



**SPIDER
BABY**

**"COME INTO MY
PARLOR, SAID THE
SPIDER TO THE..."**

SEDUCTIVE INNOCENCE
of LOLITA

SAVAGE HUNGER of a
BLACK WIDOW

A TASTE FOR **BLOOD!**

STARRING
LON CHANEY - CAROL OHMART

PRODUCED BY JACK HILL - PRODUCED BY GIL LASKY & PAUL MONKA - DIRECTED BY JACK HILL

WHATEVER
HAPPENED TO....

SPIDER BABY

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It's Bad; Or, Loving the Maddest Story Ever Told*
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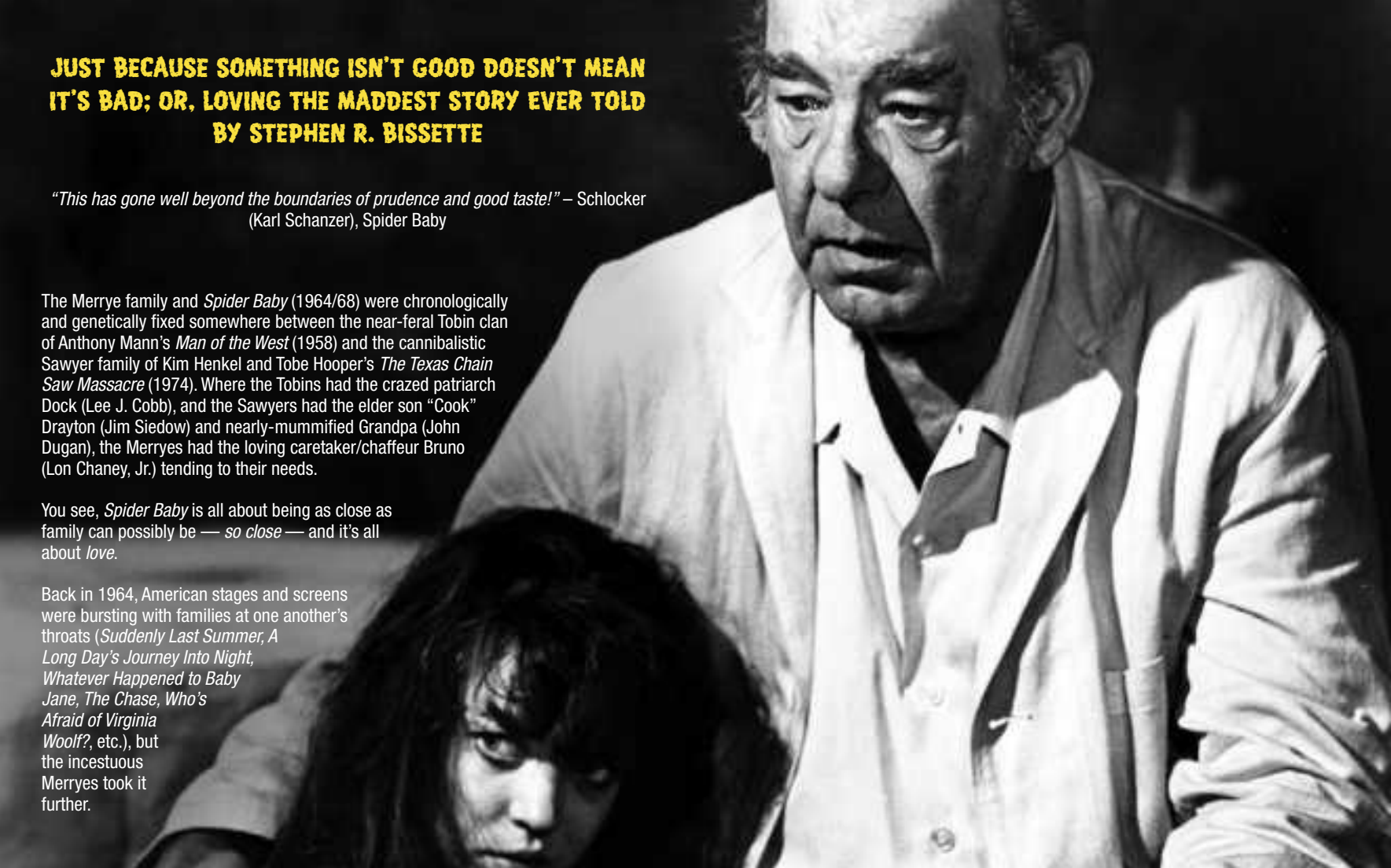




CREDITS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY Jack Hill - **PRODUCED BY** Gil Lasky, Paul Monka
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY Ronald Stein - **CINEMATOGRAPHY BY** Alfred Taylor -
EDITED BY Jack Hill - **ART DIRECTOR** Ray Story - **TITLE DESIGN BY** eip

STARRING Lon Chaney Jr., Carol Ohmart, Quinn K. Redeker, Beverly Washburn, Jill Banner,
Sid Haig, Mary Mitchel, Karl Schanzer, Mantan Moreland



**JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING ISN'T GOOD DOESN'T MEAN
IT'S BAD; OR, LOVING THE MADDEST STORY EVER TOLD
BY STEPHEN R. BISSETTE**

"This has gone well beyond the boundaries of prudence and good taste!" – Schlocker
(Karl Schanzer), *Spider Baby*

The Merrye family and *Spider Baby* (1964/68) were chronologically and genetically fixed somewhere between the near-feral Tobin clan of Anthony Mann's *Man of the West* (1958) and the cannibalistic Sawyer family of Kim Henkel and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). Where the Tobins had the crazed patriarch Dock (Lee J. Cobb), and the Sawyers had the elder son "Cook" Drayton (Jim Siedow) and nearly-mummified Grandpa (John Dugan), the Merryes had the loving caretaker/chaffeur Bruno (Lon Chaney, Jr.) tending to their needs.

You see, *Spider Baby* is all about being as close as family can possibly be — *so close* — and it's all about *love*.

Back in 1964, American stages and screens were bursting with families at one another's throats (*Suddenly Last Summer*, *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*, *The Chase*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, etc.), but the incestuous Merryes took it further.



