

Post

Deep Dive into Cannibal Horror

What do the fashion industry, the dating scene, and ritualistic cults have in common? Cannibalism.

By **Kayla Moreé** **Aug 14, 2023**



Introduction

Disclaimer: This post was last updated for format January 2026.

What do the fashion industry, the dating scene, and ritualistic cults have in common? Undertones of consumption, sensationalization, scandal laden headlines, the list can go on. This article however is only about one of the many commonalities: cannibalism.

In March of 2022 Hulu did something rather surprising, they released a horror movie I not only liked but quickly became obsessed with, [Fresh](#). At one hour and fifty-four minutes run time this movie took me on a roller coaster ride I didn't know I needed to take. By the end of this movie, I felt satisfied but still very open to another two hours of the characters on my screen, a praise I reserve for movies I think very highly of.



How a “fresh” meal lured me down a rabbit hole

Normally I walk away from a movie thinking, “I really loved [insert plot point here] ...but I would have really loved it if they’d done [insert my suggestion of a plot change here]”. This usually ends up being what I would’ve done as the protagonist to have a better ending. Fresh makes all the decisions you as a watcher would make and even comes up with some you wouldn’t automatically think of to spice things up. Moments happen throughout that lead you to believe you know what will come next, but I found myself wrong every time.

Together [Daisy Edgar-Jones](#) and [Sebastian Stan](#) give such a compelling performance I almost believed she might be into him at one point despite him removing her glute muscles without her consent. While I am still side-eyeing Stan for playing Tommy Lee in another Hulu production he gives a stellar performance in [Fresh](#). I can wrap my head around him being able to lure and even subdue captive women into his grasp while schmoozing up the vile clientele that order his cuts.



Enough dancing around the subject matter:...

...Edgar-Jones is taken hostage by a new suitor, Stan, after some modern dating red flags are understandably ignored. While in captivity she learns that our man Stan is somewhat of a butcher for the bizarre. Not only does he harvest and sell human flesh, but he also consumes it. Allow me to introduce you to our first cannibal of the article, Steve, played by Sebastian Stan.

Steve views his cannibalism as something that makes him superior and it's more than alluded to that his clientele are of the wealthy variety. By the end of the movie, we can pretty much guess that a secret group of wealthy people, most of which are men, are casual cannibals who receive regular deliveries from Steve.

In Steve's circle cannibalism is just the next, reasonable step in one's culinary journey if they dabble in the taboo long enough. By taboo I mean highly illegal, unethical, and immoral based on the methods Steve implores in his business. Leaving a wake of missing women in his path, only a wall of souvenirs exists as proof of Steve's history and the depth of his career. Noa, our Portland based leading lady played by Daisy Edgar-Jones, can seduce Steve. She does this by appealing to his mind and showing a willingness to not only understand him but share a special meal with him. Of course, this meal is of the cannibal variety.

Noa's slow burn of an escape plan reaches a fever pitch in the third act of the film that I highly recommend watching. Faced with an evolving situation, new information, and other characters with their own intentions Noa makes the best decisions she can. All while her friend, Mollie, played by Jonica T. Gibbs investigates her disappearance and goes to get her back.

At a time when I had grown tired of the same old horror plots, *Fresh* shocked me in the best ways and with unexpected subject matter I typically avoided. This intrigued me past just the plot of this movie but about cannibalism in general.

Background Research & Initial Findings



I set out to find if cannibalism historically or even modernly resembled that of the cannibalism in *Fresh*. I wanted to determine if this whole time a hidden trove of horror masterpieces lie just beyond the ability to stomach human consumption. Unfortunately, I have bad news from the other side of more than one cannibal horror marathon, the prognosis is bleak.

Before I dive into the movies, I chose to focus on researching cannibalism as a topic, its meanings, history, and more. Rather naively I figured the history of cannibalism would be clear blue water sailing, but I found instead a muddy water source of speculation and anthropology debates intermixed with a few islands of solid facts or recorded instances.

My look into cannibalism became more about coming to terms with the murkiness of our historical tellings than about the ins and outs of cannibals. Not only that but the examples that do exist are less of the "savage" variety and more of the Western European variety.

If the history isn't factual, I would posit that the horror movie portrayals based on that history are inaccurate as well. The definition of the word "cannibalism" is, "the act of consuming another individual of the same species as food." For the purposes of this article, I chose to exclude cannibalism related to demonic possession, zombies, and the animal kingdom.

Two types of cannibalism are commonly referenced...



...in anthropology: endocannibalism, which is the practice of cannibalism in one's own community, and exocannibalism which is the consumption of flesh outside of one's close social group. An example of endo cannibalism is also the only example of disease spreading from consumption of human flesh by other humans, _called the Kuru disease, found in some Papua New Guinea tribes.

Kuru spread in these tribes due to families in them practicing cannibalism as part of the funeral process for their loved ones. A broad example of acceptable exocannibalism in human culture is consuming one's enemy after war. In some cultures, this is believed to allow the person consuming their enemy to obtain their abilities and attributes.

Brief History of Cannibalism



Amerigo Vespucci.

Most of the historical documentation and analysis...

...relating to cannibalism and cannibalistic societies comes from Western culture, specifically Western European culture. According to some legends the word "cannibalism" itself is named after the people on the Island of Carib, whom explorers claimed were cannibals.

