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CAST

Mia Wasikowska Edith Cushing
Jessica Chastain Lady Lucille Sharpe
Tom Hiddleston Sir Thomas Sharpe
Charlie Hunnam Dr. Alan McMichael
Jim Beaver Carter Cushing
Burn Gorman Mr. Holly
Jonathan Hyde Ogilvie

Leslie Hope Mrs. McMichael, Alan's mother
Sofia Wells Young Edith

Doug Jones The ghosts of Edith's Mother and Lady Beatrice Sharpe

Javier Botet The ghosts of Margaret McDermott, Pamela Upton and Enola Sciotti

CREW

Directed by **Guillermo del Toro**

Produced by **Thomas Tull** P.G.A., **Jon Jashni** P.G.A., **Guillermo del Toro** P.G.A., **Callum Greene** P.G.A.

Executive Producer **Jillian Share**

Written by **Guillermo del Toro** and **Matthew Robbins**

Director of Photography **Dan Laustsen** D.F.F.

Production Designer **Tom Sanders**

Art Direction by **Brandt Gordon**

Costume Designer **Kate Hawley**

Set Decoration by **Jeffrey A. Melvin** and **Shane Vieau**

Film Editor **Bernat Vilaplana**

Music by **Fernando Velázquez**

Sound Designer **Randy Thom**

Visual Effects Supervisor **Dennis Berardi**

Casting **Robin D. Cook** c.s.a.

Concept Artists **Guy Davis** and **Oscar Chichoni**





MELANCHOLY AND THE MAIDEN: NOTES ON GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S CRIMSON PEAK

by David Jenkins

Like it or not, there's a negative stigma attached to genre cinema. That's not to say it's automatically thought of as lacking in prestige or rejecting intellectual and emotional depth in favour of more templated formal manoeuvres. More that a genre film is ultimately a riff on something that existed before it. Genre definitely doesn't preclude quality, but it is often employed as a marketing hook – an easy way to package, present and sell a movie. It's a mode of alerting a potential viewer what they're about to watch and what they're about to feel. Generic tags are helpful in the way they gently pander to the obsessions of militant fandom and to those whose idea of appreciating a movie is being able to "place" it into a wider context, like affixing a microscopic detail to a sprawling fresco. Those films that slip between the gaps, that are neither fish nor fowl, require double shifts on the marketing front, to make sure that an audience is in place, ready and waiting for its peculiar arrival.

In 2015, when Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* made its cinematic bow, there seemed to be discrepancies regarding how best to classify it. Some claimed it as a luxuriant ghost story with fine period trappings and a sense of immaculate refinement. Others considered it a macabre, effects-driven haunted house shocker that derived from a lineage of pure classical horror. And then there was a contingent (which included the director himself) who felt the film was actually more of a romantic tragedy deeply entrenched within a tradition of Gothic literature and design. There's certainly an argument to be made for each of these camps, as well as opting to just shimmy back a few steps and accept the film entirely on its own madly iconoclastic terms. Sometimes, hardcore territoriality kicks in where rival cliques feel moved to claim an artwork for themselves. They become defenders rather than connoisseurs. Walter Hill's 1979 film *The Warriors* is about this very idea. I digress...

Cast your mind back some 30 years, and you'll see that del Toro has form in this field. His 1993 feature debut, *Cronos*, was also his first unidentified flying object. This quietly radical tale of unquenchable blood lust is, at first glance, a clever variation on timeworn vampire staples, comprising veritable rivers of the red stuff and a conflicted anti-hero in Federico Luppi's lovable old-timer, Jesus Gris. But look closer, and maybe it's an art movie exploring the tragedy of time's inexorable march? And then there's *Pan's Labyrinth* from 2006, a smash-and-grab stunner which purloins from the horror, fantasy, sci-fi, literary, war, romance, political and children's genres. And even something like *Pacific Rim*, from 2014, which looks from all angles like a cut-and-dried action blockbuster, might actually be a blissful, culture-clash teen romance. And, if you were feeling frisky, there's definitely a case to be made for it working as a musical, as skyscraper-sized Jaeger robots tango with killer alien Kaiju in the rippling South China Sea.



Del Toro is extremely eloquent when talking about his own movies, so much so that it makes second guessing his impulses an even tougher game. Every exquisitely manicured frame comes with its own backstory, its own carefully chosen set of cultural reference points and its own painstakingly judged reasoning for being up there on the screen. One might say of his Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water* (2017) that it was an update of the Universal Horror classic *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), but the reality is, del Toro has merely ingested the essence of that film and recalibrated it for his own delightfully whimsical ends. So “placing” the director’s movies is something of a fool’s errand, as he is always one step ahead in some aspect or other. That is why you will find little speculation on connections and homages here. This playful sense of elusiveness is what gives del Toro’s cinema its bite and its sense of enduring intrigue. It’s why the only way to amply describe his work is by saying, “It’s a Guillermo del Toro film.”

