Trigger Warnings

written by

Jinru Yu

SETTING

Time and Technology:
A futuristic campus in 2050 buzzes with activity. Each student and teacher is wearing a digital badge, flashing names, gender, race, sexual orientation, and a "Sensitivity Index," indicating their tolerance level to various topics.

Social Context:
The campus life, under the influence of radical liberalism, has transformed into a utopian safe space where every action and word is scrutinized to avoid any potential psychological discomfort.

OPENING DESCRIPTION

The university campus of 2030, a meticulously crafted utopian safe space shaped by radical liberalism. In this futuristic setting, students live under the silent watch of drones and the companionship of high-tech devices, as if in a transparent yet inescapable bubble. In this seemingly perfect world, every corner, every interaction, is tinged with unease and surveillance. Here, freedom of speech and responsibility form a peculiar balance. But there are always those who begin to question it all.

And so, story begins…
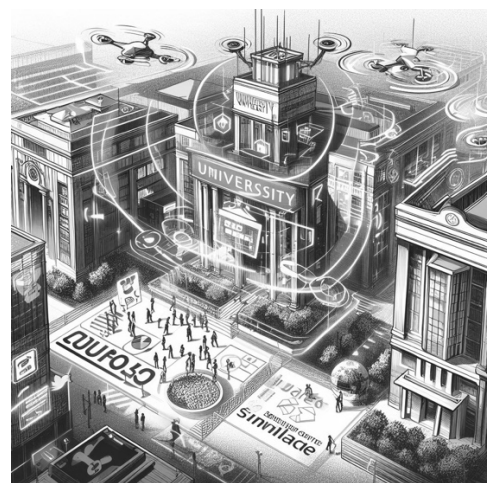
PART 1

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM – DAY
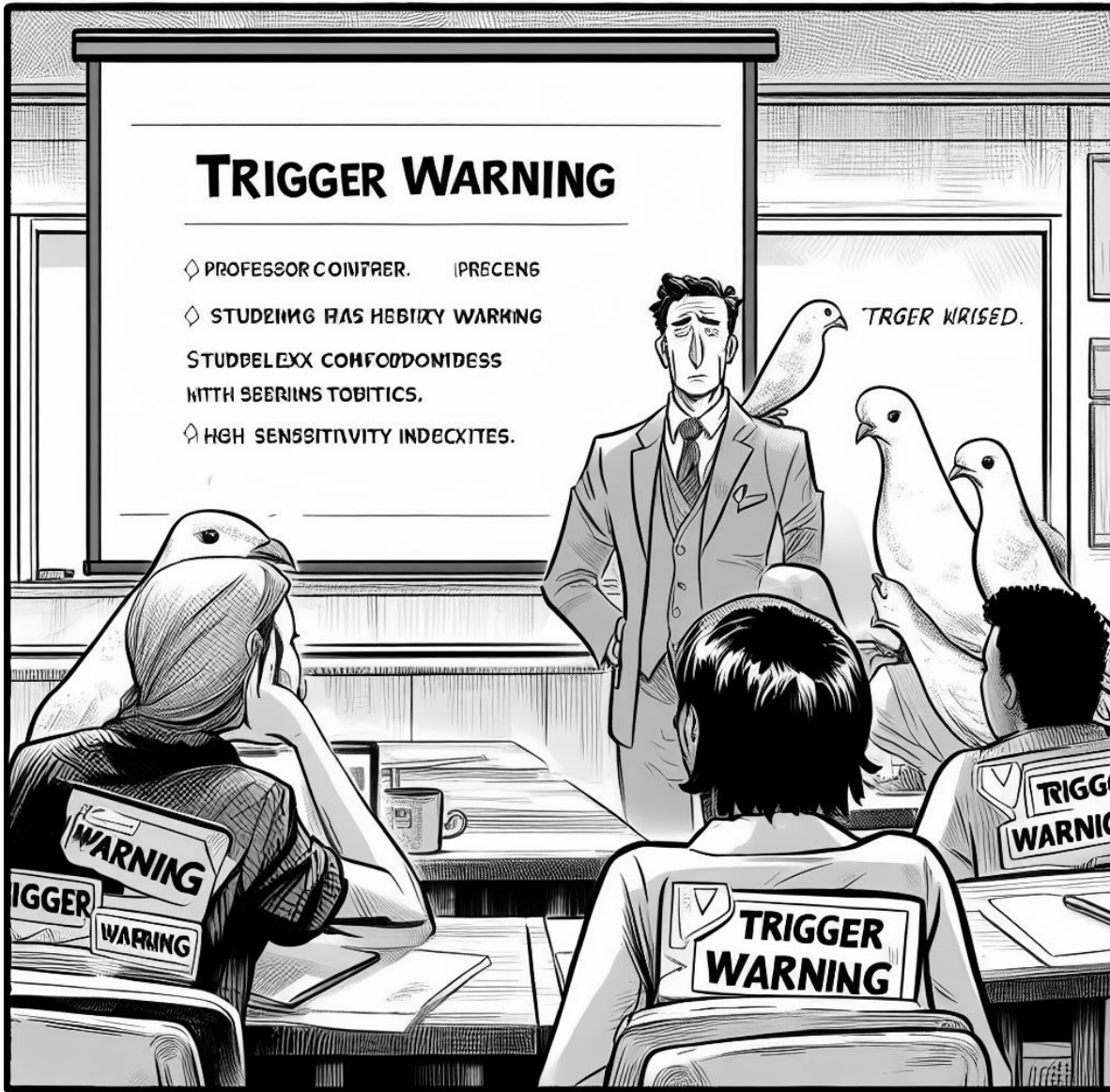
Dove, an older professor clad in worn-out clothes, stands in a classroom. His eyes, filled with disappointment and helplessness, linger on the "Trigger Warning" labels repeatedly appearing in the course outline. His digital badge reads "Dove, Male, Sensitivity Index: Low."

