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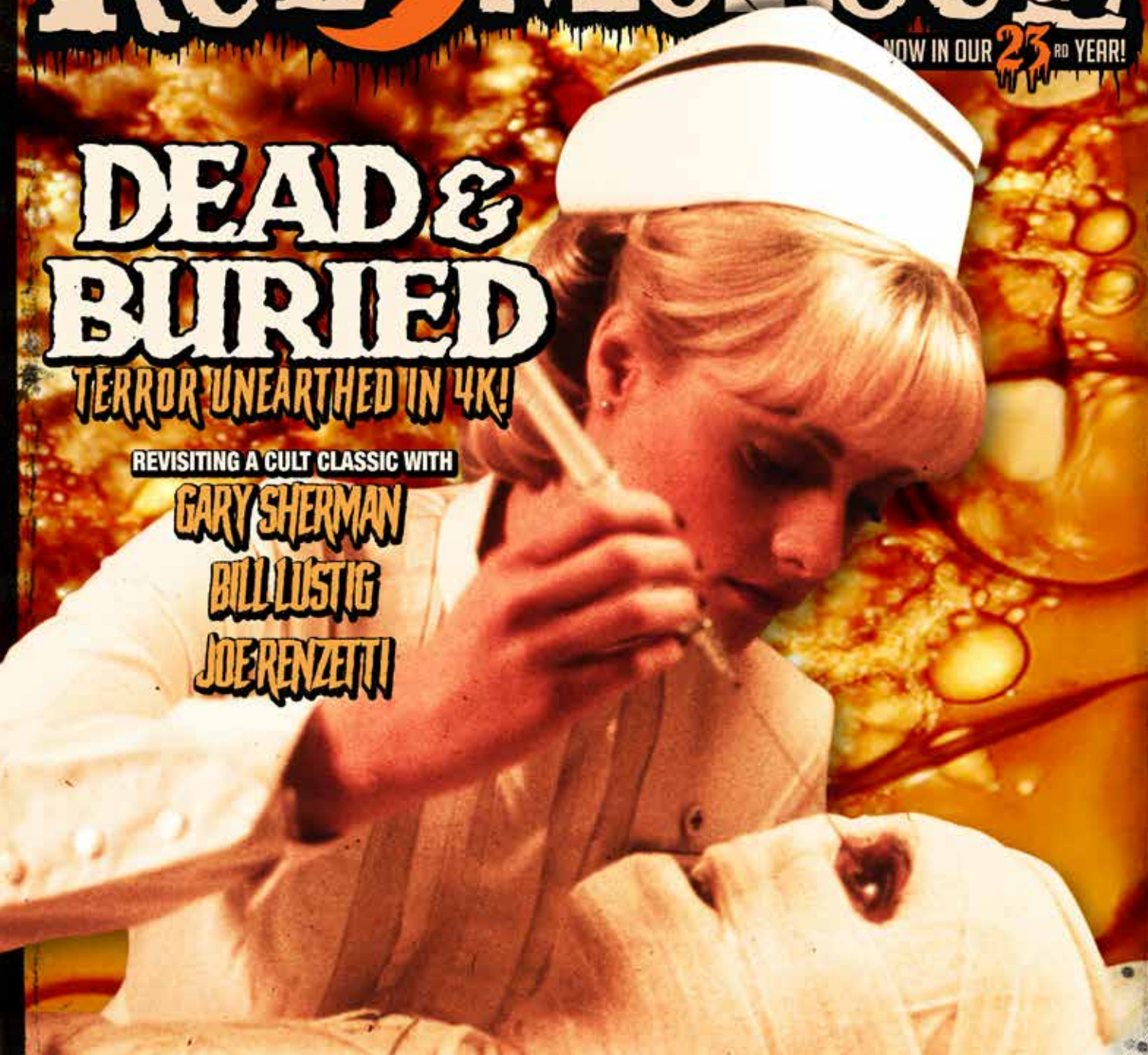
TERROR UNEARTHED IN 4K!

