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CAST

Sissy Spacek Carrie Amy Irving Sue Snell William Katt Tommy Ross Nancy Allen Chris Hargensen John Travolta Billy Nolan Betty Buckley Miss Collins P.J. Soles Norma Sydney Lassick Mr. Fromm Stefan Gierasch Mr. Morton Priscilla Pointer Mrs. Snell and Piper Laurie Margaret White

CREW

Directed by **Brian De Palma** Written by **Lawrence D. Cohen** Based on the Novel by **Stephen King** Produced by **Paul Monash** Edited by **Paul Hirsch** Director of Photography **Mario Tosi** Music by **Pino Donaggio** Art Directors **William Kenney, Jack Fisk**

Brian de Palma's Coming of Age

by Neil Mitchell

By the mid-seventies, prodigiously talented 'New Hollywood' director Brian De Palma was still searching for the bona fide box-office hit that would fully open Hollywood's doors and kick-start what had, up until that point, been a creatively vibrant but financially muted career. While his friends and peers Francis Ford Coppola and Steven Spielberg garnered both box-office and critical success with *The Godfather* (1972) and *Jaws* (1975) respectively, De Palma had yet to reach that level of recognition and success despite – or perhaps because of – the bravura stylings and distinctive narratives of the likes of *Sisters* (1972) and *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974).

A critically divisive figure with a strained relationship with Hollywood's moneymen. De Palma's fortunes were to change drastically with the release of two films in the latter part of 1976. Having sat on the dark. Paul Schrader-scripted melodrama Obsession for over a year, Columbia released the film on August 1st, to be followed by United Artists' November 3rd release of De Palma's adaptation of Stephen King's 1974 debut novel, Carrie. Though Obsession received mixed reviews - with even ardent De Palma champion Pauline Kael decrying it as an empty stylistic exercise - it unexpectedly reaped over \$4 million in domestic rentals against a budget of roughly \$1.4 million. Obsession's relatively modest success would, however, pale into insignificance in comparison to Carrie's similarly unexpected \$33.8 million returns on a \$1.8 million budget. Indeed, like Columbia before them. United Artists were so unsure of the film De Palma delivered they had toyed with the idea of retitling it Prav for Carrie and releasing it on a B-movie double bill. As it transpired. De Palma had hit pay dirt: this genre-straddling movie connected and resonated with a broad audience demographic. Carrie rose above, subverted and, in some instances, established conventions, archetypes and boundaries across both the horror and emerging aross-out teen movie genres.

King's tragic tale of bullied and humiliated teen Carrie White and the terrible, supernatural revenge she wreaks on the peers and authority figures in her short, miserable life would,



in De Palma's hands, become an idiosyncratically stylish and uncomfortably damning experience onscreen. A story whose universal themes meet its supernatural elements, light-hearted moments and social commentary head on, *Carrie* afforded De Palma the opportunity to combine grim realism, technically complex, fantastical set pieces and the director's own career-long fascination with female characters, split personalities, audience voyeurism and onscreen depictions of sex and violence.

Ostensibly a straightforward tale of cause and effect, it is the setting, context and underlying themes of the big screen adaptation that mark it out as a ground-breaking film. A teenoriented Greek tragedy, in which the female body is both an ideological battleground and a terrifyingly powerful weapon, Carrie's blood-soaked hands reached into the past and the future from its modern-day high school setting. The corrosive effects of religious fervour, the cruelty of adolescent peer pressure and the oppressive demands and restrictions of patriarchal authority butted heads with emergent, but repressed, female sexuality, the confusing horrors of puberty, second wave feminism and a changing, psychologically bruised American society coming to terms with Watergate, Vietnam and rampant, consumer · driven modernity. Telekinetic teen Carrie, alternately pitiable and repellent, victim and aggressor, would be both the canvas and the conduit onto and through which an unsettling melange of socio-political themes, societal ills and condemnatory behaviours and attitudes would be channelled. Grist to the mill of a director whose blunt but intellectually rigorous views of American society and the voyeuristic nature of film spectatorship itself are well documented, De Palma took King's source material and delivered a scathing critique of multiple targets wrapped up in what director Edgar Wright has described as "a full-bloodied teenage pop opera".

