





# CONTENTS

**Cast & Crew... 4**

## **Good Vibrations**

by Kim Newman (2020)... 6

**Original Press Kit (1990)... 15**

## **Tremors Rocks the House**

by Marc Shapiro (1990)... 39

## **Graboids, Gummer and Guns: The Evolution of a Franchise**

by Jonathan Melville (2020)... 47

**About The Restoration... 58**

**Production Credits / Special Thanks... 59**

# CAST & CREW

**Kevin Bacon** Valentine McKee  
**Fred Ward** Earl Bassett  
**Finn Carter** Rhonda LeBeck  
**Michael Gross** Burt Gummer  
**Reba McIntire** Heather Gummer  
**Bobby Jacoby** Melvin Plug  
**Charlotte Stewart** Nancy  
**Tony Genaro** Miguel  
**Ariana Richards** Mindy  
**Richard Marcus** Nestor  
**Victor Wong** Walter Chang  
**Sunshine Parker** Edgar  
**Michael Dan Wagner** Old Fred  
**Conrad Bachman** Jim (The Doctor)  
**Bebi Besch** Megan (The Doctor's Wife)  
**John Goodwin** Howard (Roadworker)  
**John Pappas** Carmine (Roadworker)





Directed by **Ron Underwood**

Produced by **Brent Maddock & S.S. Wilson**

Screenplay by **S.S. Wilson & Brent Maddock**

Story by **S.S. Wilson, Brent Maddock & Ron Underwood**

Executive Producer **Gale Anne Hurd**

Line Producer **Ginny Nugent**

Director of Photography **Alexander Gruszynski**

Production Designer **Ivo Cristante**

Edited by **O. Nicholas Brown**

Associate Producer **Ellen Collett**

Music Composed and Conducted by **Ernest Troost**

Costume Designer **Abigail Murray**

Casting by **Pam Dixon, C.S.A.**

Creature Effects Designed and Created by **Tom Woodruff, Jr. and Alec Gillis**



# GOOD VIBRATIONS

by Kim Newman

The history of American horror and science fiction cinema is inextricably entwined with Universal Studios. In the 1920s, Universal cast Lon Chaney as the Hunchback of Notre Dame and the Phantom of the Opera and Conrad Veidt as the Man Who Laughs, and made the first film version of the old dark house mystery *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). The Universal Monsters franchise kicked off in the 1930s with Bela Lugosi as Dracula, Boris Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster (and the Mummy) and Claude Rains as the Invisible Man. The 1940s was the era of Lon Chaney Jr as the Wolf Man – and monster rally team-ups that ran from *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943) to *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). The 1950s, shadowed by the Cold War and the Atom Bomb, shifted the focus of horror from Transylvania to Outer Space, beyond the Iron Curtain, or the by-products of atomic testing programs – and Universal backed science fiction monster movies, many directed by Jack Arnold (some in 3D), including *It Came From Outer Space* (1953), *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957).

Subsequently, the studio burnished their reputation for scary things with Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing* (1982), the *Child's Play* films, and a 21st century first look deal with horror specialist Blumhouse that yielded the *Purge* franchise, *Get Out* (2018) and a this-is-where-we-came-in reboot of *The Invisible Man* (2020). The studio even found time to make its own creepy B pictures, from *House of Horrors* (1945) and *Curucu Beast of the Amazon* (1956) through *The Boy Who Cried Werewolf* (1973) and *SSSSSS* (1973) to *Dr Giggles* (1992) and *Devil* (2010).

... then there's *Tremors*.

Film fans often complain that critics don't understand monster movies – but in 1990, *Tremors* went against tradition by garnering great reviews and doing only so-so business. Made on a modest budget of \$10 million, *Tremors* hauled in American theatrical rentals of \$16,667,084... which, when international takings are taken into account against distribution costs, made it modestly profitable, though not nearly what the studio's forecasters expected given favorable preview reactions and the critical thumbs-up. Some blame the marketing, but the posters and trailer look fine to me.

It came out in January and was in cinemas around the time few people were going to Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* either; I saw both on the same evening in near-empty downtown Los Angeles cinemas. These things happen – pretty much exactly the same box office fate awaited James Gunn's *Slither* in 2006, which also managed a mix of intelligent science fiction and rural black humour.

But *Tremors* had an afterlife.

In the 1990s, the ancillary medium of choice was rental video and *Tremors* proved popular in video stores as it was discovered by audiences who'd missed its brief theatrical window and now watched it over and over. Indeed, the tape success of *Tremors* launched a franchise that has proved to be surprisingly long-lasting (outliving rental video, for a start)... as witness *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* (1996), *Tremors 3: Back to Perfection* (2001), the Sci-Fi Channel's *Tremors: The Series* (2003), *Tremors 4: The Legend Begins* (2004), *Tremors 5: Bloodlines* (2015), an unsold pilot for another TV series (2017), *Tremors: A Cold Day in Hell* (2018) and *Tremors: Shrieker Island* (2020).

Gun-nut supporting character Burt Gummer, played by Michael Gross, has stuck with the series and become its lasting face. Others, including original stars Kevin Bacon and Fred Ward and latecomer Jamie Kennedy, have come and gone. *Tremors 3: Back to Perfection* brings back *Tremors* survivors Tony Genaro, Charlotte Stewart, Bobby Jacoby/Robert Jayne and Ariana Richards; youngsters in the first film, Jacoby and Richards returned to their roles as grown-ups – with asshole kid Melvin now an asshole property developer and sweet child Mindy now a sweet teen. In *Tremors*, a throwaway line after the Gummer arsenal has been useful in seeing off monsters is "I guess we don't get to make fun of Burt's lifestyle anymore." As Burt has become central to the franchise, his lifestyle remains the butt of jokes but he represents a friendlier face of toolled-up right-wing conspiracy nutcase than most other media representations of his type.

The creators of *Tremors* were director Ron Underwood and writers S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock. Wilson and Maddock, who had scripted the *Short Circuit* films and *Batteries Not Included* (1987), collaborated with first-time director Underwood on the script, a loving homage to the creature features of the fifties. It deliberately harks back to other Universal monster movies with echoes of the desert/small town setting of *It Came From Outer Space* and *Tarantula* and a brush with an unknown prehistoric species along the lines of *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*. The original pitch was called *Land Sharks* – suggesting a kinship with *Jaws*, another Universal franchise that



inspires imitations to this day (including *Avalanche Sharks*, *Sand Sharks* and other *Tremors*-like mutants).

In its plot, *Tremors* adheres to the classic monster movie structure (you can see it in *Tarantula* and *The Birds* too). In the out-of-the-way settlement of Perfection, Nevada, handymen Valentine McKee (Kevin Bacon) and Earl Bassett (Fred Ward) struggle along on odd jobs, running jokes and grumpy camaraderie – much like the amiably feckless cowpokes Glenn Ford and Henry Fonda play in *The Rounders* (1965). An unseen, unknown fiend causes early deaths – an old-timer dead of thirst up an electricity pylon, a decapitated shepherd and his slaughtered sheep, a couple's car pulled underground by snakelike toothy tentacles. The film wastes little time on townsfolk disbelieving the heroes' monster stories, since Perfection is soon cut off from the world and its inhabitants are driven to seek refuge on their roofs while the burrowing creatures attack repeatedly.

There's discussion as to what the monsters should be called, with mercenary store owner Walter Chang (Victor Wong) settling on 'Graboids' and dreaming up schemes to capitalize on the discovery – in one of the sequels, a funny moment has a tourist getting the terminology wrong and asking: "Is that a Tremor?" Adapting the parable of the blind men and the elephant, the Graboids turn out not to be what we think they are when we only know about parts of them. Those maw-tipped tentacles aren't the whole beast, but the tongues of a giant armoured worm creature. A seismologist, Rhonda LeBeck (Finn Carter), fills the role of female scientist, in the tradition of many 1950s lab-coated glamour girls – but, amusingly, this stresses that though Rhonda is up in her field she knows as little about prehistoric cryptids as anyone else. Wilson and Maddock stayed on for the first three sequels, even taking turns directing, and elaborated on the Graboid life cycle, with the second and third film introducing new stages in their monstrous metamorphosis, the hungry, vicious Shrieker and the combusive, air-borne Ass Blaster.

