

# Society -

## CAST

**BILLY WARLOCK** as Bill Whitney

**DEVIN DEVASQUEZ** as Clarissa

**EVAN RICHARDS** as Milo

**BEN MEYERSON** as Ferguson

**CHARLES LUCIA** as Jim Whitney

**CONNIE DANESE** as Nan

**PATRICE JENNINGS** as Jenny Whitney

**BEN SLACK** as Dr. Cleveland

**TIM BARTELL** as Blanchard

## CREW

Directed by **BRIAN YUZNA**

Written by **RICK FRY** and **WOODY KEITH**

Produced by **KEITH WALLEY**

Executive Producers **PAUL WHITE**, **KEIZO KABATA** and **TERRY OGISU**

Director of Photography **RICK FICHTER**

Edited by **PETER TESCHNER**

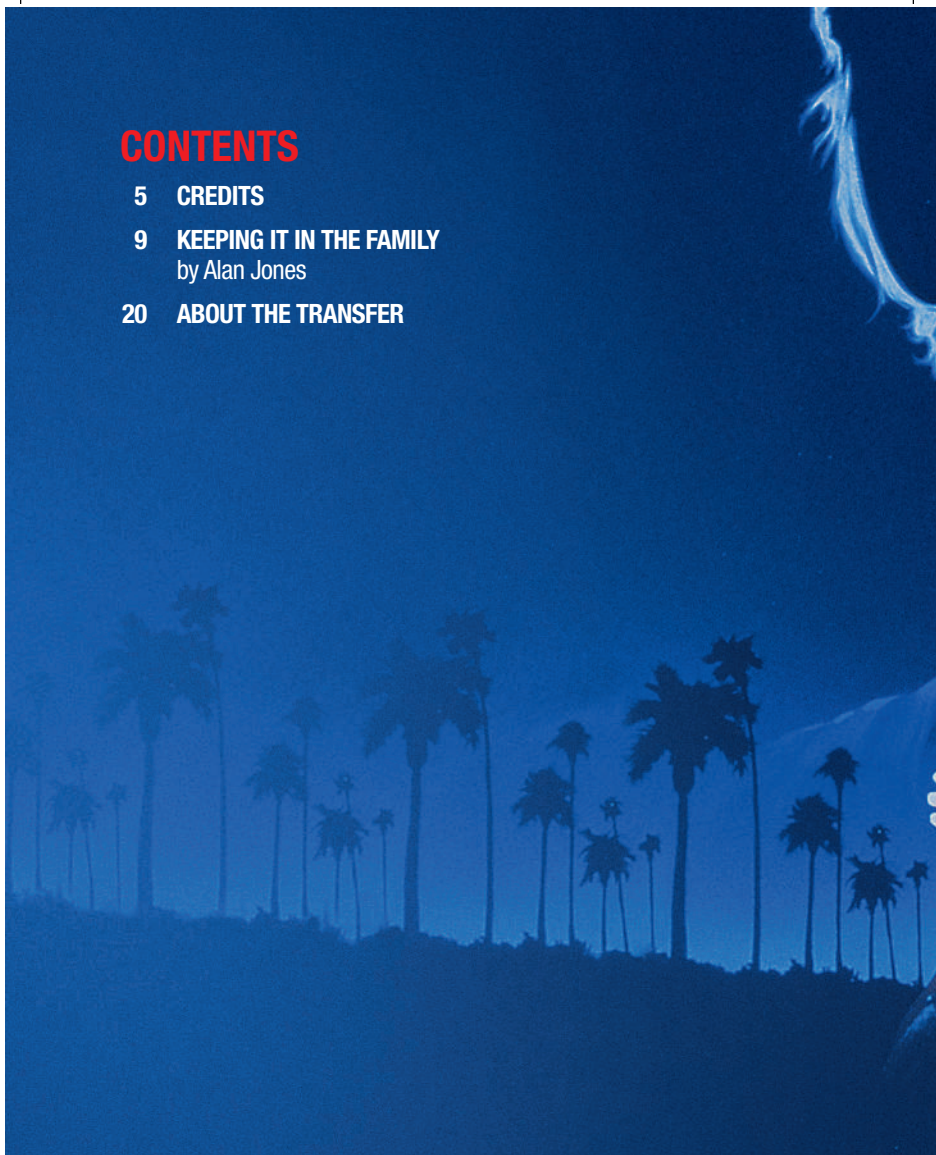
Production design by **MATHEW C. JACOBS**

Music composed by **MARK RYDER** and **PHIL DAVIES**

Surrealistic make-up effects by **SCREAMING MAD GEORGE**

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# KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

by Alan Jones

1989 was a good year for family movies like *Parenthood*, *Christmas Vacation* and *Look Who's Talking*. Thanks to their focus on close-knit nearest and dearest, each became a sizeable box-office hit. But family means flesh and blood too, and there was one film that took that description to the extreme – becoming a surreal horror classic in the process.