Due to budgetary constraints as well as creative decisions, De Palma and screenwriter Lawrence D. Cohen would make some notable changes from King's source text during the adaptation process. The novel's flashback structure, largely seen through the eyes of Sue Snell, was jettisoned in favour of a more streamlined, conventional narrative structure. Similarly, the dumpy and entirely unsympathetic Carrie of King's novel would be envisioned onscreen as more fresh-faced, and waif-like, with De Palma cannily predicting that audiences would be more drawn – and thus more morally torn – to the tortured, dichotomous central character as portrayed by Sissy Spacek. Other alterations to King's material saw a pre-credits sequence involving a Biblical storm of rocks pummelling the White household ditched for budgetary reasons and the death by heart attack of Carrie's psychologically oppressive and physically aggressive mother Margaret (Piper Laurie) being realised in the altogether more visually symbolic and attention-grabbing death-by-flying-kitchen-utensils of De Palma's finished film.

In keeping with De Palma's oeuvre, *Carrie* is replete with the audacious stylistic traits and tics with which the director is synonymous. Three-hundred and-sixty-degree camerawork, canted angles, slow and fast motion scenes, split-dioptre and split-screen shots, visual symbolism, colour coding, intricately choreographed set pieces and technically complex long takes and tracking shots. It is in *Carrie*, however, that De Palma first truly integrated and aligned his technical abilities to a narrative in such a successful fashion. Not only did the film chart a (bastardised, horrific) coming-of-age for its central pro/antagonist, it also marked the full maturation of its director's filmmaking skills. Where earlier works such as *Greetings* (1968) and *Hi, Mom!* (1970) saw the then fledgling director experimenting with various shooting styles, technical forms and narrative structures inspired and influenced primarily by Alfred Hitchcock, Akira Kurosawa and the French New Wave, *Carrie* saw the amalgamation of De Palma's technical and thematic idiosyncrasies into a film that would itself become inspirational and influential.

De Palma's off-screen production team included producer Paul Monash, cinematographer Mario Tosi, frequent collaborator Paul Hirsch on editing duties, Sissy Spacek's husband Jack Fisk as art director and Italian musician Pino Donaggio composing the first of his several scores for the director. Donaggio provided a fittingly Herrmann-esque score – the stabbing, discordant notes that accompany the supernatural scenes a clear homage to Bernard Herrmann's *Psycho* score from 1960. Veteran composer Herrmann was De Palma's first choice to provide the music for *Carrie*, but his death on Christmas Eve of 1975 scuppered De Palma's chance to work with the composer of the scores for *Sisters* and *Obsession* for a third time.

Onscreen, De Palma assembled a cast of enthusiastic young actors, veteran and rising stars, and future 'cult' genre stalwarts. Alongside Spacek and Piper – who were both deservedly nominated for Academy Awards for their respective performances – Amy Irving as virtuous 'good girl' Sue Snell, Nancy Allen as promiscuous 'bad girl' Chris Hargensen and P.J. Soles as the easily-led Norma vividly brought to life King's characters, as did William Katt as jock Tommy Ross and a pre-mega-stardom John Travolta as bad boy Billy Nolan. Betty Buckley's well-meaning but ultimately doomed gym teacher, Miss Collins, further highlighted the duality between 'good' and 'bad' characters een throughout the narrative, being the kinder face of authority in opposition to the unhinged and suffocating religious fanaticism displayed by Carrie's mother, Margaret. Of course, as De Palma made abundantly clear, no one in *Carrie* escapes without bearing some guilt, being killed or being left psychologically traumatised by the queasily prescient high school massacre, and that includes the 'victim' Carrie and the audience.