REVISITING A CULT CLASSIC WITH

GARY SHERMAN

BILL LUSTIG

JOE RENZETTI



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ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN 1981, GARY SHERMAN'S SMALL-TOWN-TAKEOVER VIDEO NASTY **DEAD & BURIED** CELEBRATES FOUR DECADES OF PRAISE, POLITICS, AND PRACTICAL EFFECTS

OPEN! THE CASKET

by Andrea Subissati

It's easy to romanticize a quaint, coastal town like Potters Bluff, but something unspeakable is afoot. It starts with Sheriff Dan Gillis (James Farentino) investigating the disappearance of a visiting photographer, who turns up immolated beyond recognition. Weeks later, residents notice he looks an awful lot like the new gas station attendant. Other visitors to the town go missing – a seafaring vagrant, a young hitchhiker, a couple with their child on a family getaway. As the mutilated bodies pile up, mortician William Dobbs (Jack Albertson) has his work cut out for him; an expert at rebuilding smashed skulls and disfigured faces, the dead of Potters Bluff are remarkably lifelike when he's done with them. The mystery deepens as the violent murders continue, with every clue leading Gillis to more questions and seemingly impossible answers surrounding occult knowledge and voodoo practices that circle too close to home. Such is the storyline of *Dead & Buried*, a gem of early '80s supernatural cinema with a twisting mystery that builds toward a ghastly and startling revelation.

Chicago native Gary Sherman is no stranger to creating a horror film drenched in atmosphere, with groundbreaking practical effects and a socio-political message that lingers long after the final credits roll. Alas, he's

also well acquainted with the double-edged business of filmmaking, where artistic compromise and studio interference can result in one film being shot, while a rather different version is unleashed upon the world. Out this summer from Blue Underground, *Dead & Buried* is being painstakingly restored in 4k Ultra HD with all the bells and whistles to celebrate its 40th birthday and the enduring legacy of a true cult classic. Welcome back to Potters Bluff!

Dead & Buried is considered by many to be a hidden gem that has yet to get its due. Would you agree?

Dead & Buried is a funny thing, because we had production company problems – our production company got bought twice while we were making the film and the last production company did not have a very good relationship with the studio, so there was a lot of aggro between [them]. Bob Rehme, who was president of AVCO Embassy, really hated Mark Damon who ran PSO [Distribution], and it got very nasty towards the release date. Bob basically apologized to me, but he says, "We're not going to give this film the release that we were going to give it, because it's not the film that you wanted, that I wanted." Anyways, it got a pretty bad release when it



first opened. It still did pretty well but it didn't do what it should have done and it just kind of came and went and I was so upset with Mark Damon and his gang of thieves. But there was a lot about the film that I really loved; there's a political message in the film that I found very important. I would go to some festivals and promote it and it just started to really build a following, and then came Bill Lustig and David Gregory who called me up and said, "We just purchased the rights to a DVD of *Dead & Buried* and we want to do this whole thing." And you know, it was Stan Winston's first major movie and Steve Poster's – not to mention Robert Englund, it was his first movie too! Bob calls me his "pre-Freddy friend." Anyhow, they said, "We want to do this big DVD release," and that's when they put together the two-disc set, the collector's edition. Well, when that got released and they did unbelievable promotion on it, it became one of Blue Underground's biggest-selling titles ever.

What made you choose *Dead & Buried* as your sophomore film after *Death Line*?