A great tradition of monster movies is improvised defence, and *Tremors* spins off from its ridiculous premise with practical notions. Like the classic moment in *The Killer Shrews* (1959) where characters escape mutant rodents by duck-walking under dustbins, the monster-fighting tactics in *Tremors* look foolish (pole-vaulting between rocks) but might actually work in the circumstances. The folks of Perfection don't have the resources to build the sonar cannons that see off aliens in *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956) but pretty soon figure out the monsters' strengths and weaknesses and act accordingly. In sequels, Earl Bassett and Burt Gummer gain reputations as Graboid hunters... but they're still fairly clumsy about it, and survive mostly



thanks to supporting characters who don't pay them much attention. An interesting, underappreciated aspect of the franchise as a whole – and a counterbalance to the valorizing of survivalist idiot Burt – is that the series features a range of interesting, un-stereotyped, respectful depictions of frontier womenfolk and non-white characters.

Ron Underwood proceeded from *Tremors* to *City Slickers* (1991), a hit cowboy comedy without monsters (except perhaps Jack Palance), and other major studio projects – *Heart and Souls* (1993), *Speechless* (1994) and the remake of *Mighty Joe Young* (1998) – before slamming into the brick wall of the enormously expensive Eddie Murphy flop *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* (2002) and reinventing himself as a handy director of series television. Wilson and Maddock stuck with the *Tremors* series until the Western prequel *Tremors 4: The Legend Begins*, in which Gross plays a clueless Gummer ancestor coming up against 'dirt dragons' in the days when the town was called Rejection – but also had the misfortune to be associated with career-derailing disasters, the Bill Cosby vehicle *Ghost Dad* (1990) and the TV series reboot *Wild Wild West* (1999). The fact that thirty years on, *Tremors* is still an active franchise – in far healthier shape than rivals like the *Critters*, *Lake Placid*, *Species*, *Leprechaun* or *Anaconda* movies – suggests just how well the mix worked on the first film. Much of it is down to the sheer likeability of the leads – Bacon and Ward, like *Tremors* itself, have never had superstar status, but improve every film they're cast in, and Val and Earl are among their best characterizations. They may seem like foul-ups and have plainly been having the same conversations for years, but they're real heroes when the monsters turn up. And they both deserve to get the girl, as preview audiences insisted when the first cut didn't end with a clinch between Val and Rhonda... though Earl didn't get a love interest until *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*, when Ward has as much chemistry with Helen Shaver as Bacon does with Carter.

The Graboids were created by Amalgamated Dynamics, a special effects company founded by Tom Woodruff Jr and Alec Gillis, who had worked with effects pioneer Stan Winston. Woodruff even wore monster suits, playing the Gill Man in *The Monster Squad* (1987), *Pumpkinhead in Pumpkinhead* (1988) and the lead Alien in *Alien 3* (1992). *Tremors* was shot in 1989 – about the time James Cameron was first experimenting with CGI effects in *The Abyss* – and is a late triumph of practical effects. Though Amalgamated Dynamics would embrace CGI with *Death Becomes Her* (1992), and increasingly use computers to augment the monsters of the *Tremors* sequels, Woodruff and Gillis remain advocates for old-school practical monsters – self-producing *Harbinger Down* (a.k.a. *Inanimate*, 2015) as a showcase for workshop-crafted monster skills in danger of becoming extinct.



The Graboids are a pleasing design, executed with skill – often manifesting as rippling earth or collapsing buildings, and only really seen as a whole creature in the climax. Given the boom in Universal Monsters merchandise (yes, I own a Phantom of the Opera mouth organ and a Creature From the Black Lagoon water pistol), it's surprising that *Tremors* merchandising seems to exist mostly as a running joke in the films – where are the Graboid lunch-boxes, the Shrieker alarm clocks and the Ass Blaster cigarette lighters?

On its own merits, *Tremors* remains a little miracle: good-humored, but free of snark; suspenseful and gruesome, but not too upsetting; literally down-to-earth in a field overrun with stargazing; enamored of its imaginary creatures, but always more struck by its human characters; and legitimately exciting, stirring, romantic and strange, in a classic movie style that looked back to well-crafted studio genre pictures but now seems timeless and built to last.

---

Kim Newman is a movie critic, author and broadcaster. He is a contributing editor to *Sight & Sound* and *Empire* magazines. His books about film include *Nightmare Movies* and *Kim Newman's Video Dungeon*. His fiction includes the *Anno Dracula*, *Professor Moriarty: The Hound of the D'Urbervilles* and *An English Ghost Story*. His official website is at [www.johnnyalucard.com](http://www.johnnyalucard.com). He is on Twitter as @AnnoDracula.





# ORIGINAL PRESS KIT

These press notes were written by Universal's publicity team to promote the film on its original release in 1990, and include quotes from cast and crew.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

In the tradition of the great monster movies of the past, Universal Pictures combines science-fiction and humor in *Tremors*, starring Kevin Bacon (*She's Having a Baby*, *Footloose*, *Diner*) and Fred Ward (*Uncommon Valor*, *Silkwood*, *The Right Stuff*) as Val McKee and Earl Bassett, handymen from Perfection, Nevada, a desolate town experiencing unusual seismic activity.

When the duo discovers that their isolated tract is situated over a nest of enormous, odoriferous creatures nicknamed "graboids" (giant critters with growling stomachs and teething tentacles moving beneath the desert at dazzling speed), they begin a race for their lives to overcome these frenetic freaks of nature and find a way to higher ground...

Gale Anne Hurd is the executive producer of *Tremors* and previously produced the Oscar winning *Aliens*, *The Terminator* and the 1989 summer release *The Abyss*.

Scripted and produced by Brent Maddock and S.S. Wilson (*Short Circuit*, *Batteries Not Included*, *Ghost Dad*) and directed by fellow U.S.C. Film School alumnus Ron Underwood, *Tremors* unearths an earthbound menace – huge, famished, 30-foot long eating machines with multi-tentacled tongues and bulbous heads, swiftly tunneling through rock and dirt.

Also starring in *Tremors* are Michael Gross of the long-running NBC-TV series *Family Ties* and country singing performer Reba McEntire, who portray survivalists Burt and Heather Gummer.

Finn Carter (*How I Got Into College*) plays Rhonda Le Beck, a student seismologist investigating the strange vibrations in Perfection.

Rounding out the cast are Bobby Jacoby, Tony Genaro, Charlotte Stewart, Victor Wong, Sunshine Parker, Michael Dan Wagner, Richard Marcus, Conrad Bachman, Bibi Besch, Ariana Richards and John Goodwin.

Shot in daytime exteriors, *Tremors* has a unique look separating it from other low-key lit monster films. Not since the black and white *Them* (1954) has a monster been seen under such enlightened scrutiny.

To ensure realism, Hurd surrounded herself with a bevy of special effects wizards to create a creature of terrifying proportions.

Tom Woodruff and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics (the duo worked with Stan Winston on *Aliens* and *The Terminator*) designed and built the hideously realistic monster puppets and munching tentacles that drag in unwilling prey; Art Brewer of SPFX Mechanicals (*Above the Law*, *The Blues Brothers*, *Masters of the Universe*, Universal Studios "Earthquake" ride) made the underground "graboids" touchy tentacles come alive to gulp a pickup truck, gobble a horse and slurp a pogo stick; Bob and Denny Skotak of Finer Things Productions, Inc. managed the SPFX Miniatures (Academy Award winners for Special Visual Effects for *Aliens*) and Bill Taylor of Illusion Arts (*Coming to America*, *Spaceballs*, *Teeny Weenies* [*Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*]) handled the magical mattes.

Other team players include production designer Ivo Cristante (*Bad Dreams*, *Amazon Women on the Moon*, *Medium Rare*) who designed the "faded glory" western town of Perfection and cinematographer Alexander Gruszynski (HBO's *Last Innocent Man*, *Brewster's Place*).

The biggest challenge for *Tremors* was designing a creature that would be both believable and horrifying in bright daylight.

There were three key factors essential to the creation of the "graboids": the design of the huge puppet heads and undulating munching tentacles; the mechanical underground and above ground movements of the monster and the post production miniature work and mattes. Coordinating the creatures, SPFX mechanicals, miniatures and mattes was critical to the production of the picture.

Another challenge was to build a complete western town in what was once desert in only two months. But first, a decision had to be made for a suitable location. Several sites were considered before Underwood, Wilson, Maddock and Hurd decided on Lone Pine, California. "It had everything the script required," says Hurd. "The majestic Sierras in the background, the rocky Alabamas in the foreground and desert panoramas."

