In our recent interview with Jason Zinoman on the historicity of his genre document SHOCK VALUE, Fango asked for his take on pushing taboos and the current state of horror, to which he responded rhetorically: "What's a slasher film?" Vince Liaguno may well have his answer. The multihyphenate recently added to "writer" and "unapologetic CURTAINS enthusiast" the title of editor of BUTCHER KNIVES & BODY COUNTS, a collection of essays by dozens of horror specialists that runs from Norman to Michael to Jason to Freddy to Victor without once stopping in the woods to catch its breath. Hell, consider that a warm-up. Read on for the first part of Fango's lengthy chat with Liaguno.

FANGORIA: What was the genesis of BUTCHER KNIVES & BODY COUNTS?

VINCE LIAGUNO: The book was actually with another publisher in the UK called Hades' Gate, and it was originally conceived to be encapsulated reviews of slasher films. But what the publisher was looking for was more like, "What I remember about this film," "Why it was special to me," "What was going on in my life when I saw this film"—that kind of thing. So I answered the call; one of my essays was for CURTAINS. She accepted those, which I thought was great and came back and asked me if I could do another one, specifically based on a blog I had written on Rob Zombie's HALLOWEEN.

A year and a half went by, and there was no news about the book. So I said to her, "I've put together anthologies, is there any way I could find the right publisher? I could buy it for a finder's fee and take it over." We agreed on a price, she gave me the essays that were part of the project, I read through them, and saw exactly what the intention was, but in looking at them, I said, "There could be so much more to this. This could be so much more than just

anecdotal." There were some writers that were really touching on film theory and film commentary and broader, pop culture commentary.

So I revamped the new submissions guideline. We completely changed the title. On Hades' Gate it was going to be called THE ESSENTIAL SLASHER GUIDE or THE ULTIMATE SLASHER GUIDE. It mirrored something very close that's on Amazon right now, one of those little guides. The response was overwhelming; we could not believe how many submissions were coming in. One of the first e-mails I got was from Jack Ketchum; it was actually a reprint piece he did on a Japanese slasher, which I took. It's Jack Ketchum. He could write about fried green tomatoes in a slasher film and I would put it in the book.

In 2009, I [spoke to] Jane Kozak, one of the actresses in HOUSE ON SORORITY ROW. We got into a conversation at the bar and I asked her "What was making the film like?" And [after] I said Harley, this would make such a great essay, would you contribute?" "Sure," boom, got her involved. So it just kind of kept growing. When I finally cut off submissions, we were already at like 400 pages to the book, but there were so many films we still hadn't covered. So I think even after that point, I accepted 15 or 20 stories from people like, "Oh, did you cover JUST BEFORE DAWN? I have this great story about JUST BEFORE DAWN." "OK, why not?"

The whole title of the book is really a celebration. Slashers are the one part of genre in horror that are really open season. You can always take a pot-shot at a slasher. It's there, just make fun of it, degrade it, whatever, yet it's lasted longer than any of the other subgenres. It's always there. It never seems to die, people always come back. So the whole thing came together in a way to celebrate it, but also pay homage to it in a way that says, "This is really about more than just killing teenagers."

FANG: What went into the process of ordering these films, in terms of their aesthetic and their historical periods?

LIAGUNO: In editing, it gave itself form. There really Honestly, it just came together. I'd love to take credit for having the brainstorm of putting that full order together, but it really was the way the essays came in, and it just fell into this sequence. I think that's why I allowed it to grow so big. There was clearly a bunch of films that I could group into something like the Golden Age of Slashers, or a group of essays I could put into the Post-Modern movement.

Then there were a bunch of these oddball essays that didn't fit into either, almost like if you were going to study a slasher, it would be introductory material. One writer did an article about slashers and their history with video games. Stacie Ponder, who runs the blog Final Girl, did an essay on the novelization of slashers. I just couldn't stop. We had more theoretical material, equating slashers to different philosophers; some really heavy kind of stuff. When you think about slashers, you usually don't think about heavy intellectual material. You think about girls in bras and panties getting slaughtered in the woods.

It's almost 500 pages, which is not the norm for publishing these days. We couldn't say no. There were so many discoveries, and some of the feedback we'd gotten; somebody wrote me and said, "Thank you so much for not making HALLOWEEN the pinnacle of the book." HALLOWEEN is only a small part of the book; it gets an essay, but it talks about the music. There were so many other fascinating aspects. One writer, Richard Kane, submitted an essay claiming that THIRTEEN WOMEN [1932], TERROR ABOARD [1933] and THE NINTH GUEST [1934] were really the first slashers. I'm blown away by the way in which people have intellectualized, gone back to those archives of film history and found legitimate cases for the first slasher. Of course, a lot of people argue PSYCHO, Janet Leigh in the shower, is the first. A lot of people argue BLACK CHRISTMAS. But some of these guys go as far back as silent movies.

FANG: That's an ongoing dialogue in BUTCHER KNIVES, the search for undeniable evidence of the first slasher. Which is it for you?

LIAGUNO: Agatha Christie's AND THEN THERE WERE NONE. It's got the isolated location. It's got the ensemble cast of characters, who, for all intensive purposes are strangers to each other. It's got an unseen killer seeking retribution for past deeds. When you dumb those down, past deeds might be "You had drugs," "You had sex," "You didn't watch the kid when you were a camp counselor." Christie goes into "You were communist," "You killed your wife"… A little bit harder of a stretch, but she's still assembling them all on past deeds. It's got the inventive kills. It's by no means gory, axe-in-the-head or something, but inventive kind of kills. And you have the Final Girl. And the big final twist at the end! It's all there. I was an avid reader, I devoured every HARDY BOYS, and from the time I was 11 or 12, I started reading Christie. I'm 43, and to this day, Christie's to me is the most still intricately plotted, well written mystery novel, and it *is* a slasher. When I wrote my first novel in 2006, my idea was to bring the slasher to print, and Christie was a huge influence.

FANG: What's your favorite slasher?

LIAGUNO: CURTAINS, an obscure little Canadian slasher released back in 1983. There’s really no rational explanation why of all the slasher films—many of significantly more merit—that preceded and followed it that that one has a special place in my heart.

I love [it] for the potential it didn’t live up to. That film has all the elements for a classic slasher. Six actresses are auditioning for a coveted film role for a well-known film director at his isolated mansion. A moody winter setting, a super-creepy killer in a hag mask, a macabre doll with outstretched arms that appears several times in the film and a great final chase scene around a theatrical prop closet. Adding to the potential, the body count consisted of several actresses familiar to genre fans like Lesleh Donaldson (HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME, FUNERAL HOME), Lynne Griffin (BLACK CHRSITMAS), Sandee Currie (TERROR TRAIN) and the venerable Samantha Eggar (THE BROOD). CURTAINS has an element of mystery at its core reminiscent of AND THEN THERE WERE NONE.

So what could possibly go wrong? Producer vs. director. Richard Ciupka was the film’s first director; he envisioned CURTAINS more as an adult murder mystery, almost more of an art house piece. Peter Simpson, who had a long and accomplished [genre] pedigree, eventually came to fisticuffs with Ciupka over the direction of the film and stepped in to finish it. [Then] a year on the shelf, script rewrites, reshoots. CURTAINS was a hot mess. Both men removed their names from the finished product, and direction [was] credited to one Jonathan Stryker, the name of John Vernon’s character in the film. What we’re left with is an uneven film, with gorgeous shots that reflect Ciupka’s highly-stylized vision and great murder set pieces reflecting Simpson’s innate understanding of the slasher formula.

TO BE CONTINUED