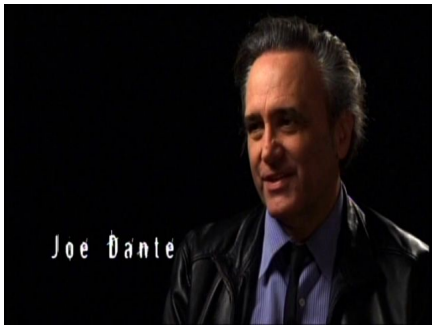
Joseph Maddrey's 2004 book NIGHTMARES IN RED, WHITE AND BLUE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN HORROR FILM has come to life as a documentary, directed by the author himself. Featuring interviews with horror legends such as John Carpenter, George Romero, Larry Cohen, Joe Dante and many others, as well as Fango editor emeritus Tony Timpone, the film (currently available across North America through Warner Bros. Digital Distribution; DVD follows September 28 from Lorber Films) will serve as a companion to Maddrey's written look at domestic horror and its progression in relation to the changing social and political climates and phases of the United States.

Bringing the book into a visual format where it most likely will gain a wider audience may seem like an obvious idea; however, Maddrey had not originally planned to go further than its initial incarnation. "The book was published in 2004, and I was contacted out of the blue in 2007 by a producer who wanted to turn the book into a documentary," Maddrey tells Fango. "I wasn't planning on doing anything like that myself, so I told him to have a go at it."

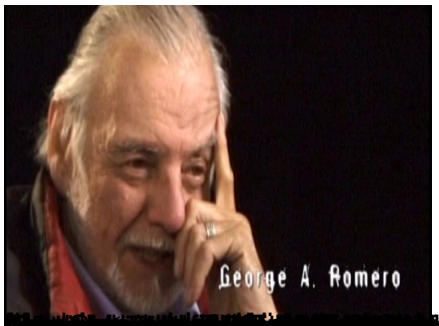
The project was begun by NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD 3D director Jeff Broadstreet and scripter Robert Valding. However, the two exited the project during production to take on a new feature, though Broadstreet retains an "interviewer" credit. "About a year later," Maddrey continues, "I was asked, 'How about if we hire you to make the documentary yourself?' I enlisted my friend Andrew Monument, who is an excellent editor and also a big horror fan, and we took the ball and ran with it."



Although Maddrey discusses much of their work in NIGHTMARES, he had not previously been acquainted with many of the notable names interviewed in the doc. “I had met George Romero and Lance Henriksen at conventions, but other than that I had never been in a room with any of these guys,” he explains. “One of the first things I had to do was get over my own insecurities as an interviewer. I kept reminding myself that most people don’t get an opportunity to interview their personal heroes. I felt nervous, but also very fortunate. I prepared thoroughly for each interview and, for me, every conversation was like two old friends catching up. We may not have known each other, but we had a lot of the same interests and formative experiences, and that goes a long way.”

One common thread between interviewer, filmmaker and horror fans alike is the commitment and total devotion to the genre as something significant. “One of the things that came out of this process that I didn’t get from writing the book was a sense that people don’t choose to be horror fans,” Maddrey says. “Horror chooses us, usually pretty early in life, when we’re still trying to sort out our beliefs about life and death and our place in the world. For horror filmmakers and fans alike, it’s a serious genre that’s important to them. We don’t necessarily search for hidden meaning in every film, but we keep coming back to horror films for a reason. What I wanted to do with the documentary was to look at the genre in that light. These are films that, to some extent, help define who we are as individuals and as a culture.”

Looking into the social importance and commentary of these films requires a lot of critical analysis and heavy thought. In the book, Maddrey cites important film critic and theorist Robin Wood (HITCHCOCK’S FILMS) as a major influence. He doesn’t plan on overloading the brain with too much intellectual jargon, however. “I think Robin Wood is brilliant and, in general, I’m very interested in any intelligent analysis of horror film subtexts,” Maddrey notes. “But I also recognize that academic writing about horror films can stray pretty far from the texts themselves. I have a hard time watching Romero’s DEAD movies these days without considering the things Robin Wood has written about them. But as Romero himself says, you can’t afford to get too deep into that sort of thing or you forget that the movies are supposed to be fun.”



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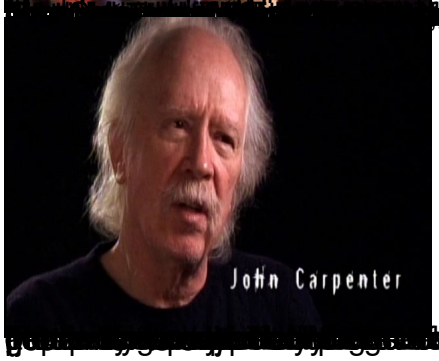

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