Brian Yuzna's *Society* came into a horror marketplace stuffed with sequels to popular franchises; *The Exorcist III*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan*, *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers*, *Howling V: The Rebirth*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 5: The Dream Child*, *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night 3: Better Watch Out!*, *Sleepaway Camp 3: Teenage Wasteland* and *Stepfather II*.

But what made *Society* stand out in this crowd was its astonishing uniqueness. For it was an eye-opening mixture of graphic special make-up effects, startling sexual concepts and sleazy outrage of the kind normally reserved for the hardcore pornography industry. When I presented the world premiere of *Society* at the third 'Shock Around the Clock' festival at London's Scala Cinema in July 1989, I described it as "*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* meets *From Beyond* with a smidgeon of *Debbie Does Dallas* thrown in for good measure" and then sat back with delight watching Yuzna's crazed, nightmarish, burlesque about teenage alienation elbow its way to the genre frontline as a bona fide masterpiece.

Time has not dimmed my laudatory view of banner producer Yuzna's debut feature as director either. In fact, the core conceit – proposing that the rich are literally an inhuman species – has simply improved with time and gained even more traction in an age when it has been reported that the most affluent 85 people on Earth

control as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population put together.

Because that's exactly what Yuzna's extraordinary anti-establishment paranoia fable is all about: the rupturing of the upper crust in an increasingly uncaring civilization, its grotesque class struggles, the power-dressed elitism it advocates, and the low morality that high society indulges in. Yuzna's ace trick with this distinctly Reagan-era political allegory is daring to put the class system under a fantasy microscope and then stripping away each pretension with scalpel-like precision to expose the rot beneath and simultaneously uncovering unfathomable vice and its even perverse versa.

Bill Whitney (Billy Warlock) doesn't feel comfortable around his prosperous A-list Hollywood parents and begins to suspect that he was adopted. Why else does he keep thinking something is clearly amiss when they refuse to involve him in family affairs and attend clandestine meetings he only hears about second hand? It seems he is always on the outside looking in. Is he just paranoid like his psychiatrist thinks? Or is there really something going on under the surface of relative perfection?

Then an old school friend plays a cassette of his sister's coming out party. Revealed on it are suggestions she's having an incestuous relationship with both parents and, worse, that they killed someone in their rabid sexual frenzy. Bill's fears are compounded when his friend suddenly dies in a car crash and the tape is mysteriously doctored to sound completely innocent.

There's only one thing to do – gatecrash the next glitzy VIP event he knows his parents will be attending and confront them about everything in a last ditch effort to unearth the truth. Little does he realise though that this course of action has been expected: because Bill is the marked sacrifice for a group order where good breeding is all that counts. "The rich have always sucked off low-class shit like

you,” his sister’s boyfriend tells him, while an ooze-encrusted Judge clarifies, “You’re a different race from us, a different species, a different class... You have to be born into society.”

A self-confessed horror fanatic since childhood, Philippine-born Brian Yuzna made his youthful *Famous Monsters of Filmland*-inspired dreams come true when he moved to Los Angeles from North Carolina after becoming a successful entrepreneur in the art, real estate, video production and nightclub business. It was after meeting innovative theatre director Stuart Gordon that Yuzna made a decision that would change his life. He mortgaged his family’s future to produce *Re-Animator* in 1985. The pulpy, gory H.P. Lovecraft adaptation became Charles Band’s mini-major Empire Pictures’ first big hit and a beloved horror classic. *From Beyond* (1986) and *Dolls* (1987) followed in its wake but then Yuzna had a terrible experience with his pet project ‘Teenie Weenies’, written with Gordon prior to both those films. Disney bought their concept, brought in new writers, then dumped them and changed the title to *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. Depressed by that chain of events, Yuzna decided he wanted a change in direction - to direction.

“Obviously I got sent a lot of strange scripts around this time,” Yuzna told me. “One was from a writer named Rick Fry who had submitted another spec script to me months before titled *Weird Museum*. *Society* was co-written with Woody Keith and concerned suspicious kids being sacrificed to a blood cult. I didn’t like that ending but found the paranoia aspects very creepy. Then a sci-fi film I was expecting to produce next, about a woman finding out all men are aliens, fell apart and I had this extra energy I needed to channel into getting something off the ground. As *Society* was closest to me at the time, I chose to focus on that and decided it would make the perfect directing debut too.”

