





CAST

JEFFREY COMBS as Dr Herbert West

BRUCE ABBOTT as Dr Dan Cain

CLAUDE EARL JONES as Lt Leslie Chapham

FABIANA UDENIO as Francesca Danelli

DAVID GALE as Dr Carl Hill

KATHLEEN KINMONT as Gloria

MEL STEWART as Dr Graves

CREDITS

Directed and Produced by **BRIAN YUZNA**

Screenplay by **WOODY KEITH** and **RICK FRY**

Story adapted from H.P. Lovecraft's "Herbert West—Reanimator"

by **WOODY KEITH, RICK FRY** and **BRIAN YUZNA**

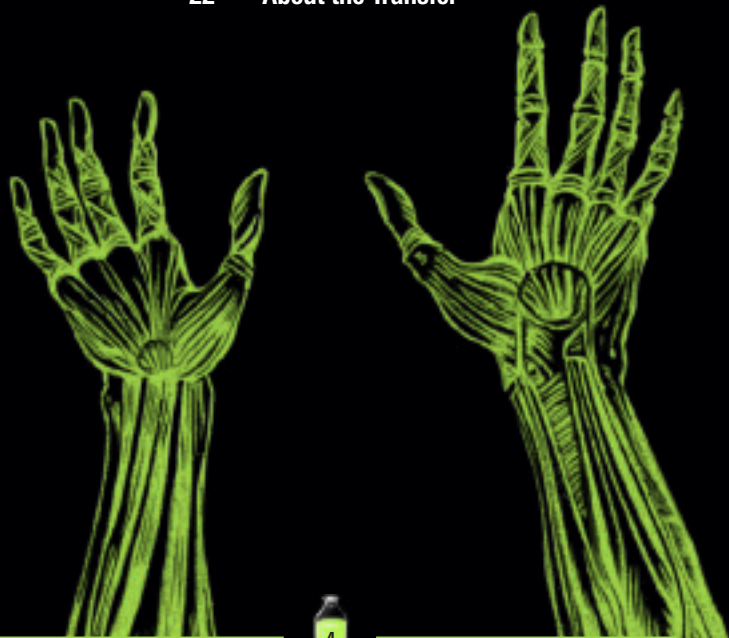
Director of Photography **RICK FICHTER**