Ron Shuset was the reason I did *Dead & Buried*, there's no question. I'm not sure I ever wanted to do another movie. *Death Line* was my first-born and it's a film that I'm incredibly proud of, but I was destroyed when Sam Arkoff took it and butchered it [see *RM#177*]. There was so little respect for the film, because it was a horror film. People would talk to me about features [after *Death Line*] and I had really just let it go. And then I get a knock at the door, and I open the door and it's this weird little man who says, "Hi, my name is Ron Shuset and one day I'm going to be a very big movie producer." And he's got a pile of scripts in his hand and he says, "Here, I want you to read some of my scripts." He said, "I'm the world's biggest *Death Line* fan and that's why I sought you out. I heard you were in Los Angeles and I came over to meet you." I had this whole pile of scripts, like *Alien* and *Total Recall*, and then this thing called *Dead & Buried*. I just really loved *Dead & Buried* but there were some things that I didn't like, and Ron and I started talking about it and he was very much in agreement with me. [Co-writer] Dan O'Bannon was not. Actually, when I did a last pass rewrite with Ronnie on *Dead & Buried* before we actually made the movie, so much of the stuff that Dan found near and dear to him, we cut. There was a lot of mumbo-jumbo in the original script about how Dobbs was able to reanimate, and I hated it. I said, "No, we don't want to know *how* he did it, we just want to know that he did it. It's much more interesting." In the back of my mind [I was thinking that it] allowed me to be more political, talking about totalitarianism and control. We worked on the film for a long time, we tried to get it put together and set up and never did. Then *Alien* opened, and after the first Friday night of *Alien*, Ron calls me and says, "I think we're going to get *Dead & Buried* set up now!"



Dead Undead: A photographer on holiday meets an untimely demise in *Potters Bluff*... more than once.

and we did. We had *Dead & Buried* set up within about two weeks of *Alien* opening.

How was it received on first screening?

I screened my cut of the film and [AVCO president] Bob Rehme's just ecstatic, everybody's really happy. And [PSO's] Mark Damon is at the screening and he comes up to me afterwards, takes me over into a corner and says, "Good movie, but if I wanted Ingmar Bergman to make a horror film, I would have hired Bergman. Now

let's make a horror movie." He just thought there wasn't enough blood and guts. He had somebody come in and they wanted to add two scenes to the movie and they took out some of the comedy – Ron and I had really thought of this film as a black comedy, and that's what we were trying to make with it. And the idea was that there was no blood in the movie until Dobbs bled at the end, because – spoiler alert – everybody in the movie is dead... it's Dobbs' puppet show. Mark didn't care about that so he wanted

BLUE UNDERGROUND PRESIDENT
BILL LUSTIG EXHUMES **DEAD & BURIED**
WITH A BRAND NEW PRISTINE
4K SPECIAL EDITION

WELCOME (BACK) TO POTTERS BLUFF

by Rocco Thompson

We called to chat about *Potters Bluff*, but Bill Lustig's mind is stuck in Chicago: "Every time I go to the Music Box [Theatre], every time I exit that place, it's drop dead cold," he says. The COVID-19 era obviously has the Blue Underground founder and golden era grindhouse figure yearning for the good old days of sticky floors, shitty seats, and packed houses.

"[*Dead & Buried*] was one of those films that was always on double features after its initial release," he continues. "I think the best way to experience it for the first time would be in a theatre, with a full audience. But since that's impossible, [we're giving you] the best presentation ever of the movie, with three surprise limited collector's edition lenticular covers."

Fans of Blue Underground know that Lustig is good on his word; the company's blockbuster 4K Ultra HD release of Harry Kümel's lesbian vampire opus *Daughters of Darkness* was one of the high points of 2020 for physical media collectors, and *Dead & Buried* promises to be a worthy follow-up.

"[These films] deserve to be treated like Criterion treats their Fellini movies," insists the filmmaker-turned-film-restoration mogul. "*Dead & Buried* always resonated with me. It's kind of like a big *Twilight Zone* episode: it's got the intelligence, it's got the characters, it's got that creepy feel. It's just a great film that delivers."

Those involved in the making of the 1981 film seem to agree; a veritable who's who of behind-the-scenes talent contributed to *Dead & Buried*'s brand new 4K special edition, including original cameraman Steve Poster and Robert Englund, who plays Harry (there are also interviews with late genre royalty Dan O'Bannon and Stan Winston). Sherman joins Poster for a can't-miss commentary, and Lustig is especially pleased with the inclusion of the film's original soundtrack, which has nev-

er before been released (see sidebar). Poster's involvement, in particular, was essential, considering that the now forty-year-old film elements were severely degraded. His expertise in supervising the colour grading of the new transfer was indispensable.