Tucked away in their off-road, seen-better-days hilltop mansion, the inbred trio of Merrye siblings—Ralph (Sid Haig), Elizabeth (Beverly Washburn), and Virginia (Jill Banner), the titular Spider Baby—slid into increasingly bizarre, savage misbehavior due to the inbred family affliction ‘the Merrye Syndrome’. They mentally regressed once they hit puberty, becoming more and more erratic, dangerous, and unmanageable in a cruelly satiric variation on Alzheimer’s and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease).

Still, Bruno loved them and was absolutely devoted to their wellbeing. As Jack Hill once said, *Spider Baby* was and is really “about unconditional love”, and love didn’t and doesn’t come any more unconditional than Bruno’s.

So, to the present tense, in case you’ve never seen *Spider Baby*: the shit hits the fan once Aunt Emily Howe (Carol Ohmart) and her brother Peter (Quinn Redeker) show up with shifty lawyer Schlocker (Karl Schanzer) and lovely secretary Ann Morris (Mary Mitchel) to claim the estate. The arrival of the two women stirs Ralph’s sexual urges; capable only of rudimentary babyish sounds and shifting about within the walls, Ralph happily kills a cat for the main course of the first family reunion meal—a precursor of infamous horror movie family dinners in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Eraserhead*, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, etc. In short order, the Merryes begin to *really* run amok, and the fun begins!

If Jack Hill’s original title, *Cannibal Orgy, or the Maddest Story Ever Told*, seems extreme or too lurid for its day, consider the pop soup it emerged from.

By 1964, cannibalism was a broken screen taboo. It really took actually *seeing* the walking dead chowing down on teen meat in George Romero and John Russo’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) to once and for all bust that taboo, but long pig was on the movie menu. Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) passed with MPAA Code approval by the skin of its homosexual-predator-devoured-by-third-world-boys’ teeth. The Code-approved *Northwest Passage* (1940) was a fixture of afternoon and late-night TV, with hunger-crazed Abenaki-head-eating Rogers’ Ranger threatening to devour Spencer Tracy (“I’ll kill you, Rogers, and I’ll eat your head, too!”). Stern stuff, this, as were the clear inferences of cannibalism in Terence Fisher’s *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958). Herschell Gordon Lewis and



David Friedman had only recently staged the first explicit color cannibal tableaux for *Blood Feast* (1963) and *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964); *Blood Feast* in particular had been an unexpected hit.

Jack Hill was consciously tapping those veins, but doing so as a satirist, too—“sick humor” was selling LPs (Lenny Bruce), comics (*Mad*, *Sick*, etc.), movies (*Dr. Strangelove*, the forthcoming *The Loved One*), and books (Jules Feiffer’s *Sick, Sick, Sick*, etc.). Even Hill’s sly subtitle was an anthropophagous pun, riffing off George Stevens’ (then forthcoming) “Life of Christ” Hollywood super production *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and its cannibal subtext (“Take this and eat it, for this is my body...”).

For all its *talk* of cannibalism, Hill’s essentially bloodless *Cannibal Orgy* was closer to the soft-pedaling of the infamous Wisconsin cannibal-necrophile Ed Gein (arrested November 1957) in Robert Bloch’s novel *Psycho* (1959) and Alfred Hitchcock and Joseph Stefano’s cinematic adaptation (1960). *Psycho* smashed box office records, but eschewed Gein’s flesh-eating crimes completely. Hill appropriated the trappings—the Gothic house on a California hilltop, the “we’ll have to stay the night” guests uncorking libidos and unspeakable cravings, and the sick family dynamic taken to fresh extremes—that most of *Psycho*’s imitators played off of, from William Castle’s *Homicidal* (1961) to Robert Aldrich’s *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). Baby Jane (Bette Davis) serving cooked-pet “din-din” to sister Blanche (Joan Crawford) may have directly inspired the Merrye feast of slain housecat, but the weirdo family scenario had deeper roots in myth, fairy tales, folklore, literature, and movies. The deranged Femm family members of James Whale’s *The Old Dark House* (1932) were ancestors; like the Femms, however eccentric the Merryes in sight might be, the relatives tucked away from view proved even more, uh, “unusual”. The Femms most lethal relative was hidden upstairs, whereas the Merryes hid the ravenous Uncle Ned, Aunt Clara, and Aunt Martha in the basement, as with Wes Craven’s later surrogate cannibal family in *The People Under the Stairs* (1991).

According to the official Spider Baby website, Jack Hill was hired “to write, direct and edit the film in the summer of 1963”. Still, you can’t believe everything you read on the internet, you know. Industry trades of the day present evidence that that claim might be off by one year: *Motion Picture Herald* for September 30, 1964 noted:

“...the completion of the curiously titled *Cannibal Orgy—or The Maddest Picture Ever Made [sic]* by the young director Jack Hill, with Lon Chaney starred in a story designed for the teen-agers, of whatever age, whose interest in the ghostly, the mysterious and the frightening is, he holds, the same today as in all the yesterdays. ‘Like the Westerns—indestructible.’

“Hill, 30, is refreshing proof that the new generation of picture makers for the screen can be depended on to do right by it. He is a graduate of the Cinema Branch of the University of California at Los Angeles. So are Gil Lasky and Paul Monka, co-producers of the film, written by Hill, and so determined were they to apply their ideas to production that they ‘went into the real estate business to make the money to pay for the production.’ ...” (“*Hollywood Column*” by William R. Weaver, *Hollywood Editor*, pg. 16)

Two weeks later, *Motion Picture Herald* reporter Ethel Rosen got the film’s original title right in her “*Hollywood Scene*” column:

“Writer-director Jack Hill and production executive Bart Patton, who recently formed the independent company to be known as Jay-Hart Productions, have purchased a horror-comedy story by composer Benjamin Winters called ‘*Spinning in the Sun, or How I Got a Bead on Her*.’ Due recently completed the filming of *Cannibal Orgy, or the Maddest Story Ever Told*, with Lon Chaney and Carol Ohmart. Picture these titles on your marquee!” (*Motion Picture Herald*, October 14, 1964, pg. 18)

This may seem like hair-splitting, but that decisive year of production determines whether Hill was *prescient* of, or immediately *present* in, what I will call the “monster family media boom”. *The Motion Picture Herald* paper trail is compelling evidence for summer 1964, which most sources acknowledge as the correct production year. The rest of the *Spider Baby* website account rings true:

