Arts & Life

Body horror continues its mainstream growth with 'Clayface'

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Staff Writer

The success of DC's newest film "Clayface" extends the increased relevancy of body horror films this decade.

Director James Watkins' "Clayface" was released Oct. 23 and earned over $24 million during its opening weekend.

The film stars actor Tom Rhys Harries as Matt Hagan, an actor who becomes the titular character following his revenge journey after his face is disfigured by mobsters. Actress Naomi Ackie stars alongside Harries as Caitlyn Corr, a doctor who uses her cell regeneration research to restore Hagan's face to its previous state before the attack.

The film started free of horror until Hagan met Corr, changing the trajectory of the former actor's life. As the film progresses, it increasingly embraces body horror and integrates it into the plot in creative ways.

Just by analyzing the film's genre, it becomes clear that this film is distinct from other DC movies. As a body horror film, "Clayface" put itself in a unique position, as it's a genre that may turn some viewers away. The makeup and prosthetics used on Harries were distinct, and audiences could see his vast transformations as the film went on.

While this film may be body horror's biggest box office success of the year, the subgenre has been building a positive reputation among Hollywood, global audiences and industry professionals. The success of "Clayface" expands upon a recent trend in the film industry, which can primarily be attributed to French filmmakers Julia Ducournau and Coralie Fargeat.

This decade has been paramount to body horror's inclusion in both critics' and the wider public's film intake. The first major indicator of this trend occurred in 2021, when Ducournau's second body horror film "Titane" won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. As the first and only horror film to win the award, "Titane" brought body horror straight to film industry professionals. Not only did they watch it, but they supported it.

Since "Titane" won a Palme d'Or for Ducournau, multiple body horror films have competed for the award. "The Shrouds," "Alpha" and "The Substance" premiered in the succeeding years, with the latter achieving widespread success after its premiere.

The Academy Award winning body horror "The Substance" from French director Coralie Fargeat became a serious contender in the 2024 awards season. After premiering at Cannes and winning the Best Screenplay award, Fargeat's film reached American audiences.

Lead actress Demi Moore put on a widely acclaimed performance, earning her a Golden Globe for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy and many other awards.

The film went on to receive five Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actress. The film also won the Best Makeup and Hairstyling award, cementing body horror's place in Oscar history. The success of "The Substance" among critics, along with making over $77 million at the global box office, showed that body horror could become mainstream.

"Clayface" has the potential to reap the benefits of "The Substance" winning Best Makeup and Hairstyling at the 96th Oscars. As the first body horror film to win the award, "The Substance" proved that it is possible for the subgenre to receive recognition in the category.

At the 97th Oscars, "The Ugly Stepsister," a Norwegian body horror film, received a nomination in the same category. This allows for the possibility that "Clayface" could gain a nomination, something previously unheard of for body horror films just a few years ago. Entertainment Weekly's Joyce Eng and Cinexpress' Francisco Cangiano are industry writers who currently predict a nomination for the film.

Beyond the film's potential for makeup recognition, its positive reception among audiences has brought success to the newest addition to DC's filmography. The film's total revenue has also surpassed its total budget, bringing the newly popular subgenre to a wide audience.

Building on successful body horror films from recent years, "Clayface" has pushed the subgenre further and ingrained it into a major franchise.



ILLUSTRATION BY SYDNEY DONN-KRAUS

Does the NFL have a quarterback development problem?

By LUCA RATHGEBER
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The college football scene is full of players with ridiculous talent and athleticism at their positions. This is especially true at quarterback. As the NFL's most sought-after position, teams consistently scout college quarterbacks for the next generational prospect. One that would become their franchise signal-caller for years to come.

However, with all the talent in college football, there are always many quarterbacks who fail to translate their skills to the big stage. Character issues and failure to adapt to NFL coaching systems can contribute. But why does it seem that young quarterbacks out of college have a ticking clock to succeed on their new teams?