On to *Crimson Peak*, a work which embraces and defies convention, often at the very same time. It sets out its extravagant stall in Buffalo, New York, circa 1887. This newly gilded metropolis is presented as a hive of civic progress and fruity society intrigue. Exteriors are shot through with a glistening, golden hue, symbolic of the stovepipe-hatted tycoons who tramp its muddy byways. Later on in the story, we are transported to the moors of Cumberland, England, over which hangs fog so thick you can cut through it with a razor. It is the story of a young writer of ghost stories who, when we meet her, is laughed out of the parlour by a cynical publisher who asks, with mock exasperation, why she doesn’t just abide by the strictures of her gender and punch out a love story? Something saleable. This writer, Edith Cushing (played as a feisty, tousle-haired waif by the Australian actor Mia Wasikowska), rejects this advice, as well as the notion that what she has written is a ghost story. She begins transcribing her manuscript for publication in a prominent literary journal. Del Toro engages in a dialogue with his audience, teasing his own reluctance to play by set rules as well as the fact that the ensuing story will straddle these divergent sub-genres.

The film’s opening line of dialogue, intoned by Edith in breathy narration, is this: “Ghosts are real, this much I know.” Del Toro boldly shores up this proclamation by segueing directly into a sequence in which Edith is visited by the creeping spectre of her late mother – now a horrifically disfigured and oleaginous phantom who whispers dire warnings into her ear. If this was, in fact, a ghost story, wouldn’t the ghost itself represent some kind of cathartic narrative pay-off? And if not, perhaps the implications of Edith’s statement run deeper than initially appears? Though amply terrifying, this first ghost is a red herring, as only Edith is able to see it. The question del Toro asks when employing these fantasy elements is not, what will their function be? But rather, whose ghosts are these? *Crimson Peak* is a film about ghosts as a projection of subjective trauma, or physical manifestations of personal fear. They are the embodiment of torment and memory. They are not on the screen to provoke feelings – they *are* feelings. Subtext and supertext merged as one.

Edith’s sorry tale kicks into gear when she is thrown together with silver-tongued rogue Sir Thomas Sharpe, effortlessly played by Tom Hiddleston. He maintains a public veneer of charm, confidence and good breeding, and even boasts the hereditary title of Baronet. He’s in town to pitch a mining contraption to Edith’s building magnate father, but is rejected and humiliated. Again, like the swift

reveal of the ghost in the opening scenes, del Toro chooses to undermine Thomas’s preening stature almost immediately, parading his insecurities and vulnerabilities for all to see. The local women suppress the vapours when he is nearby, but the reality is he is washed up and on the cusp of penury. His subsequent obsessions are then driven by an urge for self salvation, not as a way to capitalise on his inflated status. Thomas is a paragon of shame. He is a man attempting to retain a shred of personal dignity against rapidly dwindling odds.

Having both received early rejections, Thomas and Edith seem perfectly matched, and she quickly falls for him. There are warning signs a-plenty that Thomas has a skeleton or two in his closet, but Edith is convincingly enraptured. Hiddleston is perfectly cast here, his beaming, chummy smile a mask of genteel English charm, and the actor manages to deploy it liberally while always making sure the camera is aware of any raging internal afflictions. His professed love of science and engineering (he hand-crafts mechanical toys in his attic workshop), forces you to believe that, whatever past indiscretions he may have committed, they were at the service of some noble endeavour. Or that he seeks penance through learning. Interestingly, however, the melancholy, ineffectual Thomas drifts from the limelight in the film’s second half, and it ends up being a two-way battle between a pair of industrious women.

Del Toro allows his greatest creation to stew in the backdrop for the film’s opulent opening passages. As Thomas and Edith dazzle the local aristocracy with a perfectly executed waltz, Jessica Chastain’s Lucille Sharpe (Tom’s sister) sits at the piano and cultivates their bond like a witch stirring a cauldron. Sporting a tight lace ruff and a snug-fitting, cherry-red ballgown, she resembles a rancorous dominatrix who wants nothing more than to murder everyone in the room and blow this fusty burg (had this film been made in the 1940s, you could imagine Bette Davis playing Lucille). She does not care a jot that her brother has failed to secure funds for their livelihood, she is only interested in making certain that nothing comes in the way of Tom spiriting Edith away from her ludicrously rich family. As Tom seems laser-focused on wooing Edith, Lucille whispers catty commands in his ear from the cover of the deep focus. It’s clear that some kind of ruse is being played out, and that it’s Edith who will eventually suffer. Violent machinations ensue, and the trap is set.

Upon arriving home at Allerdale Hall and being carried across the threshold by Tom, Edith is surprisingly sanguine about her new life and immediate prospects. As someone who is party to supernatural visitations, she isn’t at all worried by this hideous rural estate which looks like some earthly portal between Heaven and Hell. Tom jokingly introduces her to a few structural quirks: red liquid clay constantly seeps up through the floorboards, reminiscent of the emulsion-like blood seen in many a Hammer horror movie; and in the main atrium, a shower of detritus constantly falls through a giant hole in the roof. And if that wasn’t spooky enough, they also have a severe moth problem. This motif of desiccation – of an entity on the precipice of ruination, where patching over cracks is no longer viable – courses through the film. In Edith, Tom and Lucille may have found their most formidable opponent, and she will be the catalyst for their ultimate undoing. Elsewhere, del Toro sustains an obsession with juxtaposing the robust and implacable nature of machinery (cogs, levers, pulleys, etc) against the fragility of human flesh. Tom himself succumbs to a terribly sad fate at the hands of cold

