





## CONTENTS

- 4 **Cast and Crew**
- 7 **Behind the Rows**  
by John Sullivan
- 17 **Praise God! Praise the Lord!**  
**The Influence of the Child Preacher in Reference to 'Children of the Corn'**  
by Lee Gambin
- 26 **About the Restoration**

STEPHEN KING'S  
**CHILDREN  
OF THE  
CORN**

## CAST

PETER HORTON as Burt  
LINDA HAMILTON as Vicky  
R.G. ARMSTRONG as Diehl  
JOHN FRANKLIN as Isaac  
COURTNEY GAINS as Malachai  
ROBBY KIGER as Job  
ANNE MARIE McEVROY as Sarah  
JULIE MADDALENA as Rachel  
JONAS MARLOWE as Joseph  
JOHN PHILBIN as Amos

## CREW

Directed by FRITZ KIERSCH  
Produced by DONALD P. BORCHERS and TERENCE KIRBY  
Screenplay by GEORGE GOLDSMITH  
Based on the story by STEPHEN KING  
Director of Photography RAOUL LOMAS  
Edited by HARRY KERAMIDAS  
Art Direction by CRAIG STEARNS  
Music by JONATHAN ELIAS





## BEHIND THE ROWS

by John Sullivan

*(The following essay may contain certain spoilers. Watching the film first is recommended.)*

Growing up in the Midwest, from the rising heat of summer to the anticipated relief of fall, there wasn't a day that went by when I didn't make my way past a quickly rising or endless field of corn. For me, and for others like me, it was the norm. An everyday sight I saw every day. But in 1984, everything changed when a film was released that would take the rules about the innocence of children and the nonthreatening sea of Midwestern cornfields and completely turn them on their head.

### Corn Stories

Horror master Stephen King's *Children of the Corn* originally appeared in the March 1977 issue of *Penthouse* magazine, and was subsequently included in King's 1978 short story collection *Night Shift*. As his undeniable popularity and the demand for film adaptations of his work grew, it was evident that the story of the unfortunate fate of fictional Gatlin, Nebraska wouldn't be far behind. With studio executive Donald Borchers, producer Terry Kirby and director Fritz Kiersch at the helm, pre-production began on New World Pictures' officially titled feature, "Stephen King's *Children of the Corn*". With a screenplay by George Goldsmith, which dramatically reworked the source material, the major roles were cast, with Linda Hamilton as Vicky, Peter Horton as Burt, John Franklin as Isaac, Courtney Gains as Malachai, Robby Kiger as Job, Anne Marie McEvoy as Sarah, Jonas Marlowe as Joseph, John Philbin as Amos, Julie Maddalena as Rachel and veteran Hollywood actor R.G. Armstrong as gas station attendant Chester Diehl. But although the main characters were set, there were two major roles essential to the film that still had to be cast. No corn. No Gatlin. No movie.

### Welcome to Gatlin: The Nicest Little Towns in Iowa

Corn was an intricate and crucial part of the story, and when the producers scouted the tall, green-stalked fields of Iowa in 1983, they found what they were looking for. But as much as the cornfields were to play one of the most prominent roles in the film, the look and feel of the streets and buildings within the town of Gatlin were equally important. Enter Whiting, Hornick, Salix and Sioux City. As the three smaller towns had what they needed visually for all of the exterior scenes, Sioux City was used for a number of interior shots including Job and Sarah's house, the town hall/police station, the Grace Baptist Church of Gatlin and Burt and Vicky's motel room. The exteriors were then filmed in Whiting (Main Street/flagpole/



town hall, Hansen's Café), Hornick (Job and Sarah's house, Hansen's Café, main road), Salix (side street), and also the city of Sergeant Bluff which was used for the exterior of Burt and Vicky's motel. Watching the movie, you would never know that Gatlin was actually made up of different towns. But by using a mixture of different locations from the various towns, it worked so well that unless you were a local or familiar with the area, it played on screen like one individual community. But there was one last role to fill. Many roles actually. And they were to be found not in Hollywood, but right from the corn-surrounded towns in Iowa.

