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Cynophobia in Film

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Taylor Smith, Laura Gelfand
(mentor)

Introduction

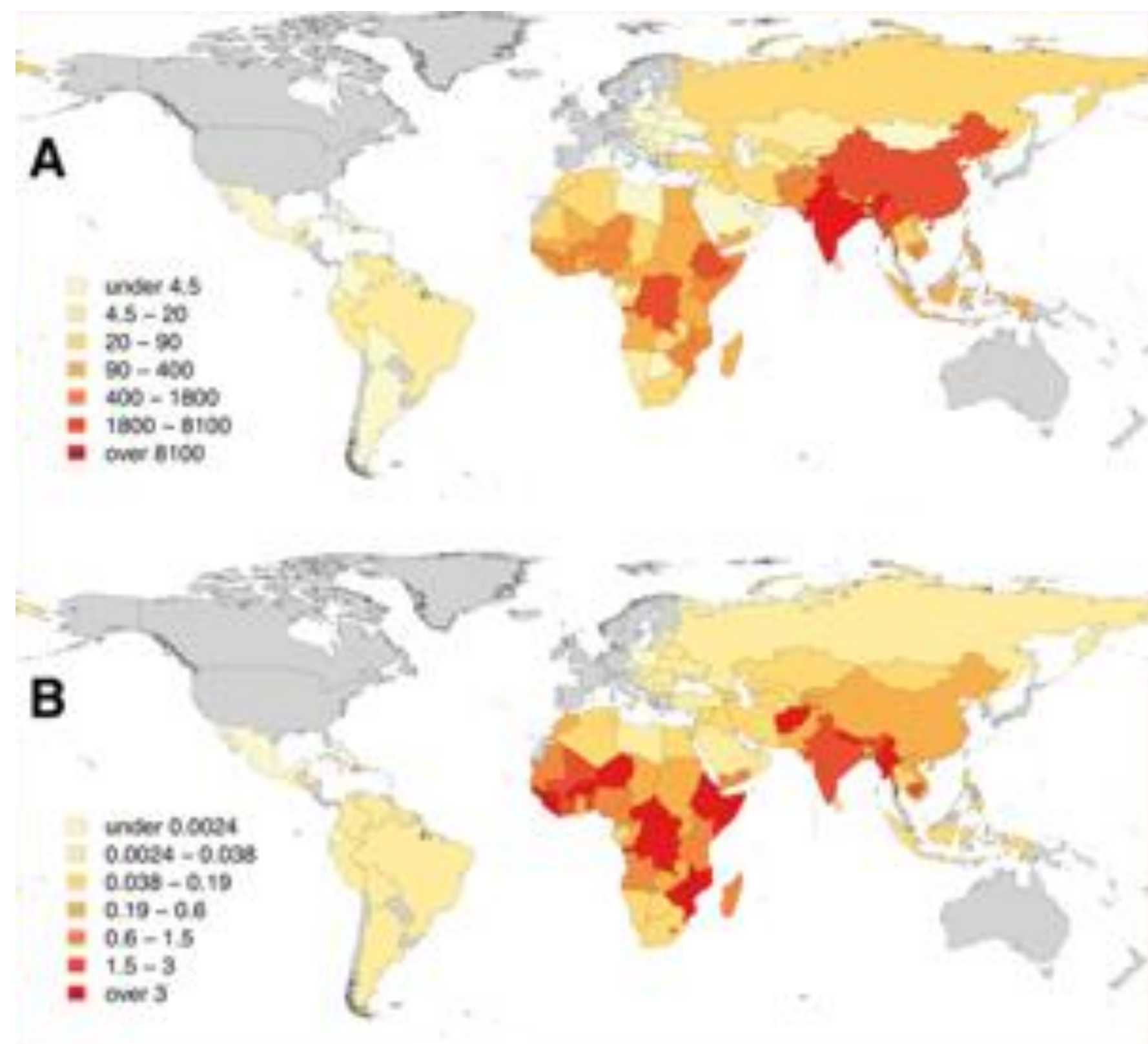
Consider this finding from a 2014 National Safety Council study....

You are more likely to die by choking on a hot dog than by being attacked by an actual dog

Yes, while it is true that cynophobia affects around 7-9% of the population, mortality by dog bite alone is not a common occurrence throughout the world. In fact, cynophobia within other countries can instead be linked to outbreaks of rabies...

Cultural Stigmas

Rabies outbreaks tend to develop in countries with issues in dog overpopulation. As cases and death rates rise, which has been the case in Asia (see map below), efforts are made to exterminate and euthanize stray dog populations in hopes of quelling the rabies outbreaks.