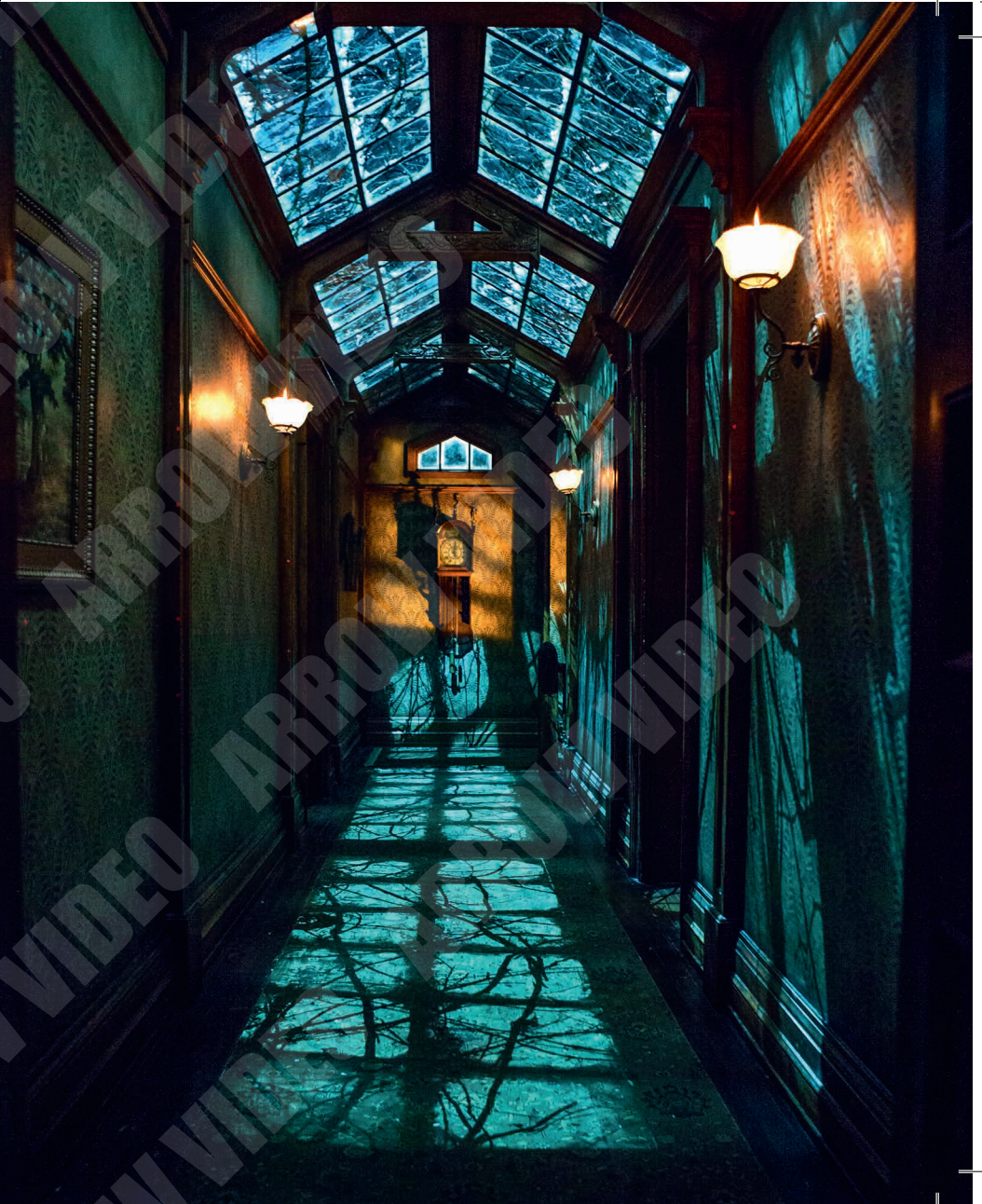


steel. His arc of shame is finally complete, as his most prized personal asset – his face – is mutilated with spiteful indifference.

In the run-up to the film's release, the author Stephen King wrote this note to his millions of Twitter followers: "Was treated to a screening of Guillermo del Toro's new movie, CRIMSON PEAK, this weekend. Gorgeous and just fucking terrifying." If feels apt that King is a fan of the movie, as there are notable cross-overs with his own *The Shining* (1977). Allerdale Hall is itself a Victorian riff on the Overlook Hotel, where humans and ghosts happily co-mingle. Charlie Hunnam plays the rugged male saviour, Dr Alan McMichael, who travels across the Atlantic to save Edith from the Sharpes. His epic journey climaxes in a similar fashion to that of chef Dick Hallorann in Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film version of *The Shining* – no sooner has he made it through the front entrance, he is cut down in a most violent fashion.

Del Toro's coup de grace, however, is the way he makes the finale feel more sad than shocking. He siphons through backstory which clarifies the Sharpes' cruel motivations, but also, to a significant degree, justifies them. As the final curtain falls and Edith is left with nothing more than bitter memories, *Crimson Peak* is revealed as a comparative essay on romantic and obsessive love. Following his demise, Thomas re-appears as an apparition, and his gaunt, sorrowful expression provides the film with its deepest cut. He is now the embodiment of his earthly failures, and he couldn't even do the decent thing and stay alive to assist Edith in her showdown with the manic Lucille. Death, for him, is not upsetting, but disappointing. It's when both women see the same ghost that Edith knows for certain that they are real. And there the film ends.

David Jenkins is the editor of Little White Lies. He previously worked as a film critic for Time Out London and has written on film for Sight & Sound, The Guardian, FIPRESCI, Montages, MUBI and various other outlets. He is the editor of a new book called The Coen Brothers: This Book Really Ties the Films Together.