DOVE

(Disheartened)

"So fragile, a single word can trigger their sensitive nerves."

A student, visibly anxious, tentatively raises a hand.

STUDENT 1

(Anxiously)

*"Professor, can we skip the case study on the Gaza open-air prison?
I find it quite triggering."*

Dove sighs, about to respond, but is interrupted.

STUDENT 2

(Interrupting, sharply)

"You should know, there are Jewish people present here."

The students' digital badges flicker red warnings, displaying high sensitivity indexes alongside their personal information.

Dove, feeling powerless and defeated, silently continues with the standard curriculum, avoiding any potentially controversial topics.

CUT TO: ANOTHER CLASSROOM

Alex, a young tech prodigy student, watches as his teacher carefully navigates around sensitive terms while discussing a theory. His digital badge reads "Alex, Male, Sensitivity Index: Medium."

<div align="center">

ALEX

(To a classmate, curiously)

"15 times.

He mentioned 'trigger warnings' 15 times in a 50-minute lecture.

Didn't he once fiercely condemn the atrocities in Israeli open-air prisons using his Jewish identity?"

STUDENT 3

(Making a cut-off gesture)

"He's just trying to keep his job.

He sat through at least ten public lectures last week as part of administrative punishment.

Many of my friends saw him writing reflections on content censorship in those classes."

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The camera slowly zooms out from the classroom, showcasing various "Safe Space" signs and emotional warning indicators throughout the campus, highlighting the extreme emphasis on the concept.