Principal photography for *Tremors* began in the rocky Alabama Hills, named in honor of a Southern battleship in the Civil War, and where Val and Earl meet seismologist Rhonda



Le Beck for the first time.

Famous film cowboys John Wayne, Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, William S. Hart, Buck Jones, Hopalong Cassidy and Gene Autry all rode the rugged Alabama hills in their early movies. Film classics such as *Gunga Din*, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *The Return of the Light Brigade*, *Sampson and Delilah*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *High Sierra*, *How the West Was Won* and, more recently, *Helter Skelter* and *Star Trek V* were filmed on location near Lone Pine.

When production designer Cristante walked out into the vast desert near Olancha, where he was to build the town of Perfection, he had his work cut out for him: two months to build an entire town of nine distinct western residences and trailers, complete with a market, horse corral, paved street, telephone poles and a town garbage dump. Teaming with construction, art department and set dressers, he went to work.

Two months later, visitors to the fictitious town of Perfection questioned which of the '50s style mobile homes with peeling paint and sun-faded trailers decorated with eclectic junk were there before production began. The answer came back... none. Though several of the building frames were constructed in Los Angeles before being transferred to Lone Pine, the rest were built and set dressed on the spot using items rummaged from Lone Pine. Several trailers were purchased in the Inyokern area, including one traded for two six-packs of Coors Light.

Cristante was truly inspired by the location. "It's very easy to have worked in Los Angeles for a while and then figure that the only resources anyone has are in L.A., because you're used to all the agencies and shops there. But it's very important to learn to tear yourself away from that because you'll find a whole new world that's much richer... three times richer when you actually go to location."

Cristante describes the Perfection set as "faded glory," adding, "It's the type of town that industry deserts after they've exploited the area. The few people that hang on are eccentrics who like the isolation, living their own personal freedom. It's much different than doing post-modern, high-tech urban style which I tend to specialize in, because suddenly you don't deal with theory anymore, you deal with character."

Cristante's proudest achievement is the rock island set at the foot of the Sierras, used for the conclusion of *Tremors*. He describes it as a "beautiful set of 60 feet by 60 feet by 20 feet high series of rocks modeled after the work of rock sculptor Noguchi. It's my tribute to Noguchi, one of the greatest artists of our time."







The SPFX mechanicals department, under the direction of Art Brewer, constructed elevator shafts for the worm holes and a 20-foot long tunnel under the wood slat boardwalk in front of the town's marketplace for the monster to race down (using a buoy tow).

Tom Woodruff and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics (who as part of Stan Winston's studio collaborated on *Aliens*, *The Terminator*, *Predator*, *Pumpkinhead* and *Amazing Stories*) were a critical team for the production. Woodruff felt that "If we couldn't bring a sense of realism to the creature's head and tentacles, the movie wouldn't be taken seriously."

The 10-foot "graboid" puppet head was designed and built in Los Angeles at Amalgamated Studios. "We wanted a creature that would look like it belonged in the desert," says Woodruff, "like a piece of the environment. We studied drawings of dinosaurs and rhinos for sheer bulk and for the creature's skin texture we were influenced by pachyderm skin. The tentacles were influenced by observing the movement of elephant trunks."

Gillis was excited by the challenge. "With most of our movies, such as *Aliens* and *The Terminator*, we were dealing with dark dripping hallways and a monster covered with slime. This was our first movie without slime on the monster. So it had to be much more realistic, with the added time to dwell on the details."

Filming of *Tremors* was completed at the Valencia Studios in California, with only two interior sets utilized during the production.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Producers/Screenwriters BRENT MADDOCK and S.S. WILSON have collaborated on numerous projects with *Tremors* director RON UNDERWOOD.

Maddock, who hails from Pleasantville, New York, and Wilson, who was born in Norman, Oklahoma, first met each other and Underwood while they were film students at the University of Southern California.

Underwood, a native of Los Angeles, began making short 8mm films in the fifth grade. In high school, his movies became more dramatically oriented, and one of them won an Eastman Kodak Award. At the age of 17, he travelled on a pilgrimage to Ceylon, India and made a film about a sacrificial tribe, a period in his life he refers to as "a turning point."

His interest in film however, did not dissuade Underwood from a career in medicine, and he entered Occidental College as a pre-med major. To pass his classes he often talked his chemistry and physics teachers into letting him make films instead of writing term papers. But Underwood preferred movie-making over medicine and ultimately headed for film school.

The three young filmmakers subsequently met at U.S.C., and Wilson, with Maddock's assistance, made a graduate film entitled *Recorded Live*, a stop action short which Pyramid Films bought in 1977.

After graduating, Underwood, who had begun directing commercials in the Midwest along with documentaries, including several acclaimed hang-gliding films, contacted Wilson and Maddock with an idea: short educational films utilizing humor and stop motion animation.

Underwood, working with Barr Films, produced the first educational film with his own money entitled *Dictionary: The Adventure of Words*. Maddock wrote and directed, and Wilson handled the superlative animated special effects of objects blossoming out of a talking dictionary. It immediately sold into schools and libraries across the country, becoming the most successful film in the Barr system.

For ten years Underwood directed over 150 short films. Maddock wrote and Wilson handled the SPFX for educational films which garnered numerous prestigious educational awards and were commercially successful as well.

During this time Wilson also wrote for *Cinefex* and *American Cinematographer* magazine and published a book on puppet animation, now a collector's item, entitled *Puppets and People*. Maddock also published a book entitled *The Films of Jacques Tati* while writing and editing several educational films of his own (ten with Underwood).

Underwood, now a recognized director of educational films, was hired by the Disney Channel to direct 70 episodes of *You and Me Kid*.

Meanwhile, Wilson and Maddock were collaborating with the king of animation Chuck Jones, as well as Friz Freleng, writing several Looney Tunes, including Daffy Duck and Road Runner cartoons. They also ghost wrote for one of the longest running comic strips in America, "Rick O'Shea."



The writing duo next adapted Kurt Vonnegut's *Deer in the Works*, a live action educational film, which Underwood again directed.

But it wasn't until 1983 and an educational film entitled *Library Report*, which featured an animated robot, that a spark ignited. Why not make a feature length film with a robot as a leading man?

Originally called "The Robot Movie," Tri-Star's successful motion picture *Short Circuit* propelled Wilson and Maddock into the limelight. The pair were then hired by Steven Spielberg to re-write *Batteries Not Included* and *The Land Before Time*.

Meanwhile, Underwood was tagged by Churchill Films to direct the ABC Afterschool Special, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (based on the children's book by Beverly Cleary), which received a Peabody Award. Underwood also directed the Emmy-nominated sequel, *Runaway Ralph*.

Maddock and Wilson next penned *Ghost Dad*, a film starring Bill Cosby and directed by Sidney Poitier, scheduled for release by Universal Pictures in the spring of 1990.

But it was several years earlier, while Wilson was editing films for the Navy that a rather significant moment occurred. As Wilson sat on a rock surrounded by sand at China Lake, he wondered what it would be like to be stranded in the desert by underground creatures.

In 1986, Maddock and Wilson started writing *Tremors*, a 1950's style sci-fi movie with a comedic bent. Maddock comments, "Instead of stock monster movies with unbelievable characters, we decided we'd make a scary movie with intrinsic, realistic, involving characters."

GALE ANNE HURD (Executive Producer) is one of the most influential independent producers in Hollywood. With the release of the underwater adventure *The Abyss*, the action/comedy *Downtown* and now the sci-fi *Tremors*, she has produced five movies in the past two years.

Hurd first gained prominence producing and co-writing (with James Cameron) the science-fiction classic *The Terminator* and followed up with the blockbuster Academy Award-winning *Aliens*. She next co-produced (with Richard Kobritz) the 20th Century Fox hit *Alien Nation* (recent winner of the Saturn Award for Best Science Fiction Film)



and then produced *Bad Dreams*. But her most challenging film undertaking to date was the epic underwater journey, *The Abyss*.

After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford University with a combined degree in economics and communications, Hurd went to work for film mentor Roger Corman. Starting as a production assistant on *Humanoids From the Deep*, she quickly advanced to other production positions including production coordinator, assistant director, casting, and assistant production manager on *Battle Beyond the Stars*. She segued to director of advertising and publicity, and then co-produced (with Roger Corman) *Smokey Bites the Dust*.