Set largely in two locations, the dour White household with its out-of-time religious paraphernalia and - in a further nod to Psycho - the modern but, to Carrie, no less oppressive Bates High School. Carrie is a rhythmical exercise in tension and release. The film is dominated by the near 25-minute prom night massacre sequence, during which Carrie's telekinetic gift/curse fully blossoms and lays waste to almost everyone and everything in sight. A hugely technical achievement combining virtually every De Palma stylistic trick, the massacre is a highly symbolic descent from romantic fantasy to stark reality and then down further into a hellish supernatural horror. Colour coded to match the red, white and blue of the Stars and Stripes, the sequence saw De Palma gleefully tear down a rites-of-passage tradition that lies at the very heart of American society. Carrie's rage driven revenge against those who have humiliated her – and more troublingly for the viewer against those who she only perceived to have done so - is, thanks to De Palma, an assault on both the characters involved in the hermetically sealed narrative and the real world social institutions and conventions whose patriarchal expectations and constraints are reflected through those fictional characters by their actions. Though the director has subsequently expressed his dissatisfaction with certain elements of the prom night sequence - specifically the distancing effect of the split screen usage - it remains a startlingly impressive set piece in a film not short on genuinely iconic scenes.

Carrie's eroticised opening locker room sequence, Margaret's demise and the shock hand-out-of-the-grave ending – absent from the novel and inspired by the hand-out-of-the-river shot in John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972) – are all sequences in which De Palma's influence symbolically heightens the underlying themes of King's original material. Voyeurism and the emotional savagery of teens, kitchen utensils – the tools of the 'domestic goddess' – and a hand grabbing at the wrist of Sue Snell, the film's 'Final Girl', respectively point accusatory fingers at the audience, adolescents, patriarchal views of femininity and womanhood and finally back to the audience again. The unexpected tonal shift in focus from Carrie to Sue in the film's coda sequence leads the viewer to identify with and as the Final Girl – we survived, but we are guilty by association and what we have witnessed has psychologically scarred us forever.

Charting the cycle of life and death, innocence and experience, *Carrie* is by turns horrific, erotic, poignant and playful. Lauded at the time by Pauline Kael in a *New Yorker* article entitled 'The Curse' and described by Roger Ebert as "a true horror story", De Palma's adaptation was later rigorously analysed by Carol J. Clover in *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) and Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1993). The film's 'final scream' jump-scare ending, Final Girl and troubled teen angel/monster became a staple of the horror genre, as did queen bees, alpha male jocks and bad-boys, comedy sidekicks, nerdy hangers-on, gross-out

gags, coarse language and nudity in teen oriented horrors, comedies and horror-comedies. Not the first of its kind to introduce or tackle teens-in-peril, a Final Girl or latent psychic abilities as a deadly weapon – Bob Clark's *Black Christmas*, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (both 1974) and Ray Danton's *Psychic Killer* (1975) being earlier examples respectively – *Carrie* did, however, cement the previously mentioned archetypal character types as well as usher in a wave of psychic horror movies, teen female-led horrors and multiple riffs on *Carrie*'s milieu and themes all keen to exploit the film's crossover box-office popularity. De Palma himself would follow *Carrie* with another – less financially and artistically successful – tale of psychic powers in the Kirk Douglas-starring *The Fury*(1978).

Among the host of other films bearing overt similarities to *Carrie* to be released in the immediate wake of De Palma's hit were the TV movie *The Spell* (1977), *Jennifer, The Medusa Touch* and cult Ozploitation entry *Patrick* (all 1978). The film would also spawn a direct sequel, *The Rage: Carrie II* (1999), an ill-starred musical conceived by Lawrence D. Cohen, a 2002 made-for-television revamp directed by David Carson, and Kimberly Pierce's 2013 reboot headed by Chloë Grace Moretz and Julianne Moore.

With the hand-out-of-the-grave sequence alone being referenced in more than 50 television episodes and movies to date and the film remaining to this day one of, if not the, finest adaptations of King's works, it's a testament to his source text, and De Palma's imagining of it, that *Carrie* resonates as much now as it did on general release. As for De Palma, his long sought after coming-of-age solidified a reputation as a divisive but hugely talented director. Short-sighted accusations of misogyny, Hitchcock-related plagiarism and empty theatrics have continued throughout a career now into its fifth decade as of writing. From *Carrie*'s artistic and financially rewarding springboard, his subsequent directorial CV went on to include *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Blow Out* (1981), *Scarface* (1983), *Casualties of War* (1989) and the Hollywood blockbuster *Mission: Impossible* (1996). Without Carrie White's onscreen coming-of-age, Brian De Palma may never have fully achieved his.