Edited by **PETER TESCHNER**

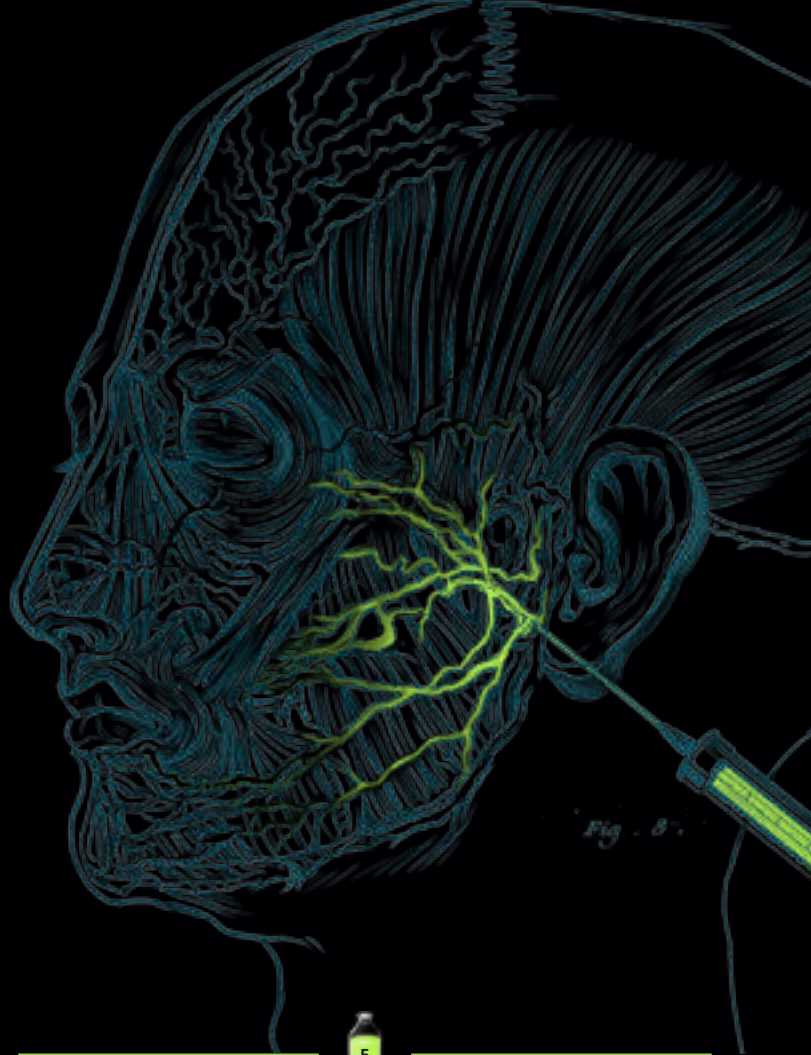
Music by **RICHARD BAND**

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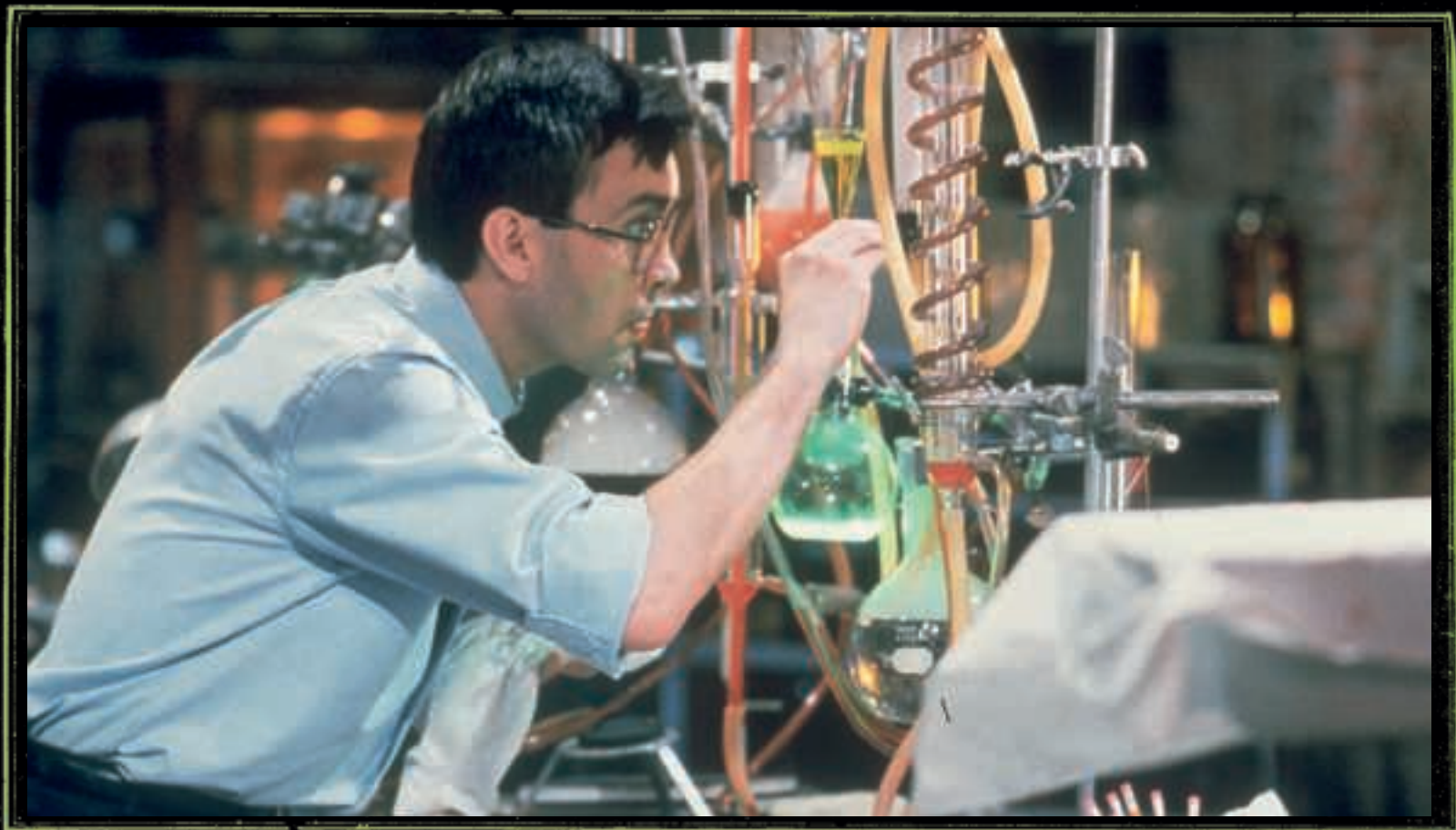
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HERE COMES THE BRIDE