“A young Jack Hill... found financing for his first solo directorial effort, *Cannibal Orgy*. A friend of Hill’s, fellow Corman alumnus Karl Schanzer, had been moonlighting as a private detective when he met two men, Gil Lasky and Paul Monka, on one of his assignments. The two businessmen were eager to invest their profits from the real estate market into a horror film, and Schanzer suggested to them that Hill might have such a story. As it turned out, Hill did have an outline, and based on that, Lasky and Monka hired him to write, direct and edit the film... Shot over 12 days in and around

Los Angeles, *Cannibal Orgy, or The Maddest Story Ever Told* (to use the film's original, full title) would sadly never see its intended release....” (<http://www.spiderbabyonline.com/>)

Lasky and Monka were part of the UCLA theater department (as had been co-star Mary Mitchel, graduating from UCLA earlier). Lasky had done some screen acting (*The Young Lions*, *The Buccaneer*, both 1958) and television (*The Silent Service*, 1958; *Death Valley Days*, 1959), but *Spider Baby* was Monka's first and last movie. Cinematographer Alfred Taylor's only previous credit was shooting Joseph V. Mascelli's *Monstrosity* (1963) in and around Los Angeles. The Merrye estate was in fact a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (#142) known as the Smith Estate, aka El Mio (“Mine,” or “My Place”). Director Denny Harris would shoot exteriors for the Jim and Ken Wheat revised script *Silent Scream* (1980) in the same location—with a mute Barbara Steele arguably channeling Sig Haig's Ralph.

And what a cast Hill and his producers assembled! Along with Hill's pal Karl Schanzer (already in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dementia 13*, 1963, soon to be in Hill's *Blood Bath*), who was the catalytic agent for the entire project, Lon Chaney, Jr. and Sid Haig co-starred with Mantan Moreland (veteran of over 125 films), Carol Ohmart (over 40 movie and TV credits, including William Castle's 1958 *House on Haunted Hill*), and Mary Mitchel (*Twist Around the Clock*, 1961; *Panic in Year Zero!*, 1962; and Coppola's *Dementia 13*, as well as many TV credits); Mitchel was the only *Spider Baby* cast member to also appear in *The Munsters*. Fellow TV regular Quinn K. Redeker anchored the film as Uncle Peter. My generation had already seen Beverly Washburn (“Elizabeth Merrye”) in *Old Yeller* (1957) and as the little girl who played ball with the “mole men” in *Superman and the Mole-Men* (1951, in syndication as *The Adventures of Superman's* only two-parter). Debuting was Jill Banner as the titular *Spider Baby*, changing her name from Mary Molumby and lying about her age (she was actually 17) to skirt California's strict child labor laws.



Spider Baby was indeed part of a media “monster family” explosion in 1964. *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* had both premiered on prime-time network television just a week or two before the *Motion Picture Herald* announcements of *Cannibal Orgy*’s shooting being completed. Jack Hill and his partners were *that close* to catching lightning in a bottle. *So close!*

The TV series that officially labeled *The Addams Family* with its creator’s name sprang from an unnamed ghoulish cartoon family drawn by cartoonist Charles Addams for *The New Yorker*. They had been introduced in 1938, and continued to appear in single-panel gag cartoons through Addams’ death in 1988.

The Addams Family’s family tree parallels that of Jack Hill’s Merrye Family. Addams did an illustration for Ray Bradbury’s short story “*The Homecoming*” (1946), which introduced the Elliots, an Illinois-bred monstrous clan. Other monstrous family stories that share Bradbury’s pulp and story magazine pedigree include Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore (Catherine Lucille Moore, Kuttner’s wife)’s tales of a mutant inbred backwoods Appalachian clan named the Hogbens (1941–1949), which spawned one novel (*Cold War*, 1949; see the still-affordable *Mountain Magic*, 2004). Similar monstrous and/or ghoulish families inhabited the stage and the big screen, most memorably the murderous sisters of *Arsenic and Old Lace* (play: 1939; film: 1944), *Ladies in Retirement* (play: 1940; film: 1941, remade as *The Mad Room*, 1969), and the homicidal hillbilly clan of *Murder, He Says* (1945), among others.

The concept for a series of animated cartoons starring a comedic monster clan was pitched to monster-friendly Universal Studios by animator Bob Clampett around the time of Universal’s hit *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). Clampett’s unproduced proposal lay fallow into the 1960s, when similar pitches from writers Allan Burns and Chris Hayward (of *Rocky & Bullwinkle*), and later from Norm Liebman and Ed Haas, eventually became the live-action TV show *The Munsters*. In the meanwhile, another cartoon monster family surfaced in 1961: Mr. and Mrs. J. Evil Scientist and son J. Junior debuted in 1961 on *The Yogi Bear Show*. By the time the TV monster family craze hit paydirt in 1964, Hanna-Barbera had also introduced The Gruesomes family to the supporting cast of *The Flintstones*.

The Addams Family ran 64 episodes on ABC over two seasons (1964–66). The same two TV seasons were shared with CBS-TV’s competing *The Munsters* (70 episodes, 1964–66), which also spawned a Universal theatrical movie *Munster, Go Home!* (1966).

By the time *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* were competing for ever-sagging ratings, comic books had spawned their own original kid-friendly monster families: Gold Key had *The Little Monsters*, the most long-lived of all the comic book creature clans (44 issues, 19674–1978); John Stanley wrote and drew Dell’s *Melvin Monster* (1965–69, 9 issues). Saturday morning TV animated shows were *much* quicker to jump on the 1960s monster family bandwagon, led by *Milton the Monster* (1965–66).

Though perfectly tuned to the zeitgeist and completed in time to cash in the “monster family” boom, *Cannibal Orgy* aka *Spider Baby* completely missed the bandwagon. The real estate boom that bankrolled the film’s production resulted in the complete feature being consigned to legal limbo until after the boom had bust.

So close.

Less than \$80,000 later (the reported cost of making the film), *Spider Baby* felt the death sting: “. . . During the final stages of post-production, [Gil] Lasky and [Paul] Monka [discovered] their real estate development business and all assets (including the film) would be held up in litigation after the Los Angeles housing market crashed. . . . It would not be until four years later that filmmaker/distributor David L. Hewitt would acquire the rights to the film, re-title it *Spider Baby* and place it on a double-bill with *Dr. Terror’s Gallery of Horrors*, a film that Hewitt also directed. Following a variety of releases and re-releases over the years (where it would also play under the title *The Liver Eaters*), *Spider Baby* seemed destined for obscurity; a flash in the memory of drive-in moviegoers and grindhouse transients. . . .” (<http://www.spiderbabyonline.com/>). The double-bill opened in January 1968, and quietly bombed. *Spider Baby* was soon orphaned.

