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Proposed essay question: **The Concept of Fear: How does Horror, the Uncanny and Folklore intertwine and shape the horror genre, and how can I build on it using Welsh mythology?**

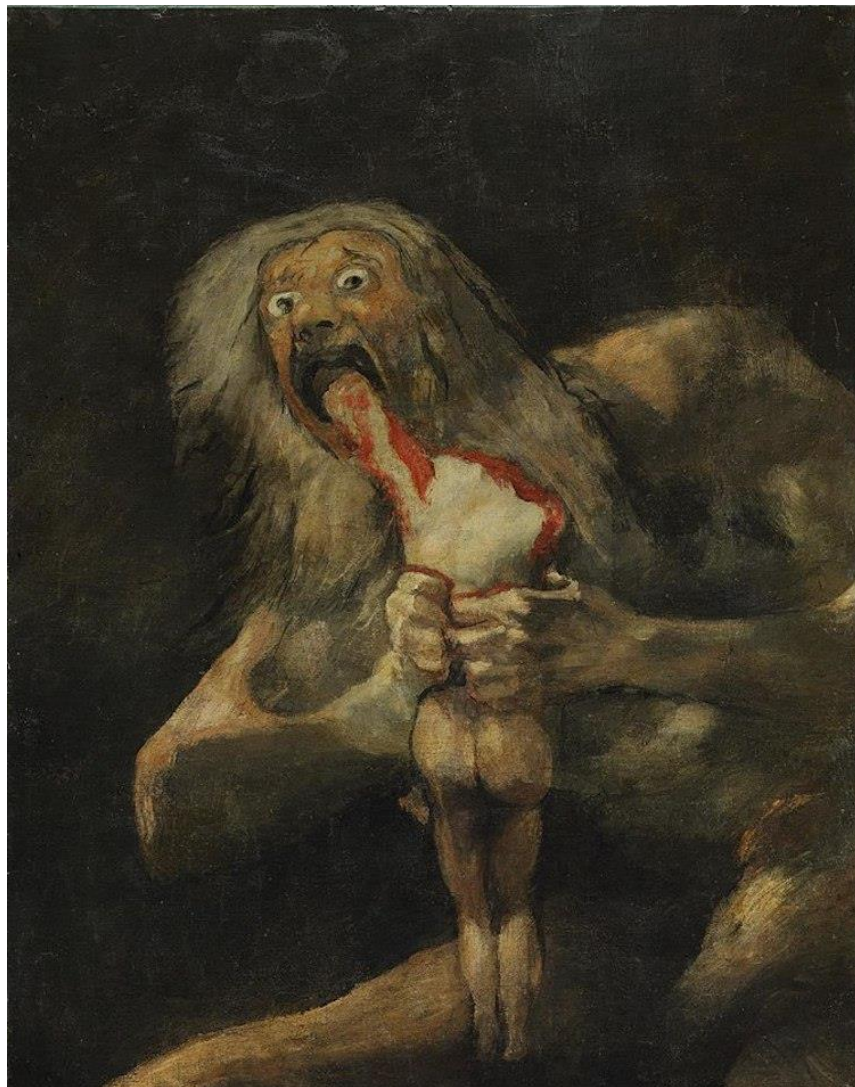


Fig.1, De Goya, 1819

Introduction

Within this project, I will be researching three primary topics; Horror, Uncanny, and Folklore. These words being explored within the context of multiple modern media types, such as graphic novels, manga, cinema and video games, and comparing them to how similar themed stories were perceived in the past. I aim to explore the significance and inner workings of the Horror genre and understanding how fright works within the human psyche; including how to utilise it through art; examining key theorists Noël Carroll and Thomas Fahy. I will also be exploring the innate fear of the uncanny, understanding its function and effect on the general populus and the philosophy behind it. Definitively, I will be aiming to explore Folklore, primarily Welsh, and pursuing how they would be viewed in the modern day compared to the Middle Ages.

Horror

“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents... someday the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new Dark Age.”