Some important historical context to consider is when such legends start showing up on record and what was also happening at the same time. During the early 12th to 14th century crusaders representing various countries and special interests explored lands separated from their home continents by vast oceans. Explorers had a vested interest in being able

to claim the lands they discovered belonged to the group they represented, even when people already inhabited the land.

For example, noble society in Spain had but one rule at the time: land should not be taken from natives *unless* the natives practiced cannibalism or other things seen as barbaric. An explorer and merchant, Amerigo Vespucci, born in 1451 in Italy once wrote, "...they themselves wonder why we do not eat our enemies and do not use as food their flesh, which they say is most savory. Their weapons are bows and arrows, and when they advance to war they cover no part of their bodies for the sake of protection. like beasts, they are in this matter." in a letter to Lord Raphael Sanchez, the treasurer of the King and Queen of Spain.

Vespucci isn't the only one to have written back...



...to Sanchez and thus the King and Queen of Spain about the encounters with Natives in the Americas. In one such letter Christopher Columbus wrote about the natives as if they were animals in awe of his group's arrival rather than a more accurate representation along the lines of needing to be saved by natives with vast knowledge of their environment.

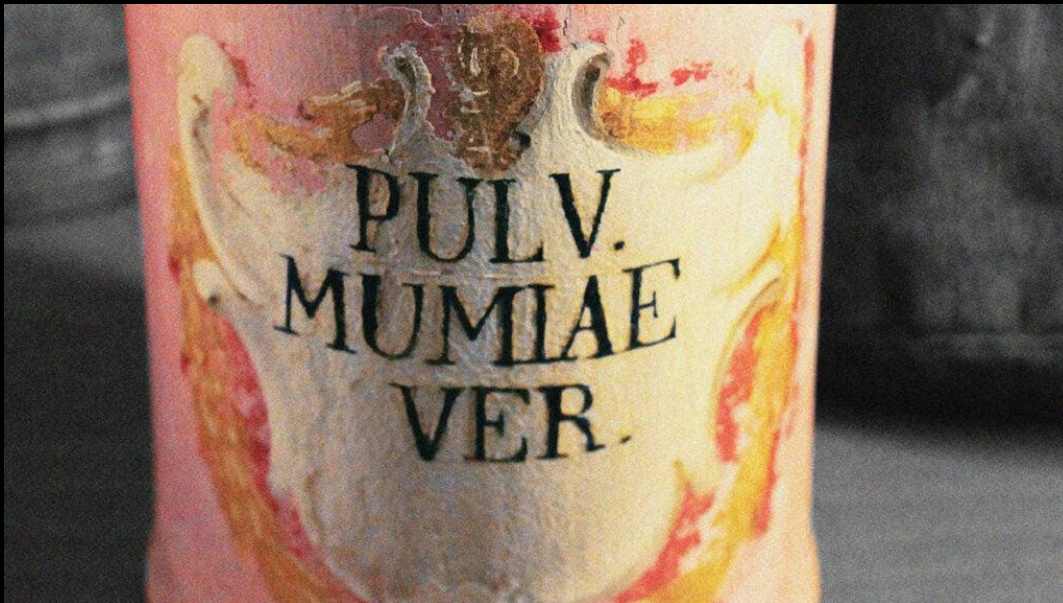
Accounts like that of Columbus and Vespucci's continued and the ideas they created spread until a strong narrative existed. This narrative allowed Native's land to be taken and the natural resources, like gold and corn, to be claimed by the Spanish, Portuguese, and

anyone else that felt they too stood to gain from imperialism. All of that pain and torment due to the idea that the Native owners of the land were "Godless people" unworthy of being treated better than an animal.

Due to this historical context, we cannot in good faith trust European accounts of natives practicing cannibalism from at least this time period onward. Painting natives as savages who had become so depraved they practiced cannibalism and thus making stealing their lands and torturing their people for centuries an easier pill for perpetrators of imperialism to swallow.

As the saying goes, those in glass houses should not throw stones, and Medieval Age Western Europeans sure seemed to love stones. The most documented, widespread practices of cannibalism come from European groups. At the time these groups viewed their cannibalistic practices to be medicinal and thus acceptable. From a Medical News Today article one such common practice involved consuming crushed up mummified human remains all the way back in the 12th century called Mumia.

This crushed powder became widely...



