

A NEW BOOK FROM FORMER RMEIC **DAVE ALEXANDER** TRACKS DOWN THE GENRE'S HEAVYWEIGHTS TO UNCOVER THE GREATEST HORROR MOVIES NEVER MADE

# WHEN THERE'S NO MORE ROOM IN DEVELOPMENT HELL

BY RYAN COLEMAN

**T**HERE COMES A TIME IN EVERY HORROR FAN'S LIFE WHEN THEY START ASKING QUESTIONS. Didn't David

Cronenberg take out a full page ad in *Variety* trying to get a *Frankenstein* adaptation off the ground? Is *Bubba Nosferatu* ever going to get made? What about that William Gibson-penned *Alien 3* script? Will that ever see the light of day? Against the current, the ghosts of horror movies never made linger on, borne ceaselessly from the past.

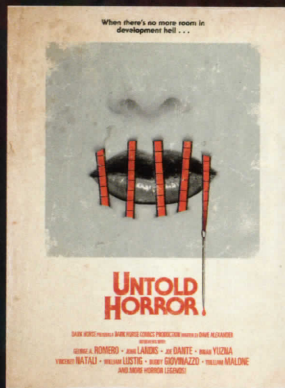
For these inquiring minds, a new book on the greatest unmade, half made, and perpetually in development genre films has arrived, rich with visuals and packing remarkable depth of research. Out August 17 from Dark Horse Books, *Untold Horror* spans ten decades, at least four continents, and countless seasons of this industry oubliette across its 150 pages.

But *Untold Horror* does more than tell the stories of how writers and directors as diverse as Brian Yuzna and James Whale hit a bump on the road to shooting, began to skid, and crashed into "development hell," as the book's subtitle puts it. In aggregate, the thirteen distinct oral histories pieced together in *Untold Horror*,

from Tobe Hooper's *White Zombie* to the dramatic, globe-trotting saga of the failed production *Worst Case Scenario*, illuminate larger truths about the business of filmmaking that transcend genre and generation. On one hand, the picture that *Untold Horror* paints of the industry is one of remarkable, unchanging conservatism — a gilded cage whose lone operating directive seems to be a hostility to creativity, while housing some of the most creative artists who ever lived. On the other, the book functions like a survival guide, anatomizing the creative, professional, and financial decisions that miraculously, when it was possible, broke the lock.

The project was born in 2015 at Montreal's Fantasia Film Festival, when former *Rue Morgue* Editor-in-Chief Dave Alexander and *Untold Horror* co-creator Mark Pollesel were in attendance.

"One night towards the end of the festival, we were feeling burnt out by all the parties," Alexander recalls. "We said, 'Let's the two of us go have a drink at some bar that won't be crowded.' We started talking about all the stuff we'd seen at past marketplaces, and we were like, 'What happens to all those films that don't





get made? What happens to all the movies that I hear about through *Rue Morgue*? Either a director mentions something in an interview and it never happens, or we do an article on something that gets announced and it never materializes. Why does that stuff happen? It's like water cooling for horror fans."

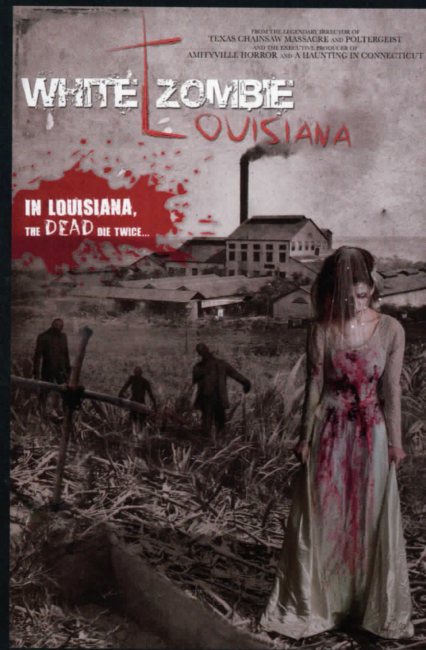
The duo started with one story they knew they wanted to tell — that of George A. Romero's thwarted attempts to make the Marvel movie, *Copperhead*. Years before Marvel's first foray into modern film licensing (1998's *Blade*), the horror master was at work developing a "politically left"-leaning script about a "cyborg supersoldier" who rebels against his government handlers. Not only would Romero also have become the godfather of the megafranchise machine, he would have made *Robocop* before *Robocop*. The *Untold Horror* team managed to get the untold story in one of the last interviews Romero ever conducted before his passing in 2017.

