



A man with long, dark, curly hair and a beard, wearing a bright red jumpsuit and a black leather belt, is aiming a silver submachine gun. He is positioned on a rocky, uneven terrain under a clear blue sky. The background shows a rugged, rocky hillside. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent watermark that reads "ARROW VIDEO" diagonally across the entire page.

CONTENTS

Cast and Crew 4

**White Fire and the Exquisite Pleasure of the 1980s Video Boom
– and How the Writer of a Cult Exploitation**

Flick Sent a Lord to Jail...

by Julian Grainger 7

About the Transfer 22

CAST

Robert Ginty Boris 'Bo' Donnelly

Fred Williamson Noah

Belinda Mayne Ingrid

Jess Hahn Sam

Mirella Banti Sofia

Diana Goodman Olga Smith

Gordon Mitchell Yilmaz, mine security chief

Benito Stefanelli Barberosa, Sofia's henchman

Ayten Gökçer Sophie De Rey, plastic surgeon

Henri Guégan Peter, Bo mercenary

Jean-Marie Pallardy Bo and Ingrid's father

Edouard Pallardy Bo as a boy

CREW

Directed by **Jean-Marie Pallardy**

Screenplay **Edward John Francis**

Story **Jean-Marie Pallardy**

Executive Producers **John L. Coletta** and **Tony Edwards**

in association with **Chris Davis**

Co-producers **Jean-Marie Pallardy** and **Alan G. Rainer**

in association with **Sedat Akdemir** and **Uğur Terzioğlu**

Director of Photography **Roger Fellous**

Editor **Bruno Zincone**

Musical Direction **Jon Lord**





WHITE FIRE AND THE EXQUISITE PLEASURE OF THE 1980S VIDEO BOOM

– AND HOW THE WRITER OF A CULT EXPLOITATION FLICK SENT A LORD TO JAIL...

by Julian Grainger

White Fire presses all my buttons: Brian Bysouth's splendid artwork shows headliner Robert Ginty wielding an enormous chainsaw, Fred Williamson ready for action with his trademark martial-arts posture, lead actress Belinda Mayne armed and about to shoot, plus a watchtower blowing up, more men shooting each other, a jeep full of marauding thugs and a massive earthmover chasing some poor unfortunate. The film has bizarre costumes, cheap sets, a labyrinthine and non-sensical plot and Gordon Mitchell's wonderful, craggy grimace.

This delightfully dotty action-adventure was filmed in English on location in Turkey in the summer of 1983. It had a theatrical release – under the title *Vivre pour survivre* – in France in August 1984 as well as in Turkey – as *Beyaz alev* – that same year. Released directly to video in the UK and US as *White Fire*, it also found a small video release in Italy under the title *Fire Commando*. Artwork for the French video release added the subtitle “Le Diamant.”

Oh those glory glory days of 1980s video! It is perhaps difficult to appreciate after all this time just how limited the British entertainment landscape had been up to this point. Until the advent of Channel 4 in 1982, the UK had a grand total of three terrestrial broadcasters. Film enthusiasts were lucky enough to have excellently curated film seasons on BBC Two, but lovers of exploitation films had access only to the odd title that made it into their local flea pit. At the start of the decade theatrical film production and exhibition was at an all-time low in the UK, and most cinemas were long past their best. High ticket prices gave one the dubious honor of sitting in an often sticky, smoky and frankly odious seat – all of which needed to be overcome to appreciate the cinematic delights on offer.

Films released to home video changed all that. Once the starting gun had been fired around 1978, Britain had one of the fastest infiltrations of this new technology into the home anywhere in the world. Video stores seemed to be opening on every corner, in spite of the cost of a VCR coming at a hefty price tag of about £400, a lot of money in those days. But



what a cornucopia of delights! Beyond the new releases, video stores had wildly varying stock: to thumb through hundreds, thousands even, of plastic-covered video sleeves with their often lurid artwork and enticing synopses was like being in your own, enormous candy store. Films you had barely read about and thought you would never have a chance to see, films you had never heard of – all at your fingertips. Being able to decide what you watched on any given evening and at any given time was an entirely new concept. You could hire three or four films for the weekend and quite literally, watch them at your leisure. In the first half of the 1980s, the industry boomed and its appetite for product was voracious. Companies bought entire back catalogues from distributors; not just feature films but exercise videos, comedy shorts on how to learn golf, documentaries, TV films and so-on. And there were genuine surprises: Rank (through its Tyburn Entertainment division) released Peter Medak's until-then never-publicly-screened *Ghost in the Noonday Sun* (1973), a *Treasure Island*-inspired comedy-adventure starring Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan, Anthony Franciosa and Peter Boyle.