(Lovecraft, 2014)

Fright, fear, disgust, terror; Horror is everything that makes us feel truly unpleasant. Whether it's an emotional response, a terrifying experience, the nature of something itself or a carefully crafted piece of media crafted to induce pure dread in its consumer; that is

Horror at its core (www.dictionary.com, 2019). Horror as an art form has been documented for millennia, deeply rooted within us as a need to contextualise and visualise our deepest fears. These examples go as far back as human history is documented, such as *Anubis weighing the soul of the scribe Ani*, from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, approximately 3300 years ago, showcasing the God Anubis judging the heart of Ani at her death, overseeing either her ascension to the afterlife or the devouring of her heart itself.



Fig 2, Hartmann Schedel et al, 1493. P.261

The delve into horror continues to medieval Germany with the *Dance of Death, Leaf from the Nuremberg Chronicle*, by Michael Wolgemuth and displayed in figure 2. Horror and themes resembling the concept and inevitability of death were extremely common across all of Europe in the era, especially given the extremely short life expectancy. This led the general population to expect an early demise. Figure 2 shows a plethora of dancing corpses, symbolising just that, the common picture of decaying corpses, and the looming fear of joining their sombre dance. Memento Mori, in English, the knowledge and remembrance that you must die (Renauld, 2021). This disturbing visual, combined with Anubis' judgement heavily demonstrates the interpersonal and instinctive feeling that horror provokes, and that common fears such as death are a regular base layer for how artists created horror, from 600 years ago to 3000. This can be argued from the point of Dr Scrivner, an American psychologist that insists that horror has therapeutic undertones that “taps into these anti-predation circuits of the mind”, creating a barrier between fiction and fantasy, and helping us understand and deal with things that are otherwise malevolent, and much bigger than us as people (Levy, Cushway and Roberts, 2025). This can suggest the usefulness of horror and the inevitability of fear, showing that artists can utilise the horror genre to help build a lighter image on the thing that is causing the fear, showing whatever horrors that are being depicted as more light-hearted and easier to digest; an excellent example being the dancing cadavers of figure 2. From a design standpoint, the work is quite simple and has glaring physiological and anatomical irregularities and errors, however those errors make the work more unsettling.

I have hypothesized that art-horror is an emotional state wherein, essentially, some nonordinary physical state of agitation is caused by the thought of a monster, in terms of the details presented by a fiction or an image, which thought also includes the recognition that the monster is threatening and impure.

(Carroll, 1990)

Carroll's quote challenges that horror art is caused by the thought of a monster or image of something threatening. In horror art from the past, monsters were the common analogy for the phobia or fear that the artists want to convey, however modern media strays away from such set ideologies and practices. Going forwards from De Goya and Hartmann's era horror becomes more subjective, not relying on singular concepts and becomes more of a broad and open creative process. An example of this is the work of H.R. Giger, who utilises subconscious fears over visual ones. The fear of death, the dead and corpses can be seen as more subconscious, however the approach Giger takes rips into the human psyche; a key demonstration is his creature from the 1979 horror hit *Alien*, the Xenomorph. The design of the xenomorph and its earlier stages was specifically crafted to show men the fear of pregnancy and sexual violence, and its violation of bodily autonomy. The Xenomorph's head is designed to be phallic, having the same shape as a penis, and the chest-buster is symbolic of a woman's psychological state at having an unwanted child (Eden, 2023). This demonstrates the evolution of the horror genre, from simple imagery and creatures to much more complex and relatable themes for those who have either gone through that type of harrowing experience, or those who have the fear surrounding it.

On the contrary to the themes of the genre, horror is outstandingly popular. Eight out of nine markets globally have at least a positive outlook or genuinely love the style of film, the highest being 72% of a country reportedly loving the genre, putting it as the 3rd most popular in general and for younger generational demographics. (Nrgmr.com, 2025)