by Michael Blyth

Despite a propensity for visceral excess and broad, often vulgar, humour, Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* has nevertheless developed a healthy critical reputation over the years, with the fan favourite standing as one of just a handful of splatter movies to find favour with not just horror aficionados, but also the more discriminating (and often stuffy) film critic. Blending horror and humour with cunning ease, Gordon's riotous debut is a pinnacle of gore cinema, whose reputation as one of the genre greats continues to grow with each passing year. But while *Re-Animator* has secured its place in horror history, its 1990 follow up *Bride of Re-Animator* has had a hard time finding an audience willing to embrace it with the same open arms. Sure, the second instalment never quite reaches the highs of its predecessor (how could it?), but the years have been kind to this inventive and witty sequel, and now the time has finally come to clear the aisle and make way for this blood-spattered bride.

With Stuart Gordon taking a step back, directorial duties for *Bride of Re-Animator* fell into the very capable hands of the first film's producer, Brian Yuzna, who had himself made his directorial debut with the masterful *Society* the year previously. Despite being filmed prior to *Bride of Re-Animator*, *Society* – a caustic critique on class and material wealth which told the tale of a disenfranchised Beverly Hills teen who uncovers the sordid truth about his socialite family – would not be released in the US until 1992. Still, the film would go on to develop a solid reputation as a defining genre film of the period, not to mention one of the all-time 'body horror' greats, and demonstrated Yuzna to be a dab hand at the perverse. Clearly he was the right man to pick up where Gordon left off.

Bride of Re-Animator kicks off around eight months after the events of the original film, opening amidst the violence and chaos of a Peruvian civil war in which our favourite doctors Herbert West and Dan Cain are serving as medics. The carnage of this warring landscape provides West with a surfeit of bodies on which he can continue his work perfecting his re-animation serum, but when





their medical tent is stormed by enemy troops the pair return home to Arkham, Massachusetts, to continue their work from the comfort of home. Using body parts from the morgue of the Miskatonic Hospital where they both work, West and Cain attempt to piece together the perfect woman in the image of Cain's deceased girlfriend Meg.

Bride of Re-Animator begins as a fairly faithful adaptation of the fifth episode in H.P. Lovecraft's "Herbert West-Reanimator" (the episodic novella on which the original film was based) named 'The Horror from the Shadows', simply updating the text from its original World War I setting to a modern day war-torn Peru. The film then mutates into a riff on the sixth instalment of Lovecraft's tale; 'The Tomb-Legions', in which West moves into a house connected to a system of ancient catacombs. These two tales may be the most direct source texts for the film, but there are many other allusions to Lovecraft strewn throughout, often in throwaway lines of dialogue. During one such moment, Dr West dismisses noises coming from his laboratory as "probably rats in the wall", which is of course a direct reference to one of the author's most loved stories "The Rats in the Walls".

Although Yuzna's film does an effective job of capturing the spirit of Lovecraft's work (whilst, as with the previous film, also injecting the source material with a liberal dose of knockabout humour), one of the most immediately striking things about *Bride of Re-Animator* is its defiant lack of narrative cohesion. While Gordon's film was an effectively succinct amalgamation of Lovecraftian ideas, the sequel is a little more scattershot in its approach, with character motivation often going out of the window in the process. In fact, a significant prerequisite for appreciating the second instalment comes from letting go of its plot inconsistencies (did West not die at the hands of a homicidal large intestine at the previous film's climax?) and simply taking things as they come.

Such inconsistencies have been acknowledged by those involved with the film, in particular the film's star, the inimitable Jeffrey Combs, who explained, "God, when I was cast in *Re-Animator*, I had no idea what was to come. Somebody made money on these films, but it wasn't me. It had a very low budget, and we

shot it in 18 days. *Bride of Re-Animator* was just cobbled together. The original script was tossed out, and we got new script pages daily, just piecing it together like the bride herself – but even so I feel that there were some great moments in that movie.”

With a name like *Bride of Re-Animator*, it is clear that this film was intended not just as a straightforward homage to the genius of Lovecraft, but also as a tribute to the monster movie classics of Universal’s golden age, in particular James Whale’s iconoclastic 1935 sequel to his 1931 ground-breaker *Frankenstein*. Much like *Bride of Frankenstein*, Yuzna’s film is laced with a potent sense of sadness and melancholic tragedy. In their manic pursuit to create life, both Dr West and Dr Frankenstein share many of the same megalomaniacal qualities, while both films question the tragic nature of the monster itself and the existential concepts of love as a whole. To make the references even more explicit, original *Frankenstein* author Mary Shelley is even thanked in the closing credits of the film.