In 1982, Hurd went independent, first forming Pacific Western Productions which produced *The Terminator* and then No Frills Films which produced the 1988 horror-thriller *Bad Dreams*. In a co-venture with writer-director James Cameron, Hurd formed G.J.P. Productions for *The Abyss*.

The script for *Tremors*, produced under the banner B.P.P. Productions, landed on her desk in 1987 and she saw it immediately as a "new genre picture."

"*The Terminator* and *Aliens* were shot with darker images," explains Hurd, "but *Tremors* is shot in all daylight exteriors. This movie walks a fine line... it's a science fiction picture with horrific undertones, but it has a sense of fun. It's also daylight and that opens up things a lot. The previous films I've done like *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Alien Nation*, all took place primarily at night or inside with low light levels and that tends to make them more intense and suspenseful. In the daylight you can have a better time. So that's one of the challenges of this film, to be able to create suspense and terror when you need to, in broad daylight."

Hurd notes that "*Tremors* is a down home movie, it's not an urban thriller. It has that element studio directors are scared to death of, dust...a western period piece. But this is a contemporary cowboy picture. I think that the combining of genres, a down-home western and a fifties monster movie, is a new way of looking at things... a new genre."



## ABOUT THE CAST

KEVIN BACON'S versatility has encompassed a wide range of motion picture roles: as the drunken but brilliant Fenwick in Barry Levinson's *Diner* (1982); the dancing rebel in *Footloose* (1984); an overly expectant father in John Hughes *She's Having a Baby* (1988); a psychotic killer in *Criminal Law* (1989); the film student director in *The Big Picture* (1989) and now, the easy going handyman cowboy in *Tremors* (1990).

A native of Philadelphia, where his father was a renowned city planner, Bacon showed signs of becoming an actor at an early age. "I had an overdeveloped fantasy life and a huge hat collection I'd use to costume the different roles I played as a child. But it wasn't until I was 15, and gave up congo drums, that it came to me I was going to be an actor."

At 17, Bacon became the youngest student at Circle in the Square Theatre in New York and studied with various New York acting teachers until he landed his film debut role as Chip in *National Lampoon's Animal House*.

However, the role that propelled Bacon into the limelight was the part of the alienated new kid in town in *Footloose*. Even though he had never danced professionally or taken gymnastics, both crucial to the role, Bacon proved he could learn both.

Bacon has done such noteworthy off-Broadway stage productions as "Album," "Poor Little Lambs" and "Getting Out." His Broadway debut was with Sean Penn in "Slab Boys" (1983). He also starred in the 1986 production of Joe Orton's zany and highly touted play "Loot" and the PBS American Playhouse version of the Lanford Wilson play "Lemon Sky" (1987) in which he met his wife, actress Kyra Sedgwick (*Kansas* and Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*).

He has appeared on television in the daytime dramas *Search for Tomorrow* and *The Guiding Light*, the television movie *The Gift* and the made-for-cable movie, *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*.

His most recent roles include the obnoxious son-in-law in *End of the Line* with Wilford Brimley and the New Zealand production of *Rites of Summer*. He also produced as well as acted in the upcoming *Johnny Destiny Turns on the Radio*, a comedy/love story.

Bacon explains that when he first read *Tremors*, he saw a script that was “so well constructed, and the characters so interesting and so unlikely for movie heroes, that I was really drawn to it. It was the kind of character I had done on stage, but not something I had done in movies or something you get to do too often. Plus, I think it’s a very interesting combination of scary stuff with humor.”

FRED WARD has been a kick boxer, a lumbermill worker in Alaska, an Air Force radar defense specialist, a migrant laborer, a short order chef in a bowling alley and a construction crew worker rigging the underside of a subway system. Roles of a consummate actor? No, just real life. The adventurous and perpetual motion life of Fred Ward.

“I’m really just a transient at heart,” says Ward. “I find the movement and insecurity of movies exciting.”

He’s had plenty of excitement. A partial list of his film credits include *Uncommon Valor*, *Silkwood*, *The Right Stuff*, *The Henry Miller Story*, *Swing Shift*, *Secret Admirer*, *Prince of Pennsylvania*, *Escape From Alcatraz*, *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins*, *Southern Comfort*, *Off Limits*, *Big Business*, *Carny*, *Cardiac Arrest*, *Time Rider*, two Roberto Rossellini films (*The Power of Cosimo and Cartesia*), *Uforia*, *Backtrack*, *Miami Blues* and the upcoming *Henry and June*.

Born in San Diego, Ward recalls that “my mother left my father when I was three. He was in and out of jail all the time. When he was ‘out’ he was a ‘roughneck,’ that’s a job in an oil field... a kind of itinerant, they drift around until they hit oil and then move on... to the next oil patch. Maybe that’s where my restlessness comes from. I inherited it.”

Three days out of high school, Ward joined the Air Force. He was serving in Texas when he decided, at the age of 21, to become an actor. “I knew I had to do something with the energy inside me,” Ward remembers. “I’d thought about being a painter or a writer, but there was a very serious and constant pull towards acting.”

After the service Ward headed with a one-way ticket to New York and enrolled at the renowned Herbert Berghof Acting Studio. To pay for his drama lessons, he worked as a janitor, then as a demolition man tearing down tenements in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen. “It was dangerous,” he recalls, “but at least it was outdoors.”



Ward moved west working a succession of odd jobs and landed in San Francisco for several years. He became intensely involved in the theatre for five years, appearing in Sam Shepard's Magic Theatre productions "Inacoma" and "Angel City" and worked with Tennessee Williams.

In 1979 Ward played his first major screen role as Clint Eastwood's jailbreak partner in *Escape From Alcatraz*. His performance as astronaut Gus Grissom in *The Right Stuff* received critical praise, as did his memorable performance as a union activist opposite Meryl Streep in *Silkwood*. In *Uncommon Valor* (opposite Gene Hackman) he played an anguished Vietnam vet. He was featured as a co-star in Goldie Hawn's *Swing Shift* and was cast as a cop in *Secret Admirer*, before landing his first starring role in *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins*.

He was drawn to the script of *Tremors* by the relationship of Val and Earl and their individual characters. "I liked the part of Earl, the itinerant cowboy handyman," he says. "It's the whole desert rat thing. I've lived in Texas and the Southwest, so the part of Earl is a lot of guys I know."

His plans for the future are simply to keep working, "I'd like to play a romantic lead in the sense of an Elmore Leonard novel. A guy on the edge. That's where I like it."





FINN CARTER'S auspicious entrance into the entertainment industry began when her mother went into labor with Carter while attending a performance at a Greenville, Mississippi theatre. The next day, the local newspaper proclaimed, "A Star is Born!"

At the age of five, Carter was enrolled in a modern jazz class in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where her father (Hodding Carter III, ex-spokesman for the state department) was studying journalism at Harvard.

Back in Mississippi, Carter appeared in numerous school productions and, at the age of fourteen, received her first paying job dancing inside the costume of Pluto at local shopping malls. "It was a horrible job," she recalls. "Little kids could see you inside the mouth and would inevitably punch you in the face."

Carter studied with the San Francisco Ballet Company for one summer and then went to boarding school for two years at Walnut Hills High School for the Performing Arts in Natick, Massachusetts.

After high school, she studied with the Jose Lemon Dance Company in Washington D.C. and then moved to New York where she studied with Alvin Ailey's American Dance Company.







Her first major role was in the daytime drama, *As the World Turns*, as Sierra Esteban, a role she played for three years. Two weeks after she left the show, Carter auditioned for, and won the part of Nina Satchi, a minority college recruiter in *How I Got Into College* opposite Anthony Edwards.

Carter has also appeared in the television movies, *Dreambreakers* and *Monsters* ("The Mother Instinct").

On the first day MICHAEL GROSS was working on the set of *Tremors*, several cast and crew members walked past and wondered who he was. The new grip? Gaffer? Teamster?

Virtually unrecognizable as survivalist Burt Gummer, Michael Gross wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Star of the hit NBC series *Family Ties*, Gross chose the part of Burt because he says, "the role is in many ways diametrically opposed to the left-wing Steven Keaton I played on *Family Ties*."