A SATELLITE OF MEANING: THE PRODUCTION AND COSTUME DESIGN OF CRIMSON PEAK

by Simon Abrams

During interviews with film critic (and my friend and co-author) Matt Zoller Seitz, director Guillermo del Toro stresses the inter-disciplinary nature of cinematography. He insists that the term “cinematography” does not *just* concern how objects within the camera’s frame are lit and lensed, but also how the director of photography works with various other artists – directors, gaffers, actors, costumer designers, set designers, assistant directors, production designers, and members of different special effects teams – to create the look of a shot.

The same is true for del Toro about a film’s production design: “When somebody says ‘that cinematography is great,’ that person is saying, ‘Great set design, great wardrobe design, great staging, great cinematography.’ And by the same token, when they say, ‘What a great production designer,’ they’re saying, ‘Great cinematography, etc.’ These disciplines are inseparable.”¹

The collaborative nature of a film’s production design warrants foregrounding when you discuss del Toro’s work, a perfectionist whose ideas are developed and ultimately realized by his various collaborators. Del Toro’s creative process – from an idea’s initial conception to what you see on the screen – is fascinating because he will frequently tweak and pore over his collaborators’ contributions until his movies do, inevitably, appear to have his fingerprints all over them.

Del Toro succeeded – in spite of the film’s poor box office performance – in giving *Crimson Peak* a grandeur that evokes (and is inspired by) Gothic classics from the 1940s like *Rebecca* (1940), *Jane Eyre* (1943), and *Dragonwyck* (1946).² Much of his film’s atmosphere stems from inter-related period details that he successfully amplified with the help of gifted artists like the late production designer Thomas E. Sanders and costumer designer Kate Hawley. Both of these extraordinary artists significantly helped del Toro to realize the “spiritual or moral decay” (del Toro’s words) of his and co-writer Matthew Robbins’s characters.³

1 - Matt Zoller Seitz and Simon Abrams, *Guillermo del Toro’s The Devil’s Backbone*, Insight Editions, November 28 2017

2 - Aisha Harris, “*Crimson Peak*’s Production Designer on Creating that Jaw-Dropping House”, *Slate*, October 20 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/10/20/crimson_peak_production_designer_thomas_e_sanders_talks_creating_guillermo.html

3 - Bryan Alexander, “Horror Makes Itself at Home in *Crimson Peak*”, *USA Today*, October 14 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2015/10/14/guillermo-del-toro-house-crimson-peak/73891140/>



Del Toro and Robbins's screenplay specifically follows the gradual decline and possible restoration of the inquisitive but repressed heroine Edith Cushing (Mia Wasikowska), a character who – as tortured love interest Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) snaps at her – seeks “perfection” in everything, but must settle for a rejuvenating kind of decadence, an atypically un-romantic conceit (by modern standards of romanticism) that's also central to many of del Toro's prior films, particularly *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006).

Edith is, as an aspiring writer of Gothic romances, positioned as *Crimson Peak's* authorial creator: the film follows her struggle to reconcile the world she desires with the one she's emotionally inhabiting. Much of Edith's inner conflict is projected onto the decrepit, multi-tiered Allerdale Hall estate (aka “Crimson Peak”). Del Toro is, like the Italian horror maestro Mario Bava before him, a similarly tactile, special effects-oriented filmmaker/problem-solver, so he and his team understandably treated Allerdale Hall like the primary stage – and not the exclusive site – of Edith's transformation as a beautiful, but moribund butterfly.

Still, before Edith arrives at Allerdale Hall, the film's creators establish the emotional foundation for her breakdown using a vibrant color palette of warm, dry yellows, oranges, and even softening pinks. These bright, but sickly autumnal colors – which are initially associated with the Buffalo world of Edith's father, Carter Cushing (Jim Beaver) – are constantly at war with the ominous blues and greens that come to represent Thomas and his creepy sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain). In typical del Toro fashion, the presence of bluish-greens is not just a life-giving corrective to Edith's anemic, parched yellow and orange background. Rather, they're a destructive force whose alluring presence presages some devastating revelation or act of violence, usually visualized with dark, Kool-Aid reds. Think of the film's tonal shifts as a messed-up traffic light: first yellow, then green, then red, followed by an expansive afterlife-like white, to symbolize the expansive nothingness that begins (the graveyard scene during Edith's introductory flashback) and ends the film (the blizzard that surrounds Allerdale Hall as the policemen, normalizing agents of sanity, approach in the distance).

Sanders and Hawley's contributions ground the film's more fantastic design flourishes in a sort of psychological realism. Both artists and their respective teams took familiar, period-specific elements and “exaggerated them to the extreme,” in the words of *Slate* reporter Aisha Harris.⁴ That's especially notable when you consider Sanders's contributions to the film, since several of his prior film credits were for period dramas like *Maverick* (1994), *Braveheart* (1995), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *We Were Soldiers* (2002), and *Apocalypse* (2006). Still, Sanders's work on *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) was undoubtedly the inspiration for his collaboration with del Toro, another project where a knowledge of Victorian period detail serves as a sort of stylistic diving board for Sanders's more outré ideas.

“I always feel that if you're going to do a movie with magic or anything supernatural in it, then the look of the film needs to support that. [...] That way, once you get into the supernatural, the audience is already in the world and they believe it more than if you just tried to do it in an existing location.”⁵

4 - Harris, op cit.