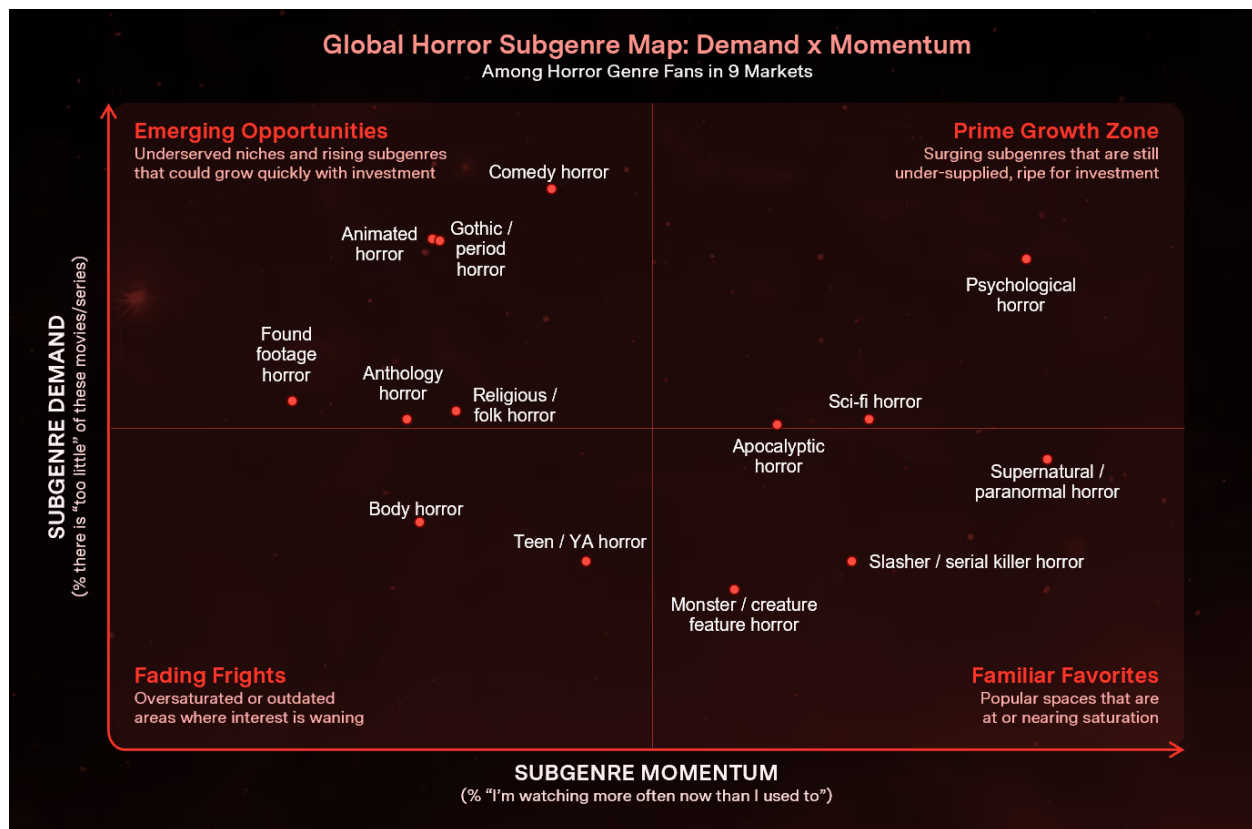


Fig. 3, Nrgmr.com, 2025

The figure above demonstrates the popularity and demand of a genre based on its watching percentile. The most popular being psychological and comedy horror. This analytic demonstrates my previous point that more complex and somewhat relatable

themes are more popular in the current climate; psychological horror relying heavily on paranoia, anxiety and madness to disturb and petrify watchers (judyt, 2022). Although popularity depends on several factors, the most widely regarded answer to horror's titanic fanbase is a simple logic. Stimulation. Innate fears and anticipation stimulate the body and the mind, manufacturing the perfect mix of adrenaline and anxiety that is addicting. This satisfies the deep-rooted curiosity that most people naturally have to explore the darker side of the mind and allow us to step into the world and minds of the media's twisted reality (Yang and Zhang, 2021). The perspectives of Yang, Zhang and Carroll paint a picture of what an intriguing canvas the horror genre can and will be to explore.

Uncanny

The subject of the "uncanny" is a province of this kind. It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread.