PART 2

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY – DAY
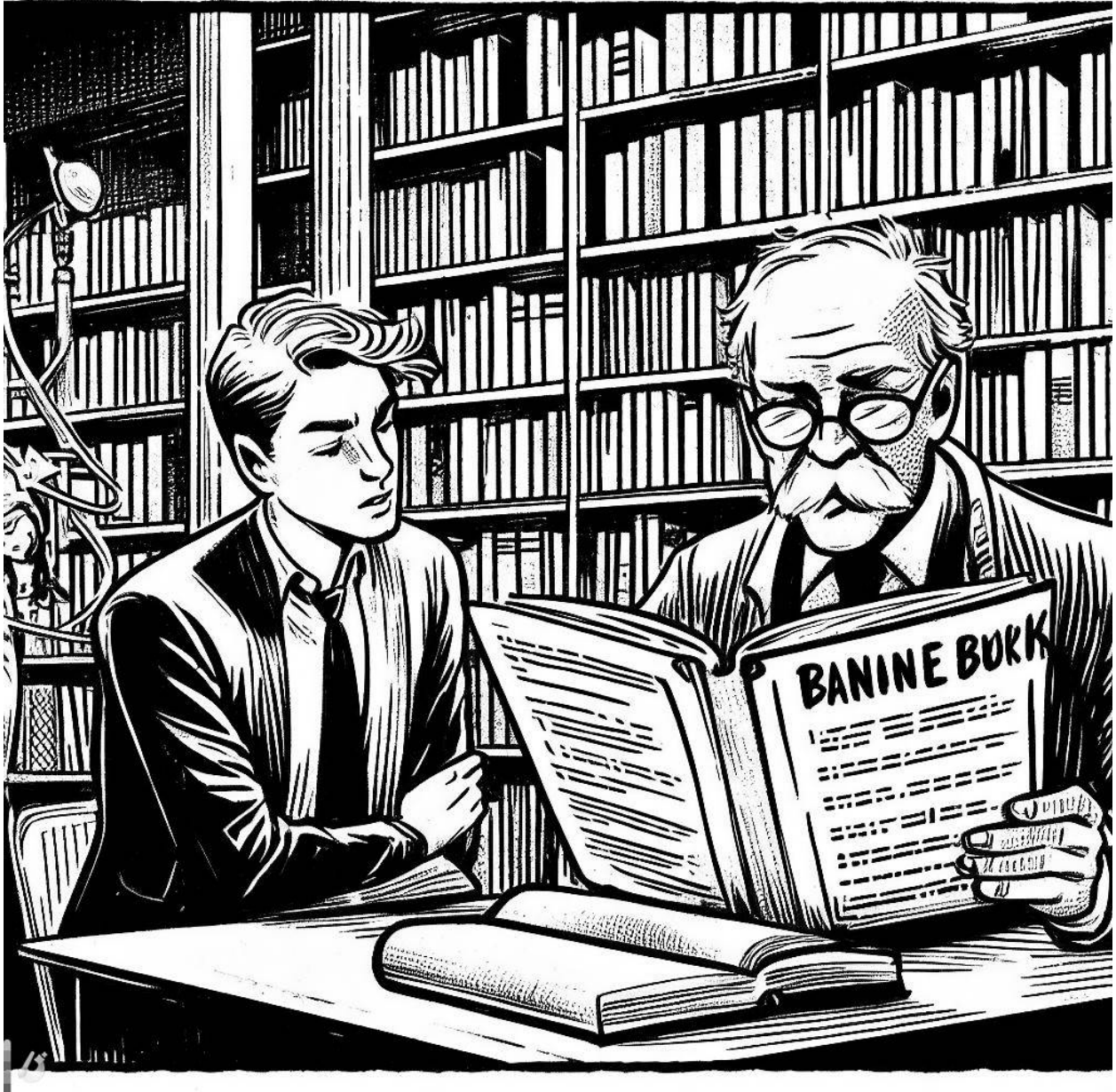
The library is filled with students engrossed in their studies. In a secluded corner, Dove is engrossed in an unmarked, paperback book. Alex spots him and approaches.

ALEX

(Curiously)

"Professor, I didn't know faculty members had access to these banned books."

Dove, unfazed, continues to read.

DOVE

(Nonchalantly)

"Yes, well, during our student days,
we faced water cannons and police dogs in street protests.
The concept of 'safe space' didn't protect us in expressing political opinions,
so these books are hardly stimulating for us."

Alex, intrigued by the conversation, leans in.

ALEX

(Half-jokingly)

"They removed all the dumbbells from a place that was supposed to be a gym. How
do they expect us to handle any real stimulation?"

Dove pauses, placing a bookmark in the pages.

DOVE

(Looking up thoughtfully)

"Without dumbbells in training, the campus's language only grows weaker...
You want to talk, right?"

The camera pans around the library, capturing the quiet and controlled atmosphere, as
Dove and Alex begin to engage in a hushed yet intense conversation.

PART 3

EXT. NEIGHBORING CAMPUS - DOVE'S HOME - DAY

A private residence untouched by linguistic censorship. Dove and Alex enter the home. In the foyer hangs a faded photograph of a young Dove engaged in social activism.

DOVE
(Noticing Alex's attention on the photo)
"Those days are long gone."

ALEX
(Interrupting)
"What was 'safe space' like back then?"

DOVE
"It was a beautiful concept initially, a space where everyone felt safe and respected, especially designed to protect those subjected to sexual harassment and hate speech."

ALEX
(Sarcastically)
"100% correct."

DOVE
"Exactly. Nobody could have foreseen the concept being stretched beyond its righteous intention."

ALEX
"And who's to blame?"