Jack Hill went on to bigger and wilder things, including more films co-starring Sid Haig. Hill helmed, among others, *Pit Stop* (1969), *The Big Doll House* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), *Switchblade Sisters* (1975), and more, including the last celluloid ever shot featuring the late, great Boris Karloff, for a quartet of made-in-Mexico genre potboilers.

Most of the *Spider Baby* creative team continued working in Hollywood, too. With the notable exception of Sid Haig—who later co-starred in Rob Zombie’s *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) and *The Devil’s Rejects* (2005), along with the instantly infamous

Creature (2011)—none of them were involved with anything remotely like *Spider Baby* again.

The one cast member who seemed happy with *Spider Baby's* complete obscurity was the Spider Baby herself: before Jill Banner's screen debut illuminated a single screen, she'd already appeared in *Deadlier Than the Male* (1966) and *The President's Analyst* (1967), and went on to live with Marlon Brando. According to Hill, Banner shunned her role in *Spider Baby* and never told anyone of it—a credit easily buried, as the film remained almost impossible to see until after her tragic death resulting from a Ventura Freeway car accident in August, 1982.

Alas: Spider Baby didn't love *Spider Baby*.

The rescue and redemption of *Spider Baby* was a slow process. Even amid the growing literature on exploitation movies, it remained obscure. Most folks first read about *Spider Baby* in Michael Weldon's *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (Ballantine Books, October 1983), and especially via Jim Morton's analysis of the film in *ReSearch #10: Incredibly Strange Films* (ReSearch, 1986), which justifiably launched *Spider Baby* into near-Holy Grail status.

Spider Baby first legally surfaced on video as a 1984 release from Admit One (on Beta and VHS), but credit bearded rock-and-roller Johnny Legend salvaging *Spider Baby* from limbo. *Spider Baby* scored a Jack Hill-sanctioned Johnny Legend VHS before 1990, followed by a 30th anniversary 35mm midnight theatrical run at the NuArt Theatre and commemorative video edition (1994), and a restored edition via Video Treasure and Anchor Bay (1997). The first official DVD edition from Image Entertainment (1999) offered *real* gold, as noted in Jack Hill's liner notes:

"Early in 1999 I... was able to acquire most of the original release prints of *Spider Baby*. ... one of them was printed on fine old Belgian Gavaert ... I had found the original 'answer print' from the film lab that was created before the distributor made cuts in the picture—in other words, this was the long-lost 'director's cut'—my cut! (for better or worse)—of *Spider Baby*..."





Spider Baby was finally available in its definitive edition. That print and those features carried over to the 2007 Dark Sky/MPI Media Group edition, which brings us to the Arrow Video release you now hold in your Merrye mitts.

So close, she is, to you. So... *close*.

Seen today, *Spider Baby* is still an utterly unique labor of love. It's unlike any movie Jack Hill or anyone else ever made, despite all that came after it. Back in 1988, I even named my comic book, graphic novel, and book publishing imprint (SpiderBaby Grafix & Publications, of *Taboo* and *S.R. Bissette's Tyrant* fame) after *Spider Baby*, for a couple of reasons—well, it's a long story, and I'm out of space. But it's mainly because, you see, I love *Spider Baby*.

As Jack Hill said, it's all about unconditional love...

...and I do, do love *Spider Baby*.

Unconditionally.

And *Spider Baby*, she loves you.

Stephen R. Bissette, Mountains of Madness, VT, April 2013

Stephen R. Bissette teaches at the Center for Cartoon Studies and is renowned for Swamp Thing, Taboo, S.R. Bissette's Tyrant®, co-creating John Constantine and has co-authored many books; his latest include Teen Angels & New Mutants (2011), "Copper" in The New Dead (2010), and illustrating The Vermont Monster Guide (2009). Bissette is currently completing S.R. Bissette's How to Make a Monster (Watson-Guption) for 2014 publication.

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VOICES FROM THE HOUSE ON SPIDER BABY HILL

Cast and Crew Members from one of the Strangest and most Hauntingly Stylish Horror Films of the 1960s Reminisce about their Experiences Making “SPIDER BABY.”

Interviews by PAUL PARLA and CHARLES P. MITCHELL

[This article is dedicated to the memory of Jill Banner, Mantan Moreland and Lon Chaney.]

THE HOUSE ON SPIDER BABY HILL IS A MAGNIFICENT Victorian mansion built in 1887 for California Supreme Court Judge Paul Hatch. It sits up on a hill surrounded by an oval lot in Highland Park, a section of greater Los Angeles. At one time, the grounds covered the entire area, but bit by bit the land was sold off for newer homes. It is now part of suburbia. The house is listed in the national register of historic homes. It has been restored during the past 25 years by various owners, and it is lived in today. But the most memorable aspect of the house is its use as the setting for *Spider Baby* in August and September of 1964.

Spider Baby is one of those rare cult films that grows in stature with each passing year. The plot concerns the last day of the mad Merrye family. Chauffeur Bruno (Lon Chaney) promised the dying Titus Merrye to watch over his children Ralph (Sid Haig), Elizabeth (Beverly Washburn), and Virginia (Jill Banner). They all suffer from “Merrye’s Syndrome”, which causes them to gradually degenerate to a wild, pre-human condition. Mayhem breaks out when some distant family members (Carol Ohmart and Quinn Redeker) turn up with a lawyer (Karl Schanzer) and try to take charge. Bruno blows the house up. Peter (Redeker) escapes with the lawyer’s assistant (Mary Mitchel), whom he later marries. And, if all this weren’t enough, comedian Mantan Moreland has a bit as a “spider” attack victim!

This bare outline cannot satisfactorily convey the film’s content, which subtly suggests a wide range of taboo topics, from incest to necrophilia – making *Spider Baby* a very unique black comedy. All of the film’s ingredients blend perfectly: writing, directing, casting, photography and music. Amazingly, the movie was shot in a mere 12 days with a minimal budget.



