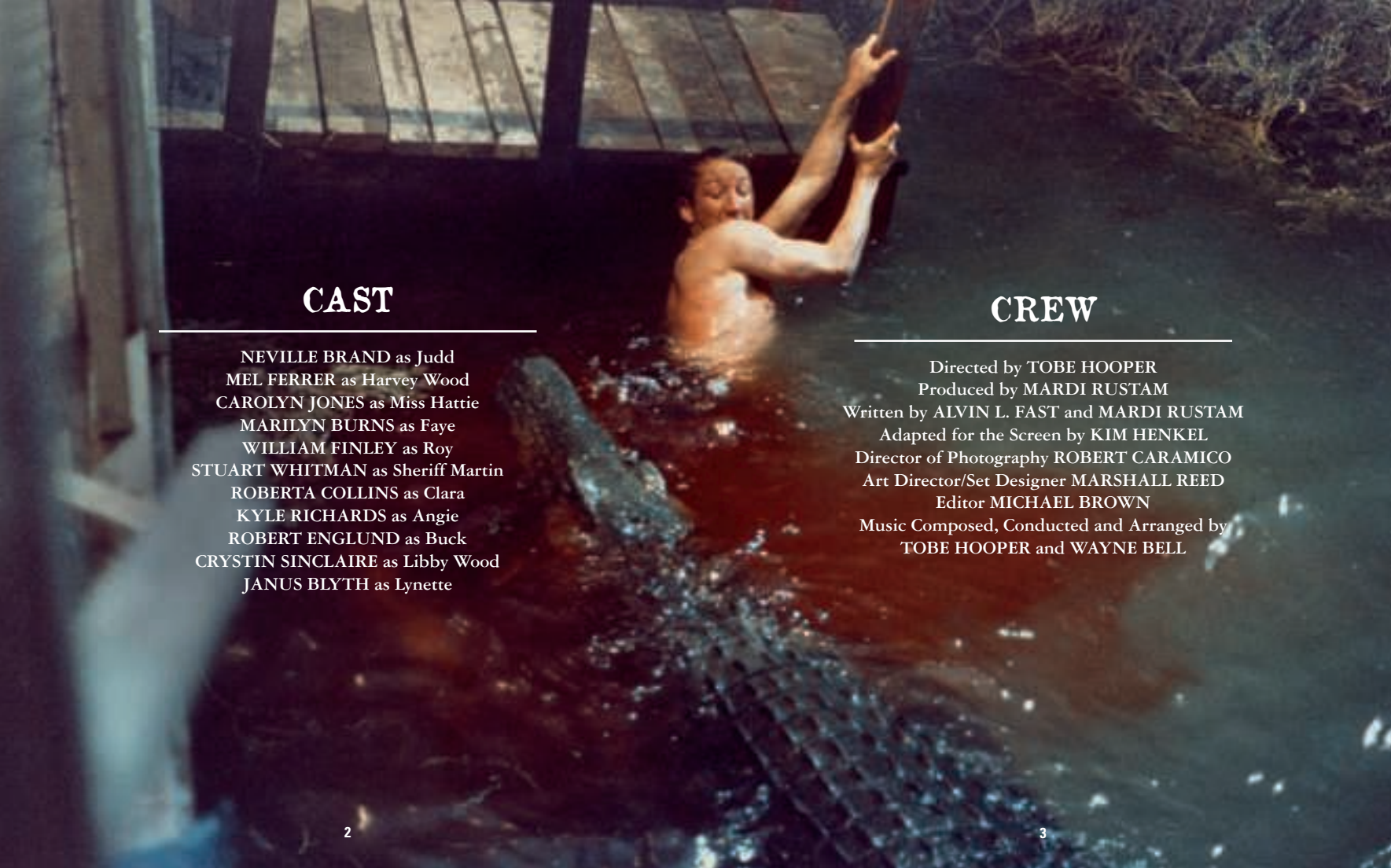