### Creating the Children

As the filmmakers descended on Siouxland, a call went out to cast the most important characters in the film: the Children. Just like the town and buildings themselves, the adolescents from Gatlin had to be believable. After holding a casting session at the local Howard Johnson's, many excited kids from Sioux City and the surrounding area were set to appear in a motion picture for the first time. While smaller groups would be used for the café massacre and Vicky's abduction at the house, larger groups would be needed for many of the cornfield sequences with Isaac and Malachai and the church scene revolving around Amos's birthday. The chosen children certainly didn't disappoint – even today, the production still gets credited for its casting of some of the best extras in film.

### Just Another Sunday Afternoon

The film's key opening scene takes place three years prior to the main narrative. As the townsfolk of Gatlin pour out of church one fine Sunday morning, we see young Job and his dad enter the town café; meanwhile, Job's sister Sarah is home sick in bed, working on a color drawing. While all the adults are preoccupied with their lunch, the town's children, with guidance from religious leader Isaac, take control of the café and town by bloody force. We then see what Sarah has been drawing – a pictorial premonition of the massacre as it happened. Even though they were made to look like a child's illustrations, the drawings were in fact done by an adult artist by the name of Judeanne Winter and director Fritz Kiersch. Although many versions of the drawings were created, only some of them appeared onscreen in the finished film. It's also interesting to note that, while completing some of her work, Judeanne used her opposite hand to make them appear as if a younger person had drawn them. Although the carnage at the café was a predecessor of what was to come, if you watch closely you'll notice a few of the main characters have slightly shorter, clean-cut hairstyles. This was due to the fact that the opening sequence was filmed near the end of the production. Ah, the powers of movie magic.

### Cutting the Corn

As is the case with many productions, there were certain scenes that, for whatever reason, didn't make the final cut. For years, a rumored "Director's Cut" has been said to have made at least one television broadcast outing, with longer takes and additional sequences that added a bit more screen time to a few of the characters' roles. While the truth of this is still open to debate, it has sparked much corn-fueled discussion over the years as to whether or not the footage exists. When initial first-run advertising for the film started to appear in a number of movie and horror genre-related publications, it showcased a tantalizing still of one scene that would not survive the final 'Harvesting', so to speak. Shot in a former train depot in Sioux City, a scene depicting the murder of a Gatlin policeman, later to be known as the Blue Man, would forever be a part of many *Children of the Corn* fans' requests for restored footage for a special edition release. Unlike the other unconfirmed deleted scenes, with the promotional stills in magazines of the policeman's murder and also images on the backs of the Embassy Home Entertainment CED Videodisc and LaserDisc, there is proof that the scene, if not shot, was at the very least staged. Unfortunately, while much work has been done to find and track down the elusive "Blue Man" footage, it seems that, for now, it remains lost in the cornfield.

### Explosions and Wheelbarrows

How do you create a monster, underground, in a cornfield in Iowa, while on a tight budget? Using a backhoe, a trench was dug wherein wheelbarrow tracks were placed. On top of the rails, a wheelbarrow was turned upside down and covered with loose soil down the track. When the wheelbarrow was pulled, it raised the ground and horror fans were introduced to *He Who Walks Behind the Rows*. As for the finale of the film, Burt is to set the cornfield on fire, thus destroying the demonic force underneath and creating a cloud-like explosion. For this effect, another trench was dug to hold a number of barrels and gasoline was then placed inside. It was an event many townspeople from the area were excited to witness.