The following symposium gathers many of the main characters responsible for the creation of *Spider Baby*, including director/author Jack Hill; production designer Ray Storey (listed as “Ray Story” in the film’s credits); cinematographer Alfred Taylor (A.S.C.); assistant director and production manager Bart Patton; Jill Banner’s agent Stephen Stevens, Jill Banner’s mother Muriel Molumby; and performers Sid Haig, Mary Mitchel, Karl Schanzer and Beverly Washburn. They are the voices from the House on Spider Baby Hill.

JACK HILL: I was discussing with John Lamb [producer/director of *Mermaids of Tiburon*] whether he wanted to produce a low budget horror movie. Then I came up with this idea, just the germ of an idea, as a treatment.

KARL SCHANZER: I was working as a private investigator when I wasn’t being an actor. To me, it was just like another part. I did a job for these real estate contractors, Gil Lasky and Paul Monka. They asked me, “What do you do when you are not a private eye,” and I told them I was an actor. They said “Really? We always wanted to be producers.”

HILL: [Lasky and Monka] had been at UCLA at the same time I was there. They always wanted to get into the movie business. They had been reading many, many scripts and hadn’t found one they liked. So Karl Schanzer showed them my story. It was just an outline, and they liked it. They took a look at the footage I shot on *Bloodbath* [later reworked as *Track of the Vampire*] and agreed to have me write the full script and finance the picture.

SCHANZER: I think they put in about \$60,000. Jack needed to get a bit more money later on.

BART PATTON: It was the black humor, the comedy of the piece that excited me. I’d just done a movie for Jack Hill and Francis Coppola, *Dementia 13*, where I was an ax murderer. So I became production manager of *Spider Baby*.

HILL: I’m not sure where the idea came from. It just came to me all of a piece and the macabre humor was the central part of the vision. I called it *Cannibal Orgy*, or *The Maddest Story Ever Told*. There was a huge epic in production called *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, so it was a take-off on that. I wanted to come up with the most outrageous title I could think of. *Spider Baby* came much later as a title. It wasn’t my title, but it was a stroke of genius.

PATTON: There’d been other films like *Old Dark House* and *Arsenic and Old Lace* that touched on black humor, but Jack’s take was fresh, never obvious.

HILL: It came to life with just the right actors – the miracle of lucky casting. I sort of had Lon Chaney in mind when I did the script. He was a natural. There are only a certain number of actors you can choose if you want to have a star.

PATTON: I called Chaney’s agent to get a price and, when he found out it was a horror movie, he gave a high price.

HILL: We couldn’t afford Chaney’s price, so we sought out John Carradine’s agent. We found out it was the same agent, so we asked Carradine’s price. When the agent told this to Chaney, he agreed to a lower price because he wanted to do it. That’s how we got him. It was lucky that it was the same agent.

PATTON: I even approached Beverly Washburn in a supermarket. I thought she would be ideal as Elizabeth.

BEVERLY WASHBURN: It was very bizarre how I got into the film. I was in “Ralph’s” on Sunset Boulevard. This man came up to me and said, “I’ve seen you in other movies; we are getting together to do a film and I would really like you to come and read for it.” I thought it was a strange approach, but I gave him the name of my agent. Sure enough, they called him and set up an appointment. When I heard about the plot, I thought that it sounded like so much fun. It was so different. I loved it.

STEPHEN STEVENS: I first met Jill Banner through photographer Earl Leaf. Her name was Mary Molumby at the time. I was also friendly with Peggy Lipton [*The Mod Squad*] and we all became close friends. I became her agent and gave her the name “Jill Banner”. I thought this girl had something very special. She was a real flower child. She liked to kick off her shoes and wear flowers in her hair. She was a trend-setter and never tried to be like anyone else. She was never into drugs or casual sex. She was a very loyal friend.

HILL: Somebody called us and said they wanted to send us this actress that we should see. Jill Banner just came in on an interview. We had seen a lot of people. She was hoping to get some little part. She was only seventeen years old, so we were concerned with the Child Labor laws. I recall she said “I haven’t done anything before, but I am a lot of fun to have around!” There was something in the way she said that that made us want to give her the script and have her read it. Then, when she did the audition, we were all impressed. It was a difficult decision because casting a leading role with an unknown was quite a risk. But we felt she was such a natural talent that we chose her.

MURIEL MOLUMBY: I never really wanted my daughter to become part of Hollywood. I had no idea she did *Spider Baby* and she did her best to conceal her involvement with the picture. I was working at the time, and she was out and about with her friends, especially Peggy Lipton. I was unhappy when she changed her name. When we were in Iowa, schoolmates teased her about her name and called her “Mary K” for Mary Kathryn. She didn’t like to be called “Mary K” so that was another reason she changed her name. I would like to remember my daughter as Mary Molumby and not as Jill Banner.

PATTON: Casting some of the other parts was easy. Jack worked a lot with Sid Haig and Karl Schanzer. I was married to Mary Mitchel at the time.

HILL: Some of these people we just knew instinctively would be right. Mary Mitchel struck me as just perfect for her part. I always thought she could have had a great career, but she wasn't lucky I guess.

SID HAIG: Jack called me in and told me what the character of Ralph was like, and asked me to do an improvisation. I remember Gil Lasky had a very shocked look on his face. Some of what I did was based on a character played by James Caan in *Lady in a Cage* [1964] with Olivia de Havilland. Of course, Caan's character wasn't taken as far as my character.

PATTON: Carol Ohmart was known for *The House on Haunted Hill* and was another good choice. We also signed Quinn Redeker [*The Three Stooges Meet Hercules*].

HILL: What I had in mind was to cast a known figure, someone from comedy, in the opening sequence of the film. It would be totally unexpected when he gets whacked. This opening would set the stage for the rest of the film. We needed an actor that everyone would know. Someone came up with the idea of Mantan Moreland.

SCHANZER: Starting the film with Mantan was brilliant. The audience knows him, and they get relaxed. They remember him, and we kill him off at the end of the first reel. So that provided quite a little shock.

HILL: We did some searching to find out if Mantan was available and able to work. We all loved him in those films with Charlie Chan. Well, he was available. He was a little bitter because of the Civil Rights movement. They were the vanguard of political correctness. Because of them, producers were afraid to cast a black actor in a menial role or a comedy role. Some performers lost work. Mantan felt, and rightly so, that his type of comedy was not degrading. Black audiences loved what he did. His word play routines with his vaudeville partner [Ben Carter] were worthy of Abbott & Costello. But the studios lumped everyone together with Stepin Fetchit. Mantan was delighted to be cast in the film.