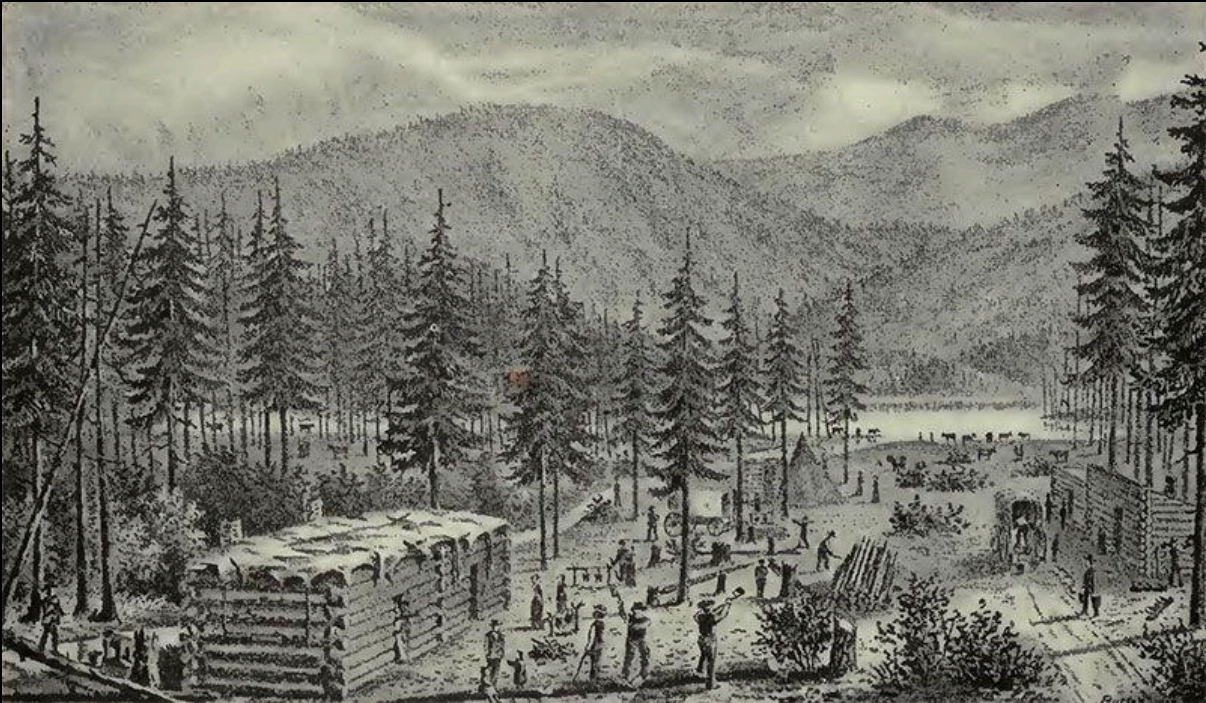
...considered a cure-all drug being used as a blood thinner, cough suppressant, anti-inflammatory, and cure for epilepsy. Some physicians doubted its usefulness but that did not stop other practitioners from robbing graves when their supply of mummies ran low.

However, it doesn't stop with mumia, cannibalism in the West still exists, widely encouraged in some circles. Western, 21st century mothers have taken to saving and consuming their placenta post birth, which is technically cannibalism. Some companies even offer to dry and crush the placenta up and put that into a capsule for easy consumption. Mayo Clinic has reported on their website that consuming the placenta post birth, or placentophagy, can be of harm to the mother and the baby based on how it's prepared.

Two forms of cannibalism usually at the very least understood, are survival and famine cannibalism. Both types occur when facing imminent death due to harsh conditions forces

one person to consume another person in order to survive. Famine cannibalism has happened during various human crises around the world and is also an occurrence of cannibalism out of necessity to survive.

The Donner Party is one of the most known examples...



...of survival cannibalism specifically. A group of migrants traveling to California spent the winter of 1846-47 stuck in the Sierra Nevada mountains and of the 87 people in the party only 48 survived following three separate rescue and relief attempts. It is said that "roughly half of the party's survivors 'eventually resorted to eating human flesh'" during the ordeal.

In addition to historical examples cannibalism also reaches into the territory of legend. Some of these legends include the Wendigo, a Plains and Great Lakes Native legend of an evil spirit created from an act of cannibalism, the witch in Hansel & Gretel who lures children to their demise, and the Wechuge, an Athabaskan legend of a man-eating creature. All of whom are cannibals or are created through the act of cannibalism to inflict harm or a lesson on other humans.

Cannibalism is the stuff of nightmares so it isn't a surprise to find so many examples of human inflicted horror related to it. Something we can only accept in the most dire of circumstances, sets apart the awful criminals from the horrendous, and is so grotesque that even the mention of it causes some to stop the conversation entirely. Honestly, it's surprising more cannibal movies aren't made-it seems even horror fanatics don't always have the stomach for it.

1st Cannibal Horror Movies



So, how did cannibal films come to be? Who are those that first dared to use cannibalism as a horror influence? In the 1970's and 80's a genre made predominantly by Italian filmmakers hit the horror scene that is now known as cannibal horror movies. Generally known to be graphic movies that depicted primitive civilizations of cannibals.

Now also considered exploitation films they mostly focused on South America and the Amazon, specifically remote tribes living primitively. Umberto Lenzi (pictured above) is one of these filmmakers, releasing *Deep River* in 1972. In 1980 Ruggero Deodato's movie, *Cannibal Holocaust*, released and is still regarded as a mainstay of the cannibal horror genre.

Cannibal Holocaust (1980)



To this day [Cannibal Holocaust, released in 1980](#), is probably still the most well known representation of the cannibal horror movie genre. Having not been able to bring myself to watch this one, watching [Ryan Hollinger's 2018 video](#) in which he goes into detail about the movie and surrounding controversy will have to work. One of the major instances of controversy was Deadato and the crew taking advantage of natives on set, even trapping them inside burning huts with no safety precautions. Along with actual, graphic animal murder and confusion surrounding what was reality and what was fiction, the real crew faced charges for acts committed while making the film.

Something this graphic in the found footage format hadn't been attempted at the time of its release in the eighties. To top it all off the film had not been presented as a horror film prior to its release, to the shock of viewers when they went to see it.

While trying to show the ignorance of Western media,...



...Deadato believed that his art would not be received as a snuff film despite all the evidence to the contrary. Ironically he has the film's plot open with a film crew that goes to the Amazon to find and record a tribe of cannibals-similar to himself. After the initial film crew in his movie goes missing another, second film crew goes to search for the original crew. The perception in their professional circles is that the original film crew died heroes.

