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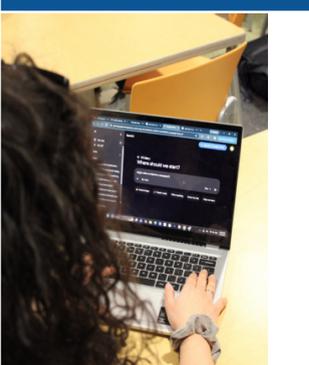
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## Local Teens Charged in Terror Attack



Emir Balat (left) and Ibrahim Kayumi, (right) Photos Courtesy of Department of Justice

**Kassandra Castillo**  
Editor in Chief

Two Bucks County teens - one of whom was a Bucks student - are being charged with terrorism after attempting an "ISIS inspired attack" on Saturday in front of Gracie Mansion in New York, authorities said.

The two suspects have been identified as Emir Balat, 18, of Langhorne and Ibrahim Kayumi, 19, of Newtown. The two young men were charged for attempting to detonate a homemade bomb aimed at a anti-Muslim protest titled "Stop The Islamic Takeover of New York City, Stop New York City Public Muslim Prayer."

New York City Police Commissioner Jessica S. Tisch confirmed that the pair confessed to attempting a copycat attack similar to the Boston Marathon Bombing from 2013. That attack left three people dead with about 500 others injured.

When officials asked

about being influenced by the Boston bombing, Balat responded that he was attempting something even bigger.

Officials also confirmed that the homemade bombs were wrapped in bolts and nails with an explosive chemical widely used by international bomb-makers. Although the bomb was thrown into the crowd of protestors and police officers, the homemade devices did not detonate.

The incident is under investigation by the FBI in both New York and Pennsylvania.

Gracie Mansion is the official residence of the mayor of New York City Zohran Mamdani, the first NYC Muslim mayor. He was not inside the mansion during the attack, according to CNN.

Both men are facing five federal charges, including Use of a Weapon of Mass Destruction, Transportation of Explosive Materials, and Unlawful Possession of Destructive Devices.

"This was not random violence. This was a planned attack, motivated by extremist ideology and inspired by a violent foreign terrorist organization," Tisch said at a New York press conference on Monday afternoon.

Balat is a Neshaminy High School student whose parents originated from Turkey and were granted asylum by the United States in 1998. Kayumi is a recent Council Rock North High School graduate whose parents originated from Afghanistan.

Bucks officials said Kayumi has been a part-time student at the college since Fall 2024 and was withdrawn on March 9.

A lawyer for Balat, Mehdi Essmidi, told news outlets that his client had never engaged in acts of violence before and that he was only three classes away from graduating. He claimed that the two teens did not know each other. "They're strangers as far as I know," he said.

The New York anti-Mus-

lim protest was planned by far-right influencer Jake Lange. Lange was also a Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol rioter who was recently pardoned by President Trump. This protest was not the first of its kind as Lange also hosted an anti-Muslim protest in Minneapolis in February which also drew a large crowd of counter-protesters.

"This was a vile protest rooted in white supremacy. I am the first Muslim mayor of our city. Anti-Muslim bigotry is nothing new to me, but let me also be clear about something else; New York city will never tolerate violence," Mamdani said at Monday's press conference. "Two men came from Pennsylvania and attempted to bring violence to New York City."

The two men were being held without bail after their arraignment Monday afternoon.

Three others were taken into custody but were released without charges.

Both suspects are due back in court in April.

## Protesters Rally in Support of Quakertown Five

**Nicole Morrow**  
Centurion Staff

A peaceful protest was held to rally support for The Quakertown 5 on Friday, Feb. 27, in the borough of Doylestown.

Many people showed up ready to rally against I.C.E. enforcement abuses and in support of the Quakertown Community High School students who had been arrested the previous Friday.

On Feb. 20, about 30 students left school to protest I.C.E. Five students were arrested. Outrage erupted after news reports showed Quakertown police chief

Scott McElree tackling a young girl and putting her into an apparent chokehold.

Controversy arose because McElree was not in his uniform, so students apparently didn't know he was a police officer. Critics argue that he is doing the opposite of serving and protecting the community.

The Bucks County District Attorney's office opened an independent investigation into how the police had handled the protest on Feb. 20. Attorneys of the students that were arrested, had requested that the district attorney to turn the investigation over to an outside

agency to investigate.

Colin Hancock was at the Quakertown protest and said, "It started with us walking out at 11:30ish, and we went from the school, we cut across two streets and there were truckers following us around the whole time, shouting slurs and stuff. It was otherwise mostly peaceful up until we got into the corner of Juniper and Front Street, in front of the restaurant, Sundays."

He added, "Then a cop came over and started talking to a couple of girls. I think one girl was out in the street and that's why he was coming over, and then that's

when the chief came in and started attacking people. Completely unmarked."