DOVE
(Sighing)

"Well, it's the entire educational system's failure to balance free speech with respect for diversity.
But there were indeed some extremists, 'liberal artists,' who abused the notion of being politically correct.
Any language that upset them was labeled politically incorrect, lectures were protested, lectures got canceled, and eventually, the administration had to bear the brunt of these criticisms.
In the end, everyone chose to remain silent."

ALEX

(Disgusted)

"Extreme political correctness is even more nauseating than political incorrectness…"

CUT TO: WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE CAMPUS

Each word and gesture in the campus is meticulously scrutinized to avoid any potential psychological discomfort. There's an omnipresent air of unease and surveillance.

DOVE

(Continuing)

"It looks peaceful, doesn't it?
Hard to imagine how humanity's reflection on utopian failures can be so flawed.
The answer is right on the surface. Utopia is a closed-door festivity.
A 'safe space'?
More like an echo chamber of safe words."

ALEX

(Defiantly)

"I couldn't care less about whether minority rights are being adequately addressed.
It's all so hypocritical.

What's the difference between academic discourse and a show if you aren't discussing what you truly believe?"
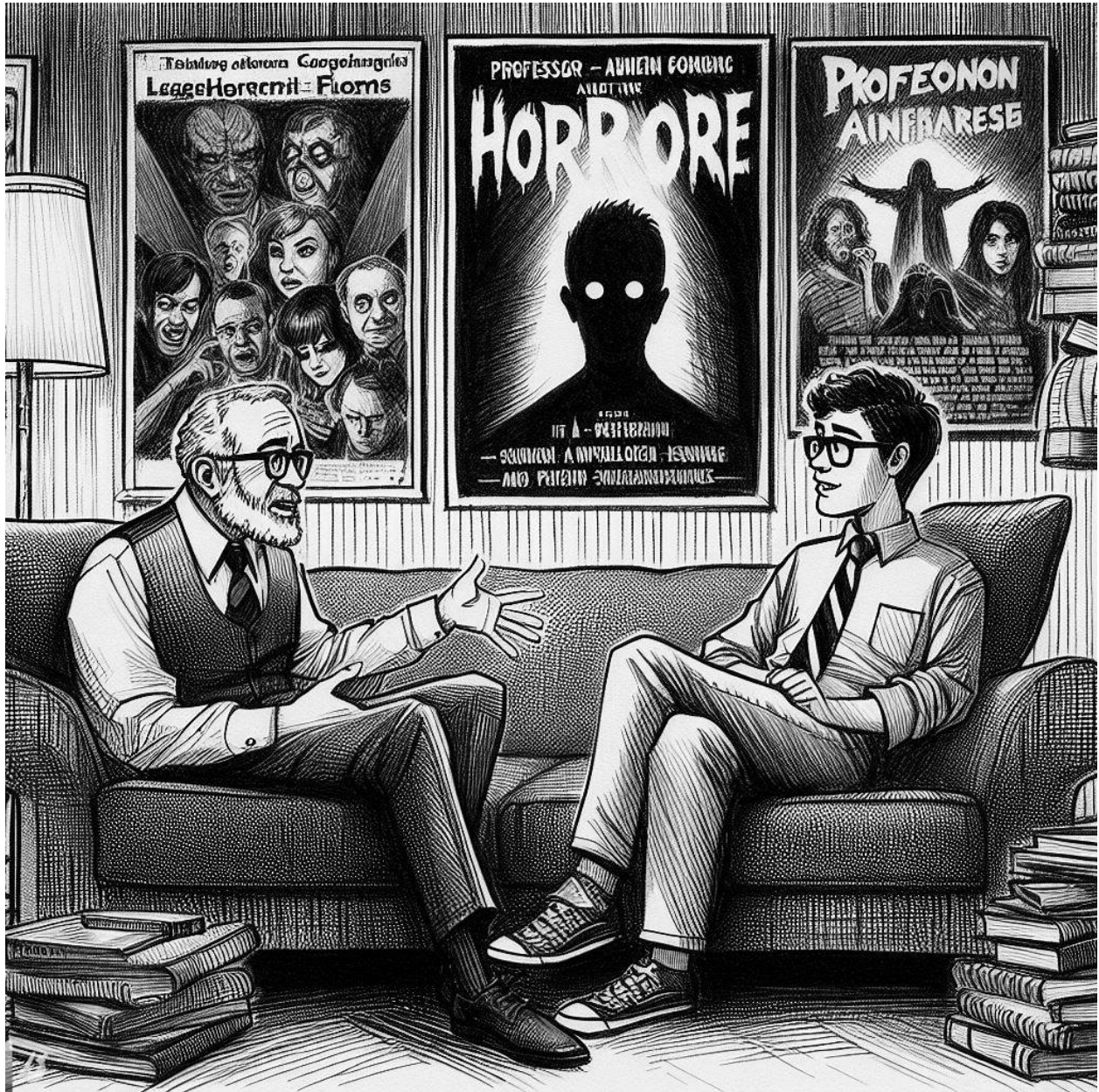
DOVE