In the same way that Dr West’s bride is pieced together from the dismembered parts of various cadavers, the film is also a patchwork of various elements and influences, of which *Bride of Frankenstein* serves as just one. Much like Whale’s creation, another influence can be traced in the form of Erle C. Kenton’s *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), based on H.G. Wells’s classic tale of science gone amok, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. In this film, Charles Laughton plays a crazed scientist conducting a series of perverse experiments on animals on a remote island. Moreau’s attempts to play God and create life offer a direct link to the on-screen manifestation of Dr Herbert West, while the gallery of deformed beasts that inhabit Kenton’s film are also echoed in the scene in Yuzna’s film in which we visit the zombie survivors of the original film’s Miskatonic Massacre. The notion of fusing together different living (or formerly living) anatomical pieces might also be witnessed in the chilling conclusion of Todd Browning’s *Freaks* (1932), while the comic tone of *Bride of Re-Animator* is precursed in films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or Mel Brooks’ *Young Frankenstein* (both 1975), both of which take similarly satirical stabs at the iconic figure of the mad scientist. Meanwhile, in one of the film’s most amusing sequences, Dr West creates

a grotesque creature using a handful of severed fingers and an eyeball. The resulting mini-monster, which scurries around the apartment, barely escaping the gaze of a suspicious detective, feels like the direct descendant of everyone’s favourite disembodied hand, Thing from *The Addams Family*.

But it’s not just the influence of horror and gothic material which can be felt running through the veins of *Bride of Re-Animator*, and surprisingly enough, a significant influence appears to come in the unlikely form of teen advocate John Hughes. In his 1985 smash *Weird Science*, two horny teenage boys attempt to create the perfect woman, and this tendency towards masturbatory preoccupations can be felt in Yuzna’s film. We are told that the titular bride is made up of, among other things, a ballet dancer’s feet, a prostitute’s legs and a virgin’s womb. This notion of what makes a perfect woman might seem unbearably misogynistic, were it not for the deliberate humour that Yuzna employs throughout, with the woman in question proving very much the product of a deranged and sociopathic mind. Clearly West doesn’t exactly have a way with the ladies, something which becomes even more clear the deeper you start to dig.

The original *Frankenstein*, and *Bride of Frankenstein* after it, told the story of two men creating life without the aid of a woman, while *Island of Lost Souls* also depicted a man attempting to procreate without the benefit of heterosexual intercourse. This obsession with non-traditional conception infuses these films with a gay subtext, offering early examples of the on-screen domestic homosexual couple and possibilities of gay parenting, something which can similarly be witnessed in the relationship between West and Cain. Although these two men are creating life (or should that be re-creating it?) within the sterile confines of a laboratory, as opposed to the physical space of the bedroom, they are very much the fathers of the things they have made.

The queer subtext of *Bride of Re-Animator* can be detected elsewhere in the film, not just through the basic idea of two men creating life together, but also through the melodramatics of West and Cain’s relationship, which often seems deliberately fraught with jealousy and unspoken desire. It is probably unlikely



that Lovecraft had intended a frisson between his two creators, but there is something about the living arrangements of these two bachelors that hints at homosexual domesticity, a detail deliberately enhanced by Yuzna's staging. Combs' unrestrained performance verges gleefully on camp, and often it does feel as though West bears a repressed sexual attraction toward his colleague, particularly in an early scene in which Cain tries to break off his working relationship with West. Presented as though we are watching a lovers' quarrel, the scene is shot and performed with a knowing wink, made even more obvious by the fact that our mismatched pair are fighting over the creation of a new life. They are like a couple arguing whether or not to take the plunge and have a baby.

Speaking of Jeffrey Combs's performance, as he proved during his first stint as the mad Dr West, this truly was the role he was born to play. Losing none of the frenzied charm he showcased in the previous film, Combs is one of the sequel's greatest strengths, unapologetically acting everyone else off the screen. Of course, this is not exactly an 'actor's film', but his co-stars don't stand a chance next to Combs, a character actor who can effortlessly blend humour and pathos, mania and sincerity, often all within the course of one scene. It is the scenes in which Combs does not appear that come off as the most awkward in the film, often feeling flat or stilted in their delivery, perhaps because the other performers were not blessed with Combs's spontaneity or improvisational skills, allowing him to go with the flow and adapt to the constant script changes that occurred throughout production. Meanwhile, there is one performer whose presence is sorely missed in the film, that of Barbara Crampton, who played Meg in the first film. Crampton was offered a small role but turned it down, and her lack of involvement proved to be something that fans of the original had a hard time letting go of.