Resident and member of the Quakertown Community, Lucia Simonelli, said, "It's really rattling to see that, you know, it hits kind of differently when it's at the end of my street, in front of a restaurant I go to and you know kids that I see walking by all the time; To feel as though there is law enforcement that is more about violence and safety and is not doing anything to deescalate but is trying to escalate, just doesn't make us feel safe."

*continued on page 2...*

# Around Bucks

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## Protesters Rally in Support of Quakertown Five

*continued from page 1...*

She added, "I think we are worried also that the kids were in custody for so long. It just doesn't make sense. And I think people are really searching for answers and I think there's a lot of healing and that has to happen to restore trust."

"People need to be out here because these children need justice, and Scott McElree needs to be prosecuted for his egregious,

disgusting child abuse," a student who preferred to remain anonymous said.

Nick Maio, a U.S. Army Veteran and organizer in Doylestown said, "One of the core principles of democracy is the ability to peacefully gather and protest. It reminds us that we are the people; we have the most power in this country. We elect politicians to represent us, not rule us. We don't have kings in this country, 250 years ago we

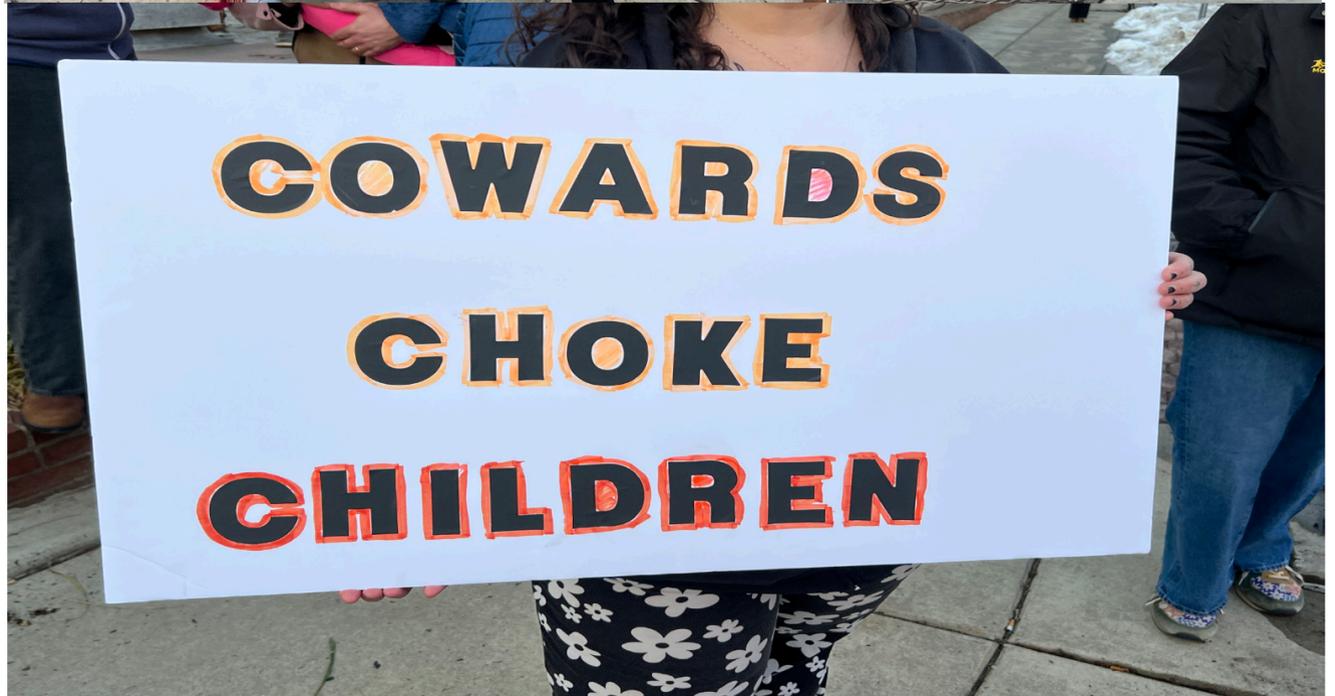
fought against tyranny so that we wouldn't have a king."

He added, "Right now, the way the administration is acting it's as if we have a king, and that's not okay with me. I joined the military to fight for democracy, and I see our democracy is under attack right now, so for me it's important to gather and that we do it peacefully and we remind people that we're not anti-police, we're not

anti-country, we're very pro everything that deserves to be protected," said Maio.

The Doylestown protest remained peaceful, despite people who drove past yelling at the group. Maio reminded the crowd multiple times that even when people are mocking and saying terrible things, to remain peaceful towards them because they too have a right to be here.

McElree is currently on leave.



