I'm a child of the 1980s. I grew up on a steady diet of Count Chocula cereal, bad hair metal and VHS tapes, most of which were procured from a mom-and-pop video store in my hometown of Winchester, Virginia. It was among these dusty shelves that I (to quote The Damned) caught "the tide at the flood" and "fell in love with the video nasty."

Actually, I can safely say that without my weekly trips to On Track Rental to get the latest in indie horror sleaze, I might not have become such a huge genre fan. I might not have proceeded to get several higher-education film degrees focused on horror, and thus might not have pursued my career with FANGORIA. So, in a roundabout way, my frequent trips to this long-closed-down shop completely shaped my career outcome, which is why it pains me so much to be witness to "the death of the video store."

I'm as much to blame as anyone else. Years ago, I stopped going to the local rental place and switched to Netflix or viewing my films on-line. For any hard-to-find or really rare titles, I may have to take a trip to "ye olde video store," but my days of patronizing Blockbuster or Hollywood Video are long gone. I never really thought much about this situation until about a week ago. Prior to that, I only knew that I had added to my personal horror DVD collection as countless Blockbusters sold off their stock. Likewise, when Kim's Video in New York City stopped renting and decreased their sales size, I was able to nab a number of hard-to-find horror DVDs and VHS tapes for bargain-basement prices. I felt like these closings were working in my favor, and like a vulture, I was there to pick at and feed off the remains.

But just recently, I got the news: The Video Vault was closing. If you live anywhere in the Virginia, Washington, D.C., Maryland or southern Pennsylvania area, you have most likely heard of the Video Vault. Located just outside D.C., this video store has long been a mecca for fright fans, as the Vault boasted the "worst movies" one could find. Their complete stock featured rooms upon rooms of countless forgotten and out-of-print horror and exploitation flicks. For many I know in the area—John Waters himself included—Video Vault was the one true place genre fans could find anything they could think of. But then word came down that the legendary store had started selling off all its stock and will be closing its doors April 30. So sad to see the horror video gods fall to mortality.

This leads me to think about the VHS tape, the DVD and now on-line movies. And again, I'm part of the problem. I no longer even rent DVDs from Netflix. Why bother with the physical disc when I can "instant view" most of Netflix stash through my PlayStation 3? But it seems with each new technological development, some titles are left behind. Whether they're forgotten gems or flicks that just never made good distribution deals, it pains me to think of some of the treasures that are still sitting back in VHS format only, slowly disappearing from our lexicon. Often these movies never made it to disc at all, or if they did, it was in such a limited run that it's now hard to touch a copy for under $75. Some examples include TICKS, POPCORN, DARK AGE, CURTAINS, THE KEEP, DEVILFISH, CANNIBAL HOOKERS and the wonderful punk documentary DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. This is also the case with many art and exploitation films such as THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE, AND HER LOVER and POOR WHITE TRASH. It's also the case with many intentional horrors like GO, GO SECOND TIME VIRGIN.

I'm becoming worried that as each new format or venue comes along, more great films will be stranded in technology limbo. I know it's weird. But when Video Vault called up to say they were starting to sell off their stock, I felt like I had to go save the forgotten movies. It was like a bunch of homeless puppies had been put up for adoption, and I had to rescue them before they potentially fell into the hands of people who did not know what a treasure they were holding.

Apparently I was not the only one, as fellow Fango writer Jack Bennett raced me to the store.

This leads me to a second thought about advancing technologies and what is left behind: VHS or DVD covers, as opposed to today's Internet movie marketing. That art was 75 percent of why I rented movies. Some of my most prominent memories of movies like THE HILLS HAVE EYES, THE MUTILATOR, THE DEADLY SPAWN, and even TROLL were their awesome boxes. I wonder if I would have been as drawn to Herschell Gordon Lewis if not for those alluring cover images. As we shift to a more Internet-based movie culture, I only wonder if on-line promotions will have quite the same affect. In the meantime, I'll turn to stellar books like PORTABLE GRINDHOUSE and SHOCK! HORROR! to relive the VHS glory days.

I'm honestly not sure where I'm headed with these thoughts, as I'm not sure where the market is headed. Does this mean that tons of forgotten horror films will be left behind on outdated formats until they disappear completely? Will the cover art that meant so much to me as a child transition into some other type of first-impression marketing like webpage takeovers or on-line trailers? Who knows? I surely don't.

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MARTIN
Three On A Meathook
Devilfish

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