(Silently contemplating)

ALEX

"Maybe you've grown numb to all this. You've acquiesced in your actions, but I haven't. I need you to see my disappointment. I need to engage with the you who reads banned books,
not the you who spouts B.S. to keep my mind at ease."

PART 4

INT. DOVE'S LIVING ROOM – DAY

Dove's living room, adorned with faded movie posters from a bygone era. Dove and Alex sit on an old couch, lost in thought.

ALEX

(Looking at a poster, curious)

"I didn't know you were into horror films, Professor."

DOVE

(Pointing at a poster)

"'Island of the Devil,' one of my favorite horror classics from 1939.
The cast had the most famous horror stars of the time, Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff."

ALEX

(Shrugging)

"Never heard of them."

DOVE

"That's alright. Not many from your generation have.
They starred in 'Dracula' and 'Frankenstein,' pioneers of the horror genre, influencing
countless works that followed."

ALEX

(Interested, yet dismissive)

"Oh, I've heard of those. Never really got into them though.
Honestly, I never understood the appeal of horror movies. Using gore and violence to
scare people seems like paying to suffer. Uhhh."

DOVE

(Spreading his hands, with a wry smile)

"Well, that's one way to see it.
Horror movies show us what society is like, what kind of monsters we are, and the crises
and choices we face. Natural forces and AI are quite similar in some ways, aren't they?"

ALEX

(Intrigued)

"What's 'Island of the Devil' about?"

DOVE

"It's about a mad scientist on a remote island conducting horrific experiments, trying to create a new form of life, but it ends in disaster."

ALEX

(Interested)

"How does it use horror elements to convey these themes?"

DOVE

"Cleverly, through the metaphor of the devil.
In the film, the scientist is dubbed the 'Devil Doctor,' his lab the 'Devil's House,' and his creations the 'Devil's Men.'
All symbolizing his malevolent and unethical scientific practices."

ALEX

(Smiling)

"Smells like a hint of the dangers of science."

DOVE

"Yes, and the arrogance and ignorance of humanity towards nature."

ALEX

(Serious)

"Do you actually enjoy horror films?"

DOVE

"Some people find joy and thrill in watching horror, I don't have that gene.
Honestly, I get scared, but that hasn't stopped me from watching many.
Horror thrives in times of cultural and social turmoil because it lets you feel fear of the unknown and uncertainty in a safe environment."

ALEX

(Smiling)

"Sounds terrifying yet hard to censor.

No one would blame a horror film for threatening 'safe spaces,' right?"

DOVE
(Thoughtfully)
"If you're thinking what I'm thinking, this could be an opportunity to bypass censorship."