Photos from the Quakertown Protest  
Courtesy of Nicole Morrow

# Student Leader Spotlight

## Reaching for the Stars: How Sierra Kunigus Turned a Childhood Passion Into a Successful Club

**Brianna Glassey**  
*Centurion Staff*

The Astronomy Club's student leader Sierra Kunigus says her childhood interest in the stars has led to vast personal and communal growth.

Ever since Kunigus was a kid, her interests seemed to lie beyond this world. Those interests quickly grew prior to starting her journey here at Bucks.

Kunigus reflected that she "was hooked on finding new information and wanted a way to share what I was learning with others who may also be interested and didn't have the time to look into it on their own, or just had a general curiosity."

So, just after her first semester, she decided to create the Astronomy Club.

Kunigus says her "main goals consisted of members learning something new, inspiring others to understand more about how the universe around them works, and to have fun during games and activities."

Always dedicated and sincere, Kunigus has spent her last four summer and winter breaks creating presentations on different topics that are used in club meetings while also creating activities to make them more engag-

ing for the members and curious students alike.

The presentations aren't all, just to add more magnificence to her club's activities, she plans trips and model-rocket-launching spectacles for members to join in on.

Returning to the personal aspects of running the club, Kunigus says how rewarding it's been, and how "presenting in front of my classmates each week has given me more confidence to speak in front of a crowd and present my ideas, which is overall extremely important in the science world."

Not only is confidence in front of a crowd important in the science world, but in scholarly and career focused settings as well. Finding your voice and community as a student is integral part of personal growth before graduating.

Though the space beyond us is far out of reach, within the Astronomy Club, it seems to provide a new means of cosmic connection between students.

Kunigus recalls that it's some of her favorite parts about the club, and how she enjoys "watching members have fun and interacting with one another during activities and discussions. They're always so creative and can make each other

laugh."

Kunigus has created many events for the club, which begs the question: What is... her favorite?

It'd have to be space-themed Jeopardy, of course. Kunigus expressed her enthusiasm for it since "it was extremely interactive, and I saw a lot of new faces." Which is always a good thing for growing clubs looking to expand.

Continuing with personal favorites — now on a celestial level — Kunigus claims that the constellation Ophiuchus is one of the most interesting, thus claiming its curious spot as the 13th astronomical Zodiac sign.

"Ophiuchus is often overlooked because it spends the least amount of 'time' within the ecliptic path," which Kunigus says makes it an unrecognized Zodiac sign.

As for astronomical phenomena, she had to give it to the runaway supermassive black hole. "The sheer speed it travels at is insane," she exclaims, which only adds to its captivating nature as a genre of blackhole.

For those now inspired to create their own club, she encourages this: "Go for it. Make it your own but also make sure to get outside opinions from those attending. A club is nothing without its members."



*Founder and President of the Astronomy Club, Sierra Kunigus*

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## Around Bucks

# Dr. Jones Eats and Chats at ‘Pizza With the President’

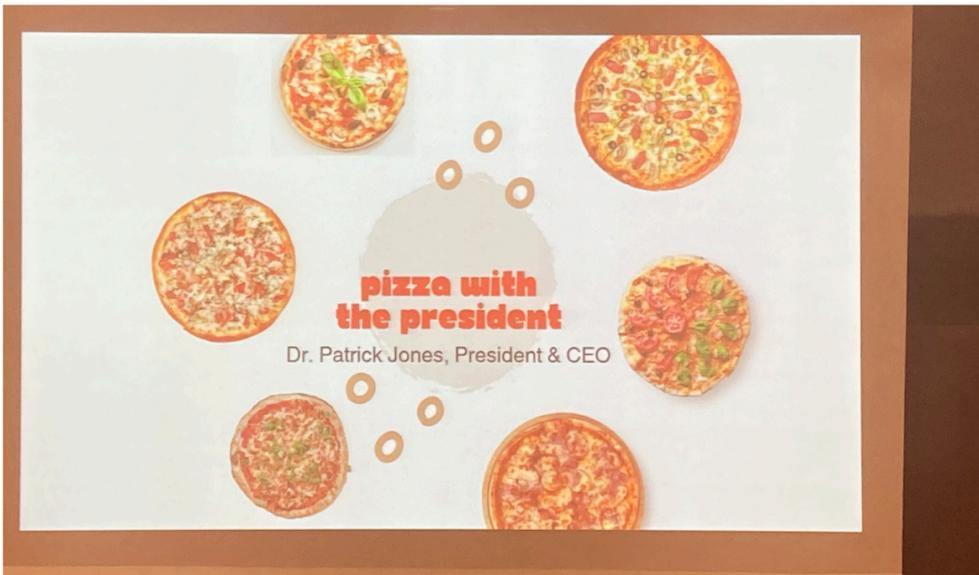


Photo Courtesy of Alexander Bersenev

**Alexander Bersenev**  
Centurion Staff

On Feb. 17 Bucks President Dr. Patrick Jones hosted an event on the Newtown campus appropriately titled, “Pizza With the President.”