"We couldn't find the original camera negative, which is something we always seek out," explains Lustig. "The only thing we had – which isn't the worst – is the interpositive. In order to protect the camera negative, they make [the] interpositive from it. From that, they make internegatives which are used to make the release prints. So, we're one generation away from the original camera negative. When you have films that are photochemical finished like *Dead & Buried*, every generation you go there's a certain deterioration. It's not huge, we're all used to seeing it, but there is a certain deterioration."

Still, Lustig insists the release is a highlight among Blue Underground's considerable library of re-releases.

"It's going to stand up there, it's going to be a good archival 4K release of this movie," he says. "I would say it's pretty much the equivalent of the restoration we did on my movie, *Maniac*. Plus, we've upgraded the audio to Dolby Atmos, which is exciting for people who love Dolby Atmos, and for those that don't, they can still listen to it on 5.1."

Anyone who is worried that an extensive clean-up might spoil the thick, hazy atmosphere that makes *Dead & Buried* so special, fear not, as Lustig is resolute that fans will get to see the movie as it was intended to be



shown.

"There are very few current horror films that are really going to endure [like this one]," says Lustig. "Hopefully, we'll get a 4K DCP that we can screen someday. We'll grab a beer after and talk about this pandemic as, 'Oh! Do you remember 2020?' But until then, I think the fans of this movie are going to be very happy." 🍷

to add this scene where the fisherman's face gets slashed with a harpoon and the acid up the nose of the doctor, which I think is the stupidest fucking scene ever. The special effects suck, the scene sucks. It doesn't make any sense – the doctor is a townsman, he's not somebody passing through.

How did you handle that situation?

My choice was to either shoot the scene or for somebody else to shoot the scene and I didn't want someone else to shoot that scene, so I gave in and shot the scene. Bob Rehme talked me into doing it. He didn't want it done either but he said for my own peace of mind, I should do it. And then it just became a battle between Mark Damon and Bob Rehme and Rehme really was my champion. And so, in the end, about 85 to 90% of that movie is my movie and Ronnie's movie that we wanted to make originally, and only about ten or fifteen percent, if that, is what Mark Damon did to the movie. It was pretty upsetting, and if it hadn't been for Rehme giving me the *Vice Squad* script, I don't know that I would have made another movie. But I'm glad I did.

Tell me about the "video nasty" ban in the UK. Were you surprised to see *Dead & Buried* on that list?

I think a lot of people in the censor's office were a little upset that *Death Line* had sneaked through, and so I was on the enemies list at the censor's office in England. I think they were waiting to get me, and that's what they jumped onto. And it was really funny because, what do you want us to cut? "Oh no, it's the attitude of the whole film, it's the zombies" – as if Hammer hadn't made a zombie movie. I don't know, I just think we got attacked, but in the end, it's what made *Dead & Buried* such a hit when it came off the video nasties list. But thank you, British board of censors, for doing that, because it really did make *Dead & Buried* even more important in England than I think it ever would have been.

Jack Albertson died of cancer six months after shooting the film. Were you aware he was sick?

Yes, we were very aware Jack was sick before we even hired him, and it was a problem for us with [the insurance] but we worked it out so that Jack had a very compressed time that he was working with us, and his wife was with him and we had people to take care of him. It was such a joy to work with Jack Albertson, what an amazing human being. Not only was he incredibly talented, as a song-and-dance man as well as an actor and comedian – he used to dance on the set! Actually, on the Blu-ray we're going to have all this 8mm footage; we kept an 8mm camera on the dolly [on set] for anybody to shoot with anytime they wanted, and so there's some 8mm film of Jack dancing in the mortuary. He was just such an elegant man. There were good things



Gore War: One of a few scenes that Sherman was unwillingly forced to add after being instructed to add more blood and guts to his movie.

**"THANK YOU, BRITISH BOARD OF CENSORS... BECAUSE IT REALLY DID MAKE DEAD & BURIED EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN ENGLAND THAN I THINK IT EVER WOULD HAVE BEEN."
DIRECTOR GARY SHERMAN**

and sad things. He was on so much medication, when he wasn't up, pumping himself up with adrenaline, he would fall asleep.