ALEX
(His eyes lighting up)
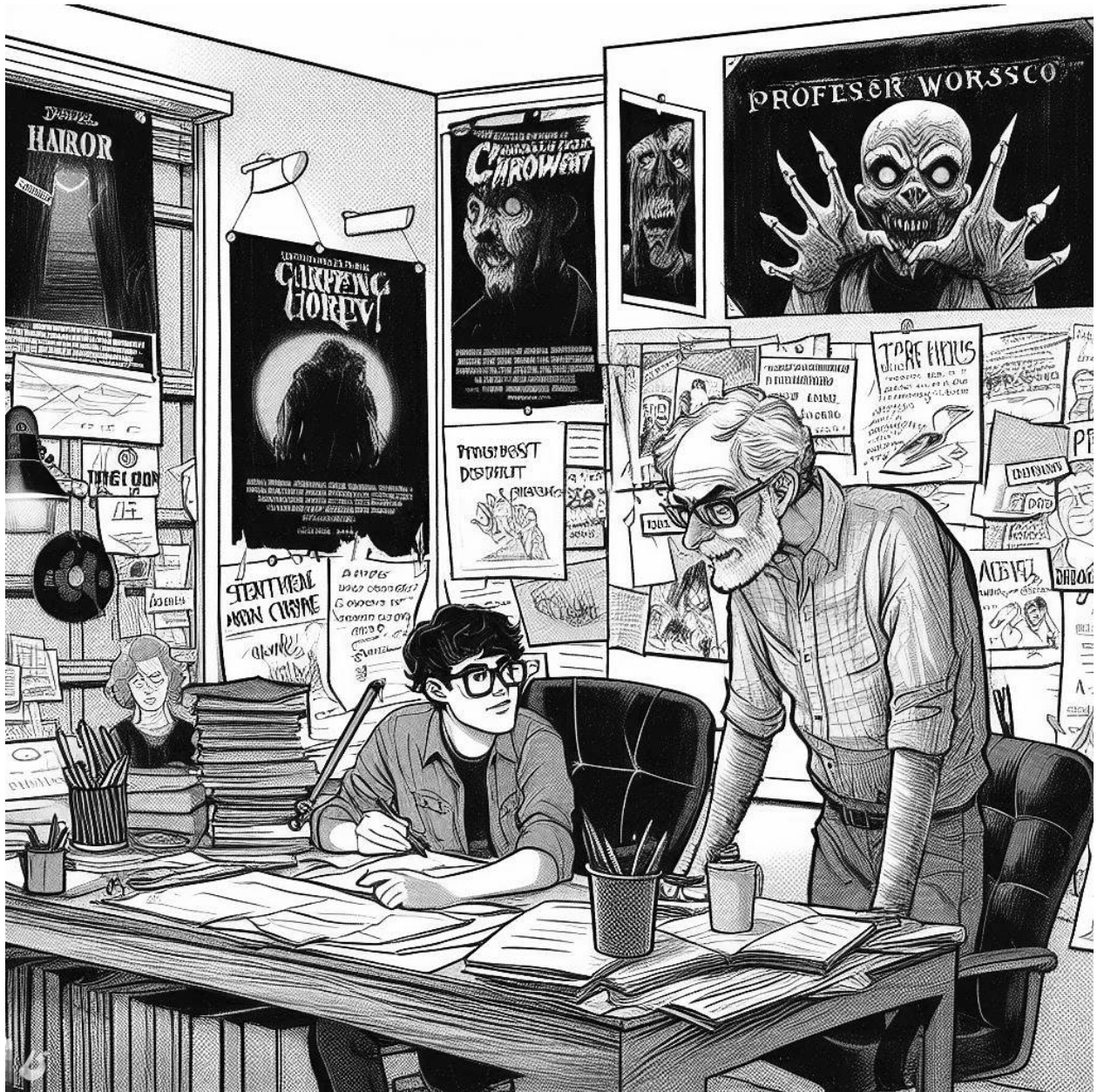*"Then we could make a film, use a ghost from any country to satirize everything that's happening."*

DOVE
(Contemplative)
"You're suggesting using symbols and metaphors from horror films to show how overprotection has turned into fear and oppression, hmm…"

PART 5

INT. DOVE'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Dove's studio. The walls are plastered with horror movie posters, with the sketch of "The Eyes of Fear" prominently displayed. Dove and Alex sit surrounded by drafts and notes scattered across a table.

DOVE

(Looking at the sketch of "The Eyes of Fear")

"Alex, we need to maintain a balance, make it look like a regular horror film, not a piece of political propaganda."

ALEX

(Typing on the keyboard, detached)

"Thanks for the suggestion-like suggestion, Professor.
No need to worry, I'm fully immersed in the role of a horror filmmaker right now, indulging in the quirks of the genre."

DOVE

"Have you considered how to deal with 'Trigger Warnings'?
You know, the campus mandates them for any content that might cause discomfort, or it's labeled as irresponsible self-censorship."

ALEX

"Most horror films are rated as restricted content, and 'Trigger Warnings' naturally appear before the main feature.
What's there to fear? It's as natural as it gets."

DOVE

(Nodding)

"Yes... I had almost forgotten how naturally 'Trigger Warnings' fit into movies…"

ALEX

(With a hint of irony)

"You know what's more ironic, Professor?
The trigger warnings in horror films even have a reverse attraction. Audiences feel more excited and tense.
They'd rather face supernatural eeriness and scares than confront an Italian's verbal wrath over pineapple on pizza.

Those people definitely wouldn't have the guts to sit in the away section at a football match."