MARY MITCHEL: Mantan's performance was right on the money. He was perfect in it. He was like a grandfather to the rest of us. He had a little trouble walking, but it was so good to have him around.

HAIG: Mantan was a lot of fun. He thought we were all kind of nuts, but that film brought the nuttiness out of everyone. It was the '60s and we were all a little strange.

RAY STOREY: I was production designer on *Spider Baby* and I had a small studio in Glendale at that time. The studio was only 50' x 50'. It was at 821 South Glendale Avenue, and it was called Alpha Omega studio. It is now the site of an Enterprise car rental agency. We shot all the interiors

there. It used to be an automotive repair service garage, and it had a grease pit; that was a good feature for films. We used it in *Spider Baby* and in Jack's earlier film, *Bloodbath*. We filled it with water and lots of Jello and corn starch. There was a trap door over it. The villain would have the victims walk on the trap door, and fall into this vat. Once Jack jumped up and down on the trapdoor to see if it would work – and it did. The stuff had been there about a week. He was quite a mess.

HILL: I knew the Alpha Omega studio would be available when I wrote the original story. I planned for the pit right in the story. You know, if you don't have a pit, it becomes too expensive to make one because you have to build a raised floor.

STOREY: I also scouted out locations for the film. The iron gate sequences were shot near the Paramount Ranch in the San Fernando Valley near Calabasas.

HAIG: The two columns were left over from another picture. We set up the gate and we did the scenes. It made it appear that the house was in a remote location.

STOREY: I chose the house in Highland Park because it was high up on a hill. A friend of mine lived in the area. A Chinese gentleman owned the place. It wasn't inhabited at the time, and we rented it.

SCHANZER: It was a marvellous old place; on the third floor was a pool table that was a work of art. We had to promise not to hurt it.

HILL: The interior was modernized, but the exterior was just as it was originally. We used it because the look of it was great and partly because there was a way you could set the camera to show the house and not show any of the houses around it, or the telephone poles. That effect was one reason we picked it.

STOREY: We thickened up the grounds with brush which we brought in. The house was surprisingly quite urban with other homes all around.

ALFRED TAYLOR: It was an old house and there was no power. I was wondering how to light it: the only idea I could come up with was reflectors and the sun.

HILL: The only interior shot from the house was with Mantan Moreland looking through the window. We couldn't do that on the sound stage because you had to see through the window. So Al Taylor actually lit that shot with reflectors from the front door and into the room. It was quite clever.

TAYLOR: I would never tell a director what to do, but I said to Jack, "If you could schedule this shot when there is more sun, I could do a good job on it." So he went ahead and shot other exteriors. Then when I saw that the sun was where I wanted it, we went ahead. I would put one reflector one

way and would bounce the light to another reflector. I had four reflectors bouncing light off around corners, and that is how the scene was shot. Mantan is looking into the “study” area of the house.

HILL: Only Mantan was in the shot. Jill, coming at him with her knives, was filmed on the sound stage. I guess you can see her hands throwing the net over Mantan in the house.

STOREY: There was an assistant of mine named Mike McClusky. Mike had only one ear, and the other was a prosthetic ear. He had several of them, so he let us use one. We made it up so it was black and we could use it for the close-up. Every time we shot it, it would bounce because it was made of latex. So we took some rubber cement, and put a thin coat on the floor. Then, when we took the shot, it would stick there.

HILL: I was extremely fortunate to have Al Taylor for this film. One of the reasons I liked working with Al was that he was always willing to listen to suggestions. I had a long background in photography myself, and I’ve done camera work. I had some specific ideas; instead of rejecting them and saying, “Stay in your own department,” as one cameraman would, Al would listen and work very closely with you. That was a great pleasure.

TAYLOR: One of the main things about the production was that I built the camera. I made the housing that went around that camera for that picture. I got the idea when I was in Carmel shooting a scene on a beach for Francis Coppola for *The Terror* and we were using Mitchell cameras. They were heavy and the tripod weighed a ton: they sunk in the sand. On a low budget film, you didn’t have much help to move things around. So I sent for my Arriflex and stuck a zoom lens on it. I made up this camera with a housing. When Jack wanted to do *Spider Baby*, I thought I’d use this camera. At that time, I was the only person in the world to have a hand-held sound camera for professional use.

SCHANZER: That entire shoot was easy. There were no difficulties backstage. There was absolutely no back-biting. We all enjoyed ourselves.

TAYLOR: Everyone was on the same wavelength. We had limited money on lighting but we had a good crew. The sound man was excellent. Lee Strosnider. He bent over backwards. My camera wasn’t that quiet but everything was OK when they used directional microphones. He had built some of the sound equipment he used on the film. I wish I had the chance to work with him again.

WASHBURN: It was a lot of fun. Working with Lon Chaney was a real joy. He was such a sweet, gentle, soft-spoken man. I was thrilled to work with him. It is a well-known fact at this point in his life he had a drinking problem, but it never was a problem on the set.

HILL: Lon was a terrible alcoholic. He wanted to do this film so badly, particularly after he met Beverly Washburn and Jill Banner. He saw it gave him a wonderful opportunity to do something tongue-in-cheek, so he stayed on the wagon. He took a half glass of beer at three in the afternoon.



SCHANZER: He cut down to a couple of beers and he sort of watched the clock waiting for the next one. I said to him, “Lon, don’t you feel better psychologically, now that you’ve cut down so?” He said “Hell no! I haven’t had a good laugh since I went on the wagon!”

TAYLOR: I was older than Jack, and perhaps wiser in a few things. Well, I was keeping Lon off the stuff. Mantan came up to me and said, “Lon doesn’t drink anymore, but boy, he sure loves oranges!” Right off the bat, I knew what was going on. He would squeeze the juice out and was pumping vodka into the oranges. He’d have vodka and o.j. Jack never knew this and I never told him. I got one of my group to squeeze out the vodka. But Lon was a great actor and he did his best on this film.

HAIG: It was so great working with Lon Chaney. He was the first “big” star I worked with. At first I called him “Mr. Chaney,” but he would have none of that. “I’m Lon and you’re Sid. We are working together.” He was very personable. He really enjoyed his role. You know, for a day or two he hung back. He saw the rest of us were crazy kids; then he joined us and was one of the crazy gang.

