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Christopher Stryker Dickens
Maureen Mooney Brooke Storm
Christopher Cousins Jon-Jon
Millie Prezioso Queenie
Jason Brill Smiler
Kathy Rossetter Sandy Hand
J. R. Horne Coach Heaton
Daniel Beer Quarterback
Victoria Andahazy Mink
Amy Beth Erenrich Little Brooke
Webster Whinery Teen Boy
Karen Russell Teen Girl
Cilk Cozart Wide Receiver

CREW

Directed by **Douglas Grossman**
Produced by **Douglas Grossman** and **David Steinman**
Written by **Leo Evans** and **Douglas Grossman**
Director of Photography **Steven Fierberg**
Edited by **Claire Simpson-Crozier** and **Greg Sheldon**
Score Composed and Produced by **Rich Macar**
and **Christopher Hyams-Hart**



STUNTMAN TO THE SLASHERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH STUNT COORDINATOR/ACTOR WEBSTER WHINERY

by Michael Gingold

It's the inciting incident set two decades before the main action, of the type all 1980s slasher movies needed. A teen couple are getting it on in a shack in the woods – or more accurately, the guy is forcing himself on the girl – and before they leave, they abuse a doll belonging to little Brooke. The child doesn't take kindly to this, and as the couple begin to speed off on a motorcycle, she throws mud from the surrounding swamp in their faces. The unintended result: the two youths fly off the bike and are impaled on the sharp poles of a broken metal fence as Brooke looks on in horror. Eighteen years later, now a high school teacher, the still-disturbed Brooke will mete out horrible vengeance when a gang of her miscreant students invade her home...

The "Teen Boy" in this sequence is actually *Hell High's* stunt coordinator, Webster Whinery, then coming to the close of the first stage in a long and prestigious career. Not long after completing his work on the movie then titled *What Do You Want to Do Tonight?* in April 1985, he left behind the low-budget horror and thriller films in which he got his start and moved from New York to California to specialize in studio fare. He would go on to coordinate stunts for directors such as Oliver Stone (*The Doors*, *JFK* [both 1991]), Paul Thomas Anderson (*Magnolia* [1999]), and Steven Spielberg (*Catch Me If You Can* [2002]), as well as performing them in dozens of other big-ticket features, among them the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise. But it all began in the world of psycho chillers: Steve Miner's *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981), Jack Sholder's *Alone in the Dark* (1982), Robert Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), and Michael Winner's *Scream for Help* (1984),



plus Roberta Findlay's possession flick *The Oracle* (1985). *Hell High*, directed by Douglas Grossman, was the last of these to see release, not making it to theaters until 1989.

Hell High was one of a handful of movies in which Whinery took an acting role; his partner in that opening scene was Karen Russell, a then-fledgling starlet who went on to appear in several David DeCoteau films. "Because it was a very low-budget film, I was trying to figure out the least expensive and safest way to do this motorcycle gag without stunt doubles," Whinery recalls. "What I did was, I took an old motorcycle that I found in a junkyard, locked the rear wheel and pumped that tire up so it was nice and solid. I put the back wheel on an air ram that I had built; back in those days, you sometimes constructed your own equipment. Then I took the front wheel and mounted it on a stand, like a bicycle stand with the upside-down U, so that the wheel would spin but remained stationary. I had a button to set off the air ram, and I sat on the motorcycle with the actress – I'm pretty sure Karen actually did it – and we had a rubber fence to fly over and a crash mat out

of frame. So you see us come down the road, I crash into the log, there's a cut and then for the next shot, I fired the air ram, which had about 1,000 pounds on it, and the bike flipped up on that front pivot point and the rear end tossed us onto the crash mat. Then there was another cut, and we did some makeup effects with the two of us impaled on the fence posts."

Sounds like a fairly straightforward gag – and Whinery reveals he had a little more trouble with the scene preceding it, in which his character gets rough with his girlfriend. "I was supposed to be like, 'Come on, baby, you know you want it,' and rip her top off and so forth. Karen and I had never met before we went in to talk with the director about that scene. He said, 'Show me what you think you want to do; I'll tell you what I want and we'll fine-tune it.' Well, it was a little awkward, because I'd been in the business about five or six years, and I never was about acting much, though I could act a little bit if you gave me a line. But when I had to do this scene, it was so unnatural that I really had to pull myself out of my real life to become this character. Karen was a champ and very professional, but it was tough being in this cabin, ripping this girl's top off, saying this dialogue and trying to make it impactful. I think we ended up doing a pretty good job with it."