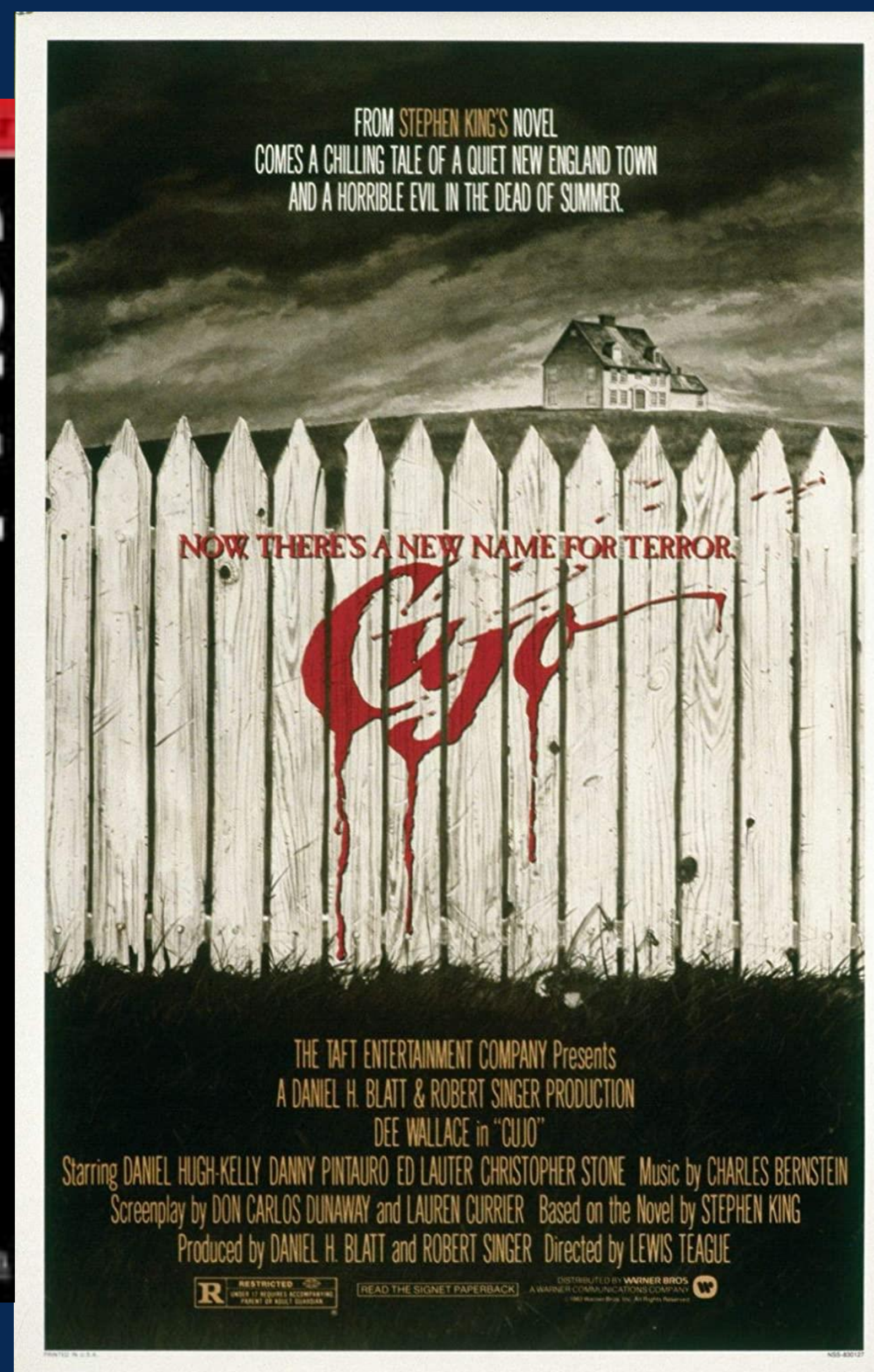
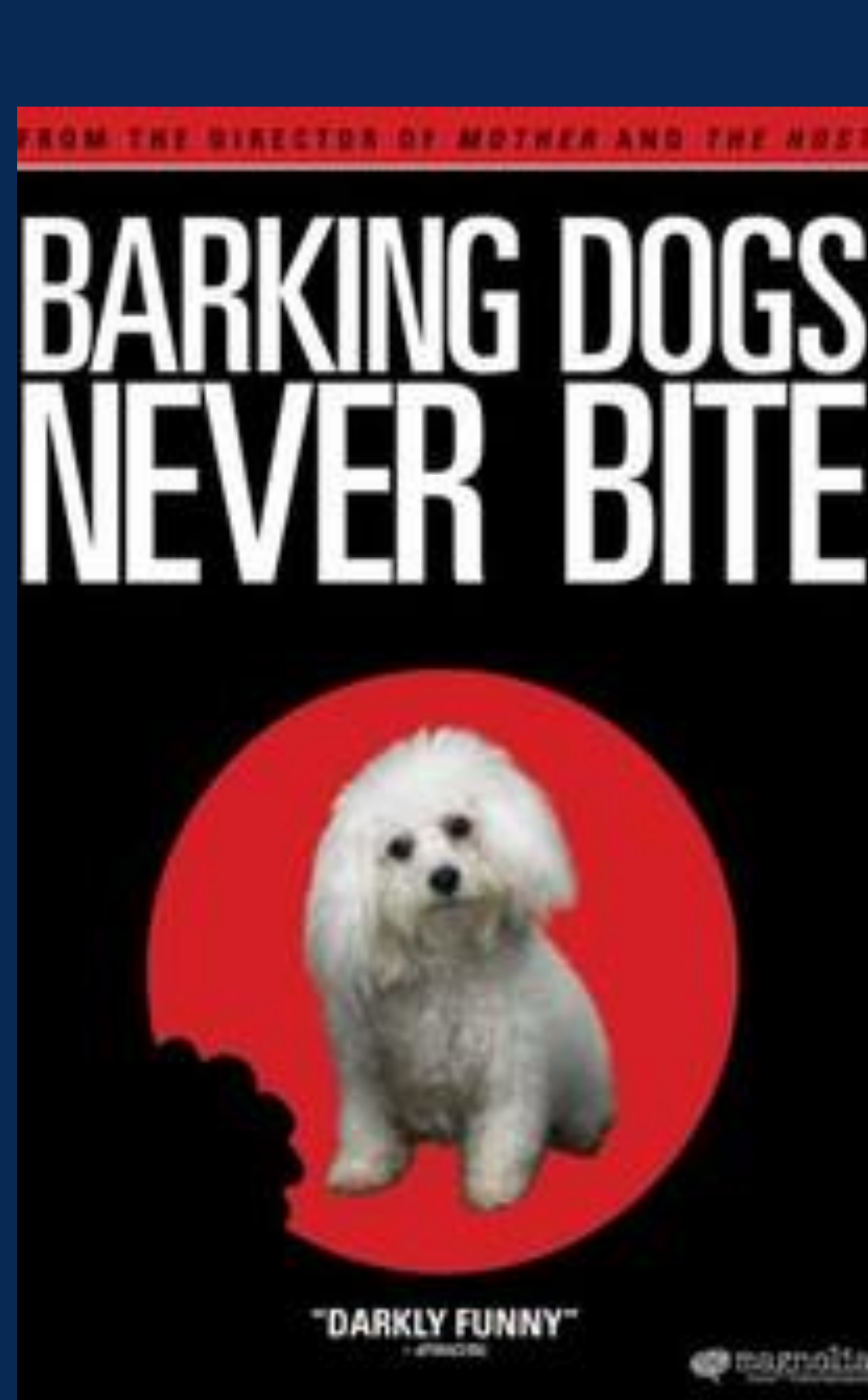