Yet, if the script and acting occasionally leave something to be desired (who needs narrative cohesion anyway?), then Yuzna ensures that his vision of Lovecraft's tale is a treat for the eyes even if the mind does start to wander. While there is plenty of visual trickery to enjoy throughout, the film really comes alive, as it were, during the final act. As his bride is born, Yuzna employs a colour





palette worthy of vintage Argento, drenching the frame with bold primary shades that feel both garish yet gloriously insidious. Visually the film becomes a comic book cornucopia of rich colours which beautifully enhance both the tone and the emotion of the scene. And indeed, it is a very emotional scene. As the bride, ravaged with anguish, begins to tear herself apart, the audience is left almost breathless. Suddenly a film so laced with irony and mordant humour becomes a devastating portrait of existential turmoil and bodily disintegration. It is without doubt one of the most affecting scenes in Yuzna's career, while from a gore point of view, it calls to mind the staggering 'shunt' sequence from the director's previous film, *Society*. Unsurprisingly, both films had Screaming Mad George at the special effects helm, and it is impossible to imagine how anyone else might even begin to translate Yuzna's visions into terrifying, physical, gloopy reality. Orgiastic self-mutilation has rarely been so heart-breaking.

Looking back at the film now, *Bride of Re-Animator* feels like vintage Yuzna, building on the body horror preoccupations he began exploring in *Society*, and acting as an interesting precursor to his later film, *Return of the Living Dead III*, in which he took notions of undying love and re-animation (not to mention the strong implications of necrophilia that also exist in *Bride*) to even more interesting levels. The director would return to the weird world of Dr West some years later with a second sequel, *Beyond Re-Animator*, which does have the odd moment, but fails to match the frenzied magic that is so often glimpsed with his first attempt. It's time that this *Bride* found the love she truly deserves. Give her another chance; she might just steal your heart.

Michael Blyth is a film programmer for the BFI London Film Festival and BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival.



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Bride of Re-Animator was restored in 2013/2014 using the best elements available to achieve complete presentations of both the R-Rated and Unrated versions of the film.

For the R-Rated version, a second generation Intermediate Interpositive was used. For the Unrated version, locating a 35mm element that was suitable for the restoration involved a near year-long search until a DeLuxe® Composite Master Positive Print with the cut sequences intact was eventually found. Though the quality of this element was generally high, the definition it exhibited in two of the cut sequences differed in colour rendition and density due to photochemical imbalance during the copying process that could not be matched exactly to the higher quality IP materials. The colour palette of the film was re-timed precisely to the photochemical attributes preserving the DeLuxe® presentations at the time of original theatrical release.

Both the 35mm Intermediate Positive and the 35mm Composite Master Positive Print elements were scanned in 2K resolution at 16-bit colour depth on a pin-registered IMAGICA Imager XE Advanced Plus for maximum yield of quality at TLEFilms Film Restoration & Preservation Services, Germany. The colour grading was performed on a Baselight by TLEFilms FRPS using the facilities of PostFactory GmbH, Berlin, Germany.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Image stability was also improved in shots where prior analysis confirmed that these instabilities were the result of duplication or copying errors during the original photochemical processing.

The film's stereo soundtrack was mastered at 24-bit/48 kHz from a Digital Betacam broadcast tape, the best existing source for the original stereo mix. The final mix on this tape was recorded well below standard average and peak levels, which

resulted in inherent digital noise. The soundtrack, which also exhibited several mixing errors, was restored with great care to present it as originally intended. This project was supervised by Torsten Kaiser on behalf of TLEFilms FRPS, with all work performed at TLEFilms FRPS, Berlin and Birkenwerder, Germany.

Special thanks to colourist Roland Fliß and Gunter Puszkas at PostFactory GmbH.

This restoration has been approved by director Brian Yuzna.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs, Packaging and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**

Executive Producer: **Francesco Simeoni**

Production Assistant: **Liane Cunje**

Technical Producer: **James White**

QC and Proofing: **Michael Brooke, Ewan Cant, Nora Mehenni**

Blu-ray/DVD Mastering: **David Mackenzie**

Artist: **Gary Pullin**

Design: **Jack Pemberton**

SPECIAL THANKS

Bruce Abbott, Alex Agran, Howard Berger, John Buechler, Jeffrey Combs, Carl Daft, Mike Deak, Tony Dublin, Andrew Featherstone, Screaming Mad George, David Gregory, Chris Holden, Mark Holdom, Robert Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero and Brian Yuzna.



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