In a dark twist, the second crew discovers the first crew's footage only to find that the original crew orchestrated scenes of the tribe murdering and cannibalizing people to make a good, interesting film. After the original crew raped, killed, and abused the native people on film, the natives justifiably killed them. The footage is destroyed in order to let the positive narrative of the original crew and those connected to that expedition in their professional circles, live on.

This is accidentally a one to one representation of the stance that the true savages are the ones documenting the acts of societies unlike their own. The lesson learned that it is worth considering the whole picture when crafting a narrative, especially a cultural one that could have dire consequences. Unfortunately, this message is largely lost due to the overly gruesome depictions of violence and the unethical conduct of the real life film crew.

Soylent Green (1973)



On the very opposite side of the spectrum we have Soylent Green, released in 1973 but set in a 2022 dystopian society. Directed by Richard Fleischer the film is somewhat based on a sci-fi novel from the sixties, Make Room! Make Room! by Harry Harrison. Rather than primitive, this society is futuristic and a warning about continuing on the same path.

In this dystopian future, due to overpopulation and climate change, (very top of mind in actual 2022 as well), worldwide shortages of food, water, and adequate shelter began. The uber wealthy live a safe life behind security systems while the rest of the people do the labor necessary to make the city work, sacrificing their time and bodies. The poor are so bad off they only eat wafers, called Soylent Red. There's also Soylent Yellow, a highly processed and not so great version and the new Soylent Green wafers. a more nutritious option.

Unfortunately, the NYPD detective, Robert Thorn, that we follow comes to learn that Soylent Green isn't made from ocean plankton like people are led to believe. In actuality, the oceans and the plankton in them are dying, and to compensate for that lack of resource the government started making Soylent Green out of human corpses. Corpses that are transported from a facility providing medically assisted suicides to those who wish to escape the hellscape that is 2022 in New York City.

It's not news that things in the United States have...



...dramatically devolved following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the culmination of a decades long slow decline. In an adjacent story not completely related to cannibalism, US prisoners are being offered reduced sentences in return for their spare organs like kidneys and liver lobes. Though not human consumption of human flesh in the literal sense it still translates into an evil sub form of parasitic behavior on those most heavily affected by wealth inequality.

Starting in March of 2024 people in Canada can consider Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) due solely to suffering mental illness, a controversial policy addition to their 2016 passing of medically assisted death for patients. Some have argued that MAID is Canada's way of financially avoiding funding action to address mental health issues, lack of disability care, and rampant poverty in society.

Cannibal Horror Reviews from Unknown to Iconic

Not necessarily a full-blown genre with constant installments, cannibal horror has both popular franchises and true hidden gems. As time goes on many stand out movies with cannibalistic aspects or about cannibalism are made and gain recognition. Not unlike *Fresh* that inspired this deep dive, *Raw* (2016) and *The Neon Demon* (2016) are two modern horror films about cannibalism that have become personal favorites and garnered much praise. Before those wonderfully interesting films got made, some truly eyebrow raising movies came out like *Eating Raoul* (1982) and *Society* (1989). Some gross and others straight up foul; each film included in this deep dive portrays cannibalism in a unique and varied way.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)



One of the most popular portrayals of cannibalism is [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre](#), centered around a family that sustains off unsuspecting visitors to their farm. The original movie came out in 1974 and like many movies of that era the plot is not as complicated or steeped in backstory as today's horror movies. Focusing more on the violent murders, the poster for the theatrical release had the tagline, "Who will survive and what will be left of them?" over a chainsaw swinging Leather Face, highlighting the main points of the movie quite clearly.



Today, the most recent [2022 remake of Texas Chainsaw Massacre](#) focuses more on the backstory of Leather Face and reveals more about his history. The story of the family is the second most important thing behind the bloodbath that it turns into as opposed to the original leaving more questions than answers. All movies in the franchise do portray

Leather Face as a super villain of sorts, able to survive far more damage than the average slasher.

Reveling in the murders of unsuspecting travelers makes the family evil and in addition to this evil their unnecessary cannibalism is an additional affront to the victims. More true crime than spiritual or anthropological, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre franchise is rooted in our nature as humans and our capability for bizarre, evil acts.

The Hills Have Eyes (1977)



Similar to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, another franchise, *The Hills Have Eyes*, is focused around a family of people who cannibalize unlucky passing travelers. Unlike Leather Face's family the family in this franchise have been subjected to nuclear testing waste nearby. This nuclear waste has caused them to have physical mutations, becoming increasingly worse with each generation of inbreeding and exposure to the nuclear waste. Influenced by *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, this Wes Craven created franchise portrays the cannibal characters as depraved, on various levels.

Not only does this family murder, but oftentimes those murders are accompanied by violent sexual assaults. At times we delve into what I hope is unintended commentary on the moral nature of those with birth defects or mutations. No explanation exists in the series for why they eat people other than that they live a bizarre, dark life.

It could be argued they cannibalize people because...



...they live in the middle of nowhere desert with little access to food, but it is worth mentioning they collect and hide the belongings of the travelers they consume. So why would they eat people if they could just sell their belongings for money to improve their lives?