The first action Yuzna took after making that monumental decision was to expand the political content and write the notorious ‘shunting’ sequence into the climactic



orgy of melting flesh, rough trade sex and deviant gender blurring. “‘Let’s make it more biological’ I told the writers, because I was a huge fan of David Cronenberg’s body horror nightmares,” he explained. Then a couple of Japanese producers (Keizo Kabata and Terry Ogisu) began showing curiosity in the highly anticipated project and suggested Screaming Mad George do the special make-up effects. George had earned his stripes on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, *Predator* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* and when Yuzna saw his work he knew he had found the perfect person to create the perverted visual delights he had in store.

The other two *Society* producers were British ex-patriots Keith Walley and Paul White. Walley was a professional football player in London who began mid-fielding for Crystal Palace and wound up playing for the California Surf team in the late 1970s. Like everyone else who moves to Los Angeles, he decided to make movies after dabbling in international film distribution. White was a self-confessed ex-hippie who ended up in Tokyo, had executive-produced *The Unnameable* (an adaptation of the H.P. Lovecraft short story) in 1988, and was responsible for piquing the interest of *Society*’s two Japanese producers.

Costing \$2 million, *Society* was shot on location in five weeks in and around Los Angeles: at headline star Billy Warlock’s own high school in Van Nuys, the Wrigley Mansion, the Veterans Hospital and at GMT studios in Culver City. With a cast drawn from reliable television regulars – *Baywatch* hunk Warlock remaining a daytime soap opera staple for the next 20 years – Yuzna threw himself in at the directing deep end. “I had no game plan, no concrete direction in mind. What you see on screen is what you get. There’s nothing like having to do it yourself to learn the craft of filmmaking and I was constantly sticking new ideas in and going off at tangents. I learned that approach from Stuart Gordon. When he yelled ‘Action’ for the first time on *Re-Animator* he just followed his instincts and remained unafraid where the subject matter was taking him. His ability to tell the story through the









actors was an important lesson and key to my method was refusing to get single-mindedly obsessed about anything.”

The ‘shunting’ sequence was filmed at the end of a very hectic production schedule because Yuzna knew it would be the most challenging section of all. By then the money had run out and Yuzna had to beg his actors to work for free while stressing how important the orgy climax was to the mystery of the whole ground-breaking enterprise. According to Yuzna, one of his young actors got quite carried away and more than rose to the occasion; but because he was doing him a favour by even being there, Yuzna felt he couldn’t say anything about his clear excitement! If his inspirations for the paranoia themes contained in *Society* were Robert Siodmak’s *The Spiral Staircase* and Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby*, then it was David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* and surrealist artist Salvador Dalí that influenced the wickedly comic spins on hardcore pornography for the over-the-top culmination of aberrant sex, slime and shock.

Put through an extensive series of work-in-progress previews to test out its trauma factors, Yuzna was very surprised when it became clear the most offensive scene to most audiences was the moment Warlock and co-star Ben Meyerson kiss each other. Yuzna adds, “I never expected *Society* to be that controversial. I didn’t think it was going to be virtually forbidden in America without extensive cuts and even then end up getting a restrictive X rating. I was the fool who honestly thought it was a mainstream movie! *Society* isn’t gory in the standard way and its imagery is clean. Why are people more squeamish about sex than they are of horror?”

That’s why Yuzna knew early on that *Society* would find a better reception in Europe than America. He explains, “Europe has always been more tuned in and far hipper than America regarding such subject matter. It’s the reason I moved to Barcelona and began The Fantastic Factory genre label for the Spanish company Filmox. England being so class-orientated obviously helped, it’s so stratified and

rooted in the culture, whereas in the United States there's this feeling that if you have money you are better than anyone else and you deserve it. Great Britain has never suffered under that delusion so there was always less of a resistance to go with the satirical flow of the movie and enjoy its many absurdist notions. Money justifies itself, but *Society* puts down everything America stands for. And in the States there's the opinion that class doesn't exist. Which is more of a fantasy than the film is!"

To this day Yuzna says he basically made *Society* as a huge joke with a vague message at its centre. But he's more than pleased when audiences and critics see something more serious within its genre radicalism. "I had a great deal of fun with the myriad of ideas in the screenplay, which essentially revolves around a standard issue teenager being scared to death of his burgeoning sexual desires. What occurs in *Society* is something that happens every day, only here it's put in a fantasy context. It's 100% real to me. Anyone arguing there are not a handful of families who do have such power in this world can't be as mistrustful as I am. Except I'm not afraid of it. From my perspective a few people have a great deal of sway over the many and that is definitely not a good thing. I'm not just talking about Presidents or Prime Ministers either."

"The idea was to create a cohesive universe where this fact is expressed. You can't outgrow your birth, you can try of course, but money isn't the answer. The Kennedy family would never have been in *High Society* because they are too nouveau riche. You don't change class with cash – you are just more able to express your horrible poor taste. The joy of making any horror film is that you can comment on everything in a surreal context and that's the main reason why I directed *Society*."

