the edges rather than tackled head-on. The modern cynic may scoff, but as Wilde reminds us, "The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible."

"Occult," derived from the Latin *occultus* ("clandestine, hidden, secret"), announces itself with such obvious drama that one almost expects a flourish of the cape. Yet its role in the development of creative thought is anything but superficial. The occult is a vast, if sometimes shabby, wardrobe from which the artist may borrow—alchemy's gold, witchcraft's midnight, astrology's fate and fortune, cabals of whisper and symbol. It has provided artists, especially in centuries of rationalist upstart, a means of defiance: a refusal to accept that all mysteries may be dispelled by gaslight and common sense.

Let us consider literature's entanglement with the shadowy. Shakespeare, ever the conjurer, gifts us the witches of *Macbeth*, whose spectral speeches still chill the air of theatre halls. Mary Shelley ensnares the mind in *Frankenstein*, conjuring life with a blasphemous spark, echoing an age obsessed with scientific Faustian ambition.

Yet it's in the late 19th century's spiritualist salons that the occult becomes a dinner guest in literary society. William Butler Yeats, whose poetry pulses with incantatory force,

joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—an organization that prized altered consciousness above all. "The visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen world is no longer a dream," Yeats mused, as if trying to reverse sober reason through sheer will.

But who draws a finer profile than Arthur Conan Doyle? That venerated chronicler of Holmesian deduction, Doyle would spend part of his post-Holmesian career "hunting the fairies." "The world is full of things that man does not understand," he insisted—a phrase, one suspects, that comforted many undergraduates before finals week. Doyle's embrace of séances and spirits stands not as an abandonment of logic but as a testament to the fact that even the firmest believers in reason cannot resist the glamour of the forbidden.

Turn to the canvas, and we find that art, too, has paid its tithe to invisible powers. Surrealists like Dalí or Max Ernst dipped freely into alchemical metaphors and dream logic, using the language of occult ritual to render visible the processes of the unconscious. Is not every gallery a temple, every vernissage a rite of passage?

Perhaps no painter fit the role of medium quite so literally as Hilma af Klint, whose abstract forms were not "abstractions" at all but, she claimed, dictated by spirits. "The pictures were painted directly through me...with great force. I had no idea what they were supposed to depict," af Klint confessed, standing as a kind of spiritual stenographer. Let no art critic complain of confusion until they, too, have attempted to translate the astral.

If literature and art sipped the midnight draught, music, too, drank deep. Occult symbolism is everywhere: from Beethoven's fascination with numerology to jazz musicians who flirt with voodoo and the blues' pacts at the crossroads.

Rock music, that most notorious prodigal, devoured the occult with the enthusiasm of a Victorian hypnotist at a séance. Aleister Crowley, the self-styled "Great Beast," leers from the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*. Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page transformed Boleskine House, Crowley's former abode, into a shrine for inspiration, and rumors of pacts and curses haunt the footnotes of musical history.

Peter Bebergal, in *Season of the Witch*, writes, "Magic, ritual, and the occult have always been the engine for the most creative forms of music." Artists like David Bowie transformed themselves into mystics and aliens, using occult symbols in a ritual of self-invention as much as of rebellion.

What draws the creative mind to the lagoon of the occult? There is, Wilde might suggest, a streak of theatricality in all artists, a relish in the mask. The occult, for all its dark trappings, allows for an exploration not just of secret truths but of self. Alan Moore, the magician-writer, argues that "Art itself is magic. Magic is art." Here, perhaps, lies the true allure: the artist as conjurer, sorcerer and charlatan—someone willing to risk nonsense for the glimpse of the sublime.

And why should the modern student not embrace this? The occult in literature and art is not merely fright-night bluster; it is a protest against a purely mechanistic vision of the world, a refusal to believe that all wonders may be measured in units tidy and small. "People who use their imaginations in literature or art ought to be the first to admit that there are mysteries beyond our comprehension," insisted Doyle. Faced with such mysteries, surely the only error is in refusing to wonder.

Even in America, the Spiritualist movement had a strong artistic pull—Victorian spirit photography, table-rapping, elaborate séances and

occult lectures. Cape May, New Jersey, home to the Victorian Emlen Physick Estate, still runs "Voices from Beyond" tours where one can view apparitions in old photos, attend lectures on Houdini's escapes and learn about Pepper's ghost—an illusion that forever changed theater.

New Jersey itself boasts one of America's best-known cryptids: the Jersey Devil. In January 1909, newspapers ran wild with stories of a monster lurking in the state's haunted Pine Barrens. Some say it's part bipedal horse, part winged reptile and wholly a local icon. Sightings were later revealed as the shenanigans of a sideshow promoter, but the monster lives on in regional mythology and as the namesake of the state's NHL team. Walk the streets of Warren County and you'll find the sinisterly named Shades of Death Road, Ghost Lake and the Fairy Hole—locations where, legend says, specters rise from the fog and whispers echo in caves. Jenny Jump State Park is tied to tales of a girl whose ghostly leap from its cliffs still haunts the land. These stories, blending actual tragedies and fevered folklore, create a uniquely Jersey atmosphere: eerie, paradoxical and always half in jest.

So the occult endures—not as a literal spell or summoning, but as a metaphor, an invitation to the shadow and a challenge to ordinary seeing. As Blake wrote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." The artist's task, then, is not to explain but to reveal, not to banish the darkness but to find within it the shimmer of meaning always just out of reach.

If you, wandering the campus quad or paging through a midnight paperback, feel the old urge to seek what lies beyond—congratulations. You are in distinguished company, for the history of art and literature is a long séance, and the table has not stopped knocking yet.

Check out the Youngtown Edition
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Recipe: A pumpkin spice latte to get you through the fall semester

BY ELISE MILLS

Staff Writer

You can't discuss Thanksgiving without addressing the elephant—or should I say the pumpkin—in the room. That PSL (Pumpkin Spice Latte, for the uninitiated) isn't just a drink; it's a cultural phenomenon that turns every Jersey girl into a basic autumn stereotype between September and November. But you know what? Own it.

Here's my gift to you (Because You're Not Paying \$7 at Starbucks)

2 shots of espresso (or strong coffee—we're not snobs here)

1 cup whole milk (2% if you're watching it, oat milk if you're really watching it)

2 tablespoons pumpkin puree (the real stuff, not pie filling)

1 tablespoon maple syrup (Jersey's got great farms, support local businesses)

1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

Whipped cream (don't skimp)

Heat the milk, pumpkin, maple syrup, and spices in a saucepan, whisking until it's smooth and steamy. Pour in your espresso, top with whipped cream, and dust with cinnamon. Boom. You just saved enough for gas to get to your cousin's house in South Jersey. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!



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