WASHBURN: He had special names for Jill Banner and myself. Jill was “Cracker Ass” and I was “Bubble Butt”.

SCHANZER: Lon was amazing. He was so good. Especially in that scene where he was talking to the girls and was explaining how he was going to have to blow them up because he promised the father he would look after them. That was great. The whole crew was snivelling. They were misting up while they were watching. He was so sincere, so real, that he got them.

HAIG: All the crew gave him a huge ovation after that scene. Chaney told me he learned to act by going to dances for deaf people. His grandparents were deaf. It taught him to concentrate and to communicate better.

STOREY: Chaney was great. He really was. We were going into overtime. Chaney was walking through the house to open the secret door that goes downstairs; he just kept getting screwed up, take after take. Bart Patton said, “We’re going into overtime, and we are going to go in trouble with the actors.” Chaney said “Hey, forget it. Let’s just finish the scene!” He really was good to work with.

HILL: Lon was wonderful up until the last night. That was a little difficult. We almost finish by then, so Lon let himself have a few drinks. His last scene took a little longer than usual. It was summer on the sound stage with no air conditioning. Poor Lon had to have somebody standing by with a bucket of cold water to wipe him off. You can actually see it on the long takes when he starts to break out in sweat. But he stuck it out. He was really good.

TAYLOR: Jack would tell [Chaney] what to do, and I would tell him, “Lon, I am going to use low light. As you come closer, raise yourself a little bit so I can get these shadows on the wall.” He

would put his arms around me and say, “Kid, leave it to me!” Well, he would move his head just so, and his eyes would just sparkle. That was my lighting, but it also was the actor helping me do it. You have to have an actor to play with the lights. I would light the set and put objects in the scene that I would highlight, like a stuffed bird or something like that. I am a firm believer in lighting foreground pieces on a low key basis, and building my light the further you get away from the camera. If you notice when the girls appear on the stairs, they come out of nothing and all of a sudden – wham! – they hit the light and people practically flew out of the audience. Your actor must work with these things. Lon was exceptional.

HAIG: Mary Mitchel brought just what was needed to the film. She was able to see the Merrye kids as kids. She was just great.

SCHANZER: Carol Ohmart was quite an actress. She was capable of much better roles than she ever got. She had a great figure, but she was an excellent dramatic actress.

HILL: Carol liked the film so much that she seriously thought the Academy Awards would be interested. The rest of us just looked at each other with our mouths open. But Carol loved the idea so much. She really looked great in negligee. She would have been great in a picture about a frustrated dominatrix. I took her myself personally to Frederick’s of Hollywood to get her clothes for the film. She had so much fun trying the stuff on.

SCHANZER: She put every bit of what she had into it. She had a ball doing Spider Baby. Quinn Redeker, who went on to star in soaps, was also happy with his part. He and I would joke about performance. Quinn always said he was the worst actor in the film, and I always said I was. Sid Haig, of course, was outstanding. He went around non-stop.

HAIG: I was married only three months when we did the picture, and my wife was upset I had to shave my head. You know, Ralph was supposed to have gotten a frontal lobotomy.

HILL: Sid prepared for the role of Ralph by going to the zoo and observing the animals and studying their movements. That was his way of working. He was incredible.

HAIG: I closely observed the orang-utans. My arms were long. I also studied children at play. On the set, Jill, Beverly and I would prepare by playing children’s games. It helped us with our characters. Of course, Ralph would screw the games up. He was “*non compos mentis*.”

WASHBURN: Sid was too much! He was just great. He was loony. It was hard not to laugh at work because he had such bizarre costumes, like Little Lord Fauntleroy. He made a lot of fun on the set.

HAIG: That’s me. That’s the way I am. I enjoy my work and I try to help everyone enjoy themselves. It keeps things fresh. *Spider Baby* was a loose set. I think that helped the film, and that is one of the reasons it’s such a cult hit.

Jill, Beverly and I bonded instantly. Jill was never really on a set before, and she was a little unsure about what was expected of her. Beverly was just perfect in her role. She was able to recreate that “little girl” quality in her performance with just the right touch of the bizarre. Beverly was totally convincing and amazing.

MITCHEL: Beverly was great in her part. She moved in and out of character between the takes, like most performers. Jill, however, seemed the same all the time.

STEVENS: What you saw of Jill on the screen was basically the way she was. Her performance was a very raw, honest Jill Banner.

SCHANZER: The amazing thing about Jill was that she had never acted before. I found her to be a little offbeat. She had a very fey look, very strange and other-worldly. She and Bev got along, but I found her attractive and a little odd.

HILL: Jill was really good. She came prepared every day, knew her lines, and only needed reassurance from me that she was doing well.

WASHBURN: Jill wasn't nervous. She was very professional and very sweet. We got along fine. We had some great scenes together and great lines. [“They are talking about us, Virginia.” “Yes. I know!”] She was a doll. Unfortunately, she was killed in an automobile accident. I still feel it's heartbreaking.

HILL: It was a horrible accident on the Pacific Coast highway in the early '80s. At the time, Jill was writing a script for Marlon Brando. When Jill died, it was just crushing.

STEVENS: I didn't want to go to the funeral. I didn't think I could deal with that. I went out to the cemetery, however, after the service. There, standing by the open grave, all by himself, was Marlon Brando. I'll never forget that. He stood there about an hour. She must have meant an awful lot to him.

MOLUMBY: She lived a very busy, full life in 35 years. I am very proud of her. Although I never encouraged her career, I'm not unhappy about it. When I finally saw *Spider Baby* [in August 1997] I thought she was real good. I liked the show. It was a little bit different. I also liked Beverly Washburn very much.

STOREY: There was a funny incident with Quinn Redeker while shooting the picture. Quinn was tied to a rocking chair. Jack brought his grandmother's rocker to the set on the first day of shooting. Anyway, Quinn was rocking in the chair. He was trying to rock over to the stairs, trying to escape from the spiders. He used too much force and the chair collapsed. Poor Jack almost had a coronary! The family heirloom was in pieces. The shot was over and it was the last use of the chair in the film. One of the carpenters on the stage was able to put it back together again. It was an

overnight job, but we were able to repair it for Jack's grandmother.