For students, meeting Bucks’ sixth President and CEO, Dr. Jones, was quite an experience. Despite the short time students had to get to know him and hear him speak, Jones managed to capture their attention and earn their respect.

An event like this gave students a chance to learn more about their college president, the responsibilities of the role, and who Jones is as a person. “It’s a chance to get to know the students and to make sure they know who I am,” Jones said.

Although the event lasted only an hour, Jones made it

clear that he is always available to help students, answer questions, and address concerns while fostering a comfortable environment for them to get to know him.

Many students attended the event to see the president and to enjoy the free pizza, free drinks and to scan a Bucks+ QR code, which offered a chance to win a gift card.

Jones presented himself as a lively and chatty person. He greeted those that attended with an elbow bump. He was very interactive with the students who were curious to learn about him or to simply spark a casual conversation.

As time went on, more kept coming into the room for either the snacks or to actually meet Jones.

Radio BUX’s co-president, Daniel McDevitt, a Bucks student who majors in communications, met

Jones and had the chance to even interview him for a broadcast right before the event began.

Chris Seifert, Director of Student Engagement at Bucks, opened the event by introducing Jones and giving him a warm welcome.

Jones became the president of Bucks back on March 19, 2024. Jones has had a career in music education. He was a trombonist, a band director and has a graduate diploma and master’s degree in conducting, as well as a PhD in music. He even spent years as a military band director.

One thing Jones reminisced about was the weather around Bucks, mostly the winter weather that had caused the campuses to be closed for a day or two.

“So, as you know, we’ve closed campuses a couple of times and I always try to take into account when I

make the decision to close a campus,” he said, “I take your education very seriously, but I also think about your safety.”

He mentioned that he always considers the safety of the campus, the students and the road conditions. He also considered that not every student has good quality tires with the latest treads.

With that information, he made sure to teach all the students how to know whether a vehicle’s tires are safe to drive on or not. You take a quarter, and you stick it into the grooves of the tire. If the tread doesn’t go as high as George Washington’s head on the quarter, it isn’t safe to drive in the snow.

He had a quarter even passed around and told everyone, “I want you to look at the distance between the edge of the quarter and the top of George Washington’s head passing around,” Jones said.

Another student asked, “How would you define success in life?” Jones answered, “So I would say success is getting to a place where you feel that you’re making a difference and you’re comfortable with who you are.”

“We spend a large part of our lives striving, right, striving to become something we’re learning, we’re growing. And then when we get to that point where we say, I’m comfortable with who I am and where I am,

and then there, of course, those measures of success, like we achieve an outcome and those kinds of things,” said Jones.

A concern at Bucks that Jones raised involved voter registration. Some individuals, as Jones called them, “unscrupulous people,” have shown up around the campus, claiming to be here to help students register to vote. Jones called them out for trying to collect students’ personal information.

Jones made sure to reassure everyone in the room that any voter registration drives at Bucks fall under Seifert, not the individuals who go around asking if you registered to vote or not, and that they would “help” you if you didn’t.

Jones also mentioned a League of Women Voters–sponsored documentary, “Join or Die,” to be shown at Zlock Auditorium, about a Harvard researcher’s work on Americans becoming less involved in community groups.

After the event, Jones said he felt “wonderful” meeting students and encouraging them to succeed, adding, “That’s why we’re here—for the students.”

## Beyond Human Limits: The Expanding Role of Artificial Intelligence

**Chelsea King**  
Centurion Staff

In the blink of an eye, artificial intelligence has shifted from science fiction fantasy to a force that’s rewriting the rules of reality. It powers the apps we scroll, the cars we drive, the recommendations we trust, and the systems that quietly shape our daily lives. It promises breakthroughs in medicine, lightning-fast innovation in business, and personalized experiences in everything from education to entertainment.

But beneath the shine of innovation lies a surge of urgent questions.

What happens when machines learn faster than we can keep up?

What happens when automation takes over not just simple jobs, but creative and thinking roles too?

What happens when technology understands us better than we understand ourselves?

AI could greatly boost productivity and help solve problems we once thought were impossible. It can detect diseases early, improve supply chains, and speed

up scientific discoveries. It could even transform entire industries.

Yet the risks are just as powerful.

Some jobs may disappear. Personal privacy may weaken as AI relies on large amounts of data. Hidden bias in algorithms can affect decisions about jobs, loans, and justice. In the wrong hands, AI can also spread false information, increase the risk of cyberattacks, and cause harm.

This is not a distant future. It’s happening now.

AI is transforming schooling, changing how students learn and teachers teach. Students use AI for research, tutoring, homework help, and writing support, getting instant feedback and personalized guidance.