FINAL

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - NIGHT - A FEW DAYS LATER

The campus is quiet, with public screens displaying routine 'safe space' speeches by administrative personnel. The scene flashes back to a group of students sitting in a small circle, seemingly waiting in anticipation for something.

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL
(on screen, intermittently)
"Our... safe space... protects..."

One of the students is seen fiddling with a projector.

CUT TO: PROJECTOR SCREEN

The screen goes black, then red text appears: "Trigger Warnings! This film is a restricted horror genre, containing: violence, gore, death, fear, oppression, injustice, satire, criticism, rebellion, etc. If you find these contents distressing, please stop watching immediately."

CUT TO: DOVE AND ALEX IN A HIDDEN CORNER, OBSERVING

DOVE
(With a hint of relief)
"Thank goodness streaming media is still dominant in this era."

ALEX
(Marveling)
"It's spreading faster than I anticipated."

DOVE
(Reflectively)
"As I said, horror films are more captivating during times of cultural and social turmoil."

Act One

A typical day on campus. Students are in classrooms, libraries, and cafeterias, studying, socializing, and relaxing. However, surveillance cameras and screens are omnipresent, displaying a giant eye that intermittently issues instructions and warnings:" Pineapple pizza choice detected. Please consume in private areas to avoid offending Italian heritage." The students obediently follow the rules, showing respect and compliance, fearful of breaking any regulations.

Act Two

A group of students gathers for a discussion about social issues. The topic is "Bridging the Wealth Gap." As they begin, they quickly realize they cannot express their true opinions for fear of triggering sensitive terms like "class," "capitalism," or "revolution." The discussion devolves into meaningless clichés, while the unblinking eye on the screen watches them like a crocodile awaiting its prey.

Act Three

A student accidentally bumps into a security guard, knocking his flashlight to the ground. As he attempts

to apologize, the guard suddenly goes berserk, grabbing the student by the neck. Other students rush in, trying to intervene, but the guard is unresponsive, growling maniacally. Suddenly, the eye on the screen emits a piercing sound, causing the guard to release his grip and collapse, foaming at the mouth. The students, horrified, notice that the guard's eyes have transformed to resemble the eye on the screen. They realize that the guard is one of the eye's followers, controlled by it. They begin to wonder how many others on campus are under the eye's influence...

Continuation Of The Film...

CUT TO: A SURVEILLANCE ROOM FILLED WITH SCREENS AND BLINKING LIGHTS.

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL
(Frowning)
"Is this film... shading the rules?"

TECHNICIAN
(Looking at the screen, confused)
"It seems to be just a peculiar creation by some students.

Also, sir, it's marked with Trigger Warnings."

[The screen goes black, then white text appears: "**Trigger Warnings, end**."**]**

APPENDIX

The original intent of 'safe spaces' and 'trigger warnings' was to create a more inclusive and sensitive learning environment, especially for marginalized groups. Trigger warnings were initially a tool of compassion, designed to prepare students for potentially unsettling material, acknowledging the real psychological impact that certain topics can have. 'Warning Triggers,' a narrative, criticizes the over-expansion of these concepts, arguing that they have become mechanisms that limit academic freedom and healthy exchange of ideas. It captures the complexities and challenges of modern content censorship, particularly in higher education environments, where the balance between free speech and respecting diversity is especially delicate.

Ellison (2016) stated in a welcome letter to incoming University of Chicago students that their commitment to academic freedom means they do not support so-called 'trigger warnings.' The university will not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.

In the envisioned future, the concept of 'lived' learning becomes particularly important. This term refers to an educational experience deeply rooted in real-world contexts and lived experiences, emphasizing the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives and challenging materials. The narrative suggests that an overemphasis on safe spaces and trigger warnings can hinder this type of immersive, challenging learning. An overly cautious approach can lead to a form of intellectual sheltering that underprepares students for the complexities and nuances of the real world.

The academic world needs to adopt a balanced approach. It should create an environment where students are encouraged to confront and engage with challenging ideas, while also being supported in their individual needs and experiences. This balance is crucial for preparing students for the complexities of the world they will inhabit, fostering a generation of critical thinkers who are resilient, empathetic, and well-equipped to navigate diverse perspectives. However, in this strange balance, all stakeholders seem to be like Skinner's pigeons, superstitiously circling.

IMAGE CREDIT

All illustrations are generated by the graphics AI based on the script

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