Former Arizona Cardinals and Miami Dolphins quarterback Josh Rosen is a prime example. As the starting quarterback at the University of California, Los Angeles from 2015-17, he threw for 59 touchdowns and 26 interceptions. Leading UCLA to a bowl game and his touted size made him a prized prospect in the 2018 NFL Draft, loaded with star talent. This draft included other quarterbacks such as University of Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield, University of Wyoming's Josh Allen and University of Louisville's Lamar Jackson, all of whom have currently seen great success on their respective NFL rosters.

Among this loaded quarterback class, the Cardinals selected Rosen with the 10th overall pick. After three-time pro bowler and Cardinals quarterback Carson Palmer retired, the Cardinals hoped Rosen would become his successor. However, this would not be the case.

After a rough rookie year in which he threw for 11 touchdowns and 14 interceptions amid a 3-10 record, a disappointed Cardinals front office not only fired head coach Steve Wilks, but also began entertaining a quarterback competition.

These talks heated up after new head coach Kliff Kingsbury began expressing interest in Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray, whom he coached during his tenure at the university. Despite having drafted Rosen just a year prior, general manager Steve Keim became enticed by Murray's athleticism and unique skill set as a dual-threat quarterback.

This combination of factors led the Cardinals to select Murray with the first overall pick in the 2019 NFL Draft. This effectively put Rosen's tenure in Arizona to an end when Murray was announced as the Cardinals' starting quarterback for the 2019 season, immediately after he was drafted. One day later, April 25, Rosen was traded to the Miami Dolphins for a 2019 second-round pick and a fifth-round pick.

Rosen's disastrous tenure in Arizona raised questions about the reasons why he was let go after just one season. Poor offensive-line play, a lack of poised decision-making and a nagging shoulder injury were all thrown around as potential reasons. Regardless, the Cardinals clearly saw enough to influence his departure. However, the Dolphins hoped they could resuscitate his career.

A 0-3 record and a touchdown-to-interception ratio of 1-5 proved otherwise. The Dolphins would only keep him for the 2019 season before releasing him, after failing to find a trade partner. Then fast forward to today, where after a short and uneventful tenure with the Atlanta Falcons in 2021, Rosen is completely out of the NFL.

Despite Rosen's tenure in the NFL being one of the most documented and talked-about draft busts, there are many other quarterbacks that received similar career trajectories to Rosen. Los Angeles Chargers backup quarterback Trey Lance is a great example.

For background, he was originally drafted third by the San Francisco 49ers in the 2021 NFL Draft. A breakout season at North Dakota State University in which he threw for 28 touchdowns with zero interceptions sold San Francisco.

Unlike Rosen, he was lucky enough to learn behind veteran starter quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo. Lance was given some wildcat opportunities early in the season, before starting a few games in place of Garoppolo. He went 1-1 as a starter, with five touchdowns and two interceptions.

After a light rookie season, San Francisco's front office and fans were hopeful he would break out during the 2022 season. However, a season-ending injury in Week 2 would derail those plans. After missing the entirety of the 2023 season as well, he was traded to the Dallas Cowboys, where he would spend two seasons backing up starting quarterback Dak Prescott. Then, he would find himself backing up starting quarterback Justin Herbert on the Chargers, beginning the 2025 season.

Before picking sides on whether the treatment of Rosen and Lance was unjustified, it is important to preface it by saying there are various factors that influence it, some not even in the quarterbacks' control.

Whilst unsatisfactory play definitely contributes, an abundance of star power in the college football scene makes it hard to resist snagging one of these quarterbacks. Another factor to consider is how cutthroat the NFL is. Every team vies for the postseason, and unmet expectations disappoint fanbases, which in turn puts more pressure on front offices to succeed in the upcoming years.

So, especially for teams under severe pressure, there is reason to assume that these teams, most of which are high on the draft order, draft highly touted college quarterbacks out of desperation. Then, they start these quarterbacks at the beginning of, or early on in, the season, in the hope of igniting a spark in an otherwise presumably disappointing season. But many fans believe these instances function as flashy moves to excite fanbases.

While college football talent is a potential reason, there is no singular reason as to why many young quarterbacks fail. There is a combination of factors that go into whether a college football star can find traction on an NFL roster, which includes competent supporting rosters, strong coaching staffs and the ability to avoid injury. But when all or some of the factors don't come to fruition, it results in these young quarterbacks having short NFL careers.



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