### Legacy of the Corn

It has been more than thirty years since the film was released to theaters everywhere and yet, even now, the title *Children of the Corn* is recognized all over the world as a permanent fixture and household name in the cinematic dictionary of pop culture and fear. Since its theatrical release, many home video formats have played host to the original film including VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, CED Videodisc, DVD, Sony PlayStation UMD, and an array of Blu-ray incarnations, the most recent of which you now hold in your hands. *Corn* fans love the 1984

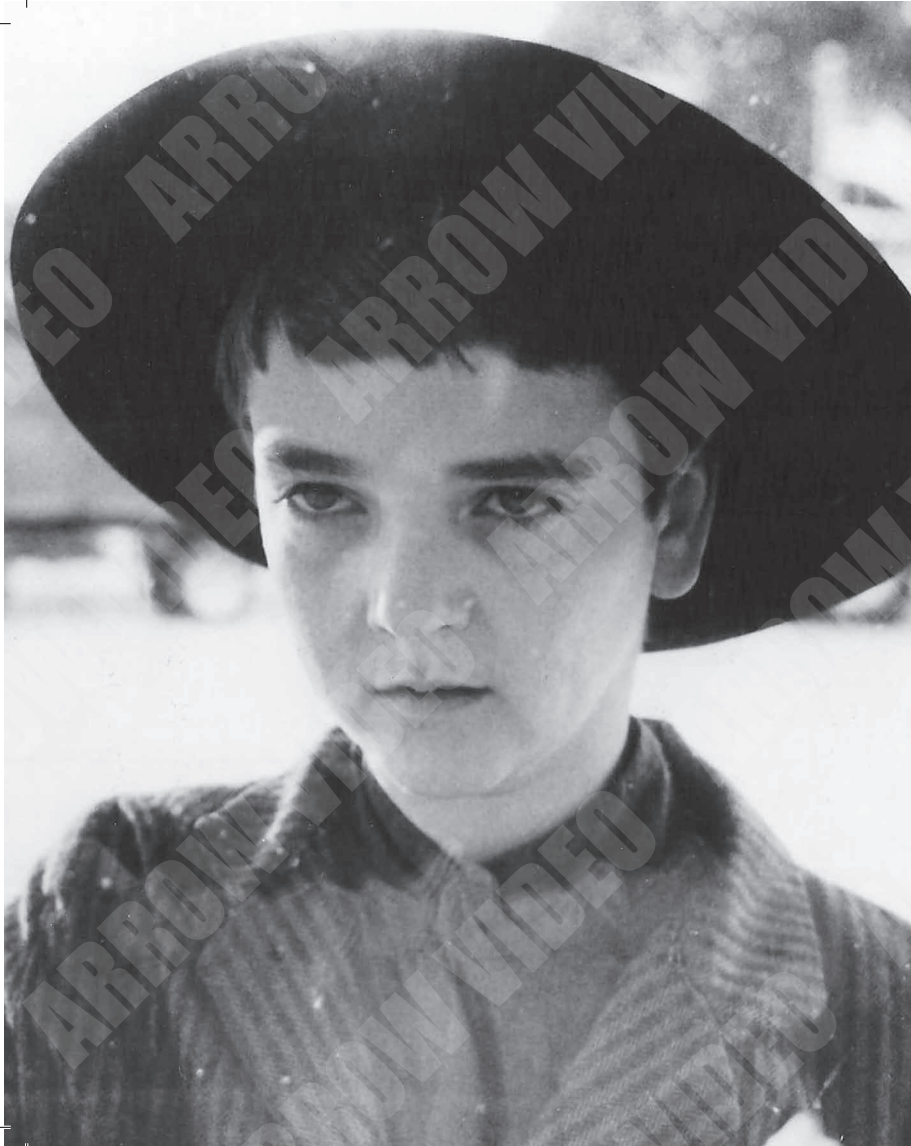


original and the characters of Isaac and Malachai hold a special place with them. But what is it that frightens us so much about deserted towns with children running amok? Now an adult, those three words always cross my mind whenever I pass through a small town and see a towering field of green: An adult nightmare. That thought frightens me. With a total of seven sequels (one of which saw the return of the characters Isaac and Rachel and was also written by John Franklin), a “Re-Harvesting” by Donald Borchers and another film soon to be released, it seems the franchise itself refuses to hide behind the rows. As long as Outlanders keep visiting the “Nicest Little Town in Nebraska”, it seems the legacy, and the cornfields of Gatlin, are unlikely ever to stop growing.