The family's actions seem to be a choice, albeit a cruel and unusual choice. From a nuanced perspective this characterization of the disabled community as savages, who when given the option to be free, would assault and murder unsuspecting victims for the sake of it. This characterization sometimes crosses the line into ableist commentary and portraying of disabled people as uncivilized, their actions being more animalistic than human in nature.

Furthermore, this connects back to the designed stereotype of native people as savages which we can draw from the historical context in which they are presented. Once again, the deeply ingrained idea that only savages would consume another human and therefore cannibals are only ever savages is present.

Eating Raoul (1982)



Family cannibal stories are not the only ones to have existed however, in the 80's horror movies overall took on a sexual undertone and with that came movies about cannibalism incorporating commentary on sex and sex lives. *Eating Raoul* is a perfect example of this shift towards openly sexual commentary in popular media. A black comedy released in 1982, *Eating Raoul* follows what is described as a "prudish couple" who have big dreams to open a restaurant and escape the mundane, bleak direction of their lives.

A series of events follow that lead the couple to start financing their dreams with stolen money. They also decide to steal this money specifically from murdered swingers they lure into their home via the classifieds section in a local magazine, *Hollywood Press*.

Mary Bland poses as a dominatrix and while meeting with clients Paul Bland, hiding in their apartment unbeknownst to the client, comes out and robs them. The Bland couple continues this for quite some time, disposing of the remains in their trash chute until they stumble across Raoul, a locksmith, also looking to rob people.

The Blands make an agreement with Raoul...



...that they will let him take the bodies of their victims in exchange for not reporting them. Why would Raoul want the bodies you may ask despite the Blands not being too concerned. To further complicate this trio, Raoul and Mary begin having an affair behind Paul's back. We learn through hints that Raoul is selling the bodies to a local dog food company. The growing company offers a versatile food that can be enjoyed by both humans and man's best friend.

The tension comes to a head when Mary must choose between the two men and to Raoul's shock, she chooses Paul. This leads to the murder of Raoul by Mary since they can't let him go and also her and Paul get away with everything.

Mary and Paul are in a pickle however because they've scheduled a dinner with their loan agent for the very night that they kill Raoul. In the 80's to receive a loan you often had to meet with and impress a loan officer, the meeting with the loan officer in this case is the only thing standing between The Blands and their dreams.

So, Mary cooks...



...Raoul to cover up the murder and to make sure they have an actual dinner to show the loan officer they have the culinary skills to run a successful restaurant. This plan works great and the loan officer is impressed with the meal, the three finish the night with a nice meal and have secured the loan. In the end the couple believe they are hardworking Americans who achieved the American Dream. After passing judgement on other's ways of life during the film *The Bland Couple* are cannibals, adulterers, and criminals.

Taking this into consideration, *Eating Raoul* is more social commentary than straight up horror, still cannibalism but the shock of cannibalism is used in a social context rather than portraying the gruesome aspects. Punctuated with non-addressed sexual assault and problematic 80's jokes, *Eating Raoul* comments on the culture of the US through the cultural lens of our practices that incorporate eating into everything from sex to success. The hypocrisy of condemning the actions of others while committing bad acts oneself ties everything together for a decent watch.

Society (1989)



Seven years later in 1989, just a few years after *Eating Raoul* a head scratching cannibal-like movie came out titled simply, *Society*. Uncertainty, this can qualify as a cannibal horror movie in an abstract sense; however, this movie is grotesque and about the consumption of people still. It also harkens back to Western Society's hypocrisy regarding cannibalism and other unusual acts being acceptable from the wealthy and savagery from the impoverished.

The first part of *Society* is surprising because of where the movie ends up, it has all the typical 1980's teen movie features, school president races, night drives, and school events. Our protagonist is Bill Whitney, a popular high school student from a well-off family who feels that he doesn't belong in his Beverly Hills socialite community. Surprisingly, his family seem to feel the same, often excluding him from information, plans, and secrets.

We come to learn that the society group his parents are a part of is a group of human-like aliens infiltrating society. They have been quietly climbing the ranks of power with their "elite, biologically selective group" aiming to become the majority on Earth. The aliens live by consuming human beings' "juices" and "nutrients" straight from their bodies. They accomplish this in the most grotesque way possible, melding into slug-like creatures that then go inside of the human body, consuming them from the inside out.

The best way to describe the imagery...



...is a human juice box being sucked too hard. The special effects aren't bad but rather they are too good. The activities that come to life on screen are not easy to forget and probably not easy to come up with either. The final few scenes leave jaws dropped and eyebrows furrowed as the alternate species shows the viewer what it is made of, literally.

Some parallels can be drawn from the events in the film and our current wealth inequality fueled system. The rich and connected are hiding their true selves with the intention of sucking the life force out of unsuspecting working-class people to live. Forms of cannibalism and other taboo activities performed by the rich are often not viewed in the same light as those performed by groups considered low class, savage, or even average.

Dr. Hannibal Lecter



Side stepping a little bit we enter the world of true crime cannibalism, previously mentioned in connection with infamous and tragic real-life cases. Dr. Hannibal Lecter is a character often immediately recognized as the cannibal horror character, one of the most mainstream portrayals.

In 1991 [Silence of the Lambs](#) focused on an imprisoned serial killer, [Hannibal Lecter](#), known to consume his victims, being interviewed to help FBI agent Clarice Starling catch a killer. Much of the plot focuses on the interactions between Clarice and Hannibal during the investigation, Hannibal orchestrating a cat and mouse back and forth between the two.