A downside of AI in education is that it can make students depend too much on technology, which can weaken critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It may encourage cheating, reduce face-to-face interaction with teachers and classmates, and sometimes provide biased or incorrect guidance, affecting learning outcomes.

AI can replace a wide

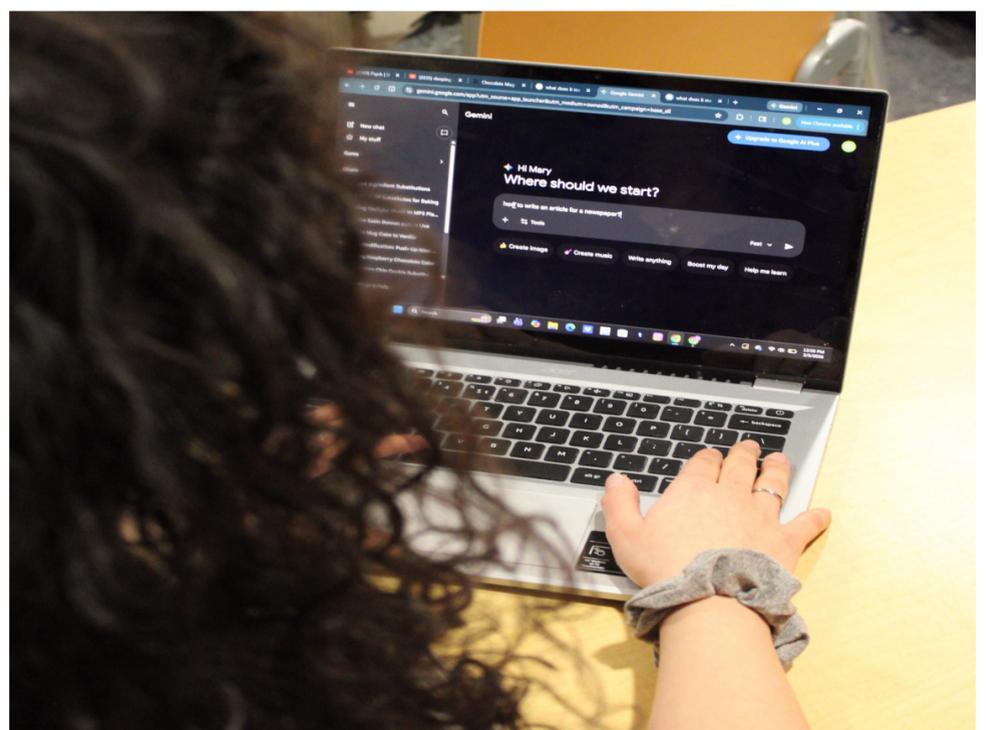


Photo Courtesy of Zac Crain

range of jobs, from basic tasks to more creative or analytical work. This can make finding new work difficult for those without advanced skills and can lead to higher stress, job uncertainty, and greater economic gaps.

At Bucks County Community College, a student-led petition has recently begun circulating that calls for a ban on the use of artificial intelligence and raises con-

cerns about related issues surrounding its impact.

Organizers want clear, fair rules for responsible technology use, sparking campus-wide discussion about balancing innovation with academic integrity and student well-being.

The real question isn’t whether AI will transform our world — it already is. The question is who controls that transformation. Will we shape AI with

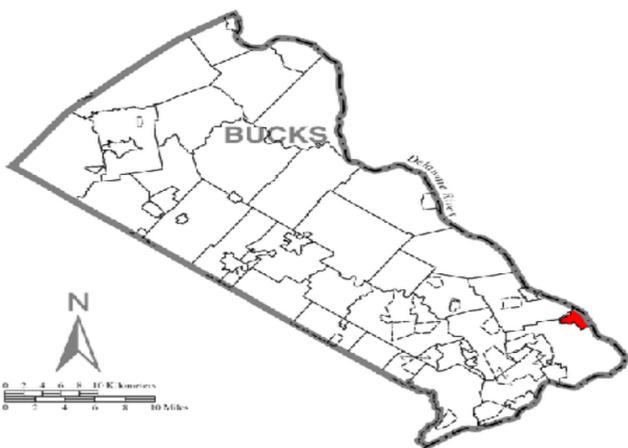
strong ethics, smart regulation, and human-centered design? Or will we race ahead without guardrails?

AI is the most powerful tool humanity has ever built. Whether it becomes our greatest ally or our greatest challenge depends entirely on the choices we make today.

The future isn’t waiting, and neither is AI.

# News

## Pennsylvania Warehouses Targeted for ICE Detention Expansion



Photos Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

**Chelsea King**  
*Centurion Staff*

Proposed ICE detention centers in Pennsylvania have sparked worries that they would overburden local services, compromise public safety, and drain tax revenue, threatening the well-being of surrounding communities.