*John Sullivan is a Children of the Corn film historian and creator of [ChildrenoftheCornMovie.com](http://ChildrenoftheCornMovie.com).*







## PRAISE GOD! PRAISE THE LORD!

The Influence of the Child Preacher  
in Reference to 'Children of the Corn'

by Lee Gambin

Fevered child preachers heading a cult of murderous bloodthirsty youngsters highlights horror's vested interest in innocence made corrupt, and the violent reaction to oppressive trappings of responsibility which runs parallel with the banality of adulthood. Fusing the oft-used cinematic subgenre of the evil child film with a religious backbone and an acute commentary on the power of influence and blind dedication to a malevolent "cause", the unsettling eeriness of the Midwest's bible belt and the golden-hued terrain of American Gothic, Fritz Kiersch's *Children of the Corn* sits firmly within the realm of author Stephen King's keen devotion in exploring the sinister undertones of organised religion and its influence on the gullible all-American. King has always examined the sinister hidden agenda used by self-professed religious types in his works and this is a recurring thematic element. In his novel *Carrie* (1974), Christian zealot Margaret White uses religious fundamentalism to dominate and torture her daughter which ultimately leads to a fiery hell being unleashed upon earth; in *Salem's Lot* (1975), the booze addled Father Callahan is weak in faith and no help in defending a small town from a vampire infestation; and here, in this filmic adaptation of King's short story, which first appeared in an issue of *Penthouse* magazine (March, 1977) and then in the collected work *Night Shift* (1978), children in rural Nebraska follow a religious doctrine that orders them to slaughter the adult population.

The multiple mythic elements behind *Children of the Corn's* aesthetic direction as well as its varied visual set pieces are heavily influenced by both Christian art and culture and pagan folklore. Burt (Peter Horton) finding the illustration depicting the fire-breathing dragon blowing a stream of flames upon a maiden lost within the high corn is straight out of medieval European legend, while the image of Vicky (Linda Hamilton) being hoisted up on a husk-riddled cross is a blatant mockery of Christ's crucifixion – therefore, the film combines earthy old world religions with Judaic-Christian ideology that reflects the motives, presentation and performative onslaughts of child preachers from the turn of the century all the way through into the 1970s. These children of God's teachings – who peaked in popularity during the era of America's vaudeville days – were a bizarre combination of sideshow freak and "serious" religious leader. Much like the aforementioned influence of both fire and brimstone folklore and Christian ethos, these pint-sized brothers and



sisters of the cloth were an extension of the monstrous otherworldliness of spectacle and spiritually-bent show business.

Within America's strange history and bizarre romance with child preachers, the unnerving philosophy of "rescuing the polluted souls of the adult" is a much-repeated mantra and usually born from the conceptualized understanding that all people (most notably people over the age of eighteen) are de facto "sinners". In a chilling moment from the film, the freckled-faced redhead enforcer Malachai (Courtney Gains) promises Vicky relief from her "sinful adulthood", telling her "We've come to give you peace". This fear and hatred of "growing old" is what propels the core narrative intention of *Children of the Corn*; the belief that once infancy and adolescence are outgrown then the spirit of humanity turns corrupt and insincere. The film (and Stephen King's short story) spins Christian fundamentalism on its head – delving into the rhetoric and diatribe of organised Western religion, but also fusing it with pagan intent and earthbound bounty. The promise of a prosperous cornfield is at the heart of the children's belief system, and that to slay the adults to feed the dry earth will bring forth the healthy plentiful corn that will feed and nourish the youngsters bringing them closer to their deity, He Who Walks Behind the Rows. Interestingly enough, He Who Walks Behind the Rows is presented as more of a pagan god than a Judaic-Christian one, therefore the film uses Christianity and the bible bashing of fundamentalism and evangelical service as a flamboyant front; even enlisting turn of the century prayer and vocabulary spouted out by the crazed and psychotic Midwest tots.