Pretty soon, this fast-growing market for video releases was feeding back into the production. The big studios were reluctant to see their expensive product released to home video and built in significant delays between the time a film had been shown in cinemas and when it could be viewed in your living room. It's easy to underestimate the value of video technologies: however low-budget your film, it was still going to cost tens of thousands of dollars not only to strike 35mm viewing prints but then also to transport five or six heavy cans of celluloid around the country and the world. The cost of shipping VHS and Betamax units amounted to a fraction of this expense and US distributors were charging video store owners often between \$60 and \$90 per tape, whether the film cost \$10 million or \$600,000. And while the big screen was dominated by a handful of enormous film studios and their distribution arms (often leaving independent producers unable to find space for their releases), just about every local town had two or more video stores and would take new releases just as fast as the video distributors could put them out. Thus, small and medium-sized producers finally achieved access to a much wider market into which to sell their work. Outfits such as Cannon Films and a little later Full Moon, were dreaming up concepts and then pre-selling projects based on artwork and a short synopsis alone.

Crucially, filmmakers worldwide were realizing that having virtually given up on achieving a theatrical release for their films, new projects could now be funded through video pre-sales plus the promise of cinema showings in cheaper (often East Asian) markets. A film that could be made quickly and cheaply while retaining certain exploitable elements (story, recognizable leading and featured actors, action, sex, violence and so-on) could make money for everyone, especially if an 'exotic' and cheap foreign location could be found. Never slow off the mark, Cannon Films had Israeli producer Alexander Hacothen set up Cannon Italia in Rome to make Dan Wolman's relatively expensive version of Emile Zola's

Nana (1983) but this production base was soon being used to launch a series of low-budget action films such as *Final Executioner* (*L'ultimo guerriero*, 1984) and *Throne of Fire* (*Il trono di fuoco*, 1983) plus a pair of Luigi Cozzi-helmed Hercules films and more. Cannon's acquisition of local cinema chains plus its own video label (and deal with larger, extant video distributors) meant that a film such as *Violent Breed* (*Razza violenta*, 1984, with Henry Silva, Woody Strode and Carole André) could find its way into literally tens of thousands of video stores worldwide.

White Fire is exactly the type of film that could, should and was made during this period. In what became iconic poster artwork, James Glickenhaus' 1980 flick *The Exterminator* showed a masked, muscled man looking down at the camera armed with a flame thrower. The result was that Robert Ginty – who had spent six years as a TV 'guest star' – finally achieved wide public visibility. The actor followed this up with a couple of US-based titles, *The Act* and *The Alchemist* (both 1983) but was better paid in a series of far-flung adventure and/or horror films such as *Gold Raiders* (1982, from Thailand) and *Scarab* (1983, from Spain). The summer of 1983 saw Ginty in Rome working on David Worth's science-fiction cheapie *Warrior of the Lost World*, one of many post-apocalyptic action titles which was soon to find its way into virtually every video store on Earth. Once again there was some terrific artwork plus a simple concept: 'The Rider' (Ginty) must battle the evil Omega Force on his computerized motorbike (thank you *Knight Rider*). For this film, along with *Star Trek – The Motion Picture* (1979)'s Persis Khambatta and English *éminence grise* Donald Pleasence, Ginty was teamed with another triple-threat filmmaker: actor-director-producer Fred Williamson. After appearing in Robert Altman's sublime Korean war satire *MASH* in 1970, the former Oakland Raiders/Kansas City Chiefs football star made a series of action titles in the mid-1970s starring himself as self-righteous righter-of-wrongs Jesse Crowder. Sadly like Ginty, by the late 1970s this wonderfully charismatic actor was increasingly lost to yet more (minor) TV guest appearances. However, in 1982 Williamson gave a terrific performance in the excellent – if troubling – William Lustig-helmed *Vigilante*, which gave him renewed street cred, and once more some market 'name' value.