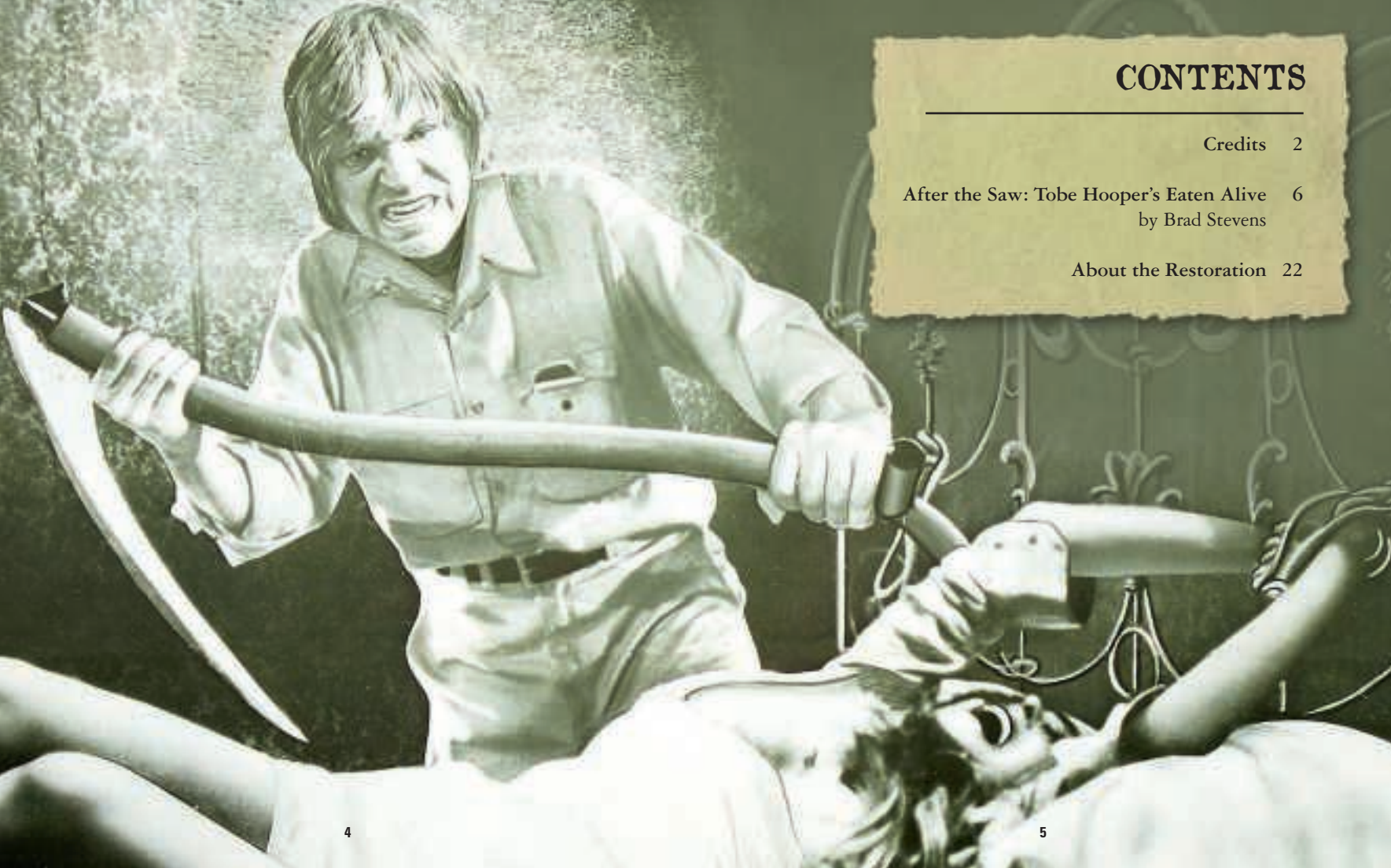