5 - Elizabeth Stamp, “Inside the Beautifully Twisted World of *Crimson Peak*” *Architectural Digest*, October 21 2015, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/crimson-peak-set-design-article>

Sanders, being a former sculptor, didn't work from drawings. Instead, he built a fully-painted, four-foot-high model of Allerdale Hall before the film's crew committed to erecting a life-sized edifice on a mountaintop just outside of Toronto. The walls of Sanders's model could be taken out so that lipstick cameras could be placed inside wherever necessary. “It's kind of backwards from most designers, who would draw things out and then maybe make a model, but I like to change the model organically as we're building it.”⁶

Much of the Allerdale Hall structure – which has about nine functional rooms – is as real as it appears: everything works, including the water faucets, fireplace, and the elevator, the last of which terrified Chastain every time she had to use it.⁷ Tubes were then built into the walls, from which blood-red clay could bleed out. The building took about six or seven months to build, and cost about \$1.8 million to make (of the film's reported \$50 million budget).⁸

Each part of Edith's new home – particularly its foyer, from which we can see the Freudian layers of the building, including the ground floor with the great hall and its fire place; the second floor with its many bed chambers; and the upper level's attic and its towering windows – has a different mood. The kitchen's neo-Gothic white tiles give off an ‘asylum-ish’ mood while the scale of the floor and the size of the bed in the master bedroom are designed to disorient viewers and give them the impression that the room “[is] closing in.”⁹ And the basement, which is lined with ominous-looking cisterns, is pock-marked with little holes that make the space seem to be illuminated by makeshift sky-lights. Sanders adds that: “We [also] made regular-size and oversize furniture and switched in the larger pieces to make it look like she was shrinking.”¹⁰

Still, while *Crimson Peak* is her story, Allerdale Hall's architecture is meant to reflect Lucille's character: even the twisted staircases are designed to look like a “butterfly killing jar” since Lucille is positioned as a blackish-blue moth who seeks to devour Lucille's butterfly.¹¹ Edith's moldering house/personality is the site of her biggest self-discoveries, like the scene where Edith, sitting by a large blue-lit, floor-to-ceiling window, listens to the confession of Enola Sciotti (Javier Botet), Thomas's third wife. Like the ghost of Santi in *The Devil's Backbone*, Enola's ghost doesn't mean any harm. Instead, she primarily exists to forewarn and forearm Edith by pointing out the parts of Allerdale Hall that are beyond Lucille's control: the cistern that contains the corpse of Lucille's dead child, and the closet with the wax canister that, when played on a phonograph, reveals Lucille's secret relationship with Thomas, and ultimately leads Edith back to her own bedroom, which she now sees is not exclusively hers.

6 - Jason Guerrasio, “Here's how the Creepy Haunted House from *Crimson Peak* was Created”, *Business Insider*, October 21 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-the-crimson-peak-haunted-house-was-created-2015-10>

7 - Alexander, op cit.

8 - Ibid.

9 - Stamp, op cit.

10 - Ibid.

11 - Alexander, op cit.



Hawley's costumes are remarkably in sync with Sanders's set pieces. For example, as Chastain notes, "The hallway [leading to the master bedroom] is lined with spikes that almost look like teeth, and my costume had those same spikes. [...] The house was designed as if Lucille could come out of the wall and blend into the interior."¹² So it stands to reason that Edith and Lucille's respective costumes also reflect their differences in temperament, especially when Edith discovers her husband in bed with his sister.

In this scene, Hiddleston and Chastain are both dressed in black under-clothes, but their slightly disheveled hair and damp, exposed skin reveal the clamminess of their relationship (which Lucille says is defined by "sweat and regret").¹³ As in the earlier sex scene, we see more of Hiddleston's body than of his female counterpart since his flesh is the site of both Lucille and Edith's clashing desires. Lucille and Edith also both wear rather unrevealing garments: there's the white nightie that Chastain slips out of – Hawley's favorite of her designs – and the buttoned-up dressing gown that Wasikowska wears. Edith's sleeves are lined with decorative buttons that match the ones that go from her chin to her navel. She's trapped in her clothes when she's confronted with the horrifying nature of Lucille and Thomas's relationship.

Edith's night gown is striking since her eye-popping outfits usually make her look like a bright yellow "canary in the coal mine" (Hawley's words), as in the scene where she defiantly stands underneath the only tree in Allerdale Hall's front yard wearing a bright yellow dress with a matching black cape.¹⁴ But, during her bedroom confrontation, Edith looks like an ailing butterfly, given her dress's lack of color, chin-high collar, and oversized, poofy shoulder ruffles.

Moreover, Edith seems to change outfits and styles each time she enters a new room, which makes sense when you realize that every room in Allerdale Hall is supposed to have a different mood. In real life, you would probably look askance at Edith after she emerges from the basement wearing a new outfit, one whose shoulders are bedecked with little decorative mushrooms. But *Crimson Peak* is nowhere near reality.

Del Toro gave detailed character biographies to Sanders, and asked him to come up with architecture that matched those personalities;¹⁵ Hawley also worked with del Toro using elaborate mood boards that she created for each character, which were in turn used to match "the architecture of the house."¹⁶ In this way, the "bible of [*Crimson Peak*]'s world," in Hawley's words, is "magpied" together from various sources, and then significantly "heightened."¹⁷ She recalls that del Toro was especially drawn to the work of Symbolist painters like Odilon Redon, as well as John Everett Millais's 'The Bridesmaids' (1851), a direct inspiration for Edith's flowing, straightened hair during her climactic

12 - Ibid.