Lore says that Lecter, born in 1933, went from...



...being an orphan in Lithuania to a cannibalistic serial killer. A successful psychiatrist, Dr. Lecter killed his patients and others he considered "rude" or a nuisance to society. Both Dexter and a real true crime case, justification is sought and added to cruel and unusual murders that should not be justified.

While *Silence of the Lambs* doesn't go much into detail other than the first and last victim early in the series, what is known about his MO is rather gross. Known to consume (or feed to dogs) his victims while holding them in captivity and torturing them both physically and psychologically.

What is now a common *Criminal Minds* plot, caught cinema by a storm in 1988 with Clarice stopping the serial killer and the door being left open for Hannibal Lecter to return. In total the character appears in five movies between 1986 and 2007 with countless pop culture references and works inspired by him.

Ravenous (1999)



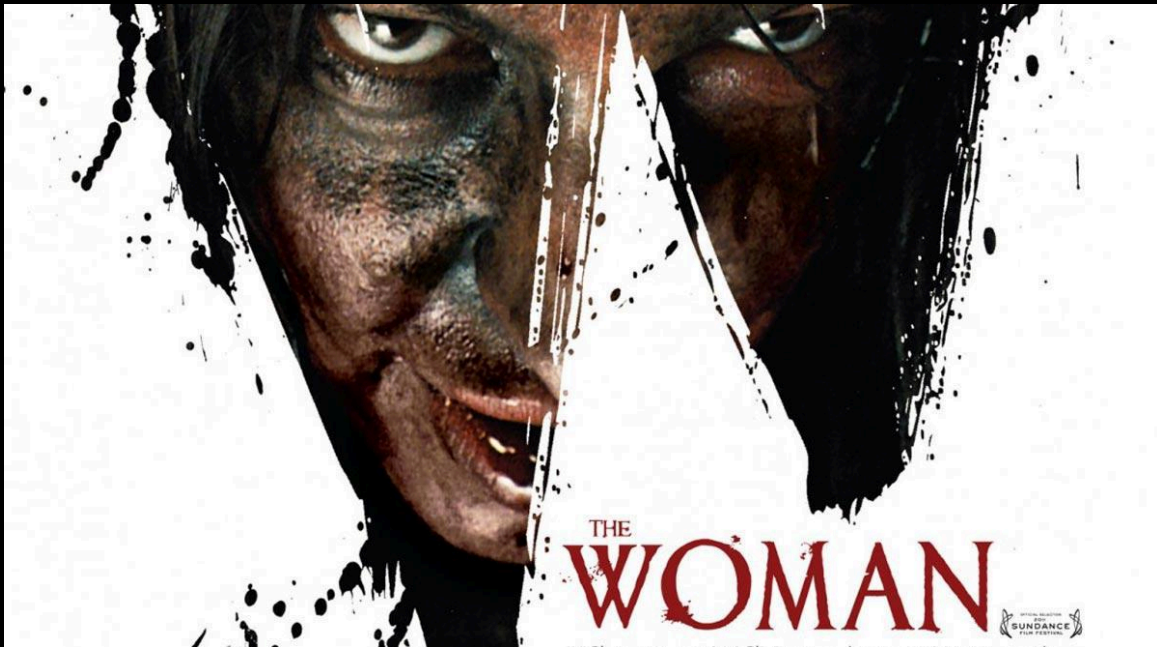
Ravenous, a 1999 "horror Western cannibal film" set in 1840s California, is a good example of survival cannibalism in horror. The screenwriter, Ted Griffin, stated that the script had been written with elements from the Donner Party and Alfred Packer stories as inspiration for the film, both instances of people being lost and forced to choose between starvation and turning on one another.

Additionally influenced by legends like the Wendigo, *Ravenous* also draws influence from Manifest Destiny, an ideological movement characterized most often by Americans forcibly taking land from Indigenous people while migrating west towards the Pacific Ocean. Circumstances in the *Ravenous* lead to a group of characters being trapped in the mountains, and like the Wendigo legend, once they consume human flesh their ailments are cured in exchange for an insatiable hunger for humans. The tradeoff for surviving the harsh circumstances trapping them is an inability to stop hunting humans for food.

Unlike the Wendigo legend however the character in *Ravenous*, who is now affected, is of semi-sound mind, able to lure people out into the forest to eat them. This ability to evade simple traps keeps the cat and mouse game going with unexpected twists and turns in the trajectory of the plot.

Ravenous didn't break even at the box office, accidentally signaling a trend moving away from experimental, or first time plots in horror. After this period a drought in cannibal horror content ensued with sparse worthwhile installments.

The Woman (2011)



A more fantastical portrayal of cannibalism, *The Woman*, dropped in 2011, following one cannibal woman's journey. This woman, a member of a cannibal tribe on the Northeast coast of North America, is captured by a wannabe alpha male named Chris Cleek. The Woman never receives a character name other than "The Woman" which is just one example of dehumanizing women in the film. Cleek lives with his wife and children in the woods, The Woman who is camping out nearby catches Chris' attention who decides to abduct and trap her.

The Cleek family lives under the abusive rule of Chris, who seeks to civilize the uncivilized through any means necessary. Civility in his opinion aligning more with the Old Testament than compassion. Of course, The Woman presents a perfect opportunity for him to save someone, to make them civilized, with a touch of nefarious intentions.