CAST

NEVILLE BRAND as Judd
MEL FERRER as Harvey Wood
CAROLYN JONES as Miss Hattie
MARILYN BURNS as Faye
WILLIAM FINLEY as Roy
STUART WHITMAN as Sheriff Martin
ROBERTA COLLINS as Clara
KYLE RICHARDS as Angie
ROBERT ENGLUND as Buck
CRYSTIN SINCLAIRE as Libby Wood
JANUS BLYTH as Lynette

CREW

Directed by TOBE HOOPER
Produced by MARDI RUSTAM
Written by ALVIN L. FAST and MARDI RUSTAM
Adapted for the Screen by KIM HENKEL
Director of Photography ROBERT CARAMICO
Art Director/Set Designer MARSHALL REED
Editor MICHAEL BROWN
Music Composed, Conducted and Arranged by
TOBE HOOPER and WAYNE BELL



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AFTER THE SAW: TOBE HOOPER'S EATEN ALIVE

by Brad Stevens

This essay contains significant plot spoilers.

Eaten Alive (1976), Tobe Hooper's follow-up to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) is a rich yet problematic film which stubbornly refuses to come into focus. Like so much of Hooper's work, it is almost, though not quite, a comedy, and despite being an 'exploitation' movie which makes few concessions to middlebrow taste, its cast includes several Hollywood veterans – Neville Brand, Carolyn Jones, Mel Ferrer, Stuart Whitman (who, appropriately, was considered for the role of Sam Loomis in Hitchcock's *Psycho*) – though they rub shoulders with *Chain Saw*'s Marilyn Burns, cult actors William Finley and Roberta Collins, and future Freddy Krueger Robert Englund (whom Hooper would direct again in *Night Terrors* and *The Mangler*)[1].

This refusal to be either one thing or another perhaps explains why critics have approached *Eaten Alive* cautiously. Reputedly inspired by the activities of Texan serial killer Joe Ball (though *Psycho* would seem to be a more obvious reference point), the plot could hardly be simpler: it involves a psychotic hotel owner, Judd (Brand), who murders his guests and feeds them to his pet crocodile. But many commentators express confusion over the film's curious tone, and appear uncertain whether its apparent flaws are evidence of a troubled shoot (Hooper was engaged in a series of conflicts with his producers, and occasionally left the direction to his cinematographer) or Brechtian alienation effects.

1 - Englund has the film's opening line: "Name's Buck. I'm raring to fuck." Quentin Tarantino later borrowed this line for *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), in which it becomes "My name is Buck and I'm here to fuck."

This confusion is rather appropriately linked with an uncertainty as to what the film should be called. Entitled *Swamp Beast* during production, it is usually known in the U.S. as *Eaten Alive* (not to be confused with Umberto Lenzi's 1980 cannibal opus *Eaten Alive!*, aka *Mangiati Vivi!* – though Mel Ferrer was in that one as well), but has also been released under the titles *Starlight Slaughter*, *Legend of the Bayou*, *Horror Hotel*, *Horror Hotel Massacre*, *Murder on the Bayou* and *Amok*. Hooper insists that the film should be called *Death Trap*, and it received a UK theatrical release under this title in 1978, the British Board of Film Censors having reduced its running time from 91 minutes to 86 minutes. This truncated print was distributed on VHS and Betamax by VCL in 1980 (running 82m 25s at 25 fps). An uncensored version was subsequently issued by Vipco in 1982 (86m 2s at 25 fps), and eventually landed on the British Director of Public Prosecutions' list of banned 'Video Nasties'. Like their transfer of Abel Ferrara's *The Driller Killer* (1979), Vipco's tape was uncut in terms of violence, but eliminated some narrative footage. The missing section, which ran approximately one minute, involved a quarrel between Roy (Finley) and Faye (Burns), a married couple staying at Judd's hotel. When the film again appeared on UK video a decade

later, still under the *Death Trap* title, it was in a post-Video Recordings Act version which the BBFC (an acronym that now rather euphemistically stood for 'British Board of Film Classification') had shortened by 25 seconds, though the scene missing from Vipco's transfer was restored. All cuts were waived for subsequent UK DVD releases.

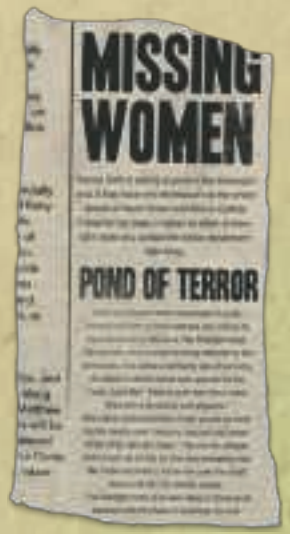
Since *Eaten Alive* has, it seems to me, been frequently misunderstood, it might be useful to approach this film by addressing a particularly obvious error in Martyn Auty's *Monthly Film Bulletin* review[2]. Auty, who later became a successful television producer, notes that all the women threatened by Judd evade his clutches, "except significantly the prostitute", concluding that "sexism remains an unconscious force in exploitation cinema as noxious as overt exploitation". The implication is that Hooper punishes the prostitute for her sexual transgressions while allowing the virginal females to live. This is indeed a cliché which would soon become prevalent in the slasher film, being parodied in Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996), in which Randy (Jamie

2 - Martyn Auty, *Death Trap, Monthly Film Bulletin* 538, November 1978, pp. 217-218.