The federal government's purchase of warehouse properties in Pennsylvania for potential ICE detention use has drawn opposition from state and local leaders.

Gov. Josh Shapiro warned the facilities could pose health and safety risks and pledged legal action, while

U.S. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick said federal officials told his office there are no plans for a detention center in his district and stressed the need for transparency with communities.

In Berks County, DHS is proposing an ICE detention center in Upper Bern Township that, according to public reports, would house up to 1,500 detainees.

The addition would almost double the township's population and is expected to strain local infrastructure, public safety services, and other community resources, prompting concern from residents and local officials.

They have also proposed

building an ICE detention center in Tremont Township, Schuylkill County, that could hold up to 7,500 people. Reports say the project would seriously harm the local community.

The proposed detention center would strain local infrastructure with excessive sewage output, overwhelm emergency services in Upper Bern Township, and cost the community over \$800,000 annually in lost property tax revenue, including losses to Berks County and the Hamburg Area School District.

These detention centers would endanger nearby residents, strain local services,

and reduce community tax revenue.

Shapiro said, "Public safety comes first, which means any facility housing people must be properly built, maintained, and run to meet safety standards for everyone." Showing he feels strongly responsible for protecting people and ensuring their safety.

Like Shapiro, Fitzpatrick prioritizes protecting residents. He stated, "When issues affecting our community arise, we tackle them directly, get the facts, and make sure our community receives clear and accurate information."

Together, their shared

focus on public safety, community resources, and transparent information underscores a commitment to protecting Pennsylvania communities from potential harm. As the debate continues, many residents remain concerned about the long-term impact such a facility could have on public safety, infrastructure, and local resources. The discussions highlight the importance of careful planning, transparency, and prioritizing the well-being of the most affected communities.

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# The History of Saint Patricks Day



## There's More to St. Patrick's Day Than Leprechauns



St. Pattys Day Parade in Asbury Park - Photo Courtesy of Zac Crain

**Eme Yotko**

*Centurion Staff*

St. Patties Day is thought of as a day full of green shamrocks, rainbows, gold and the overall celebration of Irish culture.

But Saint Patrick himself wasn't even Irish. According to his book "The Confesion of Saint Patrick," he was kidnapped by Irish raiders and for six years was kept as a slave in Gaelic Ireland. In his book it is written that "god told Patrick to flee to the coast, where a ship would be waiting to take him home".

Patrick then went on to become a priest, and "according to tradition, Patrick returned to Ireland to

convert the pagan Irish to Christianity." He died on March 17, some time in the mid-fifth to early-sixth century and was buried at Downpatrick.

Now he is widely known as the "Apostle of Ireland," and is celebrated for his role in sharing Christianity to what was once a widely practicing pagan Ireland. Which is where leprechauns come into the story.

In an attempt at successful religious integration St. Patrick's movement adopted existing pagan symbols, celebrations and traditions in the hope of more pagans converting to Christianity. They took what was applicable and then erased the parts of paganism that didn't

support the church's ideals.

According to Britannica's definition of leprechaun, these mythical creatures come from ancient folklore. They are said to be "fairies in the form of a tiny old man often with a cocked hat and leather apron." They are known to "live in remote places and to make shoes and brogues."

Fairies, otherwise known as Fae, have been rooted in Irish and Scottish folklore through the practice of paganism since before the 8th century. Their role has been to reconnect humans with the natural world. "In a time of unprecedented environmental crisis, faeries both call for and symbolize the re-enchantment of the

world."

March 17 was originally a pagan holiday called Ostara which celebrated the spring equinox and symbolized "nature's rebirth and balance of the universe." Its particular focus was on the equal length of day and night.

By the early 17th century Saint Patrick's Day was noted as an official Christian feast day. It is now not just a religious Irish celebration but also a global holiday.

Now how did a religious day of remembrance become a popular drinking holiday?

Well, due to St. Patrick's Day falling during Lent, they have historically lifted the "Lenten restrictions on eating and drinking alco-

hol." Which is how it has become a day characterized by the drinking of alcohol.

Colleges across Pennsylvania hold annual St. Paddies bar crawls and even well-known events like Penn state's infamous "State Paddies Day." This has been a yearly celebration since 2007, because of the school's spring break notoriously falling during the holiday.

But while many use the holiday as an excuse to drink, the real story of St. Patrick's Day has been lost among the commercialized figures that now characterize March 17.

## St Patricks Day.



q y w s h a m r o c k r j l d  
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c b r e z i x w k o h e u x m  
p k i m r u u z d y p m m o x

barcrawl  
beer  
downpatrick  
england  
gold  
green  
ireland  
leprechaun  
luck  
march  
ostara  
pagan  
potatoes  
rainbows  
shamrock

Answer key on @centurion\_bucks on Instagram

## Movie Reviews

# Love Beat The Hell Out of Me – A Tubi Classic

**Gary Griggs**  
*Centurion Staff*

Can a movie that manages to have every single aspect within it be awful also be the best piece of cinema you've ever laid your eyes on?