In his first attempt to approach The Woman once he's trapped her she bites off and eats his finger. This caused him to become even more dedicated to his "civilization program" for The Woman. While in continued captivity The Woman is assaulted by both Chris and his son and before an additional horrific attack can be carried out Chris' daughter, Peggy, catches and stops them.

The abuse towards the women...



...in the film ramps up in violence and control causing Belle, his wife, to make plans to leave and take their children with her. Her attempts to save her family causes a violent outburst from Chris that carries into the climax of the movie. We learn that the Cleek family has a fourth child, a daughter born with deformities that they have conditioned to behave like a dog, living in their outside dog cellar. The Woman ends up escaping and murders Belle, Chris, and the son.

After climactic scenes of The Woman finishing off the family members she frees the daughter from the barn. The three Cleek daughters and her walk off into the woods behind the house.

Particularly interesting throughout *The Woman* is the juxtaposition of Chris' claims of civility and the abuse levied towards the women in his life. His own behavior pushes past the boundary of evil while negatively judging the women in his life for normal human behavior. He is evil personified, committing sexual assault, incest, and physical assault and ordaining himself the moral leader while doing it. As with many of the other examples of cannibalism in history and media this one points out a stereotype; the "savage" is the one that gets justice for the victims and herself.

Raw (2016)



Unique storytelling makes [Raw](#), a 2016 French-Belgian movie, more fascinating than gross. The main character, Justine, has lived as a vegetarian her whole life alongside her family, both parents working as veterinarians. Jumping right into the action Justine is hazed along with her cohort of veterinarian school classmates. This hazing concludes with everyone eating a rabbit kidney which Justine, as a lifelong vegetarian, is opposed to.

Unfortunately, Justine is forced to have the rabbit kidney which results in an itchy rash to form all over her body that is diagnosed as food poisoning. Justine's desire for meat grows, making her insatiable. An accident causes her older sister's finger to be chopped off and Justine to eat it in a rather gross but well-acted scene. Alexia covers with their parents for Justine.

Now aware that Justine is experiencing the same thing Alexia takes her to a road and causes a car to crash, consuming one of the passengers and directing Justine to consume the other. Rather than go along Justine is horrified and runs away from her developing reality.

Justine falls further into...



...her cannibalistic desires after assaulting a boy mid-make out and biting her own arm to stop her from attacking her friend, Adrien. Cut to another party and Alexia gets Justine very drunk only to record her trying to take bites out of a corpse and pass that video around the school.

The sisters' relationship reaches a fever pitch as they fight and bite one another's arms in a standoff. In retaliation Alexia kills and eats Adrien, but rather than report her Justine helps clean up. Alexia is shown to be in jail only to find out that their desire to eat people is a genetic trait passed down to them from their mother, who consumes pieces of him, their father, to survive.

The final twist and reveal of the family secret going beyond the sisters is interesting and not expected upon first watch. Overall Raw is a good, interesting story about family dynamics and coming of age under strenuous circumstances. It makes sense to have come out later in the 2010's as more unique stories, and foreign to the US stories, got funded and mass released on streaming platforms.

The Neon Demon (2016)



A busy year for reimagining cannibalism, *The Neon Demon*, also came out in 2016; part commentary on the fashion industry in LA and part examining female competition the story is hard to put into one box. Crossing multiple genres and taking various twists, what seems to be a coming-of-age story quickly devolves into one young woman's ravenous rise and fall from grace.

Young model, Jesse, moves to Los Angeles to model. Upon arrival she meets Dean who invites her to a photo shoot where she meets a makeup artist named Ruby. Through Ruby, Sarah, and Gigi, two other models are introduced as nosy women getting a little more desperate with age in the harsh LA modeling world.

Jesse ends up being the new, fresh face that LA fashion is looking for after a successful photoshoot with a known fashion photographer. As Jesse gets further into the seedy underworld of young models breaking into the industry, she catches more ire from Sarah and Gigi, even being attacked by one in a bathroom.

The recognition and desire go to...



...Jesse's head immediately and she finds herself running right into the arms of danger after narrowly avoiding a break in and subsequent assault at her hotel. With Jesse now in Ruby's home the three older women, Ruby, Sarah, and Gigi attack her, dismembering and consuming her. The women bathe in her blood, and it's revealed that Ruby has tattoos of an occult nature.

More of a through line to spiritual cannibalism the women in this film are revealed to be participating in a ritual of sorts. Post consuming Jesse the two models, Sarah, and Gigi, are irresistible and back on fire with a famous photographer. Their intention is not to consume human flesh but rather want the effects of consuming her power; their cannibalism is a byproduct of them being willing to go to any length to fulfill their desires.

Conclusion

Our lack of unbiased and unmotivated evidence...



...of cannibalism makes it hard to discern fact from bias and historical re-telling from fiction. With the history barely untangled it's clear why cannibalism's portrayal in horror movies would be as varied and complicated as it is. The interpretations of cannibalism serve as mirrors held up to society, a look at how we see something like cannibalism provides invaluable insights into how we view ourselves and each other.

Few portrayals are without the stain of bias however, bias against groups of people and ways of life, especially ones steeped in misdirection and confusion. Still, all of that aside, eating people is not an inherently good thing free of harm as it requires either death or suffering from the individual being eaten. Not to mention, it's all rather gross.

