





CONTENTS

Cast and Crew	5
What Nightmares Are Made Of (2019) by Alan Jones	7
<i>The Sender</i> (2017) – Chapter 1 by Tom Baum	17
About the Transfer	22



CAST

Kathryn Harrold Gail Farmer
Željko Ivanek The Sender
Shirley Knight Jerolyn
Paul Freeman Dr. Denman
Sean Hewitt The Messiah
Harry Ditson Dr. Hirsch
Olivier Pierre Dr. Erskine
Tracy Harper Young Girl
Al Matthews Vietnam Veteran
Marsha Hunt Nurse Jo
Angus MacInnes Sheriff Prouty
Jana Sheldon Nurse Reimbold
Manning Redwood Policeman
John Stephen Hill Policeman
Monica Buford Dr. Warren

CREW

Directed by **Roger Christian**
Produced by **Edward S. Feldman**
Written by **Thomas Baum**
Director of Photography **Roger Pratt**
Production Designer **Malcolm Middleton**
Edited by **Alan Strachan**
Music by **Trevor Jones**
Associate Producers **J.C. Scott, John Comfort**



WHAT NIGHTMARES ARE MADE OF

by Alan Jones

It was Quentin Tarantino's favourite horror film of 1982. But you were lucky if you knew the instant cult horror gem *The Sender* even existed back then. Marking award-winning art director Roger Christian's feature film debut, the \$8 million extrasensory-perception chiller garnered fabulous reviews and recognition on the fantasy festival circuit. Yet Paramount Pictures had no faith in the psychological frightfest and never supported its US cinema release in October of that year, despite many trade publications predicting it would do 'boffo' box office. In the UK, it languished on the shelf for years before escaping into the home video market. That this complete and utter disinterest came from the distributor of the money-making *Friday the 13th* series and *My Bloody Valentine* (1981) just beggars belief!

The director still can't quite understand what happened and has been understandably bitter ever since. "*The Sender* was the best-reviewed film no one saw because it was in the hands of people who didn't really care," Christian told me at the time. "It boiled down to politics in the end. The preview audiences gave it a poor reception and Paramount thought it was too European in tone and wouldn't work for Americans. Precisely the reason I thought it would! Their attitude towards the film basically made me unemployable until I managed to pull *Lorca and the Outlaws* (AKA *Starship* [1984]) together."

Roger John Christian was born in London in 1944, and started his film career as an assistant in the art department on the blockbuster musical *Oliver!* (1968). Other apprentice work included *And Soon the Darkness* (1970), *Mahler* (1974) and *The Last Remake of Beau Geste* (1977) before his sterling contribution to *Star Wars* (1977) was awarded an Oscar. But directing was all Christian ever wanted to do; so, while being part of the design team on *Alien* (1979) and *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), he enrolled in film school and made the hard decision to turn any future non-directing offers down. While his wife worked as a waitress to pay bills, Christian wrote his first short film, the 25-minute medieval fantasy *Black Angel* (1980), and was determined to see it through, all the time fielding off such lucrative proposals as *Conan the Barbarian* (1982).

His tenacity paid off when 20th Century Fox financed *Black Angel* on the recommendation of director George Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz, who needed a short film attraction to play with their upcoming release of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). This trust in Christian's

talents ensured he found an American agent and put him firmly on the radar of veteran Hollywood producer Edward S. Feldman, the man responsible for such a diverse slate as *What's the Matter with Helen?* (1971), *Fuzz* (1972) and *Save the Tiger* (1973). After Christian's next short *The Dollar Bottom* (1981), a light-hearted comedy in the Ealing vein, won him another Oscar, Feldman made direct contact and offered him the opportunity to take the helm of *The Sender*, with Fox once again providing the money.