The promise of healing, exorcism, good fortune and spiritual salvation was part of many sermons delivered by child preachers throughout history, and the appeal of the infantile bible basher is a complicated and fascinating one. The idea that an innocent ("...and a little child shall lead them", Isaiah 11:6) will guide and direct the populous to the path of the righteous is a primal conception but one severely marked with an exploitation angle. Fritz Kiersch's adaptation of Stephen King's story most certainly capitalizes on this phenomenon, and his cast of talented youngsters tap into this theatricality making their delivery even more operatic and also far more potentially disturbing. Peppered within the bleak surroundings – a masterfully handled blend of carnival sideshow and ghost town smack in the centre of America's bible belt – the juvenile cast of *Children of the Corn* embody the frenzy and dedication as seen in the unsettling impression of the child preacher from yesteryear. Heading the "tribe" is Isaac, the child-cult leader.

After being cast as the enigmatic and considerably creepy Isaac, actor John Franklin studied child preachers who appeared on late-night television during the early '80s on cable networks. Franklin explains, "I probably saw some boy preacher on late-night TV when I was young, but it was the adult preachers that I observed. Time was limited once

I was cast as Isaac, so I watched a few different late-night preachers. My memories of boy preachers is that they acted like adults, so I went with a very mature Isaac. He had the respect of adults and kids – I guess a slight combination of all of that, but Isaac just came out of me very naturally. This role was also my first film, so I was determined to kick butt and make the most out of this opportunity. I was raised a Catholic, but our priest only inspired a nap! Isaac seemed to just flow as if he were channelling through my body. I was so nervous during the filming and wanted to be perfect. I was invited to screen a rough cut along with Linda Hamilton and Peter Horton as we might be sent on a press tour. When Isaac looked out the cafe window to begin the massacre, I really freaked out at how creepy and evil a performance I had given. By the end of the movie, Isaac was most pleased."

Franklin had recently appeared on stage in the gothic classic *The Innocents* (based on Henry James' novel *The Turn of the Screw*), so his connection to playing sinister children under the "influence" of moral corruption was nothing new – however, unlike young Miles from that English masterpiece, little Isaac is not possessed, he is in control and preaching a scripture that is a twisted variant of Christianity. Franklin's lengthy monologues and crazed ramblings are an absolute highlight of the film and there is a deep-rooted performative debt owed to infamous child preachers that shouted out God's word in many a tent revival across the country. One of the most influential and well-known of these kiddo preachers would be Marjoe Gortner.

Born in 1944, Marjoe Gortner (his given name a hybrid of Mary the Holy Mother and Joseph the earthly Father), was a charismatic and influential sermon spewer starting his career at age four. Lead by his religiously-fevered parents, he would wow his captive audience of the faithful with his snappy tongue and masterful handle on language and speech. This diminutive religious instructor would marry couples, christen babies that were nearly the same size as him, lead his congregation into boisterous song and promise eternal life if his disciples obeyed his strict dogma. This runs in parallel with Stephen King's creation of Isaac in *Children of the Corn* (and of course, John Franklin's performance of the character) in that here is a child reverend determined to keep his community of followers at his feet and taking orders from such a disciplined order – even if it results in grisly violence.

Marjoe Gortner would eventually evolve into an actor in his adult life, starring in some fantastic genre films such as *Earthquake* (1974), *Food of the Gods* (1976) and *Starcrash* (1978). This vocational transition is most certainly a direct extension of his history as a child preacher; there is the notion of being addicted/ attracted to performance. But he wouldn't be the only child preacher to influence *Children of the Corn's* depiction of pint-sized bible bashers.



