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CAST

David Naughton David Kessler
Griffin Dunne Jack Goodman
Jenny Agutter Nurse Alex Price
John Woodvine Dr JS Hirsch
Brian Glover Chess Player
Lila Kaye Pub Landlady
Frank Oz Mr Collins
David Schofield Darts Player
Brian Glover Chess Player
Rik Mayall Second Chess Player
Don McKillop Inspector Villiers
Paul Kember Sergeant McManus
Anne-Marie Davies Nurse Susan Gallagher
Michael Carter Gerald Bringsley
Frank Singuineau Ted
Sydney Bromley Alf
Albert Moses Hospital Porter
Elizabeth Bradley Woman at Zoo
Alan Ford Taxi Driver
Christine Hargreaves Ticket Lady
John Landis (uncredited) Man Smashed into Window
Vic Armstrong Bus Driver in Piccadilly Circus

"See You Next Wednesday"

Linzi Drew Brenda Bristols
Lucienne Morgan Lance Boyle
Gypsy Dave Cooper Chris Bailey
Susan Spencer Georgia Bailey

CREW

Written and Directed by **John Landis**
Produced by **George Folsey Jr**
Executive Producers **Peter Guber** and **Jon Peters**
Editing by **Malcolm Campbell**
Original Music by **Elmer Bernstein**
Special Make-up Effects Designed and created by **Rick Baker**
Art Director **Leslie Dilley**
Director of Photography **Robert Paynter** bsc
Production Manager **Joyce Herlihy**
Costumes Designed by **Deborah Nadoolman**
First Assistant Director **David Tringham**
Casting **Debbie McWilliams**



SICK AS A DOG

BODY HORROR IN AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

by Craig Ian Mann

The year 1981 witnessed the birth of the “new werewolf”. All teeth and snout, this modern iteration of a very old monster was huge, monstrous and distinctly lupine. And it was, importantly, strikingly different from the werewolves that had preceded it. From the release of the first werewolf film in 1913 – Universal’s *The Werewolf*, which was sadly lost to a fire in 1924 – this was a dreadful creature that had previously been portrayed either by real wolves (and, occasionally, dogs) or actors sporting copious amounts of yak hair. Archetypal wolf-men dominated the werewolf film for nearly 50 years, following the example set by Jack Pierce’s seminal make-up work for *Werewolf of London* (1935) and *The Wolf Man* (1941). These hirsute horrors appeared in the vast majority of films made over the next few decades, including *The Undying Monster* (1942), *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961), *Werewolves on Wheels* (1971), *Legend of the Werewolf* (1975) and the myriad entries in Paul Naschy’s Waldemar Daninsky saga.

This is not to say that the more traditional werewolf disappeared completely. On the contrary, it survived well into the 1980s, notably in Larry Cohen’s *Full Moon High* (1981), *Teen Wolf* (1985) and its sequel *Teen Wolf Too* (1987) – and, of course, Rick Baker would later pay loving tribute to Jack Pierce’s conception of the monster in his work for *Wolf* (1994) and *The Wolfman* (2010), Universal’s ill-fated remake of its most famous werewolf film. But, for the most part, the humble wolf-man was replaced in the 1980s by a far more ferocious beast: a snarling, drooling terror ushered in by Joe Dante’s *The Howling* (1981) and John Landis’ *An American Werewolf in London* (1981).

These are two films that have since come to be remembered as perhaps the finest in the history of werewolf cinema. In fact, they effectively revived the werewolf movie, a sub-genre of horror that had come to be considered somewhat anachronistic and outdated by the dawn of the 1980s – firmly rooted in the genre traditions of a bygone era and mostly dormant in America since the release of *The Werewolf of Washington* and *The Boy Who Cried Werewolf* in 1973. The box-office success and critical acclaim achieved by *The Howling* and *An American*



Werewolf in London is largely attributable to their invention of this new, truly monstrous lupine creature – and their specific emphasis on the bone-crunching horrors of a werewolf's physical transformation.

Of course, werewolf movies have always had a preoccupation with the moment of metamorphosis – Larry Talbot's many transformations in *The Wolf Man*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945) are proof enough of that – but these scenes had previously been relatively short, achieved with crossfade editing and the gradual application of make-up. *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* displayed an extreme and unprecedented preoccupation with long, painful and visceral ordeals that occurred in real time. Such graphic transformation scenes have become a staple – even an expectation – of every werewolf film released since 1981; these films not only revived the werewolf as a viable horror monster but firmly cemented the convention that those afflicted with werewolfism should be made to suffer.

In many ways, the new werewolf was simply in step with broader shifts in the horror genre, and was brought to life by pioneering developments in filmmaking technology. Wolf-men couldn't possibly survive as the landscape of horror changed dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was, after all, an era dominated by special-effects trailblazers like Dick Smith, Rick Baker, Rob Bottin, Chris Walas, Tom Savini and Stan Winston, all of whom found new and inventive ways to shock and disgust by employing prosthetic make-up, animatronics and puppetry. By the early 1980s, a large number of horror films were specifically constructed around their special-effects sequences. The popularity of *Fangoria* throughout the rest of the decade – following the publication of its first issue in 1979 – is evidence enough that grotesquery quickly became a central part of the genre's appeal.

A fascination with advanced practical effects certainly played its part, then, in creating the new werewolf. However, its birth is attributable to cultural and social factors as well as industrial ones. Breakthroughs in special-effects technology occurred in tandem with the rise of "body horror", a sub-genre concerned with humankind's fear of its own fragile physical form. *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* were released in the same year as *The Evil Dead* and David Cronenberg's *Scanners*, both of which also place a specific emphasis on the destruction of the body as a source for horror. And, of course, this theme would continue throughout the 1980s in the likes of *The Thing* (1982), *The Beast Within* (1982), *From Beyond* (1986) and *Society* (1989), not to mention Cronenberg's most celebrated visions of the body in revolt: *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986).

These are films in which bodily insurrection – through disease, mutation, transformation or invasion by a foreign body – is explicitly shown in all its sanguinary glory in extended sequences that are intended to provoke revulsion as much as fear. The modern werewolf transformation scene is an obvious example; it invites us to watch human flesh shift and mutate in unflinching detail. In its preoccupation with these kinds of images, the first wave of body horror is clearly in touch with developments in social and political life in the late 1970s and 1980s – this was an era utterly obsessed with bodies and their potential to turn against us.

As the 1980s dawned, an acute stigma developed around aging and disease in Western culture. A meteoric rise in the health and beauty industries and the birth of gym culture had turned the pursuit of youth, virility and physical perfection into a cultural obsession. Meanwhile, the American government was working tirelessly to raise awareness of the connections between an unhealthy lifestyle and debilitating disease; the Surgeon General's Office, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and the National Cancer Institute worked tirelessly in the early 1980s to publicize the connections between diet, heart disease and cancer. By the end of the decade, dieting had become a multi-billion dollar industry.

A fear of the human body was compounded by the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980: a Republican and staunch conservative, he was anti-abortion and sought to stigmatize any sexual activity that occurred outside the sanctity of marriage. His regressive rhetoric was aided by a growing moral panic focused on sexually transmitted disease; a widespread fear of infection was such that *Time* dedicated its front page to a fearmongering story about herpes – which it described as "the new scarlet letter" – in 1982.

Meanwhile, mental illness was actually being destigmatized from the late 1970s onwards, as psychological conditions were being named, categorized and treated. Therapy became widely available, and while those afflicted with physical conditions came to be blamed for their own fortunes (heart disease, cancer and later AIDS were all figured as diseases brought on by lifestyle choices), Western society's understanding of – and even fascination with – human psychology was growing. After all, it was in the early 1980s that a craze developed for tell-all books detailing personal battles with mental illness, particularly drug and alcohol dependency.

It is this deeply conflicted cultural context that produced the first wave of body horror, and into which *An American Werewolf in London* was released. However, its approach to body horror is, in many ways, more nuanced than the majority of its contemporaries. While it certainly displays a concern with the human vessel in revolt – its famous transformation scene being a veritable feast of bodily contortion, snapping bones and stretching flesh, all realized under fluorescent



lighting – it also displays the contradictions in a society that was simultaneously terrified by physical disease and working towards a meaningful understanding of mental health. It does so through a werewolf who attempts to rationalize his curse – which threatens to twist his body into a new, monstrous form – as a manifestation of psychosis.

An American Werewolf in London opens as two American college students, David Kessler (David Naughton) and Jack Goodman (Griffin Dunne), arrive in Yorkshire during a backpacking holiday around Europe. There, they are attacked by a werewolf on the moors after they are made to feel grossly unwelcome by the proprietors and patrons of an isolated rural pub named “The Slaughtered Lamb”. Jack is gruesomely mauled to death, while David is bitten and gravely injured before the locals come to rescue them, shooting the monstrous wolf dead. Three weeks later, David wakes up in a London hospital, where he meets Nurse Alex Price (Jenny Agutter) – with whom he begins to fall in love – and Dr Hirsch (John Woodvine), who will later come to suspect that something is seriously wrong with David. Shortly after being discharged from hospital, David experiences his first transformation.

From the moment David wakes up in a hospital bed following his traumatic experience on the moors, his werewolfism is painted as a psychological affliction as much – if not more than – a physical one. He first experiences fever dreams, in which he is running in the woods, mauling deer and turning into a fanged monster; his most violent dream sees him attacked by demons dressed in Nazi uniforms while watching an episode of *The Muppet Show* (1978–1981) with his family. When he reports the contents of these dreams to Dr Hirsch, the doctor swiftly develops some concern over David’s mental state: “Please, remain sane. At least until you’re no longer our responsibility.”

Of course, these are ostensibly only dreams. More disturbing to David are the waking episodes in which he is visited by the decaying ghost of his best friend, Jack. During his spectral visits, Jack urges David to commit suicide, explaining that the werewolf’s victims will wander the Earth as revenants until he is destroyed. Kessler’s response to his first encounter with the undead is, perhaps not surprisingly, to question his own sanity. Echoing Dr Hirsch’s reaction to his awful nightmares, he utters: “I’m going completely crazy.”

Before he experiences his first physical transformation into a monster, then, the early symptoms of David’s werewolfism have far more in common with the signs of mental rather than physical illness. Tellingly, his nightmares suggest psychological trauma rather than a physical malady, and his encounters with Jack hint at severe psychosis rather than disease. And because his experiences resemble hallucinatory or psychotic episodes, David begins to become convinced

that he has lost his grip on reality. He doesn’t want to be insane, but he finds the idea more plausible than – and, importantly, preferable to – the suggestion that he is truly able to see ghosts, or that he will actually transform into a werewolf on the night of the next full moon, or that he has contracted a dangerous and potentially fatal disease.

And *An American Werewolf in London* certainly depicts werewolfism as a disease. It is a curse passed from person to person through a bite. This was not Landis’ innovation; the idea that being bitten by a werewolf will cause you to become one was firmly established in both *Werewolf of London* and *The Wolf Man*. However, this convention took on a new relevance in the 1980s amidst that widespread panic surrounding infection and disease. Landis certainly came to view it through the lens of body horror; in a 2013 interview with Adam Savage, he discusses the notion of werewolfism as a contagion in *The Wolf Man*, and comments that it is “not a magic trick, but a bite. So, it’s like AIDS... it’s a disease that’s not your fault. When you get cancer, it’s not because you’re a bad guy. You get cancer, you get a disease.”

David’s primary instinct is that he is losing his mind, something that is clearly a better prognosis in his eyes than having contracted the malady that Landis describes. It is interesting that Landis compares werewolfism to AIDS and cancer specifically; while the AIDS crisis was yet to begin when *An American Werewolf in London* was released, it would come to be the source of a great deal of paranoia only a few years later and was popularly associated with inevitable death. Cancer was also perceived – and, to a lesser extent, is still seen today – as invariably fatal. And, of course, it is a mutation of human cells that often manifests as a malignant tumor disease.

Like cancer, David’s werewolfism threatens to cause his body to change against his will. The grotesque transformation sequence at the center of the film is a potent allegory for the potential of such diseases to mutate the human form. Once he has been bitten, David has two choices: he can commit suicide or allow himself to experience a painful and drawn out metamorphosis that will render him a grotesque monster. Clearly, both choices are unpleasant and, further to align the film’s werewolfism with terminal illness, either choice is likely to prove fatal. In line with the widespread scaremongering surrounding serious physical illness and with society’s growing understanding of mental health in the 1980s, David finds the suggestion that he is experiencing psychotic symptoms – symptoms that could potentially be abated, treated and controlled – comforting in comparison to the idea that he has been infected with a volatile supernatural affliction.





Landis originally penned the screenplay for *An American Werewolf in London* in 1969, while working on *Kelly's Heroes* (1970) in Yugoslavia. He has often told the tale of how he witnessed the traditional gypsy burial of a criminal, who was interred in a vertical grave and wrapped in canvas, rosaries and garlic to avoid his return as a member of the undead. As an educated American witnessing the sacred ritual of a traditional European people, Landis found their superstition baffling. As he recounts in an interview with Jason Lapeyre for *Rue Morgue*, his intention was to reflect his feelings towards the experience: "When you know the supernatural does not exist, how do you deal with it when it's standing in front of you?" However, Landis was only able to find funding for his werewolf project following his commercial success with *Animal House* (1978).

Had Landis been able to make *An American Werewolf in London* earlier, it might have offered a realistic, modern depiction of a traditionally gothic monster before George A. Romero's *Martin* (1977) performed a similar service for the vampire. However, the film would not have had such strong cultural resonance. It is unlikely – and in the case of the AIDS virus, impossible – that the connection between werewolfism and disease occurred to Landis in 1969. *An American Werewolf in London*'s eventual release, then, came at the perfect time to transform Landis' story about logical men confronting the absurdity of the supernatural into a meditation on cultural perceptions of physical and psychological illness. David is given the choice to believe he is either psychotic or a werewolf. He would rather assume he is psychotic and – considering the violent, repulsive and agonizing nature of his transformations – it is difficult to disagree.

Craig Ian Mann is a film scholar and writer with a particular interest in the politics of popular genre cinema, including horror, science fiction, action and the Western. His first monograph, Phases of the Moon: A Cultural History of the Werewolf Film, is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press. He teaches film and television studies at Sheffield Hallam University, edits program notes for London's Science Fiction Theatre and co-organises the Fear 2000 conference series on contemporary horror cinema. He tweets @craigimann.



ONE FULL MOON TWO YOUNG STARS

by Simon Ward

“Because there is no such thing as men who become monstrous wolves when there is a full moon, I tried to explore how one would react when confronted with this as truth,” wrote John Landis in his book *Monsters in Movies*. “What do you do when the unreal is real?”

Landis was 19 when he wrote the screenplay for *An American Werewolf in London* and, in the best possible way, it shows.

It is written for young guys and girls. Barely out of the teens himself he wrote a film that 19-year-olds would want to see – a movie starring people who looked, behaved and spoke like they did. When it came time to finally make the film, Landis was 31 and able to bring to bear his years in the industry to give a youthful, lively story his sophisticated filmmaking savvy.

The famous rhyme by Curt Siodmak runs:

*Even a man who is pure in heart
And says his prayers by night
May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
And the autumn moon is bright.*

‘Pure in heart’ being the key phrase here. It is important that our male leads David and Jack have no fatal flaws or a curse that singles them out for punishment by lycanthropy. As opposed to Oliver Reed or Jack Nicholson, who seem destined for furry monobrows from the opening frame, David Kessler is a regular, decent, New York boy – the sort of guy you feel like you might actually know. He exists in a world of TVs and cold weather clothes, not the gothic trappings of the Universal and Hammer horrors Landis had grown up with – and audiences knew inside out.

The Universal horror cycle (post-1920s-1950s classic period) is recognized with having ended in 1979, with Frank Langella’s impressively coiffed *Dracula*. Audiences had changed, horror had changed (due partially to a preceding decade of slashers, Texas chainsaws, pig’s blood



proms and possessed girls), so arriving in 1981 (via Universal), *American Werewolf* very much made a new statement that was contrary to the high gothic melodrama and sexual metaphors of bygone years. Like sci-fi, horror has always been an effective mirror to society and contemporary concerns, and Landis' masterpiece is no different, with two characters who are perfectly at home in the 1980s. It is the deliberately cliché Slaughtered Lamb pub and its inhabitants that seem out of place in the modern world. From the first scene we are sympathizing with David and Jack. Crucially, they are also not dumb. Many of the victims or protagonists in even the best horror films are somewhat to blame or deserving of their fate: don't look into that egg on the strange planet or leave the castle once your host licks his lips at your bleeding finger. David and Jack are having a vacation in England in the 1980s. Yes, they are told to keep to the road and beware the moon but, come on... *really?* Normal people like them – and us – aren't meant to be victims. But after the horrors that the real world had suffered in the 1970s, it is now clear that the worst can happen to anyone.

The story might be fantastical and the gruesome supernatural events far from realistic, but it is played with realism. The characters of David and Jack and their exchanges, have an easy naturalism, due to a director who knows exactly how to subvert and update this age-old tale and to two actors completely in tune with their trusted filmmaker.

The opening exchanges between David Kessler (a wide-eyed and innocent David Naughton) and Jack Goodman (Griffin Dunne, ever-ready with a crooked smile or sideways glance) set the tone for what's to follow. Any sense of foreboding isn't achieved via spine-tingling music or jump scares, unlike the horror films of old – Landis lets us fill in the gaps: the movie has 'werewolf' in the title, so we know what we're in for. The foreboding, when it does come, undercuts itself with humor: the outrageous pub sign, the warnings from the locals. With all the horror elements present and correct and pretty much expected by the audience, Landis allows us to focus instead on his two hard luck heroes. Through a few brief remarks we know everything we need to know about who these backpackers are, why they're there, their shared history and their easy friendship. What do they talk about? The same thing any two best friends would: girls. They laugh, they tease and we, the audience, like them. That's all that is needed at this stage from a viewer: that you care about the people on screen. In order to bring this empathy and energy to life, Landis needed the right actors.

"Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper, too?" This was the question that households across America knew well, having featured in the all-singing, all-dancing Dr Pepper TV adverts in the late 1970s. David Naughton was the face and voice of the commercial and his cheery delivery of the jingle had made him instantly accepted throughout the nation. His association with

the brand was so strong that it would continue to be referenced throughout his career: from Landis declaring himself a devoted Dr Pepper drinker during David's first audition, to Naughton noticeably drinking one during a scene in his first feature film credit, *Midnight Madness*, in 1980.

Midnight Madness (also functioning as Michael J. Fox's first film role) is a Disney live-action movie in which competing groups of college students embark on an all-night game of challenges. Not a critical or commercial success, Disney distanced themselves from the film somewhat, not releasing it under their banner until the 2004 DVD. Despite not launching Naughton's career in film, *Midnight Madness* nonetheless served as an example of the type of handsome and wholesome role that fitted him so well.

For a brief period in 1979 he was also the lead in the disco-infused sitcom *Makin' It*, which aired for nine episodes before being cancelled. Heavily influenced by 1977's *Saturday Night Fever* (the first episode was called 'Stayin' Alive'), Naughton translated John Travolta's boyish good looks into Billy Manucci, a young man who works in an ice-cream parlor by day, biding his time until he can head to the local disco at night. Poorly reviewed, the show's legacy was the theme tune, sung by Naughton, which reached number 5 in the US Billboard charts.

So while Naughton was a recognizable face, he was not a major star. But, fortunately, John Landis did not want a major star but rather someone who would appeal to the viewers. "I liked him on screen. He was a likeable guy," was Landis' assessment and, after two informal conversations, Naughton had been cast and was meeting Rick Baker for make-up tests.

Griffin Dunne's casting in *American Werewolf* was similarly casual. After supporting roles in 1975's surprise box-office hit *The Other Side of the Mountain* and 1979's *Chilly Scenes of Winter*, Dunne took time out from waiting tables to attend an audition at St. Clement's church/theater in Hell's Kitchen. Instead of reading script pages or showing a tape of his work, Dunne and Landis just talked – "John... did most of the talking, which he has continued to do for most of our friendship," recalls Dunne.

For his part, this is how Landis remembers the casting process: "I didn't really feel it was necessary to have people audition for Jack and David. For me it was more about the person. If they were likeable then that would resonate on screen. I found Griffin to be very smart and very funny – and that's really all I was looking for."

Smart and funny is a good descriptor for Dunne, who would forge a career playing characters able to deliver a wisecrack despite the oddities occurring all around them.



The chemistry between Naughton and Dunne came naturally from the earliest days doing make-up tests with Rick Baker's team. When it was time to spend hours shooting in the cold nights on location, there was very much a sense that they were in it together – a bond that translates clearly on the screen.

"It turned out that we grew up in the same area and had a lot of mutual friends in New York," says Naughton. "By the time we got to Wales to start filming, we were already fast friends, and that helped tremendously in creating this close relationship these two guys had in the movie."

Landis has said that the relationship between David and Jack was inspired by his own friendship with a fellow by the name of Greg Guss, and while *American Werewolf* is not a 'comedy duo' movie in the same way that *The Blues Brothers* (1980), *Trading Places* (1983) or *Spies Like Us* (1985) are, the interplay between David and Jack is crucial. Jack knows David better than anyone and their affection for one another gives the film humor and warmth. In our real world, no one has been bitten by a werewolf or nursed back to health by Jenny Agutter, but everyone watching the film has had good and bad nights spent traipsing around with a best friend. It is relatable in a way few horror films are because it understands that while you can't relate to the horrific happenings you can relate to the people they're happening to.

"It was so scary because they were behaving like real people. I'd never seen this before, and it frightened me because it was how it would be," explains Reece Shearsmith. "The characters are so fully realized."

"People loved those two guys," is how Dunne sees it. "They're seduced by the chemistry of these two friends and are then shocked and terrified by what happens to them. It speaks to people; I mean most people are used to moors with mists and Lon Chaney who was a middle-aged man in a wolf suit. These were kids."

Despite their place in one of the most celebrated and iconic horror movies ever made, it is surprising that Naughton and Dunne didn't go on to star in more creature features, like so many horror film icons do. The movie enjoyed a very robust box office return but much of its fame and word-of-mouth was initially due to the make-up effects, rather than being an actor-led piece. It is not the sort of film that immediately transforms its actors into bankable stars. But Naughton and Dunne's subsequent careers show the actors have more in common with the film's other genre: comedy.



For the remainder of the 1980s, Naughton guested in several sitcoms and TV movies, as well as the would-be screwball comedy *Not for Publication* (1984), the Italian comedy *Private Affairs* (*Ti presento un'amica*, 1987) and the sex comedies *Hot Dog...The Movie* (1984) and *Separate Vacations* (1986). The 1990s would see him in a handful of genre offerings, such as *Overexposed* (1990) and *Wild Cactus* (1993), before returning to horror in 1993 with the direct-to-video *Amityville: A New Generation*. A second attempt at horror-comedy, *Ice Cream Man* (1995), is notable for being the only mainstream film by adult movie director Norman Apstein. It was a made for TV effort and despite featuring cult movie favorite Clint Howard it has only amassed a minor following in the years since.

2001's *Killer Buzz* stars Naughton as Dr Stephen North and features a premise that would not be out of place in the golden age of pulp B movies which so influenced John Landis as a youngster: a government conspiracy is uncovered where virus-carrying bees could potentially wipe out Earth's population.

Since the turn of the century, this old Dr Pepper frontman has zigzagged between film and TV, showing up like a pleasant surprise in long running staples such as *ER* (1994 – 2009), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005 – present), *American Horror Story* (2011 – present) and *Sharknado 5: Global Swarming* (2017).

It was only a matter of time, but Naughton did not return to werewolves until 25 years after *American Werewolf* with 2006's *Big Bad Wolf*. Whilst not as defining a movie as *American Werewolf*, Naughton once again starred with Clint Howard. However, a reunion with Griffin Dunne – with whom he worked so well previously – has never come to fruition.

Dunne would reteam with Landis for the 'Hospital' segment of the anthology movie *Amazon Women on the Moon*. For this 1987 comedy, Landis was one of five directors, including fellow comedy-horror specialist Joe Dante. As a parody of late-night pulp flicks, *Amazon Women on the Moon* is a mixed bag and Dunne features as an inept doctor who has no idea where the baby he just delivered has gone. The skit also features Michelle Pfeiffer as the increasingly frantic mother.

Like Naughton, comedies would follow for Dunne in the 1980s, as well as producing John Sayles' first Hollywood mainstream effort, 1983's *Baby It's You*. This film was dedicated to Griffin's younger sister, Dominique, who was murdered in 1982. An actress, she had earlier that year starred as Dana in *Poltergeist*.





Outside of his instantly recognizable and quotable role (“Have you ever talked to a corpse? It’s boring!”) in *American Werewolf*, the shining light in his filmography is Martin Scorsese’s *After Hours*. This too-often overlooked 1985 film features Dunne in the lead (he also acted as producer) and there is barely a frame over the 97-minute runtime that he is not in. Dunne plays the somewhat bored computer processor Paul Hackett who decides, on a whim, to head to SoHo for a potential date with Marcy Franklin (Rosanna Arquette). What follows is a night of mistaken identity, modern art, punks, beehived waitresses, foreboding ice cream vans, papier-mâché and Cheech and Chong.

Scorsese’s only pure comedy (albeit a black one), it is a masterpiece of escalation and oddness that veers into the absurd without ever crossing over into unreality. It is another take on Scorsese’s beloved New York, this time a pitch perfect look at the city at its seediest in the mid-1980s and a stealth satire of straight-laced city types ‘slumming it’ in the more colorful neighborhoods.

Griffin Dunne in *After Hours* is the very definition of sustained tension, both unraveling and bewildered as a normal guy struggling to make sense of the cards the universe is dealing him, as each one he turns over seems to be the joker. Although not a hit upon release, the film has been recognized as a hidden gem in the great director’s career and indeed won him the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival.

Dunne became known to a whole new audience two years later as the male lead opposite Madonna in James Foley’s *Who’s That Girl*. He once again perfectly embodies the nice guy who is out of his depth. This 1980s version of a screwball film was a bomb and is better remembered for Madonna’s accompanying soundtrack and title song, along with her massively successful tie-in world tour.

Thomas Griffin Dunne’s (full name) easy affability quickly enabled him to make the transition from quirky supporting player to a highly dependable character actor. In films and TV as varied as *Quiz Show* (1994) and *Frasier* (1993 – 2004) to *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* (2001 – 2011), Dunne continually brought his slightly wary uncertainty and deadpan sense of humor.

Having already directed seven movies (including 1998’s *Practical Magic*, the indie *Fierce People* in 2005, plus the Oscar-nominated short *Duke of Groove* in 1996) he next most notably blipped on the radars of cinephiles when he premiered his documentary on Joan Didion at the New York Film Festival in 2017: *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold*. The legendary essayist

and chronicler of Haight-Ashbury is Griffin’s aunt, having married his uncle – also a widely acclaimed author, John Gregory Dunne. Alongside evocative archival footage of the 1960s and 1970s East and West Coasts and interviews with Joan, John and their contemporaries, much of the film is structured around a conversation between Joan and Griffin. Griffin’s non-invasive approach – as opposed to a more story-hungry journalist – creates a very frank and open space that allows his subject to be as candid as in her most revealing writings. Shared memories and recollections over family photos form the most engaging parts of *The Center Will Not Hold*. In a moment that shows the actor may not be that far removed from his best roles, Griffin reminds Joan that when they first met, he as a child, his testicle flopped out of his bathing trunks and she chose not to acknowledge it. It is a ridiculous story, a clashing of reality with the absurd that Dunne treats with his customary self-effacement. It could easily be a scenario from one of his more indie comedies.

In brief anecdotes we also learn that such luminaries as Janis Joplin, Roman Polanski, Brian De Palma, Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese (later to be Dunne’s director on *After Hours*) would occasionally drop by Joan’s house in Malibu. These were the sorts of circles Griffin was moving in. But separate to the razzle-dazzle, what seems like a greater crossover between aunt and nephew is an interest in America and the people inhabiting it – the reality of the streets and all their good, bad, bizarre and surprising turns.

Joan reflects on how despite how much she has seen and been exposed to at key epochs in her life, she has been convinced of “the meaningless of experience”; a phrase that could equally apply to a wild, nonsensical night in SoHo, or how two harmless friends could be attacked by a werewolf for no other reason than being in the wrong place at the right hour. We can conclude that experience has no superiority over youth and *An American Werewolf in London*, written by a young John Landis and starring two fresh-faced actors, is all the better for it.

Note:

Unless otherwise specified, all quotes taken from the invaluable *Beware the Moon* by Paul Davis, Cult Screenings UK LTD and Dead Mouse Productions LTD, UK, 2017.

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AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON: CAN RICK BAKER AND JOHN LANDIS TOP THE HOWLING?

by Jordan R Fox

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For makeup artist Rick Baker, *An American Werewolf in London* was challenge enough. His major assignment from director John Landis – to create a believable, on-screen werewolf transformation – was no small task. But Baker also must have had to contend with a constant, nagging doubt: could he top *The Howling* [1981]? Rob Bottin's transformation make-up for that film got rave reviews when it hit the screens in April. Those effects were based on principles Bottin learned from his mentor, Baker. Now it was incumbent on the teacher to surpass his student. According to Baker, he's done it.

"Our shape-altering mechanisms are more sophisticated than Rob's," said Baker. "Remember, I didn't tell Rob everything. The concept is similar, but some of the materials and processes we used are different. Our werewolf transformation is a lot quicker and more complete. We don't have the usual kind of horror movie lighting. The effect is very clearly seen, because it happens in a brightly lit room with nothing obscured. That's much more critical and demanding of our work."

The differences between the effects of *An American Werewolf in London* and *The Howling* seem to be those of degree. For example, rather than Bottin's stiletto nail trick, Baker shows a hand deform and elongate in one shot, then sprout wolf claws that look quite functional in another. Beyond the "Change-O-Heads" in *The Howling*, the operative phrase for *An American Werewolf in London* is "Change-O-Everything": every body part of Baker's werewolf undergoes changes that are more detailed and polished than those in the earlier film. Details about the end result – a big wolf creature that walks on all fours – are being kept under a tight lid by Landis, so Baker is unable to discuss the creature. "John would kill me... But it's different than what you've seen before," said Baker. The question is, will it be different enough to startle audiences who have already seen *The Howling*?



Landis wrapped filming of *An American Werewolf in London* in April and began sneak previewing the finished \$10 million Polygram production at the end of June in preparation for a nationwide release by Universal Pictures on August 21. The film was shot at London's tiny Twickenham studio, which has only two stages. Newcomer David Naughton (the black-vested hooper in the Dr Pepper commercials) co-stars with Jenny Agutter (*Logan's Run* [1976]). Naughton plays a young American who, while traveling with a friend in Wales [sic], is attacked by a wolf. The friend is killed, and Naughton's character wakes up in the hospital to the tender ministrations of the nurse played by Agutter.

The script called for a fair amount of stunt work, and some of it had to be accomplished under unusual conditions. Agutter, a one-time British citizen, explained, "In England, the police will not help filming, and they will not close the street. They said, 'If you can clear the street in three minutes, fine. If not, we'll arrest you and take you off to jail, because you are obstructing traffic.' They were very impressed when we actually did a major crash in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and cleared it within three minutes." (Ironically, that crash, involving a double decker bus, was edited out of the picture.)

Supposedly, the film Landis envisioned in 1972 (while making *Schlock* with Baker and *American Werewolf* producer George Posley, Jr) differs little from the film he eventually got to make. What seems to have made the biggest difference over the last ten years, not counting the helpful smash success of Landis' *Animal House* [1978], are the great strides that have been made in make-up technology. And Rick Baker has been a major figure at the forefront of those innovations. Baker's work on *An American Werewolf in London* marked the debut of his new make-up effects company, EFX Inc., the nucleus of which formed to develop concepts later aborted for Steven Spielberg's *Night Skies* project. Baker's staff for *An American Werewolf in London* included Kevin Brennan, Steve Johnson and Shawn McEnroe, who were part of Rob Bottin's crew on *The Howling*. Bill Sturgeon and Doug Beswick worked on effects mechanisms, Tom Hester supplied conceptual artwork and Baker's wife and long-time assistant Elaine Baker served as the company's foam latex technician.

Baker said he feels that a full, no-cut werewolf transformation – even if feasible, and no matter how convincing – would be dramatically boring, and in that he is very much in agreement with *The Howling's* director Joe Dante. Baker's major transformation for *An American Werewolf in London* was among the last scenes filmed. Naughton's make-up for the latter stages of his metamorphosis took a marathon 10 hours to apply, close to a record for Baker. "The set would be all lit and ready by the time we were done," said Baker. "Then we'd pop off a couple of shots, and that was it for the day."

Baker tried to keep a good distance from any mention of the word puppet, but it's evident that a highly developed form of mechanized puppetry has become an essential technique for this kind of film. The one example Baker did concede is a rather gruesome appearance by Griffin Dunne, the film's first victim. "Watching the old zombie movies as a kid," recalled Baker. "I'd always wonder why they just used dark make-up around the eyes. These people are dead! I always wanted to animate some really dead people – walking skeletons almost." No gore make-up could do the job. A sophisticated puppet was constructed, based on a life-cast of Dunne, to get the effect of the actor's skull covered with bits of rotting, shriveled muscle and skin. Though Stan Winston developed a similar effect first for *Dead and Buried* [1981]. Baker is satisfied that the EFX creation is far superior. Dunne's rotting corpse, moving about and speaking lip-sync dialogue, is a recurring character that must withstand the scrutiny of much longer screen time. For reasons of time and money, cable and lever action mechanics, with some pneumatics also, were used for such effects, rather than the more elaborate Anatomation process Baker developed for *Night Skies*.

Baker really doesn't like doing gore make-ups, though in his career he has found them hard to avoid. What he is interested in is the creation of characters through make-up effects. With the industry slowed by the protracted writers' strike and the possibility of a directors' strike, Baker has made tentative plans to film a test reel showcasing his Anatomation process with "sword & sorcery" characters that clearly could not be achieved by actors in make-up. In Baker's Anatomation process, an electro-mechanical character is made to duplicate the movements of its offscreen operator. "What we can do with the process is pretty amazing," said Baker.

Fortune seems to have smiled upon Baker and his crew on *An American Werewolf in London*. There were no problems occasioned by the EFX shop in Hollywood having to supply the London-based Baker long distance; nothing that they built for the film broke down during production; and, despite the fact its negative cost is five times greater, all of the film's make-up effects were brought in for a cost not much larger than the effects budget of *The Howling*.





AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

ORIGINAL REVIEWS

Review by Philip Strick, *Films and Filming* n327, December 1981, pp. 36-37:

An American Werewolf in London opens with a dedication to Clint Eastwood's former stand-in Jim O'Rourke, with whom at the age of 21 John Landis made his first film, *Schlock* [1972] in response – so he has said – to a sense of outrage at seeing *Trog* [1970]. The dedication signals his return, after the extravagances of *Kentucky Fried Movie* [1977], *Animal House* [1978], and [The] *Blues Brothers* [1980], to the concept of the satirised horror movie, doubtless encouraged by the success of Dragoti's *Love at First Bite* [1979], and with lycanthropy taking the place of vampirism as one of those diseases seldom discussed in polite society. He brings to his subject the bludgeoning hit-and-run technique of the earlier films, achieving the clumsy and the alarming with all the generous impartiality and maniacal glee of another Mel Brooks. [...]

Where the screen vampire always seems to relish his special appetites, the werewolf (his human image dominated by recollections of the endearing features of Lon Chaney Jr) is by contrast a tragic and inelegant figure, terrified and repelled by the uncontrollable sickness within. And where the vampire's attack is ingratiatingly discreet, the werewolf's is destructive, a violent, bestial assault without dignity or humour. So the basic problem with *American Werewolf* is that while it can get plenty of comic mileage out of its ill-fated hero for as long as he remains a swearing, incredulous college boy, the subject turns sour whenever the creature goes on the prowl. Like any conventional monster movie, it can't avoid making the monster far more of an attraction than the expendable humans around it. Jenny Agutter's solution is to play the whole thing straight – and extremely well, too; her final desperate confrontation with the being she loves is so authentic, with more than a touch of the Lewtons about it, as to render the slapstick elements elsewhere almost shamefully vulgar by comparison.

The film's other imbalance, and at the same time its most remarkable asset, is the superb special-effects work by Rick Baker. The transformation scene in which, writhing in agony, the human body is twisted, stretched and distorted into the animal shape, has outstripped anything



previously attempted in horror movies. Fur bursts from the skin, flesh ripples and flows, limbs extend and change, and in a final amazing close-up the human features burst forward to form jaws and muzzle. It's a shatteringly effective pivot on which the film swings into shadows too dark for comedy to illuminate, and although there are any number of good ideas to follow – in particular, the encounter between David and his miscellaneous blood-encrusted victims, haunting him from the seats of a sex cinema – the light-hearted mood is lost. Thanks to Rick Baker, *American Werewolf* is often splendidly macabre to contemplate, with its abrupt ghouls, its decomposing dead, and its catalogue of appalling injuries. But they are like fragments from some other film, perhaps the production that Landis will make when, one day, he has worked out how they fit together.

Review by John Brosnan, *Starburst* n40, 1981, pp. 32-36:

This is a revolutionary movie. It pushes the art of the horror movie out into new areas. It pulls off the difficult trick of revitalising the genre while parodying at the same time. It is, as director John Landis promised it would be, both funny and scary. And, as an extra bonus, it is also a splendid satire on life in contemporary England as seen through the eyes of an American. All in all it's a damn good movie but one with, as far as I'm concerned, a single serious flaw. But we'll get to that later. [...]

These days the idea of someone turning into a werewolf has become something of a joke. It's the stuff of old Universal movies – the ones everyone laughs at on TV as poor old Lon Chaney Jr gets progressively hairier. But what Landis does in his movie is say – right, we all know it's a joke but just imagine what would happen if you were forced to accept it as being true even though you didn't want to. The central character in *American Werewolf* knows he's in an absurd situation straight out of a Lon Chaney film, but that doesn't help him. Or the audience.

What Landis does is to take the imagery of the EC horror comics and thrust it straight into your face. Your first reaction is to laugh at it, and you do, but when it persists in staying there you have to accept it for what it is, as does the character in the movie. The scenes involving the dead friend best illustrate this technique. The fact that Jack looks like something out of *Night of the Living Dead* [1968] is one thing but what gives these scenes their unique resonance is the calm, matter-of-fact way he talks and behaves. He is simply there, thus the horror is generated on a different level than that in *Night of the Living Dead*. A living corpse that sits around making bad Jokes doing banal things like playing with Mickey Mouse toys or just scratching its nose (what's left of it) as this one does is much more horrifying than one that lurches around snarling at you.

Landis's method of introducing his horror into the real, everyday world is similar to that used by Bunuel in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* [1972] where at any moment the security blanket of 'safe reality' is likely to be pulled away from under the audience's feet. Landis even uses the dream-within-a-dream structure at one point in the movie, in much the same way that Bunuel did in *Discreet Charm*... These sequences not only build up on one of the biggest shock moments in *American Werewolf* but ensure from then on that the audience won't be able to distinguish nightmare from reality.

These remarkable sequences begin with a typical middle-class American family watching *The Muppets* on TV. Suddenly their cosy home is invaded by creatures wearing Nazi costumes but with faces made out of very old yoghurt who immediately start slaughtering them all with guns and knives. The monsters are, of course, absurd but at the same time frightening because of their obvious physical reality. This plays on the old childhood fear about imaginary monsters suddenly taking on physical form – an ever-present possibility when you're a child and don't have an adult's ability to separate the real from the unreal (or at least what they hope is real and unreal...).

Some of the impact of the movie has, admittedly, been undermined by the prior release of *The Howling* [1981] which uses similar transformation techniques. But even though I like *The Howling* a lot I think Landis's film is superior. *The Howling* is a much less ambitious film and while it's very funny its humour springs mainly from in-jokes for horror fans whereas the humour in *American Werewolf* works on different levels. Also the transformation scene in *The Howling* was its one big set-piece while the one in *Werewolf* doesn't have the same central importance to the movie even though it's just as technically accomplished. However I will admit I find the full-grown werewolves in *The Howling* more impressive than the one in *Werewolf*. In the long-shots the latter simply resembles a large dog (or bear), and I wasn't too impressed by the way it moved either. (I presumed it was an actor on all-fours but have since been told it was a mechanically operated dummy.) The two-legged creatures in *The Howling* were much more sinister and supernatural in appearance – once you show a monster on all-fours it becomes nothing but an ordinary animal, no matter how potentially dangerous it may be. Even so, I don't think this flaw seriously damages the movie as Landis wisely keeps the shots of it as brief as possible, making it seem more of an evil presence rather than a physical creature.

One of Landis's biggest achievement is the way he uses the English settings, particularly the London ones. Most American filmmakers who work in England just exploit the scenery and locales as quaint backdrops for the action but Landis obviously knows the place well. One also gets the feeling he's not exactly wild about life here. During the course of *Werewolf* he



accurately hits a whole series of targets, like the chilly atmosphere you find in small country pubs when you're a stranger, the seedy chaos of British hospitals, the joys of travelling on the London underground, British TV (Landis sums up the state of TV here when the hero turns on a set and gets a test pattern on one channel, a darts match on another and an ad for the *News of the World* on the third) and the general sleaziness of central London these days, especially in the Piccadilly area where the film's climax takes place. It also rains a lot in the picture and so it gave me a strange feeling to walk out of the cinema at the end into a dreary, wet London that looked as if it had been lit by the same lighting cameraman...

The sensation of still being in the movie was increased when I saw a newspaper placard reading "13 HURT IN LONDON BUS CRASH" – having just seen on the screen a double decker bus crashing in Piccadilly Circus when the werewolf emerges into the street. I hurried faster than usual to my customary drinking place, looking over my shoulder all the way. I think that's a sure sign of a successful horror movie. But as for the serious flaw I mentioned at the beginning of the review, I'm afraid it's the ending. After spending the whole movie subverting the clichés of werewolf movies Landis then goes and ends it very abruptly with one of the oldest clichés of all in the genre. It's disappointing because you expect something more – an extra twist or surprise. A *Starburst* colleague tells me that he pointed this out to Landis and got the reply, "It's only people over 40 who don't like the ending." Well, I've got news for him, it goes for us over-30s as well, and all the other age groups too. But it's the only thing that spoils an otherwise great movie so I think we can forgive him this one lapse.

Review by John Pym, *Monthly Film Bulletin* v48 n574, November 1981, pp. 215:

Sophomore humour appeals, if at all, simply because it is sophomoric; thus, there was no dicking with 'sophistication' in the John Landis team's *Animal House*. Here, however, the material calls for a much lighter tread, so often has the ground been covered by filmmakers in hobnail boots. Landis ends *An American Werewolf in London* with a title card congratulating the Prince and Princess of Wales on their marriage; and hovering above the preceding action is a feeling that it is taking place in a cinematic country of the imagination not far removed from tourist Britain. Trafalgar Square, Tower Bridge, the Zoo and Piccadilly Circus are all used, and all perceptibly draw attention to themselves. What is refreshing, however, about the film's ambience is that these British clichés are neither extended nor dwelt on. The Eros cinema in Piccadilly where the climactic transformation occurs is showing an authentic (though specially made) piece of homegrown tat titled *See You Next Wednesday*; the pub on the moors, filled with catatonic locals, has a sort of four-square reality, despite the pentangle scratched on the wall flanked by two immense prop-shop candles; the hospital employs an Indian porter, who

is inevitably parodied but not, thankfully, in the usual oh-by-golly fashion. It takes perhaps a percipient outsider to bring off such a cockeyed view of Britain's national monuments. Nurse Jenny Agutter is also something of a surprise, sustaining herself through the watches of the night (in what might have been a tiresome literary plant, but isn't) with Mark Twain, and displaying both pity and love for the luckless David which just hints, intriguingly, at a deeper tragedy.

John Landis' other achievement is to have successfully grafted on elements from his previous work. The young Americans are straight out of *Animal House*'s Faber College, at heart sublimely self-concerned and enthusiastically naive. Entering The Slaughtered Lamb, East Procter's pub, they settle for a pot of tea when coldly informed that there isn't anything to eat and cocoa isn't served. Furthermore, this open quality – David Naughton first made his mark extolling a soft drink in an American TV advertisement – is carefully integrated with the plot. Jack returns ashen, with half his neck missing (at each appearance his putrefaction has advanced), and addresses David in his customary sing-song voice as if nothing really untoward had occurred: his death is a misfortune of the same order as his scuppered chances of bedding the girl he has been pursuing.

The film is enhanced by uniformly careful casting in the secondary roles (John Woodvine as Hirsch, and Brian Glover as the chief stone-waller in The Slaughtered Lamb), and no one is allowed to run away with his tempting part. Mention must also be made of Rick Baker's werewolf make-up (recently seen to great effect in *The Howling*): hair sprouts, hands elongate, claws shoot forth, and a backbone metamorphoses with the sort of effortless expertise that makes one, quite properly, forget the artistry.



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

An American Werewolf in London has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original 1.85:1 aspect ratio with mono and 5.1 sound.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution at NBC Universal's Studio Post facility. The film was graded and restored in 2K resolution at Silver Salt Restoration, London. The grade was approved by director John Landis.

The original mono mix was remastered from the original mag reels at Deluxe Audio Services, Hollywood.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Silver Salt Restoration:

Anthony Badger, Steve Bearman, Mark Bonnici, Lisa Copson, Simon Edwards, Tom Wiltshire

NBC Universal:

Peter Schade, Tim Naderski, Jefferson Root, John Edell

Deluxe Audio:

Jordan Perry

All original materials supplied for this restoration were made available by NBC Universal.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Blu-ray Authoring **Fidelity in Motion (David Mackenzie)**

Design **Obviously Creative**

Artwork **Graham Humphreys**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Pat Bauman, John Bruno, Paul Davis, Lee Gambin, Mathew Garbutt, Mick Garris, Daniel Griffith, Corin Hardy, John Landis, Marc Morris, Tim Lawes, Ethan Long, Craig Ian Mann, Daniel Martin, Esme Pitts, Prop Store, Jon Robertson, Jon Spira, Simon Ward