Born in Chicago, Gross received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Illinois and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the Yale School of Drama. After graduating in 1973, he went straight to regional theatre and spent three seasons with the Actors Theatre of Louisville, where he appeared in the title role of "Oedipus the King" and as James Daley in "That Championship Season," among others. His off-Broadway credits include "Private Lives," "Endgame," "Geniuses" and "No End of Blame," for which he won an Obie Award in 1982. He made his Broadway debut as Greta, the drag queen, in "Bent" with Richard Gere and David Dukes. He also performed in the Mark Taper Forum's repertory productions of "The Real Thing" and "Hedda Gabler."

Gross made his film debut in Sidney Lumet's *Just Tell Me What You Want* (1980) with Alan King and Ali McGraw and followed with the part of Dr. Jay Marshall opposite Bette Midler in *Big Business*.

But it was *Family Ties*, one of the most successful situation comedy runs in television history, and only the second television show for which he had ever auditioned, that catapulted Gross into the limelight.

Among his other extensive television credits are the television movies *A Letter to Three Wives*, *Cook & Perry: The Race to the North Pole*, *Little Gloria*, *Happy at Last, F.D.R.*, *The Last Year*, *A Girl Named Sooner*, *Summer Fantasies* and *Right to Die*. However, it was the role of killer Bill Matix in the NBC Movie *In the Line of Duty: The F.B.I. Murders* that



Gross describes as career altering. "This was the role that finally got the critics saying, 'Hey, this guy can act... different.'"

Gross has made a smooth career transition following seven years on a hit series. "For months interviewers kept asking me, 'So... is there life after *Family Ties*?' And I said 'God only knows.' But the day after the wrap party for *Family Ties* I was on my way to Lone Pine for *Tremors*."

"Burt has rubbed off on me a little bit," explains Gross. "I've been reading survivalist literature and I've finally put together the earthquake survival kit that I've been postponing for years... for Southern California."

In the future, Gross would like to continue with character roles. "I always thought of acting as a chance to be as different from yourself as possible. In theatre the greatest compliment you can pay an actor when he walks through the stage door is not to recognize him. That's exciting to me."

REBA McENTIRE'S numerous accolades include the Country Music Association's "Female Vocalist of the Year" (1984-1987), Academy of Country Music's "Top Female Vocalist" (1985-1988), American Music Awards' "Favorite Country Female Vocalist" (1987-1989), Grammy for "Best Country Vocal Performance Female" (1987) and Music City News' "Female Artist of the Year" (1985-1988) to name a few.

Born and raised in Oklahoma, McEntire grew up on the Southwestern rodeo circuit. Her grandfather and father were world-champion steer ropers and McEntire herself was on the circuit for ten years, quarter-horse barrel racing on the WPRA circuit.

Encouraged by her mother, McEntire began singing in her teens and performed locally with her brother Pake and sister Suzie as "The Singing McEntires."

While attending Southeastern State University, McEntire studied Mozart and music analysis. "I took piano and violin," she recalls, "but it turned to fiddle when I went back home."

It was in 1975, while singing the National Anthem at the National Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City that she got her first big break. Listening in the stands was Nashville songwriter Red Steagall who convinced McEntire's mother to bring her to Nashville. There, McEntire's demo tape earned her a contract with Mercury Records. Today, McEntire appears in over 150 show dates each year.

After several successful music videos, including one for her hit song "Whoever's in New England," and co-hosting *Good Morning America* and *The Home Show*, the crossover to acting was the next step.

"Before *Tremors* I had had no stage or theatre training except performing as a singer," explains McEntire. "But I feel that performing in front of a live audience every night is a good preparation for acting."

McEntire says that she was drawn to the script because of its "sense of humor and the camaraderie between Val and Earl. They reminded me of people I've been around in the music business. Also, I felt comfortable in the town of Perfection, Nevada which is a lot like my home town where everybody knows what everybody else is doing."

Actor Michael Gross is McEntire's first movie co-star. "He really helped my acting a lot. But I think I caught him and the crew off-guard when I whooped it up after I'd finished my first shot in the movie. I was so excited, I just screamed."

CHARLOTTE STEWART was born in Yuba City, California. During her high school years, she hosted a radio show called "Teen Time" on the ABC affiliate. In the early 1960s, Stewart studied at the College of Theatre Arts in Pasadena, California. Her television credits include *The Loretta Young Show*, *Bachelor Father*, *The F.B.I.*, *Bonanza*, *Medical Center*, *Mannix*, and *Gunsmoke*. On film, Stewart most recently appeared in *Eraserhead*.

BOBBY JACOBY was born in Flushing, New York. He began his career at the age of five, appearing in *Walking Through the Firewood* with Bess Armstrong. Jacoby was a semi-regular on *Different Strokes* and appeared in a recurring role as Brian Cunningham on *Knots Landing*. He has acted in 15 television movies, including *A Different Affair*, opposite Anne Archer. His theatrical movie credits include *Iron Eagle* and the 1989 release, *Meet the Applegates*.

TONY GENARO was born in Gallup, New Mexico. As a youngster, he became involved with street gangs, and after lying about his age, joined the army at 14. After leaving the service he applied to the San Diego Theatre Group and alternated with Carl Weathers in "The Tempest" as Callaban. Genaro performed did five plays with Luis Valdez, working again with Valdez years later in the movie *La Bamba* playing the part of Rosa's father. He also appeared with Bette Davis in one of her last films, *Bunny O'Hare*.

RICHARD MARCUS was born in Midland, Texas. He is perhaps best known for his recurring role on *St. Elsewhere*, playing "Birdman" for which he garnered an Emmy nomination. On stage, he worked with Sam Shepard and the A.C.T. Theatre group in San Francisco. His television credits include *Hill Street Blues*, *Matlock* and *L.A. Law*, as well as the television movie *Jessy*, opposite Lee Remick. His film credits include *Enemy Mine*, *Deadly Friend* and *Best Defense*.

VICTOR WONG was born in San Francisco's Chinatown. As television's first Chinese American reporter (PBS channel 9 from 1968 to 1974), he covered the Vietnam war demonstrations of the 1960s and the Patty Hearst story. However, a bout with the paralyzing effects of Bell's Palsy forced him to leave reporting and turn to acting. On television he appeared on the daytime drama *Search for Tomorrow*, as well as three PBS American Playhouse movies.

His film roles include *The Last Emperor*, *The Year of the Dragon*, *Big Trouble in Little China*, *The Golden Child*, *Prince of Darkness*, *Dim Sum* and *Shanghai Surprise*.

Ten-year old ARIANA RICHARDS was born in Healdsburg near Sonoma County, California. She has appeared on such television shows as *My Sister Sam*, *The Golden Girls* and *Days of Our Lives*. Her theatrical film credits include the HBO Movie *Into the Homeland*, *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* and *Prancer*. Her most recent film is the upcoming *Martians! (Spaced Invaders)*.



# TREMORS ROCKS THE HOUSE

by Marc Shapiro

*This article was originally published in issue 91 (April 1990) of Fangoria magazine, and is reprinted here with kind permission of Fangoria.*

File: monster movies. Era: 1950s. Subgenre: animal mutants. Plot: Insect(s)/sea creature(s)/ dinosaur(s)/what-ever(s) get A-bombed, grow to enormous size, chow down on locals, trash cities, run amok and finally die at the hands of good guys spouting Cold War rhetoric. A formula that's gone forever? Perhaps not, for *Tremors* uses it. But then again, it doesn't.

"We wanted to make a monster movie in the spirit of '50s flicks like *Them!* and *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*," says director Ron Underwood of his theatrical motion picture debut. "We also wanted to do something with a '90s sensibility in terms of character and humor."

Underwood's description is quite a pedigree for a film that, since the script began making the rounds some four years ago, has been known as "that giant sandworm story." Thus Underwood, whose credits include the ABC Afterschool Special *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* and a ton of educational and children's shorts, insists that *Tremors* has both the outlandish and the progressive going for it.

"Essentially, this is a fun monster movie that doesn't take itself extremely seriously" he assesses. "That doesn't stop us from playing this all very straight and realistically." *Tremors*, a Universal release executive produced by rising genre mogul Gale Anne Hurd, is no slouch in the big-name hunt. Known lights Kevin Bacon, Fred Ward, Michael Gross and country music crooner Reba McEntire willingly signed on. Screenwriters S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock, of *Short Circuit* stature, aren't chopped liver. Neither are wormmakers (and recent Stan Winston alumni) Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis. For this bunch to fall hook, line and sinker, there must have been some bait.