13 - David Cohen, "Crimson Peak Costume Designer Mixes Frills and Chills for Victorian Story", *Variety*, September 30 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/artisans/news/crimson-peak-costume-designer-kate-hawley-1201603363/>

14 - Steve Pond, "The Design Secret of *Crimson Peak*: The House is the Real Monster", *The Wrap*, December 22 2015, <https://www.thewrap.com/the-design-secret-of-crimson-peak-the-house-is-the-real-monster/>

15 - Lauren Sarner, "Guillermo del Toro's Go-To Costume Designer Talks *Crimson Peak*", *The Inverse*, October 6, 2015, <https://www.inverse.com/article/6775-an-interview-with-guillermo-del-toro-s-go-to-costume-designer>

16 - Cohen, op cit.

17 - Everett Millais, 'The Bridesmaid', 1851.

bedroom encounter.¹⁸ Hawley also remembers that there were certain outfits and decisions that had to be adjusted to match the variable comfort levels of different cast members: "[There's] a point where a sleeve becomes ridiculous. I might look at it and go, 'Oh my God, maybe I did overdo it.' [...] But it felt right for the story that Guillermo wanted to tell."¹⁹

The harmonious unity of Hawley, Sanders, and del Toro's vision is apparent in any scene where objects – like Lucille's tea set or ring of keys – stand in for their owners. If del Toro were more of a Hitchcockian fetishist, he would have singled out any one of these singular items for the sake of underscoring its importance. Instead, he uses medium rather than extreme close-ups to create meaning by sheer act of association. The individual parts of *Crimson Peak*'s design may be compelling when viewed separately, but they create a satellite of meaning when viewed together.

Simon Abrams is a native New Yorker and freelance film critic whose work has been featured in Esquire, the Village Voice and at rogerebert.com

18 - Cohen, op cit.

19 - Ibid.





GHOST HUNTER: AN INTERVIEW WITH GUILLERMO DEL TORO

by Mar Diestro-Dópido

This article was originally published in November 2015 issue of *Sight & Sound*. Reproduced here with permission.

Can we ever shed the ghosts of our past? Leave behind the monsters of our childhood? These questions haunt Guillermo del Toro's much anticipated new film *Crimson Peak*, in which the cult Mexican director once again gives the Gothic his own unique spin. It's been nine years since his last Gothic outing, the second of what he considers his two most personal films, the internationally lauded *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), companion to *The Devil's Backbone* (2001). In *Crimson Peak* he pays lavish homage to all those ghosts that populate the Gothic imagination, with references to classics such as *Rebecca*, *Wuthering Heights* and Poe's *House of Usher*, as well as through ethereal traces of his own work; and in so doing strives to reassert that, in the words of his protagonist, "Ghosts do exist. This much I know." A profoundly sensual, ornate, carnal Gothic romance set at the turn of the 20th century, *Crimson Peak* centres on a love triangle that has protagonist Edith (Mia Wasikowska) at its apex. A young forward-thinking writer with a flair for ghost stories, Edith finds herself caught between two opposing worlds – the brash modernity of North America where she lives, full of light, enterprise and reason; and the dark, old, secret-filled world of the English aristocracy in the shape of a mysterious baronet, Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston), and his icy sister, Lady Lucille (Jessica Chastain), who lure her to the damp greyness of their ancestral pile in the Lake District. That home, the once grandiose but now decaying Allerdale Hall, is fast sinking into the crimson clay that gives the film its title; at once a symbol of the disintegration of a way of life, a backward-looking mindset, and imprisonment within a suffocating family history. A character in its own right, the house literally breathes and aches and spits blood. It was constructed for the film from scratch, with every prop – teacups, doorknobs, dresses, portraits and an exquisitely nightmarish lift – handcrafted from designs conceived by del Toro; opposite in a film where the most potent weapon, in more ways than one (and for Edith especially), turns out to be the transformative power of creation itself.

Del Toro's own creative triumph in *Crimson Peak* lies in reconfiguring a well-trodden genre on his own terms, giving a fresh slant to Gothic tropes – be they from literature, art or cinema – so that it's the female protagonists driving the narrative this time round. Despite directly passing from her father to her husband – an inevitable trajectory for a woman at the time – by necessity she must actively shape her own fate. Likening herself to Mary Shelley, Edith finds that it is her capacity to draw on her own past, in order to square up to the monsters in her present, that enables her to move forward. For, as she says to Thomas: "You keep on looking for me in the past. But I'm here, in the present."



Mar Diestro-Dópido: You wrote the story for *Crimson Peak* back in 2006 with Matthew Robbins. Why did it take so long to get made?

Guillermo del Toro: I wanted to make it right after *Pan's Labyrinth*, but two things detained it. One was that I wanted it to be R-rated. I knew that at the heart of the movie there were concerns that were very adult for me, sexually and psychologically, and visually there were moments of violence and eroticism that were not going to be PG-13. And secondly, I knew I wanted to make it for \$50 million, and not 20, not 30, because I wanted to build the house, I wanted to do the wardrobe, because I wanted to hide several clues of the story and the characters in the wardrobe and the sets. I wanted to make it like a living painting. And it took eight years for someone, in this case Legendary Pictures, to come back to me and say, "Here's the money and we're OK with the R rating."