Another attempted assault leads to a key *Hell High* stunt, as Brooke pulls away from her attackers and jumps through a window to her apparent death. For shattering moments like this, Whinery says, "Back then, we were using candy glass most of the time. You had to be careful with candy glass because it broke so easily, but we would just remove the real window and





put it in, put some putty around it, and then we'd go for it. Candy glass could cut you a little bit; I had my lip cut by it when I went through a window doubling Jason Bateman in *Teen Wolf Too* (1987). When the stunt double went through the window in *Hell High*, we shot it from the inside and the outside with low cameras, and I set up a box catcher for her to land on. What you do is, you set these boxes up in squares, then you put flats on the first level and a foam pad on top. If I remember correctly, it was only about a 15-foot drop onto that, so I think I had about four or five feet of boxes there."

Whinery first got into the stunt scene essentially on a whim. He was living in New York City, trying to figure out what to do with his life, when he chanced upon a TV broadcast of a stunt competition and decided to give that field a try. "This was around the time of *Hooper*," he says of the 1978 Burt Reynolds vehicle. "All my friends said, 'Ah, there's no way you're going to get into the movies and do this.' Well, a year later, I got into a movie."

"I ran into a mechanic who was working on a 396 Chevelle for *The Exterminator* (1980), with Christopher George, Samantha Eggar, and Robert Ginty," he continues. "This guy sold himself as the coordinator, but he really wasn't; he was just the mechanic working on this car, and I went out and practiced with it because I was going to do a lot of the driving action. But he didn't have the experience to handle the stunts, so Cliff Cudney got involved and took

over the show, and they got rid of this other guy. There was a martial artist named Rick, I can't remember his last name, and when we went to meet with Cliff, I was kind of upset because I was supposed to meet the other fella there, but he'd been fired and now they had a new coordinator, and I thought, here was my big break and now I wasn't going to get it. Well, Cliff said, 'You know what? I can't hire both of you, so I want you guys to put together a fight scene for me, and whoever I think has the best energy and more enthusiasm will get the job.' We did a great fight, and Rick was a great person, but for whatever reason, Cliff saw something in me, so I got the job. I played this character named Sammy; it was my very first real movie, and I was as green as green could be, but I drove the car, I did a bunch of fights and stunts, and it was my biggest movie ever acting-wise."

Cudney became Whinery's mentor, and next brought him onto *Friday the 13th Part 2* – which saw another, more notorious replacement occur behind the scenes. When Warrington Gillette, originally cast as Jason Voorhees, proved not up to



the task of performing the required physical action, Steve Daskewisz, aka Steve Dash, was called in to replace him. "I remember Cliff not being too impressed with [Gillette], and he went to the director and said, 'Hey, this guy just doesn't feel comfortable' – and all this was very basic action. So Steve Dash came in and knocked it out of the park. He did a terrific job of playing Jason; he created body movements that made the character much creepier."

Whinery helped Cudney rig *Friday the 13th Part 2*'s most memorable stunt, when Mark (Tom McBride) is whacked in the face with a machete, and he rolls backwards down a long outdoor stairway in his wheelchair. The team attached a rotor to the chair with a cable that ran to the top of the stairs and kept the chair from toppling over as McBride's double Tony Farentino (brother of *Dead & Buried* [1981] star James Farentino) rode it down. Whinery himself stood in – and hung in – for Russell Todd when his character Scott steps into a noose trap and ends up dangling from a tree before Jason cuts his throat.

"Normally when you do that kind of stunt," Whinery notes, "you just have a crane and run a wire to it, and the wire goes through some rope and the rope is around your foot, and you use a piston and it pulls you into the air. Well, we did it practically: Cliff found a tree that was about six to eight inches at the bottom and went up to about two inches. We bent the tree over, he put a metal clamp on it with a quick release, and we ran a cable to that, and then the rope ran down and was lying in a circle. So when I stepped into it, someone pulled the quick release, and it went perfect, even on the first test. It wasn't a bunch of cuts; you saw this tree going up, pulling me into the air, and it looked very real."

Whinery went airborne again for *Alone in the Dark*, in which homicidal asylum inmates played by Jack Palance, Martin Landau and Erland van Lidth escape captivity and go on a murder spree. One of their victims is an innocent bicycle-riding mailman who gets slammed by a van driven by Palance's coldly evil Frank Hawkes. "This bicycle guy didn't look like me at all," Whinery laughs. "I was about six inches taller than him, but on a bicycle you can't tell! Cliff developed



this gag where we took the doors off the back of the van, and then we took a 4x8 sheet of plywood and placed it at an angle in the back, and we used an air ram. Now, this was a tough stunt for me, because here was a van moving at five or ten miles an hour backwards, and I was balancing myself on the air ram with my back against this board. We did a shot of the actor riding the bicycle behind the van, and then for the next shot, we did a 3/4 angle as the van went past the camera, so we couldn't see the doors weren't there. And as the van was supposed to hit the bicycle, I fired the air ram just as Cliff hit the brakes. We had to get that timing exact so I'd go flying out and it looked like the guy got hit by the van, and it wasn't easy."

