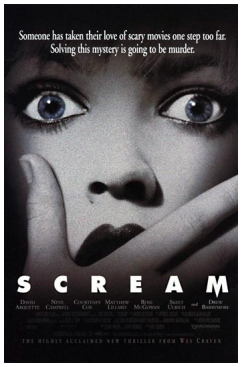
Continuing our interview with Vince Liaguno (see parts one and two), editor of the slasher-film essay collection BUTCHER KNIVES & BODY COUNTS, begun here and here…

FANGORIA: Can you subscribe to auteur theory when you're looking at slashers? Can there be intent at all, throughout the body of a filmmaker consistently working in the genre?

LIAGUNO: Probably more towards [what the book calls] that "Golden Age," and certainly from SCREAM on. Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson; that was so intentional, what they did. The whole thing was intent, almost ad nauseam. What people should hearken back to now is to make a fun movie where people get killed. Do we even watch for escapism anymore? THE WALKING DEAD, it's about zombies. We're sitting there analyzing these things, and it's like, it's about zombies, people. But there is more to it. We over think everything now. I don't think there is any more true escapism. Look at SUPER 8. When that movie was made 30 years ago, you'd say it's pure escapism. But now as an audience member, you know the director went in specifically injecting certain elements to pay homage to a director, in a time… It's diluting the experience, I think. Although the slasher continually reinvents itself, I don't think we'll ever fully enjoy the length of the run it had in the '80s. There was SCREAM 4, and we had things like URBAN LEGEND. But it never had the peak it did in the '80s. It was a time of real purity.



FANG: Speaking of reinvention, you wrote specifically about the modernization of the bogeyman in your HALLOWEEN essay. What do you make of that concept, in the context of the more recent resurgence of slashers in the 2000s period and beyond?

LIAGUNO: It's almost a crime to say we've had a resurgence of the slasher, because everything's a remake now. I don't get as bent out of shape now as some of the fanboys do,

but as a writer I have a tremendous amount of respect for source material. I'm always intrigued by someone else's take on source material, especially when someone is very unprofessional. Rob Zombie taking on John Carpenter's source material could not have been an any more out there, holy shit kind of idea. I was fascinated by what he was gonna come up with, and I was not disappointed. I thought what he did was inventive and creative. I think we become jaded by sort of a generational "Oh that was my movie in 1978, how dare you young'ns…" No! It doesn't change anything that was done in 1978. HALLOWEEN by John Carpenter is still a fucking awesome film. It doesn't matter what Rob Zombie did. Let's look at Rob Zombie and ask, "How did he interpret the source material?" But it's hard to evaluate the modern slasher, because there's not a lot of originality. Even in the early '80s, each successful slasher certainly wasn't really original, but they still weren't remakes. Remake vulgarizes it a little bit more, because now you're taking something that really wasn't original and a derivative knock off to begin with, and you're cannibalizing that. I don't think that's a generational thing, anyone could agree with that. It's disheartening, because I'd like to see more of what, say, a Wes Craven could do with a slasher that's not SCREAM. There's gotta still be something else out there to deal with.

FANG: You're a self-proclaimed Jamie Lee Curtis fan yourself…

LIAGUNO: Please. Obsessed doesn't begin to cut the word.

FANG: Was the reimagining of HALLOWEEN tainted in any way for you with Scout Taylor-Compton in the lead?

LIAGUNO: No, no. I think I was objective to evaluate her on her own merits. To Zombie's credit, he did something so outside the ballpark or anywhere near what Carpenter did, that there was no comparison. Jamie Lee stood on her own, and Scout stood on her own too. It's a completely different character, but in a great way. I followed her through both films. The second was certainly a little trippier than the first; there was more of Zombie's imprint on there. But I liked it.

FANG: In the case of something like HALLOWEEN II, and SCREAM 4 to some degree, there was a lot of studio meddling involved in their production, prematurely.

LIAGUNO: It's something else that minimizes the slasher experience today, vs. back in the

'80s. The studios [then] didn't give a shit about these films. They were so amazed that they were being made for so little money and making so much money, and they were like "Oh?! Go ahead!" But now, [producers] like the Weinsteins think they know "what works." Nobody knew back then. It was, "All you need is $100,000? Here, knock yourself out!"