"He was really passionate about *Copperhead*, because no one has ever asked him about it," recalls Alexander. "In his career he wrote far more stuff that never got made than stuff that got made. He was sitting on something like 40 undeveloped scripts. The way that Romero did it, if something didn't take off, he already had another story to tell. He loved to write. He genuinely enjoyed it. Even the periods in his career like the 1990s where he had almost nothing released, it was one of his most prolific periods as a writer. Nobody knew, but he was always creating."

From that point, research began in earnest. A trickle of inspiration became a torrent of material, and the following year, *Untold Horror* was pitched as a TV docuseries akin to *Eli Roth's History of Horror* at Fantasia's Frontières marketplace. That modest TV pitch snowballed into a larger project, including live events and a feature film. Ironically enough, throughout its six-year gestation period, *Untold Horror* itself nearly entered the stalled-in-development graveyard, but it certainly wasn't for lack of material.

"Once you open one door you find there's at least three more doors behind it," says Alexander. "There are an unlimited amount of untold horror stories. We've got over 30 interviews in the can, tons of B-roll. We were sitting on a mountain of never-before-seen images and concept art."

As the project narrowed its focus, Dark Horse's Mike Richardson got involved, and so began the possibility of a book. That introduced a strict criterion for curation — stories which could be accompanied with enough original art, from shots



**What Could Have Been:** *Untold Horror* contains a treasure trove of never-before-seen poster art and images of gore effects from genre efforts that never saw release.

of unused prosthetics and gore effects to death scene concept drawings that proved too expensive to execute, to unreleased poster mockups.

"There's a whole level of work that went into the imagery in this book, from tracking down the provenance of a lot of these images to making sure they were cleared for us to use," says Alexander. "What you see in each chapter is often a fraction of what we had to use."

Two standout batches of imagery include the trove of surreal, post-human concepts that Swiss "biomechanical" artist H.R. Giger (best known for designing the xenomorph and guiding the overall look of *Alien*) developed for two unmade films by William Malone, and a suite of repulsive illustrations by Japanese manga artist Shintaro Kago for Vincenzo Natali's *In The Tall Grass*, depicting grass people dismembering themselves into bloody pieces and birthing human babies out of their mouths.

But beyond the wistful what-ifs and the crushing too-bads, another editorial directive had a stronger hand in shaping *Untold Horror*, one that gets at the book's most potent point for filmmakers and film fans alike.



"The driving principle behind this book is the diversity," says Alexander. "What happens when you get lots of different subgenres, sizes of film, types of directors, and eras of

production together is that patterns emerge. You see that people have been struggling to make the kinds of movies that they wanted to make since the beginning of horror history, and for the same reasons. I think it speaks to the industry in a larger way, and it speaks to the creative spirit in a larger way."

Indeed, moving through the book, from big-budget sequels overseen by superstar Hollywood producers on studio stages, to run-and-gun exploitation pickups in the jungles of the Philippines, things tend to fall apart again and again for the same reasons. The true bloody heart of *Untold Horror* is in its depiction of how filmmakers are able to push against the stupefying obstacles presented by many producers, executives, and financiers to see their projects to fruition. Should they resist anything that compromises on the style that made them famous (like Romero at the beginning of his career), or give in and try to be as creative as possible within the limits they're prescribed (like Romero at the end of his career)? *Untold Horror* offers the full playbook, showing that though the industry may not have changed all that much over the years, horror filmmakers have always had to devise ever-new, ever-fascinating strategies for survival — and we remain grateful. 🧟