The Sender details the circumstances in which a young suicidal amnesiac (Slovenian-born newcomer Željko Ivanek, at the beginning of an impressive career) is taken to an unnamed state mental hospital after a very public attempt at drowning himself. There, 'John Doe 83' is put under the care of Dr. Gail Farmer (Kathryn Harrold, at the time famous for playing Albert Brooks' heartthrob in *Modern Romance* [1981]), who is intrigued by his memory loss but is unaware it masks extreme paranormal powers. Soon the good doctor is experiencing alarming walking nightmares before realizing Number 83 is telepathic, broadcasting his pain and torment to anyone susceptible to his influence.

Head of the facility Dr. Denman (Paul Freeman of *Raiders of The Lost Ark* [1981] fame) is thrilled to discover that this stranger under his roof has a unique way of manifesting his guilt and imparting information about an unknown crucial torment too painful to relate. Denman wants to surgically probe his brain to pinpoint the precise area responsible for the telekinesis. Then Number 83's equally mysterious mother Jerolyn (Oscar-nominated character actress Shirley Knight) appears, proclaims her son to be the Messiah, and warns the entire hospital staff they are in terrible danger unless he's released. But Number 83 has no intention of exiting with his mother, with whom he lived in a remote cabin removed from humanity, since their tortured relationship conceals the key to his horrifying death wish.

The Sender's screenplay was written by Thomas Baum who penned the sci-fi comedy *Simon* (1980) and the funfair drama *Carny* (1980), and would later script *The Manhattan Project* (1986) and co-create the *Nightmare Cafe* television series (1992) with Wes Craven. Baum based his story on actual experiences he remembered from his early youth of being able to communicate with his mother way beyond the usually accepted bonding time of one year after birth. Baum could connect with his mother until the age of 7 and thought a psychological variation on the theme would make a great horror movie concept.

Christian did too, and he liked Baum's script aside from some odd strains of humour he felt didn't work in context and would dilute the shocks. "The story is only a few inches removed from life and taking out the comedy sharpened that aspect and was the only major change I made," explained Christian. "Personally I had no desire to hack up defenceless women on screen as was the genre norm at the time so I took a *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's*

Nest (1975) approach to the subject to make it gritty and realistic. I wanted it normal one moment, then quite terrifying the next. The prime object was to scare the audience."

Spending a lot of time going through the incredibly rich script to achieve that goal, Christian was raring to get started when Fox suddenly pulled the financial plug on the project. But it wasn't just Feldman who had been following Christian's career closely. So had Paramount Pictures, and when *The Sender* was put into turnaround at Fox, they quickly stepped in and picked the package deal up. Christian barely had time to be at his wife's bedside while she gave birth to their son before being whisked by Concorde to New York for casting. Ten weeks of hectic filming began in late April 1982 on location in Georgia, Atlanta, with interiors shot back in the United Kingdom on sound stages at Shepperton Studios. A breakneck pace was insisted upon because the Directors Guild strikes were a contemporary reality (Christian was not yet a member so could continue working) and Paramount had already set a release deadline of October 22nd. And that's when all the difficulties began...

First off, Paramount thought Christian's director's cut didn't work and started giving him notes to make it more commercial. One executive instruction was to cut the ending and put it at the beginning. The horrendous list of amendments continued until Christian realized he'd have to fight to retain his original vision and together with his editor Alan Strachan (*The Final Conflict* [1981]) put *The Sender* back to what he had initially envisaged, a thoughtful study in sophisticated horror with intelligent bite. Then Paramount insisted on a test screening that Christian unfortunately decided to attend only to witness a crowd of clearly drunk teenagers criticise an erratic temp print complete with reel change markers, random scratches and library music, not composer Trevor Jones' masterly score. Unused to viewing such a work-in-progress, the redneck audience pulled it to pieces and stupidly Paramount took note. From that moment on *The Sender* was a problem picture, a suitable case for ignoring and Paramount simply washed their hands of it.