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CARRIE THE FINAL GIRLS ZINE

The Final Girls is a London-based screening series focused on exploring feminist themes in horror cinema and highlighting the representation and work of women in horror, both in front of and behind the camera. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Carrie, the Final Girls – in partnership with MUBI – presented a special screening and post-film discussion, as well as publishing a limited-edition zine, which is reprinted here in full with permission.

Misogynist, misanthropist, voyeur? With a career-spanning four decades, Brian De Palma remains one of the most controversial directors in the history of cinema. Despite his success and unassailable status as a great director, De Palma's films have long since been plagued with questions of objectification, pornography and violence directed at women.

So what does the man himself say? De Palma isn't one to shy away from the blurring of boundaries between voyeurism and pornography. His 1980 film, *Dressed to Kill*, was protested by female activists upon release with claims of objectification and exorbitant violence towards women. The film concluded its London run at a cinema specialising in softcore porn films. Despite criticisms, De Palma defends his approach, famously stating: "I'm always attacked for having an erotic, sexist approach – chopping up women, putting women in peril. I'm making suspense movies! What else is going to happen to them?"

In 1976, De Palma brought Carrie White to our cinema screens; a young girl tormented by a hyper-religious mother and the meanness of teenage girls who, upon entering womanhood, discovers her telekinetic powers. Based on the infamous Stephen King novel, Carrie soon became De Palma's most iconic female character. Contrary to claims of wholly vacuous females who are slashed at will in many of De Palma's films, Carrie White is a fully developed character in a story embedded in femininity and womanhood, and largely unconcerned with the activity of its male characters. Carrie's victimisation by her peers, her insecurities and anxieties, embody the teenage experience. When Carrie looks to the camera, wide-eyed and terrified but exuding tremendous power, we are with her.

We love you, Carrie White.

The Final Girls

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE CARRIE

by Michael Blyth

In their song, 'What's Yr Take on Cassavetes?', electro-punk feminists Le Tigre asked whether the renowned indie filmmaker was a misogynist or genius. While an interesting question, perhaps Brian De Palma might have proved a more incendiary subject for scrutiny, as it could be argued that no other auteur divides critical opinion with such flagrant, irresponsible abandon. Don't get me wrong, I love De Palma. But even a fullyfledged fanatic like myself wouldn't be hard-pressed to compile a list of problematic female representations in his films: the sexually adventurous married mother 'punished' for her indiscretions in Dressed to Kill (1980); the porn actress used as a pawn in a game of murder in Body Double (1984); and the naïve escort fatally out of her depth in Blow Out (1981) being just a few that immediately spring to mind. I won't lie, being a gueer, liberal De Palma fan can be tough. But thankfully, no matter how problematic his gender politics might get, we'll always have Carrie. All the ingredients for an anti-feminist shocker are present and correct - the woman as victim, the woman as witch, the woman as abject neatly wrapped up in a story which kicks off with cinema's most harrowing depiction of menstruation. But despite this, Carrie is by no means the regressive vision of femininity that De Palma cynics might lead us to expect.

If De Palma has regularly been accused of the voyeuristic, often erotically charged slicing and dicing of female victims, this tale of latent feminine power resolutely places female experience at the very centre, inviting viewers (both female and male) to identify with its browbeaten heroine. Our prom queen is a not a monster, she is an outcast in a monstrous world, a symbol of female suffering not to fear, but to empathise with. Put simply, Carrie is an exercise in compassion as much as it is a tale of terror, and for a genre (and indeed a filmmaker) frequently accused of revelling in the sadistic suffering of women, that is quite a revelation. For me, meeting Carrie at the impressionable age of around 11 or 12 was nothing short of life-changing. I was captivated by Sissy Spacek's face, so strange and beautiful. I was deeply moved by her struggle and thrilled by her fiery vengeance. But perhaps more than anything else, I identified with her in a way I never before had with a film character. Over the years that followed, I must have watched my well-worn VHS a hundred times. I would often think of her as I carved out a lonely path through high school, blocking out the taunts of my own bullies who surrounded me on a daily basis. Sure, you can think what you want about De Palma, but this misogynist will always be the man who gave me the most extraordinary woman I have ever seen on screen. What's my take on Brian De Palma? Genius. Definitely a genius.