Map from World Health Organization (WHO) detailing countries that have been affected most by rabies cases (A) and deaths (B) in 2017.



ART

Cynophobia in Film: What Our Fear of Dogs on the Silver Screen Actually Represents



Sources for Posters:
Barking Dogs Never Bite: rottentomatoes.com
Cujo: amazon.com
White God: pinterest.com

Violence Against Dogs

What results is a cultural rejection of dogs, one which justifies violence extended towards them. This explains why we have movies about dog abuse in countries where dog overpopulation is an issue, like Hungary (*White God*).

Another example of such a film is *Barking Dogs Never Bite*, a South Korean comedy revolving around a man going around his apartment and killing the dogs that live there because their barking annoys him.

Disease

Even in the US, dogs are depicted as carriers of disease – it's a common horror movie trope to have a dog turn violent after contracting rabies (*Cujo*). However, it is highly likely that rabies in film can also be representative of other diseases such as HIV, the flu, and even most recently the coronavirus when considering disease timelines and corresponding dog-horror-film release dates.

Examples...

- US influenza epidemic in 1968 followed by *I Drink Your Blood* (1970)
- US AIDS epidemic of the 80s followed by *Cujo* (1983)
- Current coronavirus pandemic followed by the upcoming US release of the Spanish film *Prey*.

Conclusion

Ultimately, looking at the context behind when and where a film is made can reveal a lot about the metaphorical and implied meanings behind the directors' work. All aforementioned films are, either directly or indirectly, reflections of the state of disease across our world and how we as humans respond to that in relation to man's beloved best friend.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES USED

- CDC
- Harvard Health
- Healthline

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