Yet Christian did find some comfort in the fact that the reviews were mostly raves. It was a favourite of the noted American critic Roger Ebert, and the top trade weekly *Variety* enthused, "a superbly-crafted modern horror picture, credibly using telepathic communication as its premise for creating nightmarish situations," also pointing out, "Harrold represents an attractive, sympathetic heroine and Ivanek a mesmerizing, troubled youngster." *Cinefantastique* magazine, the US genre bible at the time, called it: "A class act with impeccable directing and acting, made with love and care."

And I myself, given a private screening of the movie by the UK distributor UIP for my honest opinion, wrote in *Starburst* magazine: "Christian marks his debut feature with images of such crystal clarity that it is impossible not to be moved or held by them. His thoughtful



and thought-provoking approach lifts *The Sender* way above any recent entry in the genre of late. Based on a fine blend of science fact and science fiction, it sets out to disturb and achieves that end with some beautifully orchestrated set pieces, complemented by Nick Allder's (*Alien*, *The Empire Strikes Back*) special effects. Bleeding mirrors, levitation and a subliminal decapitation are all the props needed by Christian to scare the audience by making them pinpoint his characters' unease. Like *Videodrome* (1983), the 'sent' hallucinations are seamless, so you are never sure what you are seeing is indeed real. Other reasons why *The Sender* works so well include the virtually flawless ensemble casting and the truly great score by Trevor Jones."

The uniformly excellent reviews and critical recognition, however – at both the Avoriaz International Fantastic Film Festival in France (where *Mad Max* [1979] director George Miller raved about how awesome it was) and the Edinburgh Film Festival in Scotland – counted for nothing in Paramount's depressing scheme of things. They just had no idea how to market a crisply directed, atmospherically eerie and superbly performed shocker that didn't wallow in gore but pre-figured the themes of dream, hallucination and reality-blurring that became the main trope of the genre, after the massive success of Wes Craven's ground-breaking *A Nightmare On Elm Street* (1984). And so the way-before-its-time *The Sender* became a must-see title that proved impossible for genre fans to actually see.

But the thing about underrated horrors is that, more often than not, they find support from the most unlikely of places. In the case of *The Sender*, the most vocal of champions turned out to be the enfant terrible of the US independent scene: Quentin Tarantino. The *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) director had been asked by his *Pulp Fiction* (1994) star John Travolta who would be a good choice to helm his pet project, the ultimately notorious *Battlefield Earth* (2000), based on L. Ron Hubbard's novel. As Travolta kept naming directors for consideration, Tarantino kept saying no – until Roger Christian came up. Travolta had loved his historical biopic *Nostradamus* (1994); the trailer for *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace* (1999) had just been released, showcasing much of Christian's second unit directing, and Tarantino raved about *The Sender*.

When he finally met Tarantino, Christian later found out that *The Sender* had been released while he was working in Video Archives, the video store in Manhattan Beach, California, where his film buff knowledge expanded and his reputation grew legendary. Realising it wouldn't be around for long thanks to Paramount's mishandling, Tarantino took a steady stream of friends to see it and eventually videotaped it from television. Realising that the TV version featured some 20-odd minutes of deleted scenes to compensate for censorship edits, Tarantino (at his own expense) created his own extended version of the film using the TV version and the VHS of the gorier theatrical version.

Since that amazing endorsement, the reputation of *The Sender* has consistently grown. Like its most bravura moment, where the entire hospital is convulsed by Number 83's shock treatment, get ready to be galvanised by its night terror glories in this stunning Arrow edition, which guarantees that an even wider audience will now spread the word. With its ambition, unpredictable twists and dips into metaphysical, supernatural territory, this disturbing masterpiece unfolds its mysteries to keep one constantly alert and on edge of their seat. Finally: if you haven't done so already, it's time to surrender to *The Sender*.

Alan Jones is an international film journalist, critic, author, broadcaster and co-director of FrightFest.