THEY'RE GOING TO LAUGH AT YOU

by Sophie Brown

"Do any of you ever stop to think if Carrie White has feelings?" Miss Collins's kindness resonates. I had a teacher who subtly tried to stick up for me at school, who recognised what was going on. I remember him explaining to the class, as he saw notes passed around, that in a few years' time, these hierarchies would be nothing.

It's my 14th birthday. I'm having a disco in the church hall. Having distanced myself from the first group of bullies, it's started up again within a new circle of 'friends'. There are two main bitches heading it up. They're an intelligent, privileged bunch, reared with confidence – the middle-class offspring of competitive aspirational parents. Disdain is infectious and soon girls who don't even know me are threatening violence. I grew up being told to never follow the crowd or be a sheep – but I also had no ability to stand up for myself.

I go to the toilets to change out of my fancy dress costume and put on a new sparkly gold dress. They start barricading me in. Piling chairs on top of one another. Holding the door. Laughing. I can't get out.

I watched *Carrie* for the first time before the worst of it started, at a girly sleepover. It was the hand that terrified me the most; just when you hope Carrie's finally found sanctuary from the endless abuse – she lives on: a figure of fear, an eternal, desperate outsider that just won't die. Like Carrie, I was timid but optimistic. I kept hoping that if I just waited it out, they would come to their senses and stop the psychological and verbal abuse. Sissy Spacek's Carrie has a strange beauty, one that is obvious from an adult perspective, but not from a hermetically-sealed world of teen power wars. Power equals beauty in school, and confidence is something that – understandably – eludes Carrie.

I was obsessed with the supernatural from an early age, but had no telekinetic barriers against teen girl contempt: a lethal force that gathers inexorable momentum. Even the most passive teen in a friendship group will follow suit with blanking, excluding and insulting. Cruelty is normalised, and collusion is epidemic. I remember when the boys tricked me into believing my crush was mutual. They teased him as I sat there, silently mortified, with the realisation that I was the joke.

"They're all gonna laugh at you," rings out the cacophonous refrain in Carrie's kaleidoscopic breakdown. Wide-eyed and drenched in blood, she sleepwalks out of the burning school, humiliated to the core. With her gaping face of trauma and hands out, stricken, she floats, detached from the carnage. Spacek's Carrie embodies a neurosis invoked by relentless cruelty, an exposed nerve, gorgonised.



BLOOD SWEATERS AND TEARS

by Catherine Bray

In Noah Baumbach and Jake Paltrow's doc *De Palma* (2015), the great director professes a sort of mock-innocent surprise that people might have interpreted an enormous drill penetrating an attractive woman's abdomen in *Body Double* (1984) as in some way phallic. These critics, with their dirty minds! The drill was so long and thick, he explains, because it needed to plausibly penetrate not only the woman's guts, but the floor beneath her, in order to get that horrifying shot from Craig Wasson's perspective of the drill coming through the ceiling/floor, dripping with blood.

Sure, Brian, whatever you say. Of course, it's actually a more effective, horrible and – yes – exciting image because it doubles as a penetration, an act Wasson's character, Jake Sully, has wanted to perform too since he first laid eyes on the stunning Gloria Revelle (Deborah Shelton). He's aghast, yet on some level envious.

Sully is, after all, emasculated throughout the film: by his failing career, by his cheating wife, and most of all, by a diamond navy and orange patterned sweater. This sweater, memorably worn during a trip to an outré underground club, is the antithesis of any kind of sexual conception of the self in every configuration of gender or sexuality yet known to humankind. Together, the diamond sweater and Wasson's screen presence combust to create something magical, a cinematic image for the ages, conjuring fishout-of-water frustration, a sense of repressed sexual entitlement and seedy, collusive voyeurism all at once.

To see that you can't just stick any old A-list actor in dubious knitwear and achieve the same effect, look no further than an alpha-era Michael Douglas strolling through a different louche nightclub almost a decade later in *Basic Instinct* (1992). Douglas was at the height of his powers and it shows: he's discomforted, but the sweaty sexual heart attack Wasson summons is nowhere to be seen.