Kennedy) insists: "There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance, number one: you can never have sex... Sex equals death."

The difficulty with applying this formula to Hooper's film is that it is impossible to do so unproblematically. For one thing, Buck's girlfriend Lynette (Janus Blythe) is sexually active, yet Judd fails to kill her; she flags down a car and escapes, leaving her pursuer impotently hacking away at a tree with his scythe (much like *Chain Saw*'s Leatherface, last seen angrily waving his chainsaw in the air after Sally is rescued by a passing driver). More importantly, Clara Wood (Collins), like Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in *Psycho* (1960), is killed at precisely the point when she has decided to stop engaging in prostitution (and it is by no means certain that she has already slept with anyone; Buck, whose overtures she rejects, apparently being her first customer), the murder taking place as a direct result of her decision: had she remained at the brothel, she would never have encountered Judd. This may well be a 'punishment', but it is one that viewers can hardly avoid perceiving as grossly disproportionate and unjust. If *Eaten Alive* references a sexist mode of representation, it does so purely in order to subvert it. All the female characters are resourceful and vibrant, the men either unsympathetic or dull. Hooper's highly critical attitude towards ideals of heroic masculinity is suggested by his treatment of Sheriff Martin (Whitman), the film's sole representative of legal authority, who talks tough and strikes all the right poses, but fails to actually do anything even vaguely useful: the final scene has him arriving at the hotel just in time to see Judd being devoured by the crocodile.

As in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, the ostensible villain is ironically the centre of sympathy, his male victims being characterized in only the most general terms. The exception in *Chain Saw* is the crippled Franklin, who, as



Robin Wood has noted, "is as grotesque, and almost as psychotic, as his nemesis Leatherface"[3]. Franklin's equivalent in *Eaten Alive* is Roy, a typically eccentric William Finley creation who functions as Judd's mirror image. The key scene here is the one missing from Vipco's initial transfer, which shows Roy reaching towards Faye, twisting his hand, and grimacing while letting out a high-pitched squeal. Far from representing a norm which is opposed to Judd's madness, Roy's behaviour links domesticity with neuroticism.

But then normality here is nothing more than the acceptable face of insanity, and Roy is hardly the only character for whom Judd functions as a secret sharer. In one of the film's most extraordinary scenes (though from a strictly narrative perspective it is completely superfluous), Buck shoots pool with Lynette and his friend Marlo[4] as a man wearing a cowboy hat enters the bar; he is identified on the end credits only as The Cowboy, and is played by David Hayward, who had been cast by Robert Altman as the shy young

3 - Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" in *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (Toronto Festival of Festivals, 1970), p. 21.

4 - Marlo is played by David Carson, brother of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*'s screenwriter L. M. Kit Carson. He is credited as 'David "Goat" Carson', and later appeared in Hooper's *The Funhouse* (1981), as well as Jim McBride's *Breathless* (1983), in which he is credited as 'D. Lee Carson'. According to McBride, "I never figured out what he actually did in life, maybe something to do with music, but he would pop up at some point whenever I was working with Kit. In *Breathless*, he appears in a scene where Jesse and Monica are running away from cops and interrupt some sort of warehouse heist. Kit gave him a character name (Mr. Andre) so he wouldn't be just an extra. Kit was also great friends with Tobe, which is, I'm sure, how Goat (his nickname) was cast in that film. An even more esoteric piece of trivia: in my film *Pictures from Life's Other Side* (1971) he makes an appearance when we visit Kit's family in Texas, midway through the road trip." (Jim McBride, email, April 15th 2015).

man responsible for *Nashville*'s climactic assassination the previous year (he might even be playing the same character here). Standing awkwardly near the pool table, he first cleans his glasses, then stares lasciviously at Lynette in a way that makes him resemble Judd, who has a habit of drooling over his female guests. When Marlo notices Hayward, he begins taunting him and, as a new song starts up on the jukebox, engages in a bizarre ritual which is part dance, part assault and part seduction. Again, Marlo's behaviour recalls that of Judd, who is also defined by his odd movements and semi-coherent statements. It is as if the perversity Judd represents has seeped into every aspect of American society. Indeed, it is precisely the image of an American flag that connects him with Sheriff Martin. At one point, Judd is seen talking about the need to follow rules and regulations while making careful notes about his two latest guests (one of whom is dead, the other tied to a bed); this is followed by a scene in the sheriff's office which begins with a shot of an officer filling in a form (a gesture which itself recalls the account books kept by the brothel madam).

