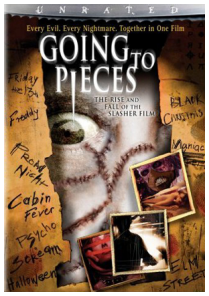
Just hitting stands is FANGORIA #304, with a cover and plenty of features celebrating the legendary Tom Savini, who narrated and hosted this 2006 documentary examining a genre his work simply shined in. Presented below is Michael Gingold's review of GOING TO PIECES: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SLASHER FILM.



When a documentary tackles a subject as specific, and with such specific appeal, as slasher films, the challenge lies in conveying that attraction to the unconverted while not simply feeding the fans a buffet they've already fully sampled. The Starz original GOING TO PIECES: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SLASHER FILM is more successful in offering devotees a gorenucopia of clips and talking heads (still attached to bodies) recounting the subgenre's history than it likely will be in convincing non-fans that this grisly strain of cinema is a worthy one.

The hour-and-a-half show is based on Adam Rockoff's book of the same title, which stands as the single best study of stalker cinema ever published. Weaving revelatory interviews with both luminaries (John Carpenter, Sean S. Cunningham) and the less celebrated (Joseph Zito, Tom DeSimone) throughout his text, Rockoff combines the enthusiasm of a fan with clear-eyed assessments of the individual films (it's nice to find someone else who thinks that SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE, for all its claims as a feminist satire on the subgenre, is no less formulaic and exploitative than many others of its ilk). The Starz adaptation, directed by Jeff McQueen, is less critical, but gives equal face time to the filmmakers listed above (including Carpenter, pictured) and others as it tracks the progression from HALLOWEEN through the many holiday horrors it spawned, the supernatural variations of the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series and the resurgence in SCREAM and its own derivations.

The interviewees, who also include Fango's own Tony Timpone (and who are frequently, for some reason, taped while walking toward the backward-tracking camera), relate a number of stories that will be familiar to die-hard fans, but a few fresh nuggets are shared; Paul Lynch, for example, reveals that Paramount was outbid for his film PROM NIGHT by Avco Embassy, inspiring the former studio to go after FRIDAY THE 13TH. And for those buffs, there's an inherent appeal in seeing faces and voices put to names like MY BLOODY VALENTINE and HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME producer John Dunning and GRADUATION DAY director "Rabbi Herb Freed."

McQueen, executive producer Michael Ruggiero and producers Rachel Belofsky and Rudy Scalese demonstrate throughout GOING TO PIECES an awareness that showing is better than telling; narration is kept to a minimum, and the on-camera interviews are interspersed with a wealth of visual material. We get peeks of the combat photos Tom Savini took in Vietnam before he began recreating the atrocities for movie cameras; newspaper stories about the real-life dream-deaths that inspired Wes Craven to make A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET; and video footage of picketers protesting SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT's killer Santa. And of course, there are the movie clips, which are a gorehound's wet dream. Standards and Practices would have a fit if this sucker was ever submitted to them, as grisly highlights from FRIDAY THE 13TH, SCREAM and every blood fest in between splatter across the TV screen.

There are plenty of impassioned defenses of this violent breed of film on view in GOING TO PIECES, and criticisms of its sexism are addressed and refuted—though that can be a tough case to make in between excerpts of a screaming woman from PIECES being hacked up at length with a butcher knife or the pitchforking of a naked girl in the shower from THE PROWLER. And the brief attempt to establish these movies as products of their turbulent sociopolitical times comes off as half-hearted; really, what we're largely talking about here are a series of films—good, bad and indifferent—trying to grab a piece of the original HALLOWEEN and FRIDAY's box-office pie. And in the end, the documentary's heart (and other organs) clearly lies with those who would reject in-depth analysis, and just enjoy slasher features for what they are: a series of bloody "magic tricks" (to quote Savini) performed by celluloid magicians of varying talent.