FANG: Many contributors in the book talk about what in the genre repulses them, where "the line" is drawn. Is there a line for you?

LIAGUNO: As a fan, no. I don't believe any art should be censored. But as a viewer, I'm not big on incorporating rape as a plot device. I didn't care for the original LAST HOUSE or the remake. I remember people picketing LAST HOUSE; for all I know, the movie is empowering to a rape survivor. I don't know. To me, it's just something I'm uncomfortable watching on screen. The original MOTHER'S DAY kind of turned me off; I don't know if the new one has rape, but it's probably something I wouldn't see, for that reason. Without passing moral judgment, everybody has their own personal policy. The home invasion stuff bothers me—it's terrible!

FANG: I think that's the point.

LIAGUNO: It makes me uncomfortable, and sometimes I force myself to watch it. Would I say I enjoy it? No, because it starts to raise my own fears. Was I really afraid that I'd [die as] a camp counselor at Camp Crystal Lake? Probably not. But am I afraid that people that want to cause violence for violence's sake could break into my house and torture me? Yeah, that could happen. That shit bothers me. So a movie like THE STRANGERS, I watched, but I'm having a total visceral reaction to it. I wouldn't say I enjoyed it.

FANG: So you'd want a detachment from reality to some degree…

LIAGUNO: Yeah, unless the art form can elevate it. THE STRANGERS didn't have the [artistry] that could made me appreciate it on a different level. It bothered me, it affected me, it made me fearful. Then you take something like the American remake of FUNNY GAMES—which was brutal to watch, more so than THE STRANGERS—but it was done so f**king brilliantly. Performance, direction, choices of music, a stunning ending. It bothered me to no end.

FANG: FUNNY GAMES is also a film that smacks you in the face for liking it; it chastises you the longer you sit through it. Adam Green writes in his foreword to BUTCHER KNIVES about how we as fans have to constantly justify enjoying these movies. Why is it that you think slashers keep getting called to be defended? Will there ever be a point where they'll be left alone?

LIAGUNO: I think they are left alone to a large degree now. Other mediums, like video games have taken them to a new level. But horror in general is counterculture. I think a lot of people miss the boat, in that [slashers] can help these people stare down demons. In any event, when you're confronted with those demons, you have frame of reference in your head. As fictional as it may be, but still a frame of reference. It's all about surviving.

Horror films for me were a rite of passage. For some kids a rite of passage was going to scouts, going to gym class and learning to climb and get to the top of that rope, going hunting with their dad and killing their first deer. For me, it was 8 years old, four tries to get through JAWS. Every time I went to see JAWS with my dad I got a little bit further. First time, poor naked Chrissie didn't even get banged against the buoy the first time—"Daddy, can we leave, I've gotta leave!" Next time, I made it past the Chrissie part. By the fourth time, I got through it, my shirt soaked from perspiration, it was like my merit badge.

FANG: With the death of the video store, suddenly there's an absence of part of that rite of passage—of picking up a cover and being enticed by something otherwise unknown or forbidden. Does the cornering of the market by digital pose a threat to young kids and filmmakers, looking to discover slashers the way you once did?

LIAGUNO: I don't think it's less accessible, it's just been replaced. The internet's made it more accessible. There's so much more exposure. My exposure was once a month, pedaling to the comic book store. "Hey Mr. so-and-so, did FANGORIA come in yet?" "No, not yet." "Aw!" Now it's just, laptop up, "Oh—gore!" The question is, does the accessibility take away from the experience? If we have access to whatever we want, are there any more taboos? Are kids really restricted anymore?

FANG: Could you have imagined that something like Universal's Halloween Horror Nights would exist? Films that were the forbidden fruit of their time…

LIAGUNO: Now benign, family attractions. It's kind of cool how that's come full circle. An amazing interview to me would be people from organizations, religious or political, who launched campaigns against movies like SILENT NIGHT DEADLY NIGHT. How would they feel about those films now?

FANG: [*Laughs*] Now that they've been conglomerated, with toy lines…

LIAGUNO: [*Laughs*] It's like, "Oh my God, I can't believe I got so bent out of shape over that shit!" It's pretty wild.