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A Stagecoach beyond Space

“We’re standing on the edge of a new frontier” - Anthony griffin

During the Golden Age of Hollywood, the idea of something new, mysterious, and unmapped becomes a fascination for moviegoers. Two genres during this age depicting the adventures of traveling beyond the known frontiers are Western and Science fiction. *Stagecoach* (1939), a western and *It! The Terror beyond space* (1958), a science fiction film, both capture the excitement or trepidation of exploring the frontiers. As America dissolves the western front through conquest, people begin to look towards the stars as the new frontier. Both films are analyzed to see what genre was more effective with capturing the journey into the unknown.

Stagecoach (1939) is a black and white western movie directed by John Ford. The film covers a group of strangers on a stagecoach traveling from Tonto to a town called Lordsburg. These towns are separated by hostile territory that is home to Geronimo and the Apache. The film is exuberant, filled with upbeat music, emphasized clapping, and bustling action with a comedic undertone. While the journey is underway, these strangers begin to become acquainted with each other. The director uses the literary device of doubling to characterize the stagecoach’s company, such as Buck (Andy Devine), the sheriff in contrast to the criminal Ringo Kid (John Wayne), Hatfield (John Carradine), the gambler in contrast to the banker Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill), Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt), the respectable pregnant woman in contrast to the prostitute Dallas (Claire Trevor), and the overcautious whiskey salesman Samuel Peacock (Donald Meek), who is referred to as a clergyman on numerous occasions by the degenerate doctor Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell). As they become aware of the imminent danger of an attack by Geronimo and the Apaches, their differences are abandoned by their need to survive.

The director uses basic shots to capture their journey beyond the frontier. The shots consist of movement, bringing the viewers along the ride. Each character shared closeup shots where they share each other's intimate space. Also, the director does a great job capturing the beauty of the journey through the western wilderness showing colossal mountains in contrast to the small stagecoach. While depicting the climax, the showdown between the stagecoach and the Apaches is shown fast paced with gunshots and war cries being emphasized. The seriousness of not being captured by the Apaches is conveyed by the scene where Hatfield is willing to shoot Lucy Mallory to save her from being scalped. Instead of defeat, the stagecoach is saved by the Army. The darkness of Ringo's sworn vengeance is depicted by the nightfall but is followed by the daylight of a hopeful future with Dallas. John Ford's film ends with his idea that a journey should conclude with a new beginning.

It! The Terror beyond space (1958) is a black and white science fiction film directed by Edward L. Cahn. The film is made during the Race for Space period, the domination of space between the U.S. and Russia. Along with the introduction's dramatic music, the narrator (Edward Carruthers) speaks of Mars, this new frontier as a westerner would speak of an Apache performing the scalping of their companion on the American frontier.; It's treacherous! In contrast to Stagecoach, This film has not an inkling of comedic relief. The protagonist speaks of dread and regret of this newfound frontier.

Unlike Stagecoach, this frontier is plagued by the unknown. Col. Edward Carruthers (Marshall Thompson) is a lone survivor of a space expedition gone wrong on Mars. A rescue crew is sent to retrieve Carruthers and bring him back to earth to face the charges of murdering his crew for food ration and water. He is outcasted and ridiculed of his innocence by the rescue crew, especially by Col. Van Heusen (Kim Spalding). As the plot unfolds, an Alien/humanoid

prowls on the ship and crew members begin to vanish shortly after. The director uses basic shots with dark lighting to convey the mysteriousness of the creature. The early attack by the humanoid is portrayed by the shadow of the act. The humanoid is not identified until later but is preceded by its growling and lower appearance. The remaining crew races to find the weaknesses of the humanoid that seems unstoppable and thirsty for oxygen.

This film uses the unknown creature and circumstances of space to build suspense throughout the plot. Here, this genre outshines *Stagecoach*'s western by the use of imagination and the fear that the unknown produces. In *Stagecoach*, the frontier was known to the travelers. The stagecoach's company was informed of the Apaches and knew their weaknesses, guns; Buck was fully aware of the journey's dangers and still felt compelled to conduct his duty. In *It! The Terror Beyond Space*, the rescue crew thought their mission consisted of arresting a crewmember turned murderous for self-preservation (I felt similarity to Geronimo) and felt they were equipped to complete their mission. However, the humanoid seemed to be more horrifying, more terrifying than they ever could imagine.

The explanation given to destroy the humanoid was creative. It captured the imagination of the logical mind very well. Science fiction films are more effective in the production of frontier movies due to space still being unknown to us and incorporating the imaginative mind. The western world has been conquered, populated, and even gentrified. The antagonists of the American exploration are longed murdered or placed in concentration camps dying slowly from liquor poisoning. Western films died out once Clint Eastwood aged and people began to sympathize with the dispossessed Native Americans. Science fiction is a genre of imagination, so it has the capacity to create what is impossible to witness within reality. Though I enjoyed the

humor of *Stagecoach*, I do not believe the film captured the seriousness and true essence of that time.

In conclusion, *Stagecoach*'s doubling of characters, the breathtaking shots of the landscape, the movement of the film, comedic undertone, and the director's concept of the frontier was enjoyable to watch. However, *It! The Terror beyond Space* fed the moviegoers imagination of the frontier and the unknown that lied beyond it. The plot, lighting, and sound effects created trepidation within the viewer; You shared in the characters fear and uncertainty. Today, westerns would not be effective in depicting a frontier because it no longer exists, but the frontier of space still does. *Stagecoach* was good but did not capture the times better than *It! The Terror Beyond Space* adding horror and suspense to the Race to Space period.