Unusually for your Gothic films, *Crimson Peak* is about adults rather than children – we see the ten-year-old Edith only briefly.

It's a curious thing because although there are no kids, in reality the stories of both the protagonist [Edith] and the antagonists [Lucille and Thomas] are firmly rooted in childhood. Edith we see in the opening as a little kid. But then we hear innumerable times about the childhood of Thomas and Lucille; the whole point of the movie is to show that the real horror was that childhood. I gave the house windows that look like eyes and the house almost becomes all those ancestors watching over them. And then you see Lucille and Thomas as children in a very strange mural in the attic. So it is still rooted in childhood. I wanted very much to talk about this Chinese puzzle box of abuse that is the family, this ancestral horror of a family passing the poison from one generation to the next – that was interesting to me.

The house not only literally breathes, but it's as if it gets bigger or smaller depending on Edith's emotional state.

Yes, and the proportions of Edith too. Edith looks so small when she is afraid because I put her in a giant sofa, but when she is more in charge the sofa looks smaller, because I actually made it in two sizes. And I made two sizes of the teacups. So, she has one giant teacup when she's feeling vulnerable and a smaller one when she gets stronger. We actually did that with the bed too – we did giant pillows and giant bed covers to make her look almost like a character out of a fairytale, a little girl in the bed.

Why did you choose to place the story in this particular period – the turn of the century at the transition from Victorian to Edwardian – and to contrast the US with the UK, the New World with the Old?

It's a crucial moment. When Henry James was discussing Gothic romance, and I'm paraphrasing here, he said it was essentially about ghosts that represent the past, or the incapacity to move into the future without vanquishing them. And I thought it was a very interesting time because in 1901 Buffalo, New York, and America in general were practically futuristic. In 1901 Buffalo was the most electrified city in the world. Edith is using a typewriter, we see cars on the streets, we can hear the

constant traffic of trains in the distance, there's a telegraph, we hear phones ringing everywhere. And even though she's seen a ghost, Edith has an incredibly modern, almost futuristic attitude towards her femininity. Then she travels to a world that is frozen in time. In fact we made that point in the design of Thomas and Lucille's clothes – they are 10 or 15 years older than anybody else's because they are their parents' clothes. So the idea was: can I pose Edith as the future, trying to break with the past and the guilt and the horror of that family? This was crucial for me, since it was such a female-centric movie in my mind. I wanted her not to be rescued by the hero, but for her to rescue the hero.

In many ways it seems your most complex film, narratively and thematically.

I made three decisions that were completely counter to making the movie more accessible, or commercially easy. One decision was to make it female-centric, which curiously enough really makes the movie sit very weirdly with male audiences. Female audiences engage with the movie very strongly, but males actually seem unhappy to see that every male figure in the movie is kind of useless. They cannot get their head around it.

The second decision was that as the movie progresses, instead of applauding and having a rah-rah moment when the villains are finally confronted, I thought, like I did in *Devil's Backbone*, that they would actually reveal their humanity, that you would understand them a little more towards the end.

The third thing I rejected that would have made the movie easily more commercial was that I decided, like I did in *Devil's Backbone*, that I would not cheat and have a Judaeo-Christian sense of evil for the ghosts, that I would not say they were evil ghosts, or demonic ghosts, or that the house was possessed. I wanted to reveal little by little that they were trying to help Edith, the way Santi was trying to help the boys in *Devil's Backbone*.

One of the most recognisable traits of your work is precisely the humanity you give to the ghosts and monsters. That's reflected in the effects you use to create them – they are ethereal here, but much fleshier than a CGI-generated image, like a mix of flesh, bones, spirit and smoke.

I wanted the movie to feel handmade. I wanted people to realise that they are not in a digital set, that we actually built the house. I wanted people to sense that we painstakingly hand-made those dresses. And, in fact, Lucille and Thomas's clothes are hand-stitched, in contrast to the American wardrobe which is machine-stitched. I wanted people to have a sense that it was almost like an opera, that everything had been created, slightly exaggerated, but beautifully enhanced. I wanted the ghosts to be unlike any other ghosts you've ever seen, so I decided I would use actors and make-up. I then said to the digital effects guys, "Let's find a way to make them translucent, without having to shoot them against a green screen." I wanted them to be on set with the actors. We came up with a very simple but nice solution and created a little black box of photogrammetry that reproduces the background. Then we animated a skeleton inside the bodies, like we did with Santi in *Devil's Backbone*, and I made their body a little more liquid, so when they move they leave traces of their body around. That way it's a perfect mixture of make-up and digital effects, because it's 50/50.



***Crimson Peak* seems the most lavish and beautiful film you have made. Why was this so important for you?**

I have a nostalgia for the big Hollywood Gothic romance, like Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1943) or Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) or the beautiful production of *Great Expectations* (1946) by David Lean. But I have an almost painful realisation that for many people horror or anything Gothic means a B-movie and that no one has produced anything that's as operatic as those films in at least 30 years. I wanted to make this opulent sort of operatic movie because Gothic romance is about excess, albeit a very controlled sense of excess – in the acting, in the *mise en scène*.