Stan Winston's practical effects hold up beautifully, with the exception of the acid injection scene...

He didn't do that. First of all, Stan really fought for me on the changes they wanted to make; he was really pissed off about it. He didn't do the slashed fisherman scene and he didn't do the acid scene, he would not do the scenes. He was hoping that his refusal to do the scenes would convince *them* not to do the scenes. I don't even

remember who they brought in to do those; I wasn't involved in the prep of those scenes, I didn't write those scenes, but I did direct and Stevie Poster shot them, but that was our total involvement. It was like a work-for-hire – we just went in there and did what a director and a DP do when they're called in to do something. But no, Stan Winston did not do the acid-in-the-nose scene and had he done it, it would have probably been great.

Stan's effects work is incredible.

Freddy in the bed with the needle in the eye – that is one of the great pieces of practical effects. I mean, whether it was in my movie or anybody's movie. That whole body in the bed was shaking and moving its lips and turning its head – that was all mechanical and there were five people under the bed operating that dummy. And of course, the rebuilding of the hitchhiker's face – you know, those are Stan's hands. He actually sculpted that face on the table with the camera mounted above. It was in pieces and we kept replacing pieces but it was actually Stan's hands sculpting, and then when he opens up the eyelid and puts the eye in – those were Stan's hands. Then we switched it over so that his hands move away and there's Jack Albertson standing there.

THE SCORE FOR GARY SHERMAN'S CULT
HIT RECEIVES ITS FIRST OFFICIAL
RELEASE, COURTESY OF
SHIP TO SHORE

DEAD AND BURIED NO LONGER

by Aaron Von Lupton

Joe Renzetti is a hero in film score composition. He won an Academy Award for *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978) in which he taught actors to play their instruments, sing, and perform to the music, but Renzetti also has horror galore to his credit with his work on *Poltergeist III* (1988), *Frankenhooker* (1990), and a little film called *Child's Play* (1988). Now, Ship to Shore Phonograph Co. is set to release one of the composer's earliest scores, *Dead & Buried* (1981), on vinyl; its first appearance in any format. The release marks Renzetti's second collaboration with the film's director, Gary Sherman.

"There was this cult in the early to mid '80s in L.A. and they thought the world was going to end," says Renzetti of the project's genesis. "They were in this house, they all waited for it to come. It was just stupid end-of-the-world type stuff but somehow something went bad and it was the news of the week. So Gary wrote something based on it called *Mysterious Two*. It was sort of horror and my first time working with Gary. He trusted me so that led to *Dead & Buried*."

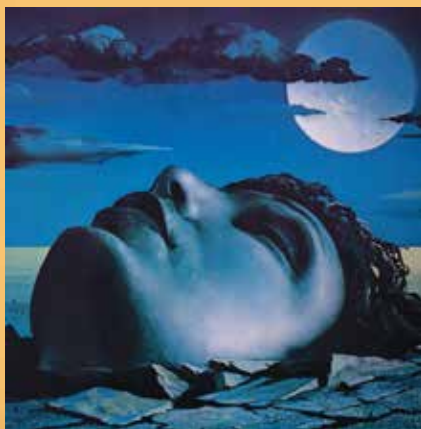
Though he would go on to score a major horror credit with *Child's Play*, Renzetti never received much recognition for that work, perhaps because his score didn't offer an immediately recognizable musical theme for Chucky the way the *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* scores did for their killers. Instead, *Child's Play* relied on dissonant and atonal sound design to create the killer doll's musical landscape. Looking back at *Dead & Buried*, one can hear a similar type of chaotic drone, which might be a little surprising given Renzetti's diverse musical skill set. Of course, working on a budget far below the likes of Hans Zimmer, Renzetti was also forced to employ some ingenuity and experimentation to create *Dead & Buried*'s more action-oriented

sequences.

"I borrowed an idea from a Norwegian composer," he recalls. "What he did was create loops but with real players. He would take woodwinds and have them play a 6/8 bar thing. Then it would repeat, but a player can't play it all because they would run out of air. So, he would have two clarinets and one would start, and when he runs out of air another would take over, then another would take over and so on. So you would have what sounds like one player playing continuously, which is simple but brilliant. I borrowed that idea for *Dead & Buried*, especially on the trumpet. The viewer won't think about it, but they will get a sense of anger, chase, or driving."