Twelve-year-old Uldine Utley was another high-profile child preacher, who would find her success under the heavy-handed guidance of the legendary Aimee Semple McPherson. McPherson was a vaudeville superstar and a leading Pentecostal evangelist who was also the founder of the controversial Foursquare Church, and in literary and cinematic terms, she would become the inspiration for the character of the doomed Sister Sharon Falconer in the provocative novel *Elmer Gantry* (1926) which would get an electrifying and frightening film adaptation in 1960 with the character portrayed by Jean Simmons – an actress whose performance propels this influential and darkly charismatic woman with an operatic vigour and demented zeal. Much like Rachel (Julie Maddalena), the ceremony leader in charge of human sacrifice in *Children of the Corn*, Utley delivered her frenzied sermon with a heightened and maddening zeal, and she would work herself up to bloodcurdling chants that would rouse the fans of tent revivals across America.

The scene in *Children of the Corn* that highlights Rachel's sermon where she is about to share the blood of the "ageing" Amos (John Philbin) with her congregation is a pivotal sequence that is disturbing and unsettling. The children, all dressed in what would be considered a combination of Midwest turn of the century farming and Amish modesty, sit entranced by Rachel's command ("And now the blood of Amos shall be shared"), while the imagery that plasters the walls of the church include a bizarre collage of Christ and a screaming gorilla (evoking commentary on the battle between creationism and evolution), corn dressing the headpiece of Jesus (a creepy take on the invisibility of the Native American Indian and indigenous culture being washed out by Christian ideology) and passages from the bible smeared in blood. Julie Maddalena remembers: "The art direction really informed everything as well. It was set up with paintings of Christ with corn as hair and bloodstained walls with passages from the bible and it was completely the kind of place where children just should not go, and here I was conducting this sermon to them. It was incredibly creepy and very disturbing and so much fun. Everything about that scene helped create the mood."

This kind of decorative aesthetic would also be popular in the child preacher's place of service – for example, Solomon Burke (a black child preacher who excelled at gospel singing and incorporated that into his sermons) would have his halls decked out with images of Christ walking with children; tapping into the belief that the messiah is as pure as the babe in the woods. *Children of the Corn* successfully perverts this ethos and distorts religious teaching that promotes the innocence of children as holy – the film inverts this principle and warps it into something sinister, malevolent, selfish and cruel.

*Lee Gambin is a writer, author and film historian. He writes for various film related magazines and sites and has written the books Massacred by Mother Nature: Exploring the Natural Horror Film and We Can Be Who We Are: Movie Musicals of the 1970s. He will soon be releasing new books The Howling: Studies in the Horror Film, Nope, Nothing Wrong Here: The Making of 'Cujo' and Tonight, On A Very Special Episode: A History of Sitcoms that Sometimes Got Serious. He also runs Melbourne based film society Cinemaniacs and lectures on cinema studies.*



## ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Children of the Corn* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 5.1 and 2.0 stereo sound and was exclusively restored by Arrow Films for this release.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution at EFilm/Company 3, Burbank. The film was restored at R3store Studios, London. The film was graded in HDR/Dolby Vision at Silver Salt Restoration, London. The original English language 4-track stereo mix was transferred from the original Dolby mag reels and was remastered to 5.1 by Lakeshore at Deluxe Audio Services, Burbank.

All original film and sound elements for *Children of the Corn* were made available for this restoration by Lakeshore Entertainment

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films  
R3store Studios: Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Rich Watson / R3store Studios

Silver Salt Restoration: Anthony Badger, Mark Bonnici, Stephen Bearman

EFilm/Company 3: Sean Casey, David Morales / EFilm  
Deluxe Audio: Jordan Perry / Deluxe Audio  
Lakeshore Entertainment: Mike Lechner

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**  
Associate Producers **James Flower** and **Neil Snowdon**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert**, **Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**  
Disc Mastering **Fidelity in Motion/David Mackenzie**  
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**  
Artist **Gary Pullin**  
Disc and Package Design **Scott Saslow**  
Booklet Design **Obviously Creative**

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