One could hardly call the story premise groundbreaking. Things are pretty much status quo in the one-horse town of Perfection: a survivalist couple (Gross and McEntire) shop for bullets, local handymen McKee (Bacon) and Bassett (Ward) look for their next job, and student seismologist (Finn Carter) investigates why the town has a sudden case of the shakes.

One of the townspeople is found dead of dehydration. So much for serenity. A farmer's body is discovered six feet underground, literally torn to pieces. Needless to say, it doesn't take long to discover that the town of Perfection is under siege by a group of 30-foot sandworms. (How did they get there? Hey, don't screw up a good monster movie by explaining everything.) The battle rages, good guys vs. invertebrates.

Underwood concedes that, on the surface, *Tremors* does sound like a rehash of everything from *The Black Scorpion* to *Reptilicus*. He also asserts that the film has its own fair share of twists and turns. "For openers, this is a movie that plays out almost entirely in the daytime, so we didn't have the benefit of the normal night shooting techniques to hide like the fact that our giant sandworms are special effects," Underwood points out. "There are no bad guys in this film, just very likable, interesting characters, and we've also ditched the idea of an expert coming to the scene to tell us everything about the monster. Besides, everything we thought of to explain why the sandworms were down there and why they were so big had already been used. Given the time frame of the story, there really wasn't time to do that without stopping the movie dead in its tracks."

Gale Anne Hurd loves monster movies too, and she's also crazy about good scripts. So when an acquaintance said, "I know these writers who have this project you might be interested in," Hurd bit.

"I knew immediately it was a great idea," the savvy producer of *Aliens* and *The Abyss* recounts. "And the writing was superb, which was not something you often found in '50s monster movies. It was also a kind of movie that had not really been done well lately. I was sold." So sold, in fact, that she worked overtime pulling together the financing and, on the strength of Underwood's past work, backing him to spearhead the film. Rather than copping an easy plea and casting unknowns, Hurd went after some rather notable actors. And the producer knew going in that she'd have to stave off many qualms.

"The main questions everybody had was whether Ron Underwood was the right director for the project, and was it in their best interests to be in a film that will be known for all eternity as a giant sandworm movie?" Hurd laughs.

"We had a great response from the script. People like Kevin Bacon and Fred Ward felt there would be enough benefits to get involved.



"I also think we hit a few of these people at the right point in their careers," she continues. "Michael Gross was looking to break away from his *Family Ties* image, and Reba McEntire was looking to break into acting. Both really knocked themselves out as the survivalist couple, and it shows."

Hurd cites the substance of *Tremors*' characters as a main selling point. "The characters are very likable and very real," she explains. "There's quite a bit of humor to these people and how they react to this situation, but it's not forced humor. It's played in a very believable manner. The film does not have a lot of gore, and the graphic scenes are played more for laughs than chills." The producer points to a recent screening as a defense against horror aficionados lumping *Tremors* in with past lame humor/horror exercises.

"People jump when they see this movie," swears Hurd. "People scream. I'd call that an indication that this film works quite well as horror."

*Tremors*, budgeted in the \$5-10 million bracket, shot most of its 54-day schedule in Valencia, California and in the Lone Pine Desert. In the latter location, recalls Underwood, the real horror took place. "Nothing was easy about making this film," the director groans. "Doing an effects-heavy film in the middle of the desert was a real problem. I mean, where do you go to replenish your supply of creature goo in Lone Pine?"

"We were faced with real extremes in weather," Underwood continues. "We were shooting in rain, snow, windstorms, and we never had those conditions when we were shooting simple scenes. The wind was at its worst when we shot people on top of roofs, the rain was coming down hardest when we had our actors pole-vaulting from rock to rock to escape the worms. I'm telling you, everybody earned their pay on this film."

Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis, now known as Amalgamated Dynamics, came to *Tremors* after missing the creaturemaker's bid on another Gale Anne Hurd project. "Gale called us back and asked if we could give her a budget breakdown on *Tremors* for her line producer. We recognized Steve Wilson's name on the script and talked to him. What he had in mind for this movie was such a novel idea that we figured it would give us a real good chance to show our work," smiles Woodruff.

Woodruff and Gillis' work on *Tremors* consists of – you guessed it – worms. But not just your ordinary night crawlers. We're talking four full-scale worm heads, complete with articulated, three-tentacled tongues. "We also did a full scale, head-to-tail 30-

foot worm, and a bunch of miniatures for postproduction work,” Woodruff lists. “All the worms were built to quarter scale, which made things much more manageable out in the desert.”

“The biggest challenge was trying not to make it look like the worm in *Dune*,” explains Gillis. “The script left the description of the creatures open to interpretation, so Tom and I took the cue and started poring through reference and nature books. We picked out shapes and textures and just started combining things.”

“Calling these things worms may be a bit of an injustice,” injects *Pumpkinhead* vet Woodruff, “because what we came up with definitely has a vertebrate look to it. We went for more reptilian textures and shapes.”

“We felt that, if we couldn’t bring a sense of realism to the creatures’ heads and tentacles, the movie wouldn’t be taken seriously,” Gillis posits. “We felt strongly that the worms had to look like they belonged in the desert.”





Woodruff and Gillis, who have worked on a *Monsters* episode and did some touch-up work on the movie *Warlock* since going out on their own, claim that *Tremors* offered them a definite change of pace from the big-budget nasties they handled with Winston.

"With movies like *Aliens* and *The Terminator*, we were dealing with dark, dripping hallways and a monster covered with slime. This was our first movie without slime on the monster, so the creatures had to be much more lifelike," explains Gillis. Underwood insists that the movie's strength does not totally rely on the early introduction of the desert demons. "The monsters are seen a lot," he reasons. "So what we've really got going for us is the psychological value of their unseen presence. These are creatures that can pop up anywhere, anytime. There is no place to hide. Now, that's pretty scary." While Underwood does not rule out a possible *Tremors* sequel, he claims his creation will be unique by current horror standards in not containing a back door ending. "This is a self-contained story with a definite conclusion." chuckles the director. "So don't look for any sandworm eggs at the fade."







# GRABOIDS, GUMMER AND GUNS

## THE EVOLUTION OF A FRANCHISE

by Jonathan Melville

**Please note: this article contains spoilers for the *Tremors* sequels.**

By rights, the last few seconds of *Tremors* - as Valentine McKee (Kevin Bacon) and Rhonda LeBeck (Finn Carter) kiss, Reba McEntire's 'Why Not Tonight?' kicks in, and the end credits roll - should have been the last viewers saw of Perfection, Nevada.

Thanks to a confused marketing campaign from Universal Studios, its advertising department unsure whether to sell the film as horror-with-laughs or a comedy-with-scares, *Tremors* took just over \$16.5 million at the box office and disappeared from sight. For most films that would have been the end of the story, but the late 1980s had seen sales of video cassette recorders (VCRs) boom in the United States, resulting in a slew of direct-to-video (DTV) horror sequels premiering on VHS including the likes of *Ghoulies 2* (1987) and *Howling IV: The Original Nightmare* (1988).

It was in 1992 that *Tremors*' writers S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock, director Ron Underwood and their manager, Nancy Roberts, co-founded their own production company, Stampede Entertainment, and by 1993 Universal Studios was showing some interest in reviving the *Tremors* brand for a cinema release, mainly due to strong sales on home video. Their only stipulation? Kevin Bacon and Reba McEntire must return as Val McKee and Heather Gummer. When both actors declined, the project went into limbo.

Fast forward to 1994, and staff at the recently established Universal Studios Home Video department also saw evidence of *Tremors* success on the small screen and set the wheels in motion for a new DTV sequel, bringing the Stampede team aboard the project at an early stage. Despite Kevin Bacon's reticence to return to Perfection, co-star Fred Ward had no such qualms, agreeing to star as Earl Bassett as long as he could keep his hair long. Also signing-up once again was Michael Gross as survivalist Burt Gummer.

The original script for *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* had found Val and Earl running an ostrich farm in Perfection Valley, before a Graboid attack in Australia took the pair Down Under with Burt and Heather Gummer in tow. The group met Graboids and the

next stage in their evolution, Shriekers. The revised DTV version, made for around \$3 million, teamed Earl up with cab driver Grady Hoover (Christopher Gartin) as they're hired by a Mexican oil company to rid their plant of Graboids. Earl finds romance with Dr. Kate Riley (Helen Shaver), while a now divorced Burt Gummer arrives in Mexico to help his old friend Earl.