Hooper often suggests that the monster of the horror film and the sheriff or cowboy of the Western are two sides of the same coin, a theme further

developed in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986), which links Leatherface with Dennis Hopper's sheriff. And just as that film's cannibal family, whose flesh-eating activities are seen as a logical extension of capitalist business practices ("The small businessman always gets it in the ass"), lives in an abandoned amusement park decorated with images of legendary Texan heroes, so here is Judd associated with the Wild West. This connection is explicitly made by the splendid moment in which – as Faye noisily struggles to free herself, her daughter crawls about beneath the hotel, and Buck makes love to Lynette – Judd strides around his living room striking self-consciously dramatic poses (much like those of Sheriff Martin) while a song with the lyric "A cowboy is true to his word" plays in the background[5].

Hooper's films frequently link modern-day horrors with America's pioneer past; the haunting in *Poltergeist* (1982) occurs because a housing development has been constructed over a Native American burial ground. But if, in the traditional Western, Indians are representatives of savagery and implicitly opposed to civilisation, the Westerner occupies a curious middle ground, being neither totally savage nor entirely civilised; settled communities cannot accommodate him, and once his imperialist project has been achieved, he will have little option but to wander out into the desert, like John Wayne at the end of *The Searchers* (1956). Judd and Leatherface occupy a similar position in Hooper's oeuvre, being simultaneously the inheritors of those savage passions once associated with the Indians, and spokespersons for capitalism. In Freudian terms, they are the products of sexual repression... and what is repressed always returns in monstrous form. Amusingly, all that remains of Judd by the end of the film is his phallic wooden leg, neatly matching the opening close-up of Buck's crotch.

Yet, as in *Chain Saw*, Hooper avoids providing psychological explanations for his characters, and the earlier film's metaphysical hints ("When malefic planets are in retrograde... their maleficence is increased.") are conspicuous by their absence here. Tempted as we may be to explain away Judd's activities as products of aberrant psychology or universal Evil, Hooper refuses to let us draw any such conclusions. We must experience this film as nightmare rather than reading it as text. If we are unsure of the extent to which normality can be separated from abnormality, sanity from insanity, Buck's 'conventional' sexual behaviour from Judd's brutal abuse, then it makes sense that we should remain uncertain whether or not *Eaten Alive* is supposed to be funny. The grotesquely excessive comic tone rarely ceases to be disturbing (as in *Chain Saw*, Hooper and Wayne Bell's score, a cacophony of discordant noises, maintains a constant feeling of tension), but at the same time nothing can quite be taken straight.

5 - Marco Ferreri's *Dillinger Is Dead* (1969) makes strikingly similar use of country and western music to mock solitary masculine behaviour.

Hooper's stylised mise-en-scène and anti-realist devices – the brothel madam's Kabuki-like make-up, the artificial crocodile – serve much the same function, never permitting us to view what is presented onscreen as merely the 'realistic' recording of a series of events. We are constantly reminded of the fact that this film has been shot in a studio rather than on location (note the theatrical red curtain which figures prominently in the opening scene), and Hooper's use of his set as a set again suggests *Eaten Alive*'s split nature, looking back to a period of Hollywood studio-based filmmaking (Hooper has mentioned *The Wizard of Oz* as a specific influence) while anticipating a group of films from the early 80s which shared a similar stagebound aesthetic: Francis Coppola's *One from the Heart* (1981), David S. Ward's *Cannery Row* (1982), Wim Wenders' *Hammett* (1982), Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Querelle* (1982), Federico Fellini's *And the Ship Sails On* (1983), Jean-Jacques Beineix's *The Moon in the Gutter* (1983) and Altman's *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* (1982) and *Streamers* (1983). For Hooper, this dreamily artificial set, as isolated from the world of comprehensible everyday normality as Judd's hotel, is the perfect embodiment of his nightmare vision.

Brad Stevens is the author of **Monte Hellman: His Life and Films** ***(McFarland, 2003) and Abel Ferrara:*** **The Moral Vision** ***(FAB Press, 2004). His 'Bradlands' column appears regularly on*** **Sight & Sound*****'s website.***

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Eaten Alive is presented in 1.85:1 with mono sound.