HAIG: There were a number of strange things in that film just under the surface. Ralph was supposed to have raped Carol Ohmart. Some viewers missed that. Actors can be very dangerous if you take too many of their suggestions. It becomes an open house. I came up with Ralph saying “Mommy” when he sees her lying there half-naked. I imagine the sight struck some chord in him. That scene was shot in Griffith Park, and it was my last scene in the film. It might have been the last scene done.

TAYLOR: The outdoor chase scene with Carol Ohmart, Sid Haig and the girls was shot “day-for-night” with a special filter. I think that was shot in the Mandeville Canyon area of Los Angeles.

WASHBURN: My favorite scene in the film was when I went in for the kill, attacking with a pitchfork. It was so far removed from anything I had done before. I usually played the sad victim who cries all the time.

HAIG: Then there was the other scene where I am sleeping on the couch with my behind raised up. They ripped the seam in my pants for the shot. Jill looks at me with the knife in her hand. What is on her mind? I think Jill came up with that bit herself.

SCHANZER: Actually, the most difficult scene for me was going up in that little dumb waiter.

HAIG: I had a dancing background which I used when I had to do some unusual movements and strange positions like in the dumb waiter. But I had problems in the scene where I hung upside down outside of Carol's window. They tied ropes around my legs on the set and lowered me down. It put a lot of pressure on my eyes, and it was very difficult. Then I came down with a terrible case of the flu one day. This was when we were shooting the scene where the girls held down Mary Mitchel and tried to saw her legs off. I was pretty sick. The doctor came in every four hours and gave me a shot.

STOREY: You can know the cat that Sid killed for supper? That actually was rabbit (sic) with an ox-tail. A friend of mine roasted two or three rabbits, and we tried to make it look cat-like.

WASHBURN: The salad in the dinner scene was actually grass and weeds that the prop department picked from a nearby lot.

HAIG: The dish that Jill ate was chocolate syrup with plastic bugs in it. Jack wanted me to start drooling in the dinner scene. I gagged when I put egg whites in my mouth, so I worked it out myself instead.

STOREY: The tarantulas were harmless. They were real gentle, but they looked terrible. Using live animals can sometimes be difficult, but we had no problem with them.

HAIG: I'm glad I didn't have to work with the tarantulas. I'm not a big spider fan. Jack, however, did have an encounter with the owl. We were getting ready to shoot the scene and, just as Jack went to check on something, the owl left its perch and got his talons into Jack's shoulder. It was pretty wild.

HILL: I edited the film as well. There were scenes in the film where I used pieces of film that were not originally intended. It was about three in the morning on the last day of shooting. It was the last shot and I said, "Cut!" So Beverly turned to the camera and made this funny face. It was so perfect, I just had to use it. It's there when Carol is dragged into the pit. There are also three or four frames of Chaney, and suddenly everything turns white. That was the camera slowing down at the end of a reel. As the camera slows down, it looks like flashes of light. Anyway, when I saw it, I thought that would work at the point of explosion. We had no money for special effects. When you make a twelve-day movie, a lot of unexpected things happen. That's the fun of it. Chaney's expression at the end of the picture, however, was planned. I asked him for a repertoire of facial expressions, and I picked the one I liked best.

STOREY: Jack is so much fun to work with. He was so appreciative of anything you did so you know you would bust your butt for him.

WASHBURN: I loved working with Jack. I think he's something special. He is very nice to be around. He never gets riled.

STOREY: Everyone pitched in and everybody did everything. I had a dog, an Australian sheep dog. There was this stuffed dog on the set. We came in for the second day of shooting, and my dog tore the stuffed dog to pieces. We just could not believe it. I don't think they got a chance to use it. [This stuffed dog can be seen briefly in the scene where Schanzer is heading down towards the cellar.] The set was all dressed and we had to clean up all the pieces. It was a crazy time!

HAIG: Some of the crew members helped out and played Uncle Ned and the other relatives. I was given a puppy by Bart Patton and Mary Mitchel. They just had a litter. I named him "Uncle Ned". You recall the little girl at the end of the film who is becoming the next "Spider baby"? She was played, I believe, by Paul Monka's niece.

TAYLOR: Model Carolyn Cooper played one of the aunts. She wanted to break into films but this was as close as she got. Another crew member almost got fired because he was always smoking a joint, but Jack straightened him out.

HILL: I loved the car. It was an old Deussenberg. We just rented it from a period car rental agency. I went down to the place to look at it. It was wonderful. I kept it at my house during the filming of the picture.

STOREY: I've done a lot of studio films since then, and never had as much fun as (sic) doing a low-budget film as *Spider Baby*. Maybe those days are coming back. Right now I'm involved in doing a low-budget picture, *One Dozen*, set in a jury room, and maybe we can recreate the excitement of a good low-budget production.

HILL: I think the picture would have been very successful if it had immediate distribution. By the time it was finally distributed, the drive-ins wouldn't show black-and-white features. But, at the time it was made, it would have been perfect. [The film got tied up when the producers went bankrupt. Producer David Hewitt acquired it for distribution in 1968. Hewitt came up with the title *Spider Baby*; he later called it *The Liver Eaters*. *Spider Baby* eventually found its audience thanks to videotape and later, laserdisc.]

First published by *Filmfax: The Magazine of Unusual Film & Television* No. 63-64 Oct/Jan 97/98.

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Spider Baby was transferred from the 35mm original camera negative and a section of the director's cut from a vaulted 35mm check print. The film was transferred in High Definition on a Spirit Datacine at Point 360 in Burbank, California. Audio work was completed at DJ Audio, Inc in Los Angeles. Restoration services were completed on a Davinci Revival at iCubed in Chicago. Mike Hyatt and writer-director Jack Hill supervised the project.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Spider Baby Cast and crew panel discussion from *FILM-TO-FILM Festival/Spider Baby (1968)* presented at the Linwood Dunn Theater on September 29, 2012, courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. *The Host* (1960) courtesy of Jack Hill. 'Voices from the House on Spider Baby Hill' first published by *Filmax: The Magazine of Unusual Film & Television* No. 63-64 Oct/Jan 97/98.

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Daniel Brantley, Nicola Goelzhaeuser, May Haduong, Jack Hill, Lawreen Loeser, Jennifer Saunoris, Nathaniel Thompson, Calum Waddell, Todd Wieneke





FCD794/AV011