From there, Whinery went off to *Sleepaway Camp*, assisting Cudney on the opening boat accident and assorted smaller action (he would reunite with Hiltzik two decades later for 2008's *Return to Sleepaway Camp* – a commitment that led him to decline an offer to rejoin Spielberg on *The Terminal* [2004]!). He also



took part in the Westchester County, New York-lensed portions of the British production *Scream for Help*, doing what are known as “ND” (nondescript) stunts – essentially the stuntperson’s equivalent of extra work. He has few specific recollections about his contributions to that film, though he remembers director Winner as being something of a screamer himself.

“Michael Winner was a winner, all right; he was a cranky old director, really full of himself. His reputation preceded him in the business; he was a good director, but he was a prima donna and he’d raise his voice to a holler sometimes. There was an incident on the set involving the stunts; I don’t remember whether it had to do with Cliff or the foreign stunt coordinator, but there was an altercation and he wasn’t happy about it. I think it was actually something pretty stupid, that wasn’t much of a problem.” Conversely, Whinery says of *The Oracle*, “I’m afraid I remember nothing about that movie, but I do remember Roberta Findlay. She was very interesting, very nice, very professional, knew what she wanted.”



In the midst of all these low-budget independent gigs, Whinery also took part in a more expensive horror project: Tony Scott’s *The Hunger* (1983). Like *Scream for Help*, this shoot divided its time between the UK and New York, with Whinery doubling David Bowie in bits of the Manhattan-lensed material. “I did some fights and stuff for him, and a scene where David is walking across the street and a taxicab almost hits him. The first time I met David, we were doing a scene in Central Park. David had this long black jacket on that he wore clear through the movie, and it was such a surreal moment, because he was a huge, famous singer at the time and didn’t do a lot of movies. I remember we were in the park around 59th or 60th Street, in a walkway under a bridge, and he came up to me and I introduced myself, and David’s energy was like Zen energy. I don’t know how to describe it other than it was like, if you jump out of an airplane, which I’ve done many times for movies, you hear nothing. Well, that’s what it was like when I met David; it was only him and me and there was nothing around us, no sounds, no nothing. It was almost like meeting God, in a way. We started chatting, and it was the coolest thing ever.”

Looking back, past a career that has seen him double the likes of Nicolas Cage and Mickey Rourke multiple times, Whinery still appreciates the opportunities the smaller movies gave him. “When I was doing the independent films,” he says, “I was much more involved in the creative process, even as far as the script and stuff, because these were younger directors, and we all were learning. Whereas with a studio film, sometimes you’ll get a director who wants you involved in helping develop the storyline with the action, and sometimes you don’t; they just tell you, ‘OK, this is the action, this is what I want from you.’ I had more control on the smaller films as far as input, because they needed that, you know? It was almost like being an assistant to the director at times.”

Michael Gingold has been with Fangoria magazine since 1988, and the Fangoria.com website since 2000, as a writer and editor. He also contributes to Rue Morgue magazine and its website and Delirium magazine, and has written for Birth.Movies.Death, Scream magazine, and Time Out New York, among others. He is the author of the Ad Nauseam and Ad Astra books (1984 Publishing) and The Frightfest Guide to Monster Movies (FAB Press), and has directed numerous Blu-ray documentaries and featurettes, including the award-winning Twisted Tale: The Unmaking of “Spookies” (Vinegar Syndrome). Back in his high-school days, one of his best friends auditioned for Hell High, when it was called What Do You Want to Do Tonight?

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Hell High is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo audio.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution at Company 3, Los Angeles. The film was graded and restored at R3Store Studios in London. The audio conform was completed at AGFA.

The original materials were made available for this restoration by director Douglas Grossman.

Restoration supervised by **James White / Arrow Films**
R3Store Studios: **Dan Crussell, Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin,**
Nathan Leaman-Hill, Rich Watson
Company 3: **David Morales, Heidi Tebo**
AGFA: **Sebastian del Castillo, Ivan Peycheff**

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producer **Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**
QC **Aidan Doyle**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artwork by **Ralf Krause**
Design by **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

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