Sigmund Freud and Strachey, 1919, p.1

The uncanny, within the context of horror, is undoubtedly how Freud describes it, "All that is terrible", a creeping chill and a dread that isn't so easily rationed with. It a feeling of familiarity and unfamiliarity; a tranquilizing fear that can make the most welcoming of places feel like a hostile, panic inducing hole. It's the place where reality and fantastical beliefs and delusions intertwine (Royle, 2003, p.1-15). This feeling can stem from a multitude of things, such as visual errors on computer screens, and observing something that doesn't quite match but is similar to a human, be it auditory, visually or through movement.



Fig. 4, Ito, 2019, Ch.6

Uncanny in art has one very clear figurehead and is today one of the most prolific horror artists of the 20th century, Junji Ito. Figure 4 is one of his more revered panels from a collection of short stories he made. Ito's work is truly disturbing, taking menial everyday obsessions, uncontrollable events and twisting of the human body into the extreme, using the surreal and often supernatural to explore these narratives. The drawing above has a psychological effect on the human mind that is named "Uncanny Valley." According to

research conducted by the University of Cambridge and Dr Fabian Grabenhorst, this cognitive phenomenon is caused when the brain observes a human form and expects certain social formalities to occur. This in turn causes the brain to conflict heavily with what it is seeing; these features then causing an evolutionary response to the threat, usually to panic and avoid whatever is causing it (Braun, 2019). This point can be made by observing figure 4, and upon doing this we as people put a set of predictions on how the person or thing will act, if it appears human. If these predictions are violated, such as the boy's face above, looking at the figure will trigger a physical and/or emotional response, which can vary from chills down the spine and the overwhelming urge to look away, often regarded as the heebie-jeebies (Urgen, Kutas and Saygin, 2018) (Psychology Today, 2023).