Eaten Alive has been exclusively restored in 2K resolution for this release by Arrow Films.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution at OCN Digital, USA. Kodak Digital Ice was used to remove thousands of instances of negative dirt and debris. Some sections of the CRI element were also scanned for completion.

The film was graded on the Baselight Grading System at Deluxe Restoration, London. Director Tobe Hooper supervised and approved the grading.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Image stability, density fluctuation and other picture issues were also improved. Some scenes appear softer than the surrounding footage as they only appeared in the CRI element.

The mono soundtrack was transferred from the original 35mm magnetic stripe tracks by OCN Digital.

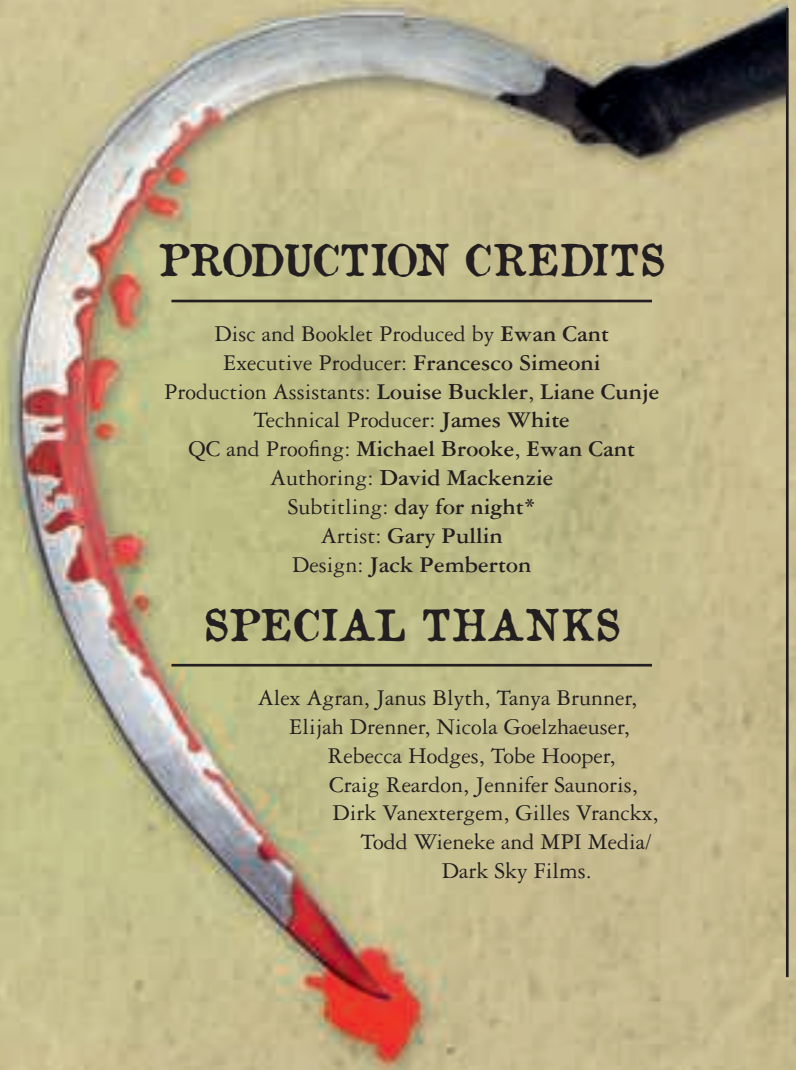
This restoration has been approved by Tobe Hooper, whose generous assistance has made this release possible.

Restoration Supervised and Produced by **James White**, **Arrow Films**

Film Scanning: **OCN Labs**, **Joe Rubin**

Restoration services by **Deluxe Restoration**, **London:**
Film grading: **Stephen Bearman**
Restoration Supervisors: **Tom Barrett**, **Clayton Baker**
Restoration Technicians: **Debi Bataller**, **Dave Burt**, **Lisa Copson**, **Tom Wiltshire**
Restoration Management: **Mark Bonnici**, **Graham Jones**

Audio Conform: **David Mackenzie**



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producer: **Francesco Simeoni**
Production Assistants: **Louise Buckler**, **Liane Cunje**
Technical Producer: **James White**
QC and Proofing: **Michael Brooke**, **Ewan Cant**
Authoring: **David Mackenzie**
Subtitling: **day for night***
Artist: **Gary Pullin**
Design: **Jack Pemberton**

SPECIAL THANKS

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ARROW VIDEO

FCD1122/AV015