Thank you for reading! Use the links below to check out more reviews, deep dive essays, or my 1st book, *Impaired Judgments: A Collection of Poems*, now



Citations

Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, February 23). *Cannibalism*. Wikipedia. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannibalism#:~:text=Cannibalism%20is%20the%20act%20of,ancient%20and%20in%20recent%20times>

Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, March 3). *Human cannibalism*. Wikipedia. Retrieved March 8, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_cannibalism

Tikkanen, A. (n.d.). *Cannibalism*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cannibalism-human-behaviour>

Edwards, P. (2015, February 17). *7 surprising facts about cannibalism*. Vox. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/2015/2/17/8052239/cannibalism-surprising-facts>

Schutt, B. (2019, July 15). *A brief history of cannibalism - Bill Schutt*. YouTube. Retrieved March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y20DPFiksBE>

Science Insider. (2018, June 3). *Is eating humans actually unhealthy?* YouTube. Retrieved March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAY7k0DPIuU>

National Geographic. (2011, March 22). *Chatting with Cannibals*. YouTube. Retrieved March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjfksDI980E>

60 Minutes Australia. (2018, December 17). *Last ever cannibal tribe*. YouTube. Retrieved March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRXwwZWEYkU>

Newman, T. (2022, January 22). *Cannibalism: A health warning*. Medical News Today. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/311277>

Worrall, S. (2021, May 3). *Cannibalism-the ultimate taboo-is surprisingly common*. National Geographic. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/cannibalism-common-natural-history-bill-schutt>

Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. (2022). *Cannibalism definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cannibalism>

Chen, A. (2017, February 22). *Cannibalism: It's 'perfectly natural,' a new scientific history argues*. NPR - The Salt: What's on Your Plate. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/02/22/515668867/cannibalism-its-perfectly-natural-a-new-scientific-history-argues>

Lindenbaum, S. (2004). Thinking About Cannibalism. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33(1), 475–498. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.33.070203.143758>

Raymond, S., Léger, A., & Gasman, I. (2019). The Psychopathological Profile of Cannibalism: A Review of Five Cases. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 64(5), 1568–1573. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1111/1556-4029.14099>

Kolan, M., Leis, K., Baska, A., Kazik, J., & Gałązka, P. (2019). Wendigo Psychosis. *Current Problems of Psychiatry*, 20(3), 213–216. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.2478/cpp-2019-0014>

Schwegler-Castañer, A. (2018). The art of tasting corpses: the conceptual metaphor of consumption in Hannibal. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 32(5), 611–628. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1080/10304312.2018.1499874>

Breier, M. (2016). The death that dare(d) not speak its name: the killing of Sister Aidan Quinlan in the East London Riots of 1952. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 46(1), 115. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1080/03057070.2015.1086569>

Lester, D., White, J., & Giordano, B. (2015). Cannibalism. *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying*, 70(4), 428–435. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1177/0030222815573732>

Rawson C. Unspeakable Rites: Cultural Reticence and the Cannibal Question. *Social Research*. 1999;66(1):167–193. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://search-ebshost-com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=aph&AN=18187861&site=ehost-live>

Jameson, S. M. (2018). Dystopian film on the edge of a food coma. *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 16(1), 43–56. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1386/ncin.16.1.43_1

Méndez, G. L. (2014). The cannibal wave: the cultural logic of Spain's temporality of crisis (revolution, biopolitics, hunger and memory). *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 15(1/2), 241–271. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1080/14636204.2014.935013>

Yang, H., & Zhang, K. (2022). How Resource Scarcity Influences the Preference for Counterhedonic Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(5), 904–919. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1093/jcr/ucab024>

Fuchs, M. (2015). Cooking with Hannibal: Food, liminality and monstrosity in Hannibal. *European Journal of American Culture*, 34(2), 97–112. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1386/ejac.34.2.97_1

Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, January 24). *Cannibal film*. Wikipedia. Retrieved March 8, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannibal_film

Metro, J. (2015, April 30). *Horror history: Cannibalism in Cinema*. Wicked Horror. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://wickedhorror.com/features/horror-histories-cannibalism-cinema/>

Peacock, A. (2021, October 15). *Unnatural hunger: Female desire and cannibalism in horror*. Dread Central. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.dreadcentral.com/editorials/416088/unnatural-hunger-female-desire-and-cannibalism-in-horror/>

Kennedy, M. (2020, January 24). *Why cannibal holocaust was so controversial*. ScreenRant. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://screenrant.com/cannibal-holocaust-movie-controversy-explained/>

Hirst, R. (2017, November 3). *Film: Film features: Eating people is easy: A brief history of cannibalism in film.* The Quietus. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://thequietus.com/articles/23517-hannibal-lecter-cannibal-article>

irishcentral.com. (2020, October 18). *Real-life horror story of the Irish cannibal in Australia.* Irish Central. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/real-life-horror-cannibal-alexander-pearce-australia>

Reilly, L. (2021, June 16). *7 historical cases of cannibalism.* Mental Floss. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/647417/historical-cannibalism>

Roy, C. R. (2020, April 1). *12 real-life cannibals whose stories will make your blood curdle.* ScoopWhoop. Retrieved March 8, 2022, <https://www.scoopwhoop.com/world/real-life-cannibals/>

Wikimedia Foundation. (2021, August 21). *The Delectable Negro.* Wikipedia. Retrieved April 2, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Delectable_Negro

Hollinger, R. (2018, April 20). *Exploring cinema's most controversial horror movie.* YouTube. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAZYhnmQXow>