

AV384/FCD2198





**If you believe the only thing to fear is fear itself. . .
See 'Death Screams', where your most terrifying fears come alive.**



Death Screams™



Susan Riger Jody Kay Jennifer Chase Monica Boston Andria Savio Martin Tucker William T. Hicks

Death Screams™ An Ernie and Chuck Production

Starring **Playboy Centerfold** Susan Riger • Jody Kay • Martin Tucker • William T. Hicks • Jennifer Chase

Co-starring Andria Savio and Monica Boston • Music by Dee Barton • Screenplay by Paul G. Elliott

Directed by David Nelson • Produced by Chuck Ison and Ernest Bouskos • Executive Producers Ernest Bouskos and Chuck Ison

An **AB** Production • Released by United Film Distribution Company

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ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Death Screams is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono sound.

Despite our best efforts, no pre-print materials for *Death Screams* could be found. The sole available feature element, a badly faded 35mm release print, was scanned in 2K resolution on an Arriscan by OCN Digital Labs. All color grading was performed on DaVinci Resolve 17 and all digital restoration was performed using PFClean. The soundtrack was sourced from the 35mm optical track and was ingested via a Mag-natech Dubber and restored in Pro Tools. Audio remastering completed by Matthew Jarman.

Although every effort has been made to present *Death Screams* in the best condition possible, some obvious signs of picture wear remain, due to the poor state of the materials available.

35mm release print supplied from the collection of Brian Darwas.

Restoration Producer **Joe Rubin**
Lead Scanning and Audio Technician **Brandon Upson**
Colorist and Lead Restoration Artist **Lannie Lorence**
Audio remastering **Matthew Jarman**

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artwork by **Sadist Art Designs**
Design by **Sister Hyde**

SPECIAL THANKS

An extra special thanks to Charles Ison, Jan Ison, Nathan Wheeler and the entire team at Create Network Studios for their invaluable assistance in bringing this project to life.

Additional thanks to: Alex Agran, Sharon Alley, Sebastian del Castillo, Paul Elliott, Joseph Henson, Nathan Johnson, Worth Keeter, Justin Kerswell, Jim Kunz, Hanns Manship, Henry Darrow McComas, Robert "Billy Bob" Melton, Ivan Peycheff, Curt Rector, Phil Smoot and Erik Threlfall.

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CAST

Susan Kiger Lily
Martin Tucker Coach Neil Marshall
William T. Hicks Sheriff Avery
Jennifer Chase Ramona
Jody Kay Sandy
John Kohler Diddle
Andria Savio Kathy
Curt Rector Bob
Bill Gribble (as "Josh Gamble") Tom
Hanns Manship Casey
Helene Tryon Edna Sharpe
Mary Fran Lyman Agnes Bottomly
Monica Boston Sheila
Mike Brown Walker
Sharon Alley Sara
Larry Sprinkle Ted
Penney Miller Angie
Bill Ison Arch Johnson
David Lenthall Jackson

CREW

Directed by **David Nelson**
Producers **Charles Ison** and **Ernest Bouskos**
Screenplay by **Paul C. Elliott**
Director of Photography **Darrell Cathcart**
Editor **Jerry Whittington**
Special Effects **Worth Keeter**
Music by **Dee Barton**

There were outside pressures as well. By the mid-1980s, production costs had skyrocketed and the tax incentives that had drawn so much investment into the film industry had been eliminated. The network of independent theaters and sub-distributors that had sustained operations like Owensby's were also falling by the wayside, replaced by large chains and conglomerates. Video stores kept the indies afloat for a while and gave marginal productions like *Death Screams* a second life, but that channel eventually dried up as well.

North Carolina still has a thriving film industry, with multiple studios operating across the state playing host to dozens of film and TV productions every year. Charles Ison, after briefly toying with retirement, returned to North Carolina, where he remains active operating Creative Network Studios in Charlotte.

After the *Abyss*-related lawsuits in 1989, Owensby briefly retired and shuttered the studio. He relaunched his operation in the 1990s, and although activity has slowed down significantly, Earl Owensby still maintains an office there. Most recently he directed and released a documentary about the life of Jesus Christ in 2012, and fans can buy copies of his movies on the studio website. And while Earl Owensby remains an obscure figure, even among fans of low-budget exploitation films, his role in fostering that industry is undisputed.

"Earl Owensby in large measure is responsible for our success," Bill Arnold said in a 1985 interview. "I think Dino De Laurentiis set up his studio because he looked at what he (Owensby) was doing. When you look at what's feasible, all you have to do is look at Earl Owensby."

*Brian Albright is a writer and editor based in Cleveland, Ohio. He is the author of *Regional Horror Films, 1958-1990* and *Wild Beyond Belief!**





grand plans to expand his operations. In 1983, he announced a Studio City project near Myrtle Beach that he said would eventually include a theme park that would rival Disney World, a private airstrip, hotels, apartments, and a new studio. His star had also risen significantly in North Carolina. There was an Earl Owensby Memorial Wall at the Shelby shopping mall, an Earl Owensby Theater, and the aforementioned tribute room at the Western Steer Steakhouse.

By the 1990s, hundreds of films had been made in the region, everything from low-budget slasher films like *The Mutilator* (1985) to hits like *The Color Purple* (1985) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987). In 1987, Governor Martin estimated that film production had brought more than \$128 million to the state in one year and created thousands of jobs. In 1990, the state ranked third behind California and New York in terms of film and TV revenue.

In 1988, however, there were signs of trouble. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG) declared bankruptcy. Owensby also faced financial troubles. He purchased an abandoned nuclear power plant from Duke Power that he wanted to convert into a new studio. He constructed a large tank for underwater filming that he hoped would draw in other outside productions.

James Cameron filmed part of *The Abyss* (1989) at the plant, but the production was plagued with problems. Owensby attempted to evict Cameron and his crew at one point, claiming they had damaged the tanks. The filmmakers filed a restraining order against Owensby, and the producer later filed a lawsuit against 20th Century Fox Film Corp. and GJP Productions (James Cameron and *The Abyss* producer Gale Ann Hurd's production company) for \$2.088 million (the parties reached an out-of-court settlement). An outside contractor later sued Owensby over unpaid fees, and Duke Power sued him to obtain payment for the property.

to offer. As a right-to-work state, producers could skirt union involvement. Costs were as much as 30% to 40% cheaper than filming in other regions. And like Florida, North Carolina offered a wide variety of locations that could double as everything from a Canadian city to a tropical jungle.

Their efforts paid off. By the mid-1980s, the film office had expanded (at one point, Arnold's office prominently displayed a *Death Screams* poster) and increased its budget, production in the state had grown significantly, and other studios had opened. The biggest of these was built by Italian producer Dino De Laurentiis, who had originally come to North Carolina to film part of *Firestarter* before setting up shop in Wilmington.

EO Studios, however, was still operating independently to create new, local productions and attract outside projects. "North Carolina had a film office, but it was just one guy," says Worth Keeter, who started at EO in the 1970s, doing special effects and eventually acting as a director and producer. He also worked on *Death Screams*. "Earl Owensby really did more for the film industry by far than the film commission did. He got a lot of publicity and drew a lot of people into the state to take a look at the studio."

For outside productions, EO Studios served as a one-stop shop that could provide sound stages, carpentry, equipment, crew, screening and editing rooms, and even housing for cast and crew. "There weren't that many film technicians in the state at the time, and a lot of them worked for Earl," Keeter adds. "When we weren't in production, Earl would keep people on in some capacity working at the studio so they could be available for other productions. We had everything there under one roof."

By the time *Death Screams* was in production, Owensby also had

TAR HEEL TERROR:

DEATH SCREAMS AND THE RISE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA FILM INDUSTRY

by Brian Albright

From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, there was a boom in regional film production fueled by increased demand for low-budget films, the lower production costs available outside of California, and generous tax incentives for potential investors. Lively hubs of independent film production sprang up everywhere from Gleason, Wisconsin to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and all points in between.

Death Screams was typical of these regional productions: a low-budget horror film with a pseudo-star attached (in this case, Playboy Playmate Susan Kiger). The movie played drive-ins and hardtops across the country before enjoying another decade or so of life via video store rentals. It was filmed in one of the most unlikely of these regional film hubs (Shelby, North Carolina) just as the state government was increasing its efforts to bring Hollywood to the Tar Heel State.

Death Screams producer, Ohio-born Charles Ison, started out as a singer, and eventually worked his way into television production. He specialized in country music specials and variety shows, splitting his time between Hollywood and Nashville. In 1979, he launched the *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters* variety show (bringing in Sid and Marty Krofft to executive produce) on NBC. Around the same time, he met North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt at a Hollywood function, and came to the state to make a horse racing film, *Rare Breed*, starring George Kennedy and Forrest Tucker, and directed by former child star David Nelson.

He was approached by a California contact, Ernest Bouskos (who operated grocery businesses on the West Coast), to make a horror film as a follow up. Ison hired Nelson to direct, and for the screenplay, he turned to a writer named Paul Elliott, who he had met through his work on TV variety shows.

Tennessee native Elliott was an actor, playwright and drama teacher who had worked his way into television almost accidentally. In the 1970s he wrote a horror screenplay (called *Fangs*) that he mailed, unsolicited, to actor Monte Markham. Markham actually responded and connected with Elliott while in Nashville where he was touring with a play, a meeting that made the local newspaper. The article prompted a local producer to reach out to Elliott about writing for a new TV variety series. That turned out to be the Dolly Parton's *Dolly*

to Shelby so Nelson could film the lengthy fairground sequences.

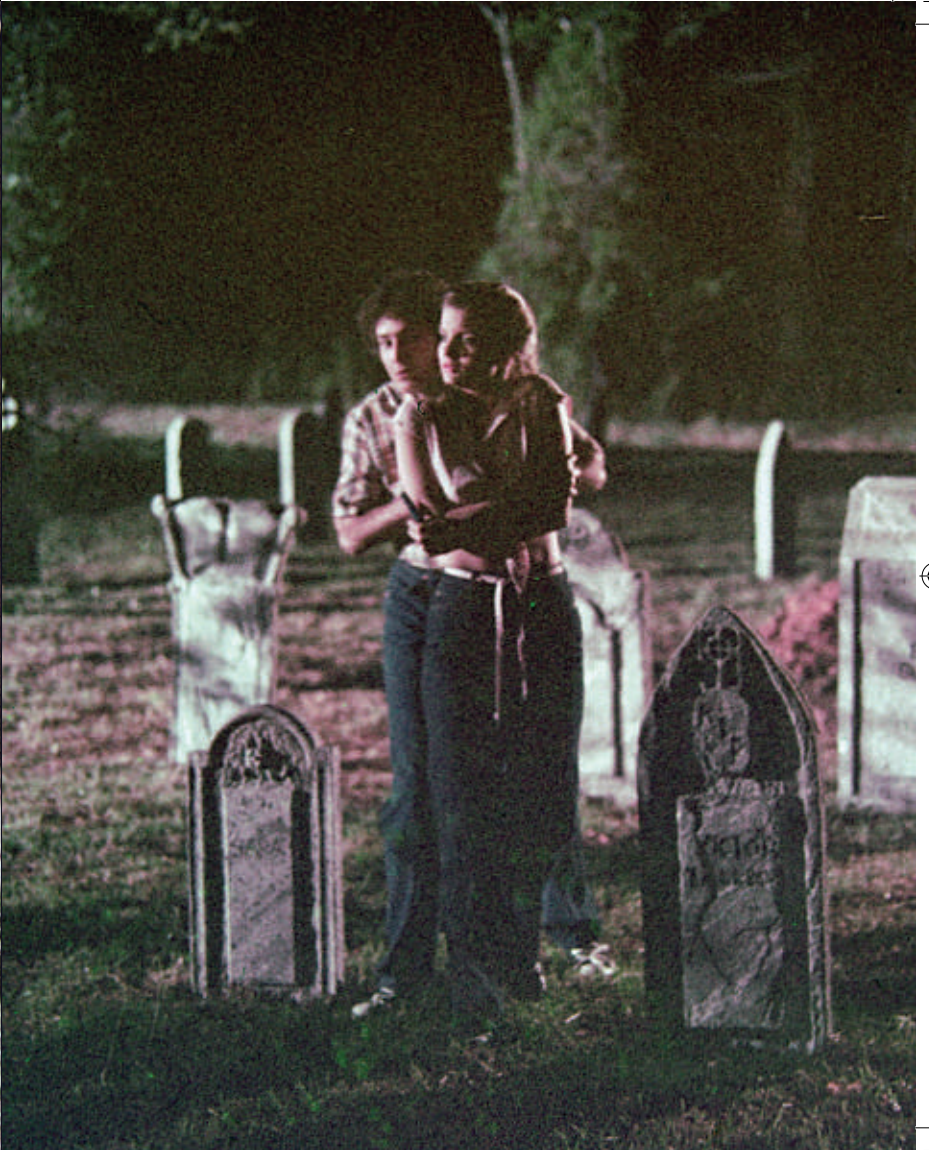
Elliott says that there were numerous changes to the script before and during production, including the addition of the scene where actress Sharon Alley has an arrow shot through her neck. The opening sequence in which a couple is strangled while on a motorcycle was originally written to take place in a car – which would have made slightly more sense, given what the amorous couple was up to. The reveal of the identity of the killer was also confusing, as there had been almost no build up for that particular character. The murky transfers of the film available on VHS did not help matters.

"You can't even see who the killer is before they kill him," Elliott says. "It didn't make any sense. I cried when I first saw the film, but I have since gotten over it."

Hollywood South

The rise of EO Studios predated a push by North Carolina governor Jim Hunt to draw more outside productions to the state. Hunt set up a state film office in 1980 and appointed Bill Arnold to head it up. Arnold was a former newspaper reporter and director of the NC Department of Travel and Tourism who had no prior film experience. "They said, 'There's an office, and there's a phone. You're it,'" Arnold told the *Orlando Sentinel* in a 1990 interview. "We didn't know what we were doing, and we didn't have any money to do it."

Without a separate budget, Gov. Hunt directed the Department of Commerce to scrounge up money from other departments to fund his efforts. Hunt and his successor, James G. Martin, would regularly head to Hollywood to convince filmmakers to bring their productions down south. North Carolina had a few key advantages





Ison first met Owensby before EO Studios even existed. A decade earlier, Owensby had approached him with an offer to make movies in Shelby. "He was in the basement of this little brick house in Shelby, and he had some movie equipment," Ison remembers. "He took me out to this huge field with five or six cinder blocks in it and he said, 'I am going to build a studio here and make movies.' Then he took me to lunch at the Holiday Inn, and when you opened the door there was a huge portrait of Earl Owensby that was signed, 'To all my fans'!"

When the opportunity came to actually make films in North Carolina, Ison signed a five-year lease with EO Studios to make full use of its sound stages and equipment.

Owensby (the self-described son of a mountain woman and a bootlegger) began his career in the pneumatic tools industry but used the money he made there to launch his own production company. Inspired by the success of *Walking Tall* (1973), he produced and starred in the similar revenge thriller *Challenge* the following year. The profits from that film helped him establish the studio, and he would go on to produce 18 films in all. He eventually set up his own distribution company.

"There's millions of dollars between L.A. and New York and that's what I'm after," Owensby said in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1980. To capture that box office, Owensby released a spate of action, horror and science-fiction films throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many of them starring Owensby himself.

For *Death Screams*, EO Studios provided crew (including Owensby's son), equipment and soundstages. Ison also hired a carnival to come

variety show, which launched in 1976. That experience led to a stint with the *Donny & Marie* (1975-1979) show until that series ended.

According to Elliott, he and Ison were originally developing a comedy about a man who inherits a puka (an invisible creature in Irish folklore, similar to the titular rabbit from the 1950 James Stewart film *Harvey*) in the form of a walking, talking stuffed bear. Ison and his partners decided to make a horror film instead and asked Elliott to write the script. "I whipped it out in a couple of weeks," Elliott remembers.

Filmed in the spring and summer of 1981, *Death Screams* was part of the first wave of slasher films made in the wake of *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1980). It was also one of two slashers partly filmed at roughly the same time near Shelby, N.C. (the other being Jimmy Huston's slightly more energetic *Final Exam*) at the EO Studios facility, which played a key role in the development of what is now a thriving film industry in North Carolina.

His Name Is Earl

EO Studios was founded by self-made movie mogul Earl Owensby. Like his regional contemporaries Bill Rebane (Wisconsin), William Grefé (Florida), and Lloyd Kauffman (New York), Owensby fostered a local film community that would steadily spread beyond his own productions. Owensby, however, had uniquely grand ambitions coupled with an overabundance of self-confidence and chutzpah. Before his burgeoning empire faltered under the weight of too-rapid expansion and multiple lawsuits, Owensby had built a multi-million-dollar studio facility that spanned hundreds of acres; helped produce more than 30 films in two decades; almost single-handedly jump started the Carolina film industry; and earned himself a tribute in the form of the Earl Owensby Room at the nearby Western Steer Family Steakhouse.