For what could have been an easy cash grab by both the studio and the creators, *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* is a remarkably entertaining follow-up that is almost as good as the original. Writers S.S. Wilson (also in the director's chair) and Brent Maddock have fun playing the 'What If?' card - what if Val and Earl had won their 15 minutes of fame? What if the Graboids evolved? What if Earl found romance this time around? - and once again nail the combination of humor and drama that made the original so unique.

Though Gartin is no Kevin Bacon, something the script acknowledges with a few knowing one-liners, he's instantly likeable as the over-enthusiastic Grady, while Helen Shaver is another welcome addition to the franchise. The character of Kate Riley continues the theme from the first film that the use of intellect to defeat the creatures is just as important as a few tonnes of high explosives.

Talking of explosives, special mention has to go to Michael Gross for his triumphant return as Burt Gummer. It's a scientific fact that the entertainment factor of *Tremors 2* rises by a factor of ten when Burt appears in any scene, something that's all the more impressive when you consider Gross was only on set for a few days of the shoot, doing most of his own stunts and enjoying getting covered in Graboid blood (in reality Libby's Pumpkin Pie filling). Creature-wise, *Tremors 2* once again featured practical monster effects from Amalgamated Dynamics' Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr., with puppeteers donning Shrieker costumes to interact with the actors.

The finished film arrived in North American video rental stores on 9th April 1996 and won plaudits from the likes of *TV Guide*<sup>1</sup>, whose reviewer reckoned the film was "not only worthy of its theatrical predecessor but suggests that it, too, belongs on the big screen." According to the *Los Angeles Times* that year, keys to DTV success included a recognizable title, a name actor and a film in the action-adventure or horror genres<sup>2</sup>, all things that were present and correct for *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*.

---

1 *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*, *TV Guide*,  
<https://www.tvguide.com/movies/tremors-2-aftershocks/review/131534/>

2 Brass, Kevin, "Video Invasion: B Film Makers Battle A-List for a Place on the Shelf", [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-04-19/business/fi-60235\\_1\\_video-title](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-04-19/business/fi-60235_1_video-title)



So enthused was the Stampede team at being back in the Graboid hunting game, and inspired by the popularity of *The X-Files*, that they began pitching the idea of a TV series around this time. It would have found Val and Earl (and probably Burt) taking on new cases each week, from Bigfoot, to killer toaster ovens and even vampires. The idea didn't get past pitch stage, but the idea of an albino Graboid tormenting Perfection through the series would remain with the team.

## A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

The next few years found the Stampede team working on other projects, with S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock hired to write the original script for Barry Sonnenfeld's *Wild Wild West* (1999). Sadly for the writers, the script was heavily rewritten after they'd submitted it, leaving them heartbroken at what they felt was their best work.

As they licked their wounds, they were approached by Universal Studios Home Entertainment with the news that *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* had met their sales expectations and that they were keen to move forward with another *Tremors* film on home video. Convinced this would be the final instalment in a trilogy, Wilson, Maddock and their agent Nancy Roberts worked on a treatment for *Tremors 3: Back to Perfection* that saw events set once again in the town of Perfection, with script duties carried out by screenwriter John Whelpley and Maddock taking over as director.

Entering production in 2000, Michael Gross returned as Burt Gummer, now the franchise's lead actor thanks to the absence of Fred Ward, while Charlotte Stewart, Ariana Richards and Tony Genaro returned as Nancy, Mindy and Miguel (respectively) from the first film. Also back was Robert Jayne as Melvin, now reimagined as a duplicitous property developer trying to make a fast buck from Burt's land. Burt is once again up against Graboids (including the albino "El Blanco", an idea resurrected from Wilson and Maddock's old TV series pitch) and Shriekers, though this time he and his fellow townsfolk are introduced to the flying Ass Blasters.

New characters included store owner and entrepreneur Susan Chuang as Jodi Chang, niece to the first film's Walter Chang (Victor Wong), and "Desert" Jack Sawyer (Shawn Christian), this film's younger sidekick character. Just as the first sequel explained that the original Graboid attack had made Val and Earl famous, *Tremors 3* took things a step further and showed tourists eager to take part in Graboid tours and buy themed trinkets.



Loaded with references to the first film and featuring a fun new addition to the Graboid family tree, *Tremors 3* is something of a nostalgia-fest for fans, with old faces offering continuity with the now 11-year-old original film. At the same time, the Ass Blasters add new menace to proceedings, forcing Burt to once again think on his feet. Budget cuts meant that CG effects started to creep into the films, beginning a trend in the *Tremors* sequels that hand crafted monsters would be used sparingly.

Released on VHS and DVD on 1st October 2001, *Tremors 3: Back to Perfection* received next to no promotional activity from Universal, the assumption being that fans would read about them on message boards and seek them out in stores. The film also benefited from highly rated screenings on the Universal-owned Sci-Fi Channel, and in 2002 the Stampede team accepted an offer from Sci-Fi bosses to create a 13-part TV series based on the events of the third film.

*Tremors: The Series* debuted in March 2003 and found Burt Gummer living in Perfection with Nancy (Marcia Strassman), Jodi (Lela Lee), Tyler Reed (Victor Browne) and other locals as they watched over El Blanco. They also regularly butted heads with federal government agent J.D. Twitchell (Dean Norris) and Melvin (Robert Jayne), the latter appearing infrequently to complicate things with his property plans. Each week would see Burt face a new foe, while the likes of Christopher Lloyd made cameo appearances. Sadly, *Tremors: The Series* was the victim of studio politics, with many episodes aired out of order and the creators left out of the editing room. The show was finding its feet when the axe fell, leaving fans to wonder what happened next to Burt and El Blanco.

Just as the series was entering production, Universal Studios Home Video decided that they needed a new *Tremors* film, causing the Stampede team to come up with a story set long before the events of the original *Tremors* film so as not to contradict the TV episodes. While Brent Maddock was left to manage the show, S.S. Wilson and Nancy Roberts were moved over to *Tremors 4*, with Wilson once again directing.

Set in 1889, *Tremors 4: The Legend Begins* introduces viewers to Hiram Gummer (Michael Gross), great grandfather to Burt, who comes to investigate a series of mysterious deaths at his silver mine in the town of Rejection, Nevada and promptly discovers giant worms are killing his workers. Premiering on the Sci-Fi Channel on 2nd January 2004 before heading to DVD soon after, *Tremors 4* rewards fans with multiple callbacks to the first three films, putting a novel spin on a premise that was creatively running out of steam.

While fans could have been forgiven for thinking a new TV show and film meant *Tremors* was a franchise in rude health, things weren't looking so good behind the scenes. With the DVD rental market disappearing, the profits to be made on DTV films evaporated, while Sci-Fi decided to invest in a revamped *Battlestar Galactica* rather than another season of *Tremors: The Series*.

It would be another decade until Burt Gummer went Graboid hunting again.

## BRINGING BURT BACK

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Universal Studios Home Video announced that “the fifth heart-pounding instalment” in the *Tremors* franchise had begun filming in South Africa, while a day later the Stampede Entertainment team made their own announcement that S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock would not be returning due to Universal’s refusal to give them “meaningful creative control”, despite basing the new film on a 2004 script from the pair.

A returning Michael Gross would star alongside Jamie Kennedy (as cameraman Travis Welker) in *Tremors 5: Bloodlines*, in which the mismatched pair travel to South Africa in search of Ass Blasters and encounter a new breed of Graboid. Scripted by *Tremors 3*’s John Whelpley and directed with gusto by action sequel veteran Don Michael Paul, *Bloodlines* marks the point where the *Tremors* films diverge from their early noughties brethren.

Just as the Graboids in *Bloodlines* are bigger and nastier in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the original creatures, so the tone of the post-Stampede films changes to accommodate them. This is a darker, grittier and more cynical world, with Burt Gummer having to adapt to surroundings that are more often seen in action adventure movies than horror comedies. It’s debatable whether the Burt of *Tremors 3* would have killed an Ass Blaster and shown no remorse as its burning carcass falls on a man, but in *Bloodlines* it’s just part of the hunt.