It's that peculiar mixture of arousal and self-consciousness that De Palma conjures so consistently, opening out the steely brilliance of the ludicrous drill climax, adding colour and life and Frankie Goes to Hollywood to the queasy unease to which we've also surrendered (however arch and knowing we like to think we are, with our sophisticated, analytical gaze).

If De Palma wants to pretend that such acute psychological manipulation of the visual medium is the result of pragmatic choices, made for practical reasons like the depth of a floor/ceiling divide, he is very welcome, but like Wasson as the plot unravels in *Body Double*, we could be forgiven for smelling a rat.



THE WOMAN THAT REMAINS

by Chiara Marañón

"He wrote me that only one film had been capable of portraying impossible memory – insane memory: Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo". (Sunless, Chris Marker, 1983)

Forty minutes into *Obsession*, a scene reveals itself as an ominous fractal of the whole film and, who knows, perhaps the entire De Palma filmography. A fresco of a Madonna on one of the walls of the San Miniato al Monte in Florence is being restored and, in the process, a second, more ancient painting is appearing underneath. Which one to preserve? The fact that *Obsession* was released in 1976, that is, the same year as *Carrie*, seems inexplicable and rather unfortunate considering the abysmally different reception both films had. However, I wonder if being overshadowed by another movie doesn't disclose the underlying nature of this film, and if in the end, it isn't just one more expression of duality – eventually morphing into multiplicity – among the many that the film inhabits and displays.

The original title of the screenplay, penned by De Palma and Schrader, was *Déjà Vu*, which went on to be the working title of the film during the shooting. On one hand, *Déjà Vu* is arguably a tailor-made title for this film as it encapsulates the essence of the story in a perfectly literal way. A man struggles to come to terms with the guilt of letting his wife and daughter die, and a second chance is given to him when, 20 years later, a woman who looks exactly like his wife appears in his life. On a second layer (it's all about layers) the film proudly transpires an audacious Hitchcockian pulse as much as it deliberately loses itself in the labyrinths of *Vertigo* (1958), while Bernard Herrmann's ubiquitous score gloriously fills the screen. All this results in a sort of phantasmagoria in which Sandra is not only Elizabeth, but also Judy, and Madeleine – the spectral Madonnas that were always there emerge from beneath. Déjà vu.

Until that point in the film, Geneviève Bujold's character hadn't said a word, and in an ironic turn of events when she finally does, she's no longer the woman we had been introduced to but another one. Another woman who so closely resembles the first woman, that Mike (Cliff Robertson) can't help but be utterly mystified and dragged into this spiral of reflections, and refractions, and death. He's unable to resist and ultimately succumbs to the maddening effect of time on his pain and guilt. Might that be the insane memory Chris Marker is talking about? Bujold's character is not one but many, a palimpsest of echoes delivered

through one single performance: Amy is hired to perform Sandra in order to seduce Mike, who in order to be seduced demands from her to perform Elisabeth. She undertakes this mission secretly in the name of revenge, this in turn pushes her into Electra's territory as – let's not forget this is a De Palma picture – she becomes infused with an unwary fascination towards the act of performing along the way. Conversely, the irrepressible necrophilic compulsion that unleashes Scottie's desire towards Judy/Madeleine in Vertigo (she is, to quote the French title of the novel, returning from among the dead) is topped here with a perversely incestuous plot that, in a sophisticated narrative move, only exists in retrospect. Such intricate psychosexual undercurrents peak in the grandiose closing scene of the film; a 360-degree panoramic shot in which Amy reveals her identity and begs for forgiveness before Mike's perplexed eyes. Redemption and damnation seem to be one and the same as the two embrace in a cathartic hug. They have a lot to digest.

De Palma's turn of the screw materialises in the meticulous way in which he ups Hitchcock's game of mirrors, with a level of artifice that tends to infinity. Memory is a construction, and so is cinema.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Carrie is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 5.1 and original mono sound. The film was restored from the original camera negative by Shout Factory, sourcing elements from MGM.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield Steelbook Produced by Ewan Cant Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni Technical Producer James White QC Manager Nora Mehenni Blu-ray Mastering David Mackenzie / Fidelity in Motion Design Obviously Creative Artwork Gary Pullin

SPECIAL THANKS

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