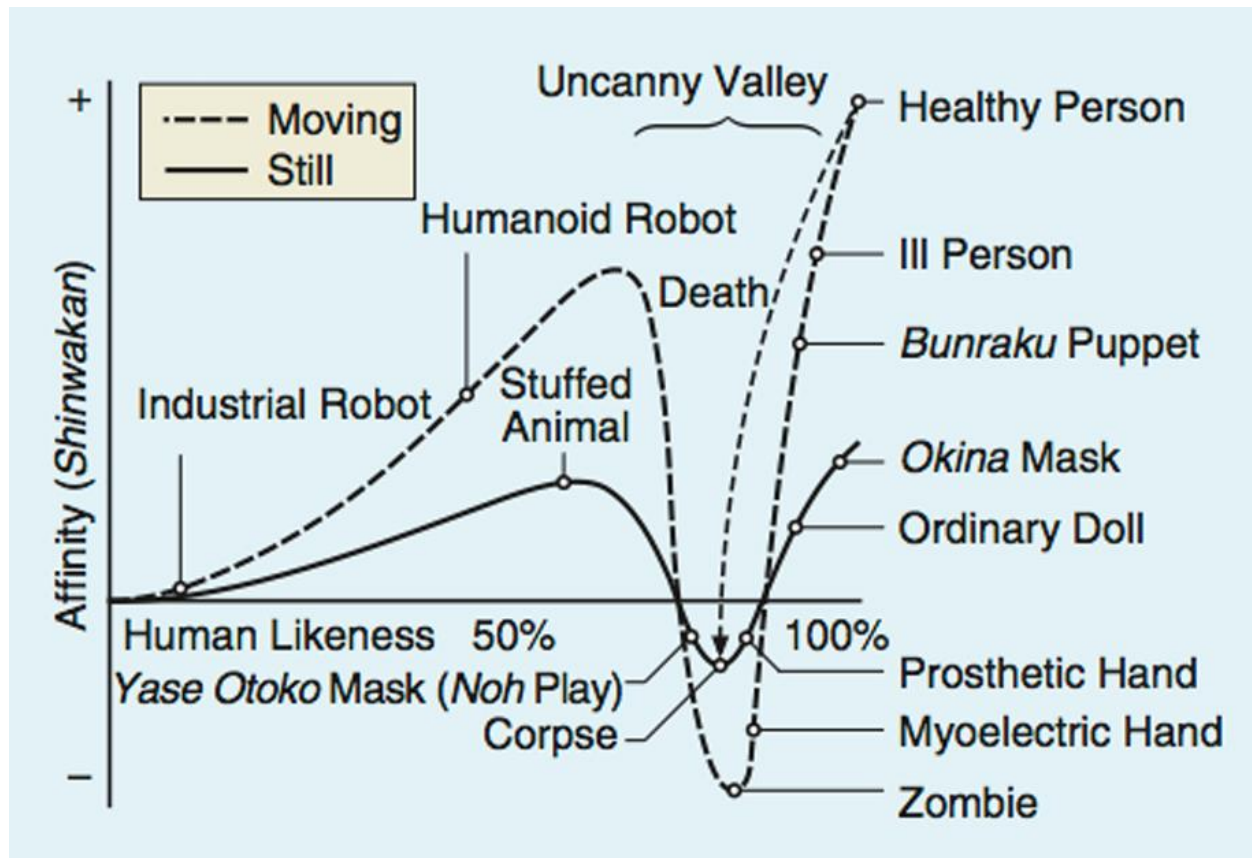


Fig.5, Mori, Macdorman and Kageki, 2012

The uncanny has a strong link to two things in its origins, robotics and the dead. The term of uncanny valley was coined in the 70's by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Moshi, who became deeply disturbed by a humanlike animatronics smile. The graph above was Moshi's understanding of how the phenomena worked, showing a clear line where human likeness and affinity cause the feeling (Kendall, 2022). Mori's original paper was on the cusp of the research on the uncanny valley phenomena, however in recent years artists have used the phenomena as a tool.