Among the South African cast there’s a strong performance from Pearl Thusi as Dr. Nandi Montabu, while the revelation of Burt and Travis’ previously unmentioned relationship is one that was needed to give the reboot a shot in the arm. (It’s just a shame neither character seems to like one another.) *Bloodlines* did well enough on streaming and DVD to justify the September 2016 announcement of a sixth film, again with John Whelpley writing and Don Michael Paul directing - *Tremors: A Cold Day in Hell*.

Filed in South Africa in January 2017, this instalment was set in the Arctic and suggested that climate change had led to the conditions being right for Graboids to be present. Burt and Travis discover that the creatures are being developed as bio-weapons by scientists, while encountering Valerie McKee (Jamie-Lee Money), the daughter of Valentine McKee and Rhonda LeBeck.

Long-time fans were treated to a cameo from Chang's store at the start of the film, now apparently run by Burt, though Perfection itself is a shadow of its former self, a sign that the miniscule budget of *A Cold Day in Hell* couldn't quite stretch to a complete rebuild of the town. With Burt the angriest we've ever seen him, his banter with Travis quickly becoming grating, and a forgettable supporting cast that's only there to become Graboid fodder, the film's success hinges on Michael Gross' performance and Don Michael Paul's visuals.

In the 16 months between the filming of *A Cold Day in Hell* and its release on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018, fans were presented with the possibility that yet another iteration of the franchise would be arriving on the small screen. Following *Tremors'* 25th anniversary in 2015, Kevin Bacon had let it slip in numerous interviews that he was keen to find out what had happened to Val McKee since the events of the first film.

As a result, in June 2017 it was announced that low budget horror studio Blumhouse had ordered a pilot script for a new series from screenwriter Andrew Miller, to be produced by the SyFy channel. The pilot even had an acclaimed director at the helm in the form of Canadian sci-fi horror auteur Vincenzo Natali, best known for *Cube* (1997), *Splice* (2009) and *In The Tall Grass* (2019), as well as episodes of *Hannibal* (2013-2015) and *Westworld* (2016-present) among others. (Fans of *Cube* may recall Andrew Miller acted in that film as the idiot savant Kazan.)

Ignoring everything established in the *Tremors* sequels, the script introduced a washed-up Val McKee, still living in Perfection a quarter of a century after he helped rid the town of Graboids. Val has never managed to escape from the shadow of his 1990s fame, and is living on past glories, convinced that the Graboids will return again as the locals ignore his ramblings and try to move forward with their lives. Inevitably Val is proved right, and the creatures are summoned back to Perfection by a Graboid worshipping cult. Melvin Plug returns as antagonist, this time played by actor P.J. Byrne, and the pilot further distances itself from the ongoing film series by offering an alternate version of Val's daughter: Emily McKee, played by Emily Tremaine.

Despite a leaked trailer impressing both long term fans and a more general audience with its mix of horror and humor, the decision was taken not to broadcast the pilot or to commission a full series, leaving Kevin Bacon confused and viewers disappointed. A potential second season reunion between Val and Fred Ward's Earl Bassett, hinted at by Andrew Miller, would now never happen. The pilot allegedly remains unfinished, missing vital effects work necessary for Bacon's return to the franchise to be released to the public.

Syfy may have got cold feet about rebooting *Tremors*, but Burt Gummer is set to take on Graboids once again in the seventh film in the series, 2020's *Tremors: Shrieker Island*. Directed once again by Don Michael Paul, written by Brian Brightly and filmed in Thailand in November 2019, it sees Burt and new sidekick Jimmy (Jon Heder) come up against trophy hunters who have genetically modified Graboid eggs for their own nefarious purposes. Inevitably things go wrong and the world's greatest monster hunter, Burt Gummer, is hired to destroy the Graboids and their Shrieker offspring.

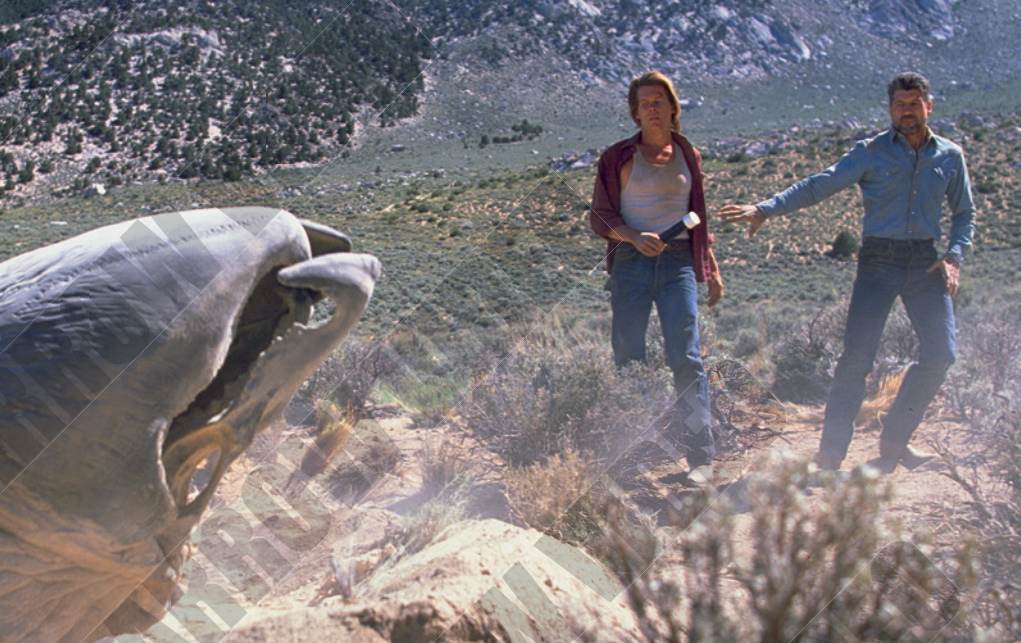
It's incredible that an action adventure/horror/comedy franchise is still going strong thirty years after the film that spawned it flopped at the box office. What's even more impressive is that the 73-year-old Michael Gross is still headlining the series, while still happily discussing the possibility of *Tremors 8* on his Facebook page before *Shrieker Island* is even released.

The evolution of Burt Gummer has been as confusing as that of the creatures he hunts, heavily dependent on the whims of the creative team involved on each project, but Gross is the one constant that anchors each film. Anyone deciding to download, stream or boot up the DVDs of the *Tremors* sequels (and the TV show) after watching the original film is in for a treat. Come for the monsters, stay for Michael Gross.

Burt Gummer will never let you down.

---

Jonathan Melville is the author of *Seeking Perfection: The Unofficial Guide to Tremors*.









# ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Tremors* has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo, 4.0 and 5.1 sound.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution at EFILM, Burbank. The film was graded and restored in 4K at Silver Salt Restoration, London. Grading was approved by director Ron Underwood and director of photography Alexander Gruszynski.

The stereo and 4.0 mixes were newly remastered from the original sound materials at NBC Universal.

Restoration supervised by  
**James White, Arrow Films**

Silver Salt Restoration:  
**Anthony Badger, Steve Bearman, Mark Bonnici, Lisa Copson,  
Simon Edwards, Lucie Hancock, Ray King, Rob Langridge**

NBC Universal:  
**Peter Schade, Tim Naderski, Jefferson Root, John Edell**

EFILM:  
**David Morales, Jason Esquivel**

This restoration of *Tremors* has been approved by director  
**Ron Underwood.**

All original materials supplied for this restoration were made available by  
**NBC Universal.**

Special thanks to **Ron Underwood** and **Alexander Gruszynski**  
for their general participation on this project.

# PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc & Booklet Produced by **James Flower**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**  
QC **Alan Simmons, Michael Mackenzie, James Flower**  
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**  
Disc Mastering **Fidelity in Motion**  
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**  
Artwork **Matt Frank**  
Design **Oink Creative**

# SPECIAL THANKS

**Alex Agran, Tara Ansley, Pat Bauman, Ian Day, Elijah Drenner, Roxanne Emberson, Abhi Goel, Danny Herbert, Rod Jones, Juan Leon, Brent Maddock, Jonathan Melville, Kim Newman, Phil Nobile Jr., Michael Rybek, Jessica Safavimehr, John Sanderson, Dave Smith, Matthew Snead, Ron Underwood, Steve Wilson, Thomas Winward**