THE NOVEL OF THE FILM CULT CLASSIC

"MY FAVORITE HORROR MOVIE '82"
- QUENTIN TARANTINO

THE SENDER

T O M B A U M

THE SENDER (2017)

by Tom Baum

In 2017, screenwriter Tom Baum revisited his script for The Sender in the form of a novelisation, distributed as an e-book by UK-based publisher Kwill Books. This revamped version of the story, which transplants it to the modern day and features some intriguing departures from the original film, is currently available to Amazon Kindle readers. This is the first chapter, reproduced courtesy of Tom Baum.

“And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a son, and shalt call him Jesus”

Luke 1:31

1

He was a young man and not in his right mind. Other than that, he wasn't sure of anything.

The skin on his hands was wrinkle-free, white as no-fat milk, two heads taller than the cars rolling past, and his scratchy beard came down below his Adam's apple. There was a time he hadn't been able to grow a beard, but exactly how long ago was that? His memory was vanishing behind him like the road he was walking on.

And that wasn't right either. He was walking on the shoulder, not the road.

He knew the words for things, but not the word for himself.

She'd given him a name, and he'd mislaid it, along with the memory of his face. Back at the cabin, the windows had black contact paper that turned them into mirrors when the lights were on—he could remember staring at his reflection, talking to it, but now couldn't picture his features or Momma's face either, or isolate her voice from the TV chatter in his head, and when he tried to see her as anything but a shape in a doorway, or a sleeping body in a bed, his thoughts darkened and a film of sweat bubbled out along his hairline.

Not only that, but none of the billboards made sense.

Dent Wizard Auto Body, Braxton Acura, Glorious Nurseries, nothing rang a bell. The road's name was I-35, which gave him a feeling he could be from anywhere, and caused another wave of sadness to crash over him. He clenched his fists inside the pockets of his jeans, and felt the scabs on his palms loosen and the blood trickle out.

Where had these cuts come from? He had a vague memory of stumbling out the cabin door, dragging his windbreaker behind him, and scaling the fence that enclosed the backyard. Were the rips in his pants a clue? No money in the pockets, so either you didn't have time to rifle Momma's purse or you simply ran out.

If you've run out of money, how long since you last ate? Have you been begging? But there was an art to that, you couldn't learn it from TV. TV was aimed at people with wallets and credit cards and I.D.s. No begging lessons.

So maybe you haven't eaten at all. You made it to the highway, and all you've been doing since then is walking. And if you haven't been eating you can't be that far from home—although the absence of woods argued against that. No trees in sight, just two windowless factories with

an alley between them and two mud-brown, slope lidded metal containers along one of the walls. Dumpsters, they were called—sometimes they had food in them.

Well, if you know that, he told himself, maybe that's how you've been scraping by.

He started toward the dumpster, and the moment he broke into a run, a foul-looking dog came barreling around the corner of the factory, as though it had picked up the scent of the blood on his palms. Put a drop of a man's sweat in a swimming pool, a dog can sniff it out, some breeds—he'd seen that on Animal Planet. But this didn't look like any TV dog. TV dogs either went for your throat or were super well-behaved, but this dog skidded to a stop and was giving him the evil eye. In his mind, he asked the creature to stay put, then tiptoed around it, thrusting one scabby hand in his pocket, and stuck out his other thumb: people in old movies used to do this, why didn't I think of it before? And the instant he put out his thumb he heard the screech of car brakes. A Honda, he recognized its logo from TV, and it was waiting for him up the road.

He sprinted toward it—the dog might be in his head, but this car hopefully was no mirage. At the wheel was a woman with bright red lipstick.

“I'm going as far as Trego,” she said. “Does that help you?”

As far as he could tell, the woman was real, so he opened the door and climbed in, slamming it just as the foul-looking dog pulled even with the Honda.

“I don't usually stop for riders,” said the woman, easing back into traffic. “This must be your lucky day.”

Through the rear window he saw the dog retreating into the alley. When he glanced at the woman again she was giving him a funny look, as though attempting to figure out exactly why she'd stopped. Evidently, she hadn't seen the dog.