One ingenious idea between Sherman and Renzetti was in the creation of a musical theme for *Dead & Buried*'s main villain Dr. Dobbs, a deranged mortician played by Jack Albertson. Given that Dobbs is an old-timer, Renzetti wrote and recorded two big band music tracks as the character's signature calling card. As it turns out, Ship to Shore will be offering these tracks as a bonus to the vinyl in a very unique format, a 78rpm record (a format made between 1898 and the late 1950s that played at a speed of 78 revolutions per minute) in reference to the music's era.

"As a label, we pride ourselves on sometimes releasing material on dead formats," says Ship to Shore co-founder Justin Martell. "That said, we only utilize dead formats if they make sense thematically. In this case, we have put Joe Renzetti's big band tracks on a replica of the 78 that you see Jack Albertson put on his victrola toward the end of the film. It will be available as a bundle with the LP and limited to 100 copies. We had some fun with it, too, and credited the tracks to Joseph Renzetti & the Potters Bluff Reanimated Orchestra." 🎵





How was it working with Stan?

Working with Stan was just great. I just think Stan Winston was a genius. Unfortunately, he worked with all those chemicals over the years to make all that stuff and that's where his cancer came from. It took him from us way too early. Although CGI was trying to displace him anyhow, which is too bad because CGI does not belong in horror films. CGI belongs in sci-fi, and it's great for sci-fi, because it is sci-fi. But horror films should all be practical effects. When I'm emperor of the world I'm going to make that a rule – no CGI in horror films. If you can't do a practical effect, you shouldn't be a horror filmmaker.

The poster for *Dead & Buried* is stunning – I always think it looks like the Statue of Liberty interred, which is a very Gary Sherman notion. Tell us about its creation.

I can't take credit at all for the poster, the credit for the poster all goes to Ronnie. I think that H.R. Giger gave him the idea for the poster; I think they were trying to get Giger to do the poster but for some reason it didn't happen, and as I remember, Giger turned Ron on to this painter that Giger was aware of [Dario Campanile] and Ronnie just went to the painter and said, "Go for it." I remember Ron coming over to my house and unrolling an early sketch of the poster, and I was like, "Wow!" The poster blew me away, I thought it was absolutely incredible, and AVCO Embassy loved the poster. I actually have a French version

"WHEN I'M EMPEROR OF THE WORLD I'M GOING TO MAKE THAT A RULE – NO CGI IN HORROR FILMS. IF YOU CAN'T DO A PRACTICAL EFFECT, YOU SHOULDN'T BE A HORROR FILMMAKER."

DIRECTOR GARY SHERMAN

of the poster that's about the size of a billboard, it's huge! It's one of those full, big posters that they do in France. *Réincarnations* is what they called it in France. I don't have anyplace to put it. I love the fact that I have it but I can't hang it anywhere, it's too big!

Regarding the small-town setting where residents are clearly anxious about the dwindling old ways of American life – how might the next generation of audiences view the film differently?

It's funny because in a lot of ways *Dead & Buried* was about Donald Trump many years before Donald Trump became Donald Trump. In a way,

Dobbs is Donald Trump. He's a manipulator, he takes people's will away, he lies and manipulates. *Dead & Buried* was a warning about totalitarianism and about nationalism and about all of those "isms" that bring up demagogues and that create dictators. [Quoting Dobbs' final line in *Dead & Buried*] "Come Dan, let us fix those for you..."; that's exactly Donald Trump. "Hey, let's make America great again." Well, the only time America wasn't great is when we were led by Donald Trump. And it's funny; maybe there's something poetic about the fact that this 4K re-release is this year, because maybe there's a hopefulness, and we can watch *Dead & Buried* and learn from it and know that there's better things out there and people can care about each other.

You left horror for a little while after this movie, only returning to it in 1988 with *Poltergeist III*. Was there a reason for that?