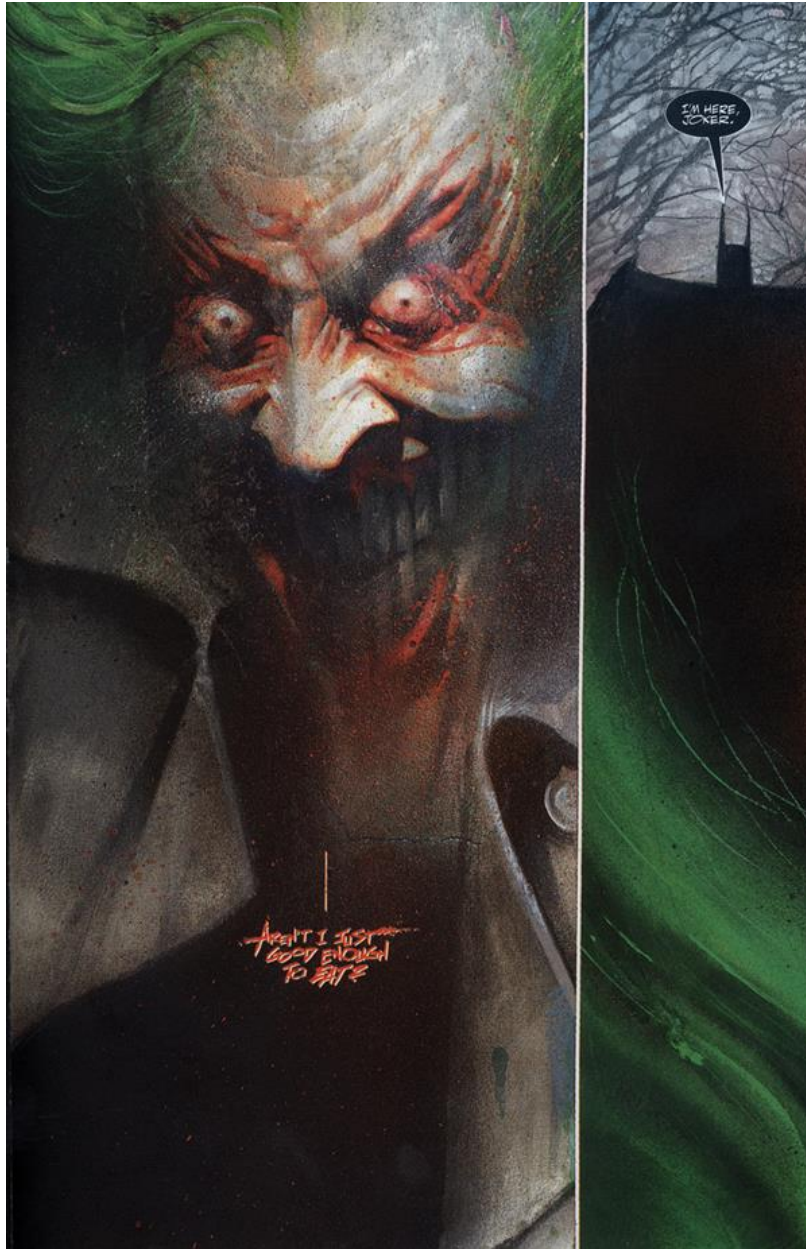


Fig.6, Morrison and McKean, 1990

Dave McKean's work on the *Arkham Asylum* comics in the 90's was a very clear example of the uncanny coming into modern media. Figure 6 is a depiction of the Joker alongside a panel of Batman, both drawn to show a psychotic view of the two, considering the book is set in an Asylum. In McKean's words, "seeing as though the whole book is set in an asylum it's the perfect like coat hanger to just hang all this this madness on if there's an

image in there” (God Loves Comics, 2022, 01:57). The disruption of human form, and the subtraction or emphasis on human elements, Mckean creates a painfully grotesque play on the psychotic mind and proving the theories of Mori and Freud as previously mentioned.

Folklore



Fig.7, England, 2017

Folklore is defined as an academic discipline, a study of culture, often used as a term to describe fairy tales, stories of legend, and ballads; all a cultural significance to the location of its origin (Britannica, 2020). Wales is no different, being rich with tales of old and myths ranging from small fairies to giants, some so large that they are world renown, such as King Arthur and Myrddin, or Merlin in most other dominions, the sunken city of

Cantre Gwaelod, and haunting spirits (Watkins, 2020). Welsh culture is rich with stories such as these, many collated in its own book, the *Mabinogion*.

Folklore provides a framework from which to tell stories of the ghostly and the uncanny, tales that are often so deeply ingrained into our cultural psyche they possess a sense of existing in perpetuity. For audiences who love both genres, the connections between the two is rich terrain for storytelling.

Okojie, 2025

Looking at folklore within the context of the last two keywords, there is a clear tie between them. Many stories from the medieval era that were folklore were very powerful due to the lack of literacy throughout the general populus, which gave these tales a significant role in very basic education, entertainment and the spread of Religion. Since such a high percentile were completely illiterate, these stories were essentially the only way people could experience some form of connection to culture and social normalities, which united people to some extent across the classes (Watts, 2024). Observing the modern statistics for horror-themed media it would be fair to reason that there were many that did enjoy the adrenaline of horror in the distant past, which could be attributed to non-religion-based creatures such as the kraken. However, researching into the various folklore tales of Wales its clear that many were religious fearmongering, labelling many creatures as evil or giving them a gruesome anecdote, many “create horror by tapping into the fear of an unholy reclamation of the soul and a tempting away from God by demons and the devil” (Kim et al., 2013).

Comparing this to folklore in the modern day, there isn't as big of a stigma and push with religion, and most people have a decent education; and with entertainment at our fingertips there is a heavy contrast to how we see folklore today. There were realistic beliefs and genuine fear towards the stories being told the medieval period, the demons and ghost being tangible for them. For the modern era, these creatures are nothing but fiction; entertainment for the masses and myths made to either attract the curious or for pop culture (Byrne, 2024) (Watkins, 2004).



Fig.8, Chepstow Town Centre, 2025

Figure 8 depicts a good example of a medieval folktale that absolutely is not as scary as it was centuries ago, Mari Lwyd. Although the first documented case of the wassailing folk custom was in the 1800's, its expected to be centuries older. The homeowner or tennant of the house the horse visits would have to have a battle of rhymes

and words, where if the person loses, Mari Lwyd would be granted to enter and raid the pantry, usually of cakes and ales (Brett, 2022). Although still celebrated today in some areas of Wales, it is not taken anywhere near as seriously; the eerie and striking figure not quite hitting as close to home as it did all those years ago.