Love Beat the Hell Out of Me, not to be confused with the 2000 film of the same name, released to Tubi on February 7th, 2023, and would gain popularity later in the year as the face so called "Tubi movies".

Written and directed by Maurice Jones, Love Beat the Hell Out of Me very obviously seems to be a very low budget movie, and that is very apparent from the title card in the opening minutes, but the films shoe-string actually adds to the charm as we get to see tons of scenes shot in local areas, like a chicken shop, a barber shop and even a middle school.

Love Beat the Hell Out of Me stars actress Sherell Brown as Rene Jenkins

and actor Lennox Blu as Antonio Jenkins, our main characters and troublesome couple we follow throughout the movie's 77-minute runtime.

Typical in a review of this sense, there would be positives to discuss by now, but those don't exist in this movie. Love Beat the Hell Out of Me manages to fail so spectacularly at everything it does, yet you can't look away for that exact reason, almost like a car wreck except those can be accidental. This movie being made was a conscious decision.

Starting with the acting, it's an atrocious start to finish from every actor that was casted, but there are highlight moments where it's so bad it's entertaining, or someone gives a line a gutbustingly hilarious delivery.

While no performance is good per say, Lennox Blu is easily the biggest highlight in the acting department as he gives such an eccentric performance for Antonio. Without spoiling the plot,

Lennox Blu essentially has to play two completely different versions of the same character in each half of the movies, and in the second half he ramps it up to 11 and steals almost every scene he's in.

The one other major thing that's to be discussed is the writing in general, as the story is awful and gets completely nonsensical due to a major plot hole in the middle of the movie, and the dialogue is just abysmal.

The story revolves around the tumultuous relationship of Rene and Antonio, as throughout the movie it spirals down the drain as Antonio isn't the man Rene thought he was. There are unnecessary scenes where Rene and her friends are talking about the stuff we just seen 5 minutes ago.

Instead of talking about how bad overall the dialogue is, here's the worst piece of dialogue in the whole movie. While in a chicken shop, one of Rene's friends asked the teenage looking worker if he had



*Photo Courtesy of Unsplash*

ID with him and proceeded to hit on him while he was walking away.

Now with everything being said and all the negatives discussed, this may be the greatest piece of cinema released to the public. I thank Maurice Jones for making it, and I thank Maverick Entertainment for distributing the movie.

This movie does everything it can do wrong, and this is said without exaggeration. The acting, music, plot, dialogue, cinematography and the audio are all

an affront to filmmaking, and for that reason alone this movie is worth watching.

It is the worst movie in many regards, and it's a masterpiece because of it.

9/10



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## Movie Reviews

# Predator: Badlands Has Hit the Streaming Service

Alexander Bersenev

Centurion Staff

Dan Trachtenberg has delivered another stellar entry in the “Predator” franchise. The filmmaker, who has previously directed “Prey” (2022) and co-directed the animated anthology film “Killer of Killers” (2025), returned with his latest project, “Predator: Badlands.” All three projects have proven how much love he has for the franchise.

With “Predator: Badlands,” Trachtenberg pushes the franchise into new territory, offering far more unique stories and world-building on the big screen. The film has recently arrived on streaming and is now available on Hulu and Hulu on Disney+.

For years, the “Predator” franchise has struggled to recapture the spirit of the 1987 film. Most of the other films have failed critically or commercially, mostly bombing at the box office, though “Predators” (2010) would receive, what many considered, a “mixed success.” The 2010 film was practically a poor attempt at copying the very first movie without offering much new

to it.

But something (slight spoiler) “alien” had happened, “Prey” was finally revealed, set in 1719 and centered on a Comanche warrior. Embracing a whole different setting while also assuring to stick to the core themes of the original. It was met with widespread acclaim and revitalized old and new fan interests in the franchise.

Momentum continued with “Killer of Killers” (2025), an animated anthology that included a fan-requested story set in Samurai-era Japan. The short featured a Japanese ninja and warrior facing an outcast Yautja, further expanding the universe’s cultural and historical reach.

Later that year, Trachtenberg would finally release his next anticipated project: “Predator: Badlands,” released on Nov. 7, 2025, the highest-grossing film of the “Predator” franchise. The film, unfortunately, bombed at the box office. With a budget of \$105 million, it only earned a \$183 million worldwide; the film needed to make the estimated \$300 million or more to break even.

Now with spoilers ahead, if you haven’t watched this film yet, please stop reading if you wish to avoid spoilers.