I don't know what my reasons are for anything. My whole life has just been a flow. I just flow from one thing to the other. I've been very, very lucky in my life that the flows have been very good, and I enjoy all kinds of different things. I did *Death Line* and then Sam Arkoff came along and screwed that up. I came back to do my next horror film, which was *Dead & Buried*. I had a total free hand while I was making it... what they did is after they pulled all the stuff that they didn't want, they destroyed all the negatives.

Mark Damon didn't want me to have the chance to go back and do a director's cut. But anyways, we have it on 8mm, so fuck you, Mark Damon. So I was a little upset, and then Bob Rehme said, "Here's a pile of scripts, pick one," and there was *Vice Squad*, which was a whole different genre for me, a police kind of drama – although I must say that a lot of people consider *Vice Squad* a horror film, so I don't know if I did get away from horror. While I was doing *Vice Squad*, some really awful things happened in my personal life. I lost a relationship and then I said, "Fuck it," and I disappeared. My agent, my lawyer, my manager, nobody knew where I was, I just left. I just travelled in what I called my year of living dangerously; I just went crazy. I spent money like it was going out of style. I just travelled and I did really stupid things. I had a great time, in a way, but it was all out of sadness. People were angry at me, people that wanted me to do movies, my agent was angry at me. I just stayed away from movies, period.

What brought you back?

One day Bob Rehme calls me and says, "I got a problem. I've got a script here that just came in that is so bad, it is not only unshootable, it is unreadable. And we bought a title and we sold the movie based on the title, and it has a release date and everything, based on the title, and now I don't have a movie to make. Can you just read the script for me and see what you think?" So they send over the script, I read the script, and it was even worse than he had described. It was terrible. He said, "Can you make it work?" and I said, "Yeah, sure I could make it work." So I finish that movie [*Wanted Dead or Alive*] and Jay Cantor and Alan Ladd Jr. called me and said, "You want to do *Poltergeist III*?" And I made a deal with them, I said, "If I can shoot it in Chicago and I can shoot it all practical, I'll do the movie." And I did my next horror film. And then, Heather [O'Rourke] dies, and we never really got to finish the film the way we wanted to, and then MGM says to me, "Bring us any script you want to make, as a thank you for finishing *Poltergeist* even after all the trauma." And I brought them *Lisa*, which is a script I loved; it's scary, it's poignant. And while I'm making *Lisa*, the studio dies! MGM goes into bankruptcy, the film never actually gets released; it went straight to cable, it had one week out in the theatres – it did amazing business, but MGM had no money to support the film. And I went, "Why am I doing this? I do one film and my star dies. I do the next film, the studio dies"... it was almost three years of my life involved in *Poltergeist* and then another year or more of my life involved in *Lisa* and they weren't happy memories for me. And I said "Goodbye, I'm going back to television." And that's what I did.

I've seen *Dead & Buried* billed as everything from a slasher to a zombie film to a suspense

"I HAD A TOTAL FREE HAND WHILE I WAS MAKING *DEAD & BURIED*... WHAT THEY DID IS AFTER THEY PULLED ALL THE STUFF THAT THEY DIDN'T WANT, THEY DESTROYED ALL THE NEGATIVES."

DIRECTOR GARY SHERMAN



Operation Mutilation: Despite his big city training, Sheriff Gillis (James Farentino) is horrified by the rash of violent murders in his quaint, coastal hometown.

thriller to the dark comedy you intended. Where would you place it, if you had to?

If there was a word that combined all of those words that you just listed... I mean, we made it as a black comedy with political overtones, that was what the film was initially intended to be. And a horror film! Hiding political overtones and political polemics in horror films is my hobby, that's what I love to do and I've done it over and over again. I still think of it as a black comedy, there's nothing in *Dead & Buried* to be taken to-

tally seriously except for the overall message of the film, and it's a film I had so much fun making. I don't think I ever had more fun making a film – it was just a joy from day one until Mark Damon got involved.

Maybe the black comedy/political horror subgenre we're looking for should be called "a Gary Sherman film."

I don't know [laughs]. It is a Gary Sherman film. ❤️