Practice

Observing the strong connections between the keywords Horror, Uncanny and Folklore I have decided on the working title and question The Concept of Fear: How does Horror, the Uncanny and Folklore intertwine and shape the horror genre, and how can I build on it using Welsh mythology? This ties into my practice, which will be creating a fully fleshed out concept for a horror movie using the style of concept art, and alongside this possible marketing for said movie. Practicing concept art, I will further my understanding of horror and the uncanny by basing the work around Welsh folklore and trying to utilise the primal fear that I have mentioned throughout this proposal.

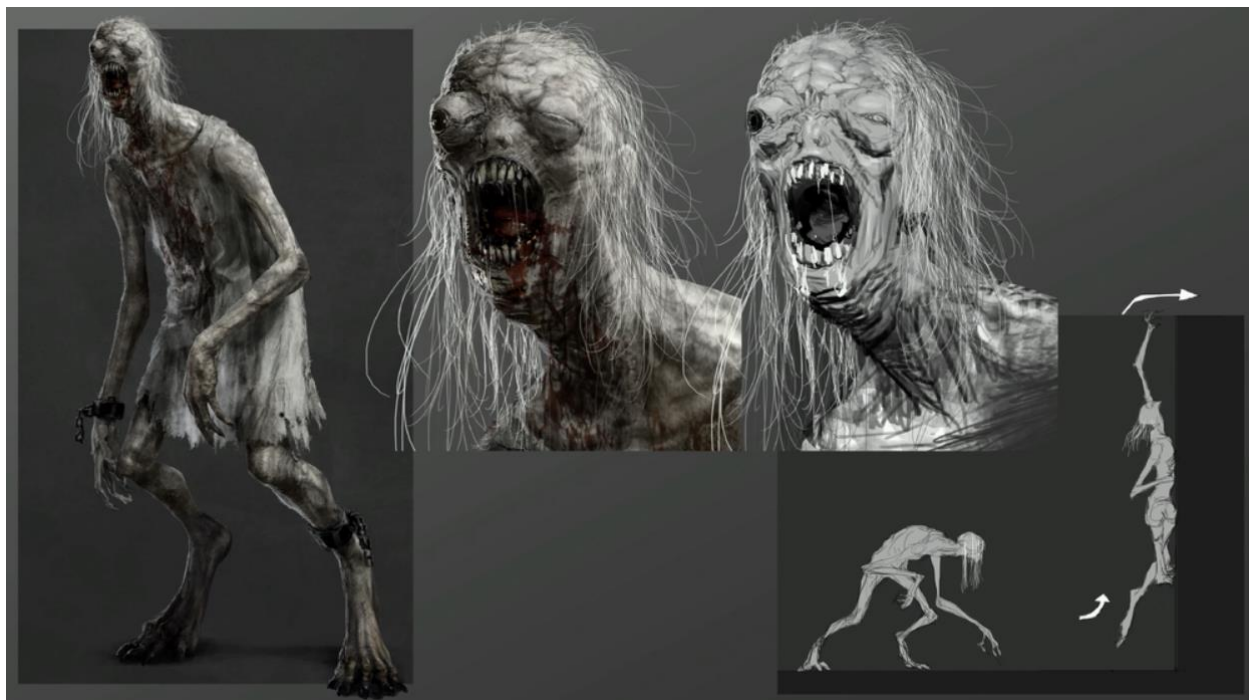


Fig 9, to, 2026



Fig 10, to, 2026

Figures 9 and 10 demonstrate some of the work I want to try make in my own style and for the topic I want to cover, these being concept art from the game *Resident Evil 9: Requiem*. Taking inspiration from the ways medieval humans would likely perceive these horrors and the overwhelming horror drawn from uncanny art and design, I aim to continue my research and create an engaging piece of horror that I will fuse pure dread and Welsh culture; two of the things that I am most passionate about.

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Figure list

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