The artwork for *White Fire* cleverly references *The Exterminator*'s poster by having its Ginty character looking up at the camera, but this time wielding a chainsaw. In case we might miss the connection, the catchline is explicit: "EXTERMINATION is the reward for the World's richest prize." Whatever his skills as a film-maker, director Jean-Marie Pallardy made sure to hammer the point home by having his own character (as the two lead characters' father) being flame-throated to a crisp while attempting to escape the marauding Nazi soldiers.

Oh yes, and while we're on the subject – what on earth is the meaning of the prologue in which parents and their two children flee the Nazis through some (French) woods? If this is to be taken literally – and surely it is – presumably this scene could not take place any later



than 1945. Which would mean *White Fire* is set in 1965. Well, despite Gordon Mitchell's extraordinary red jumpsuit, it is likely that the film was meant to take place in the present (i.e. 1983). So exactly who were the family fleeing from? And what were they escaping from? Pallardy doesn't seem interested in such trifles.

It's curious how, once he appears at the 50 plus minutes mark, Fred Williamson simply replaces Robert Ginty as the film's leading man, in spite of the fact that he is very obviously a baddie. The charismatic Williamson proves why, with his all-consuming self-belief, he is just so simply, ineffably, gorgeously, wonderfully cool.

Italy-based American actor Gordon Mitchell first worked on location in Turkey in 1972 in Sergio Garrone and Ernst Ritten von Theumer's *3 The Big Bust-out (lo monaca... per tre carogne e sette peccatrici)* about a breakout from a women's prison which soon finds the erstwhile captives in even deeper waters trying to evade white slave traders. In early 1974 Mitchell introduced Richard Harrison to his Turkish actor-producer friend İrfan Atasoy (aka Tony Tiger) and the three starred in the kidnap drama *Four for All*. Later that summer, Harrison and his company H.P. International returned to make an additional two projects (*The Twins* and *Please Don't Shoot Me in Bed*) with Atasoy. As the owner of an Italian film studio, Cave, Mitchell was always on the lookout for productions and co-productions that could utilize his own facilities. When an old friend of Mitchell's, French director-writer Jean-Marie Pallardy, suggested that he make a western at Cave, Mitchell advised him that westerns were on the way out but that if he could come up with an action script involving children, then he (Mitchell) would introduce Pallardy to the well-established and highly successful Turkish producer Türker İnanoğlu who had the backing of his company Erler Film. Pallardy had a script entitled *The Man from Chicago* (1975) about the kidnap and ransom of the son of a gangster (a thoroughly obnoxious child played as if to-the-manner-born by the producer's ten-year-old son) by several former associates. The film was released as *Belalı tatil* in Turkey and *Le Ricain* in France. Pallardy liked working in Turkey and was always looking for an excuse to return.

This came about through the efforts of two men: Uğur Terzioğlu (born in 1933 in Milas (Muğla) in Turkey) began his career as a general director of a company manufacturing plant protection chemicals before moving into politics. In the early 1970s, Terzioğlu moved to Rome and set up Film Centre International (FCI), specializing in the international sales of movies from Turkey, Greece, Holland, the Middle East and East Asia. Many film markets sold FCI product in the late 1970s, including, not coincidentally, the international rights to the Turkish-made, English-dubbed effort entitled *The Man from Chicago*.

Sedat Akdemir formed the investment company Sifisan in 1965. This diverse company has had holdings in hotels, bowling alleys, cinemas and film studios. In 1980, Akdemir opened Turkey's first "first multi sound stage film studios" with his A.F.M. Film Studios in Istanbul.

A.F.M. needed product. In September 1982, production started on Antonio Margheriti's *Yor, The Hunter from the Future*, which was sold to titan Columbia Pictures and released worldwide the following year. *White Fire* came along in July 1983 and a second Antonio Margheriti film, the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), er, tribute entitled *The Ark of the Sun God* began production in October of 1983.