“You're welcome,” said the woman.

That was just like Momma—to speak without being spoken to. A girl was singing on the stereo, he wasn't sure who.

“Miranda Lambert,” said the woman. “Where you headed, hon?”

He was supposed to make up something, but that was another thing TV hadn't taught him.

Anywhere but home.

“So, where's home?”

I wish I knew.

“Yeah, you look a little lost. My name's Irma, what's yours?”

Begins with J. He took off his cap, examining it to see if there was a name stitched anywhere.

“See, I told you my name just now, you're supposed to tell me yours. I give you a ride, you give me conversation. That's how this works.”

Nothing on the cap, not even a brand name.

“All right, let's try another tack. Where are you from originally?”

“All over.”

“You don't look old enough to be from all over. What's the matter?”

Trees.

"What about them? They're just pine trees, nothing special."

Beyond the trees were pieces of a lake. The glare off the water was making his stomach turn over.

"You're in a bad way, aren't you, hon?"

"Yeah, I guess," he said.

"I guess so. What are you running away from?"

"Hard to say."

"Why is that hard to say?"

"It's kind of fuzzy."

"Right. You're doing some drugs, are you?"

"Drugs?" he said. There were picnickers in the pine grove, and kids playing on the beach, and fingers of fog curling through the reeds. "Just generics," he said.

"Generics. O-kay."

The fog fingers looked ready to pluck him from the Honda. "Momma used to take sleeping pills. When I couldn't sleep," he added.

"When *you* couldn't sleep. Uh-huh. And where's your momma at now?"

"No."

"No, what?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Oh, I think you do know," the woman said and abruptly braked the car, swerving into a small parking lot with vans and trucks and a small log building with **GENTS** and **LADIES** over the doors.

"I think you want to get out here."

Yes.

"Yes. I think you've ditched your family, and you're having second thoughts. Thing you don't want to do, though, is end up in jail or in a hospital."

But that's where I belong.

"You belong with your people. So get yourself back there, OK?"

"OK," he said aloud.

"That's better," said the woman. "And try and cheer up, all right?"

"All right," he said, and got out of the Honda before the fog could grab him. The moment the woman was gone he started loping through the pine grove toward the lakefront. Torn clouds were moving in a pale blue sky, toy boats sputtered along the shore, a Frisbee skittered past his feet. Near an empty lifeguard stand, a sign reading **SWIM AT YOUR OWN RISK** was planted in the dirty gray sand. Beside it a young woman lay sleeping, a straw hat tilted over her face.

He bent down and picked up a rock.

A large beetle crawled out from underneath. The sight of it made him feel in the wrong somehow—for exposing the creature to the noon light. He lifted the beetle by a foreleg, returning it to the bare oval patch left by the rock, then started to replace the rock itself, but realized he was in danger of crushing the beetle, so instead he dropped the rock in his pocket.

The woman sleeping by the lifeguard stand bolted awake, clutching her straw hat; a man guiding a toy boat dropped the joystick he was holding; three small boys looked up from the sand castle they were building and shouted for their mothers.

He began to fill both his pockets with rocks.

And though no one was actually watching him, the whole beach was coming alive with murmurs, as if writing had suddenly appeared in the sky, or a famous person had walked out of the pines. In a minute his pockets were full, and he made his way down to the water's edge.

A baby began to wail. A couple embracing on the grass broke off a long kiss.

He waded deeper into the lake, toy boats bobbing in his wake.

See, Momma, you were dead wrong. I can't walk on water after all.

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Sender was restored in high definition by Paramount Pictures with stereo sound. This high definition master, transferred from the original film elements, was provided by Hollywood Classics.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Flower**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Nick Mastrini**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Luke Insect**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Tom Baum, Roger Christian, Elijah Drenner, Tracy Harper, Alan Jones,
Alistair Leach, James MacCabe, Kim Newman, Jon Robertson





FCD1889