*Alan Jones is a film critic, author, broadcaster and curator of Film4 FrightFest.*







## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Society* was restored in 2013 using the best film and audio elements available. For this restoration a second generation Intermediate Interpositive was used, with the colour palette sensitively re-timed precisely to match the photochemical attributes of the original Eastman Color print presentations at the time of the film's original theatrical release.

The 35mm Intermediate Positive was 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 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 revealed 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.

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 Puszkar at PostFactory GmbH.



## PRODUCTION CREDITS

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

**Executive Producer:** Francesco Simeoni

**Production Assistants:** Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje

**Technical Producer:** James White

**QC and Proofing:** Ewan Cant, James Flower

**Subtitling:** Rebecca Kerby

**Authoring:** David Mackenzie

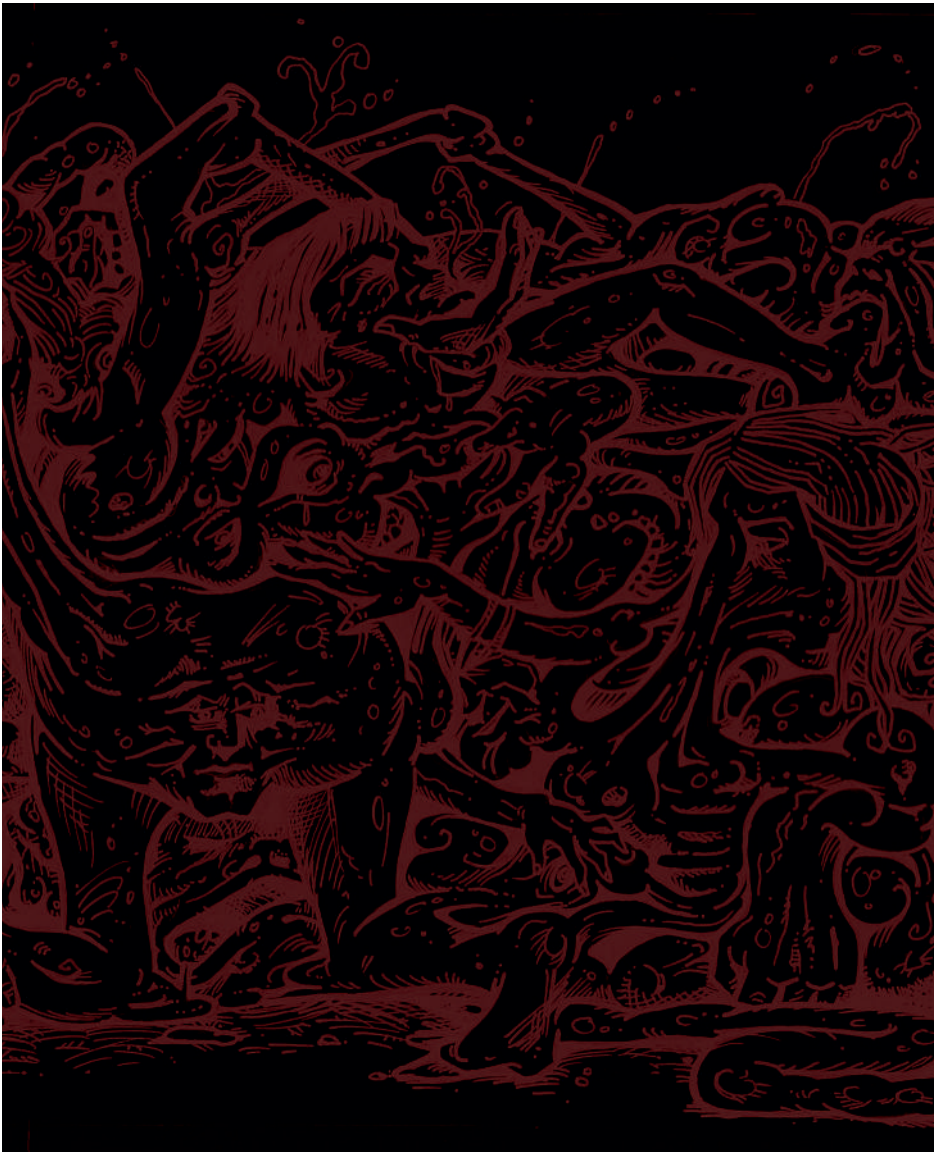
**Artist:** Nick Percival

**Design:** Jack Pemberton, Matt Armstrong

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Tim Bartell, Nick Benson, Carl Daft, Devine DeVasquez,  
Andrew Featherstone, Screaming Mad George, Dave Grasso,  
David Gregory, Ben Meyerson, Edward Murphy, Robert Nevitt,  
Martin Trafford, Paul White, Billy Warlock and Brian Yuzna.









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