I watched “Predator: Badlands” on Disney+, and the film really takes its original predecessor and completely flips the script in a whole different story that many were skeptical of at first.

It immediately distinguishes itself by shifting the narrative focus away from humans and onto the Predator itself, a young Yautja character.

The story centers on Dek, who is the runt of his clan, dismissed by his clan for his smaller size and scrappy appearance. Only his brother, Kwei, treats him with respect. We see him trying to fight his brother Kwei in an attempt to prove himself as superior.

With an interesting bass, pulsing and atmospheric score at the start, composed by Sarah Schachner, her soundtrack blends alien textures with emotional undertones, heart-pumping with moments that give the film both scale and calm.

Visually, the movie is striking; the environments feel expansive and tactile,

with scenery that feels so real despite having a smaller budget; you could even momentarily confuse this film as a James Cameron film.

Just the first few minutes of action are spectacular and convey the scale and danger to the world and space Dek lives in.

After Dek and Kwei’s fight, we skip to a scene in Kwei’s ship, with Dek’s brother assisting him on who and what to hunt, with words of encouragement. Dek selects the most powerful beast of them all, the Ballisk. Kwei is against the idea, but Dek is only determined to prove himself; the same beast scares even his father, and bringing back the head of a powerful beast to a clan that sees him as weak only motivates him.

Unfortunately, their bond is short lived; their father, Njohrr, has found them and wants Kwei to kill Dek as he believes it would do the clan more honor if Dek simply dies. Kwei refuses and saves Dek, forcing him into his ship and holding their father back. But Kwei is overcome and loses easily. In a last-ditch effort, Kwei programs his ship to launch away, to the planet where the Ballisks live — planet Genna, also known as the “Death Planet.”

Kwei is ultimately killed by his father as Dek is forced to watch helplessly from behind the ship’s glass.

Dek crash lands on Genna, he’s focused on killing the Ballisk to not only prove himself but to avenge his brother.

With larger spoilers ahead, along the way, Dek meets Bud, an alien of high intelligence, and Thia, a Weyland-Yutani synthetic. That’s right! Scott Riddle’s “Alien” world of the franchise’s corporate giant makes a return, placing the film’s timeline around or after the year 2400—the furthest point yet in either franchise.

Weyland-Yutani, in their usual fashion, are trying to capture the Ballisk for its regenerative abilities, the same one Dek hunts for but is unaware of its regenerative ability from the early portion of the film.

No humans are present in this film, since the planet is entirely dangerous, the company (Weyland-Yutani) thought it would be best to only deploy android synthetics to the planet.

This film excels with the combination of its scores and the moments that occur, one standout sequence in which Dek ignites a trail of fuel to trigger a loud explosion and making a Yautja roar to lure the Ballisk towards him. His internal struggle — resentment, pride and need to prove himself outside his clan’s toxic culture, a strong emo-

tional driving point to the story.

Dek’s battle with the Ballisk is pure visceral and fast-paced. Dek manages to “beat” the beast, “killing” it by decapitating its head, but the most jaw-dropping and chilling reveal is as Dek watches the Ballisk’s head and body reattach themselves.

Dek’s best line, in my opinion, is “I am prey to no one” towards Thia.

Towards the third act, Dek finally overcomes his internal struggles, and not just by trying to prove himself; he starts his own clan, and he begins that by choosing Bud and Thia to be a part of his newfound clan. His relationship with Thia can be described as a sibling-like bond.

Dek’s and Thia’s relationship transforms from just him calling Thia a “tool” to genuine respect, calling her by name towards the end.

The film’s pacing is tight, with a runtime of only one hour and 47 minutes, and it manages to keep you immersed in its dangerous world, featuring moments similar to those from the first film while carving out its own unique identity.

Dek uses the nature he learned around him to his advantage to fight the real monsters, the Weyland-Yutani Corporation. Dek ultimately abandons his hunt for the Ballisk after he learned that it was thanks to Bud that he had survived his encounter with the Ballisk, as Bud is the child of the Ballisk. Earlier in the film, Bud had marked Dek with its spit, claiming Dek as part of its Ballisk family. The larger beast had spared Dek once it felt its child’s scent.

Dek sees this compassion, a character rejected by his family, he is claimed by the family he tried to kill. Dek claims Bud as his own in return and intends to the Ballisk and rescue Thia, who was taken by the other synthetics.

The story’s twist really questions the idea of monstrosity, who and what we consider a monster and not. This theme suggests that morality isn’t just biological; it is defined by one’s nature, as both Dek and Thia show empathy in a world fueled by violence and exploitation.

Ella Fanning’s portrayal of Thia and Tessa is excellent, playing as Thia and her twin counterpart, giving the two distinct personalities. Thia is such a fun and amusing character.

If you wish to see “Predator: Badlands,” the film is available on services such as Hulu, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video.



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