

Freddy's never dead, neither is his creator

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Three guys stand around trying to remember the titles of Wes Craven movies. This melancholy scene is a grieving process that has occurred in cinemaphile DVD rental stores throughout the nation since Wes Craven died on August 30.

Matt Evans, Josh Hodgen and I lean against the checkout counter of Orbit DVD in West Asheville in silence as they pull movie titles from memory.

Josh snaps his fingers and convulses a little.

"The Serpent and the Rainbow!" he yells.

Yes. How could they forget *The Serpent and the Rainbow*? Bill Pullman. Based on nonfictional research into Haitian zombification.

"Swamp Thing," Evans announces as if he were betting on an unfortunately named horse.

Clearly, they are challenging themselves to remember movies between the spectrum of his most obvious and best movie, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and the worst, *A Vampire in Brooklyn*, starring Eddie Murphy speaking in an accent I still haven't placed to this day. Sometimes, though, it keeps me up at night wondering, "What was he thinking? For what dialect was he striving?" Hence, the tossing and turning.

"I loved *Scream* when it came out. *The Hills Have Eyes* is good. *The Last House on the Left* is good but it is super rapey," Evans says thoughtfully. "I appreciate the fact that he liked to push the envelope a little bit."

A few more titles emerge. Evans describes his favorite scene in the catalogue of Wes Craven movies from the movie *Deadly Friend*.

"The evil mom from the *The Goonies* is in it. There is a dispute that happens, then a robot guy picks up a basketball and throws it at her head and her head explodes and blood goes everywhere. That's pretty much awesome," Evans recalls fondly.

Eventually, the group of men, while not solving the world's problems but still being more productive than Congress, have to face the inevitable *Nightmare on Elm Street*, a movie that toyed with the viewer's mind like a cat pawing at a terrified mouse.

The cinematic masterpiece did not just blur but completely remove the boundaries between reality and fantasy, leaving no safe place to retreat.

I first saw *A Nightmare on Elm Street* when I was 11, which may explain a lot of things that do not pertain to this article.

Aside from wanting to sleep in my parents bed for the next year, the movie stimulated my imagination in more healthy ways than unhealthy, contrary to studies suggesting violent movies corrupt children.

I, a frightened 11-year-old, was ingrained with a persistent interrogation into the nature of fear and reality. But I also lived in a large, two-story house deep in the woods, so the interrogation of reality really wasn't helpful in any philosophical sense at the time.

Wes Craven asks his audience two questions with



Photo by Johnny Condon - Staff Photographer

Orbit DVD creates a display for the recent passing of Wes Craven.

A Nightmare on Elm Street: what is reality, and what is fear? The first question he leaves rhetorical. But he had answered the second question in the original ending, before New Line Cinema re-edited it for a sequel.

In the final act, Nancy, the protagonist, realizes her own fear gives Freddy Krueger, the antagonist, his power. Without her fear and the fear of others, he is powerless.

"What the original ending of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* means, symbolically, with Nancy turning her back on Freddy, is, 'I won't participate in fear,' the fear the Freddy instills, and that I think is a very satisfying ending," states Robert Englund in the documentary on the *Nightmare* franchise *Never Sleep Again*.

Jack Sholder, professor in the School of Stage and Screen and director of the Film and Television Production Program at Western Carolina University, directed *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*.

When Sholder first met Wes Craven, he was upside down.

"He was shooting the scene where Amanda is killed and the set ceiling was on the floor," Jack recollects.

Jack says Wes originally planned on directing the sequel, but backed out because he did not like the script.

"I took over having little idea how to shoot the 162 special effects the script called for and was rather panicked by the enormity of the task ahead," Sholder says. "Like almost all movies, it got finished, and it went on to make enough money, so I could continue directing films for the next 20 years."

Sholder says Wes disliked *Freddy's Revenge*, but he was still nice to him and offered his advice.

"You'd think, with his professional air and quiet voice, that he was an unlikely maker of horror films. But unlike a lot of young directors who made a way of breaking in, horror films were very much a part of Wes' psyche," Sholder says. "It's still hard to think he's not around. He was a gentleman and a scholar. And a memorable filmmaker."

Christopher Oakley, assistant professor of new media at UNC Asheville, says Craven's genius cannot be overstated.

"He reinvented the horror genre with *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and then reinvented it again with *Scream*," Oakley says. "It's rare for any filmmaker to get to reinvent something twice."

Craven reinvented *A Nightmare on Elm Street* with *A New Nightmare* in 1994. *A New Nightmare* is a meta-nightmare, a movie about the actors of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, including Wes Craven. Haunted by Freddy Krueger, who not only terrorizes Craven, but



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