Another part of the mix was Britain-based film financier Alan G. Rainer and his associate John L. Coletta. Rainer had co-produced 1974's concept album and live rock opera *The Butterfly Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* with Roger Glover (bassist of Deep Purple). Rainer subsequently exec produced Tony Klinger's filmed version of the concert held at London's Royal Albert Hall, performed in aid of several charities. This music documentary of the filmed rock opera based on the concept album which was itself based on the children's poem was titled more simply *The Butterfly Ball* (1976) and features the enticing combination of David Coverdale, Ian Gillan, Twigg and Vincent Price! Rainer seems like an interesting fellow: around the same time as *White Fire* was being made, he also found time to produce and act in Bill (The Giant Spider Invasion) Rebane's ultra-low budget murder-mystery *The Game* (aka *The Cold*, 1984), filmed at Rebane's Shooting Ranch facility in the relative backwater of Gleason, Wisconsin. Another (oddly uncredited) production partner was Michele Marsala of RAI, who had produced Margheriti's *Yor*.

With Turkish, French (via Pallardy's own Les Films J.M.P.), British and Italian backing, a decent exploitation cast was hired. Apart from, Ginty, Williamson and Mitchell, female roles were assigned to actors Belinda Mayne (daughter of actors Ferdy Mayne and Deirdre de Peyer), Italian actress Mirella Banti (who had debuted a couple of years earlier as Marion, an early victim in Dario Argento's *Tenebre* [1982]) as well as Turkish actress Ayten Gökçer. Rainer brought on board British model Diana Goodman, who had a few credits including the same year's *Curse of the Pink Panther*.

Another delightful presence is that of France-based American actor Jess Hahn, who had worked with directors such as Julien Duvivier, Philippe de Broca, Orson Welles, and is great value in Jules Dassin's Istanbul-filmed classic *Topkapi* (1964). Something of a good-luck charm for Pallardy, Hahn appeared in several of the director's works, including providing Pallardy's aforementioned *The Man from Chicago* with its best performance.

In spite of – or perhaps because of – the multiple producers and co-producers, filming was complicated and frequently held up. Gordon Mitchell recalled how during one break in filming, he was able to hop between productions to appear as a drug dealer in his friend Tony Zarindast's terrorist thriller *Treasure of the Lost Desert* (1984).

So, to *White Fire*'s somewhat bizarre script: it was assumed that the single name credited as writer – one Edward John Francis – was a pseudonym for another, perhaps European,



writer. In fact, Francis turns out to be aka Ted Francis, the British producer of the 1990 TV series *The Castle of Adventure*, based on the book by popular children's author Enid Blyton and featuring Gareth Hunt and Susan George. Earlier he had worked on sponsored documentaries for such companies as Chrysler, as well as an item on London's Swingin' Sixties called *Dolly Story* (1968).

Francis hit the headlines when in November 1999, the British newspaper *News of the World* carried a story in which Francis claimed that he had lied during an infamous 1987 libel case brought by author and politician Jeffrey Archer against another newspaper, the *Daily Star*. The *Star* had claimed that Archer had spent an evening with a prostitute. Archer won the case, based largely on an alibi provided by his good friend Ted Francis. Around 12 years later, when the Conservatives vigorously promoted Archer as their preferred candidate in the 2000 London mayoral race, Francis felt moved to admit that he had lied during the original trial. Francis was charged with perverting the course of justice but was found not guilty. Archer was charged with perjury and perverting the course of justice and was subsequently jailed – his political career over. Who knew?

Having made a film in Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, Pallardy would return for the third decade running to make another film in collaboration with Sedat Akdemir and his A.F.M. company; an 'erotic thriller' filmed in 1997 entitled *The Donor* starring David Carradine and his daughter Marina plus Florence Guérin and Karen Black. After a gap of over 20 years and with Pallardy just 80 years of age, there is surely still time for one more?

Julian Grainger is a film historian, writer and archivist based in London.







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

White Fire is presented in its original 1.85:1 aspect ratio with mono audio. The High Definition master was provided by Films Boutique.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Heather Buckley**
Executive Producer **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**
Artist **Luke Preece**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Frédéric Ambroisine, Cyril Despontin, Eli Dorsey, Shawn Duffy, Ethan Halo, La Maison de la Pub, La Nuit Nanarland, Jim Kunz, Jean-Marie Pallardy, Emmanuel Rossi, Alexandre Tardif, Fred Williamson, Linda Williamson, Bruno Zincone



AV267 / FCD1999