I made it clear to the cinematographer [Dan Laustsen] that we were creating the opposite of the desaturation that normally goes with period pieces. We were going to be really saturated. The one movie I watched a lot was *The Leopard* (1963). I really studied the way Visconti shot the dancers, and the way he controlled the colour palette. And then I said to my cinematographer, we are going to move the camera as if it were very heavy. We won't be chasing people around; it's going to be very stately, like we are on tracks or a dolly, even if we use the Steadicam.

It's very striking the way you've colour-coded the film. Edith seems almost preserved in amber, especially when she's in England in that cold, inhospitable house.

We were talking about beauty, and for me beauty is part of the language of a film. Beauty is not eye-candy – it is like protein, it needs to contain something nutritious, a narrative. I wanted very much to encapsulate America in that golden period, and then transition with Edith, who remains golden, to this very cold, north of England decrepit mansion. Little by little her colours are leached out until she is in white; they are literally sucking the blood out of her. I wanted the past to be represented by the colour red, which is the clay of the house and at the same time is the blood of the earth. It is about these aristocrats effectively sucking the blood out of the earth until it dries and even then, refusing to let it go. The movie is divided into two – a golden passage which is modernity, and then a cyan blue passage which is Allerdale Hall. In the middle you have the colour red linking Lucille to the ghosts, to the ground. But in the case of Edith I really wanted to posit something that concerns me, which is that beauty is as isolating as ugliness. Because when a woman possesses beauty in the way that she carries herself, the way that she presents herself to the world, that's instantly equated with weakness. And most people cannot see past that beauty in the same way that most people cannot see past ugliness. In many Greek trials the innocence or the culpability of the accused was decided on the physical appearance. The judges would look at the two parties and they would absolve the beautiful party.

Are there any autobiographical elements in the film?

Crimson Peak is like a throwback to the Hollywood productions that I saw as a kid. The first ever movie I saw in my life, when I was four years old, was *Wuthering Heights* in the lap of my mother. So that is very present in the film. *Crimson Peak* has a lot of personal little things that were secret until now; the opening memory, the girl in the bed – that actually happened to my mother. My mother was in bed after the funeral of her grandmother whom she loved, and she heard footsteps and felt the soft whisper of the fabric, the silk of her grandmother's dress, as she entered the room. She sensed her perfume, she heard and felt the weight of her on the bed and the bed springs creaked. She felt her grandmother embrace her. She screamed and ran away from the room. And I've had two ghost encounters in my life, the second of which is in the movie. When I was scouting locations for *The Hobbit* in New Zealand, I stayed in a haunted hotel and I heard this horrible murder in the room. In the middle of the night I heard the screams of a woman being killed and a man sobbing. That's the murder in the bathroom that Edith hears in the house. And many other little details... I identify with all the characters. I am the father, Edith, Thomas, I am everyone, and they all have traces of my emotional biography in there.

This is the most Gothic of your films, but do you think it also has a Mexican dimension?

Normally the Anglo-Saxon approach to a ghost story – even in the best cases, like M.R. James – is an approach that sees the rational clashing with the supernatural. On the other hand, in *Crimson Peak* there's a full-blown acceptance of the ghosts being real from the first ten seconds of the film. There is a postulate that opens the movie that says, "Ghosts are real. This much I know." That's a very Mexican thing to say. The violence and the passion of *Crimson Peak* is very Latin; the relationship with stabbing in particular as a means of death is extremely Mexican. And ultimately, there is a very intimate relationship with melodrama, which is almost a signature part of the Mexican culture – the explosive passions that run underneath the very Anglo-Saxon façade of characters like Lucille.

This is also the most starry cast you've worked with. Could you talk a little about how you work with your actors?

What I do is write an eight to ten-page biography of each character and tell the actors what they like and dislike. Then I give them a very detailed narrative of their life and each actor gets a secret they don't reveal to anyone. For example, Lucille's secret is that she wants to remain in Allerdale Hall forever; Thomas's secret is that he wants to leave – so they are playing opposite forces. After that I keep it very much in the moment, because I don't want to give complex instructions during the shoot. I direct by giving them a verb, never a noun. So I go to them and say, "You are in a hurry." "You are manipulating her." "You are watching the tea, you are not watching her." For example, the place where the verb is most obvious is in the porridge-feeding scene [when Lucille is nursing Edith]. We could have had that happen with dialogue, but I felt it was more interesting for Lucille to be feeding Edith in a really violent way, almost like penetration with the spoon. Lucille uses the spoon like a stabbing weapon, almost. So, in that way you give the actor something to do rather than something to think about.

Is there anything you wanted to do in this film that you weren't able to?

Not really. Whatever shortcomings there are in the film are entirely mine. After the fact I see everything that I could have done better. But it's too late, you have to accept it, you cannot reshoot this or reshoot that. But it is one of the top three films in my affections. *The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Crimson Peak* are the three movies I feel are the closest to being what I dreamt they could be.





CRIMSON PEAK REVIEWED

by Kim Newman

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Like his earlier films *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* has at its heart a visual centrepiece that is genuinely haunted – in this case a cavernous, ruined mansion full of clutching, bloody ghosts that might be kin to the spook in the del Toro-produced *Mama* (2013) and are CGI models built around the frame of the director's favoured monster-man Doug Jones – but the real horrors here come from malicious living human beings. Shorn of the Spanish Civil War setting (and Spanish-language dialogue) of the earlier films, *Crimson Peak* still has its element of vitriolic social analysis. Early on, Carter Cushing (Jim Beaver), the practical, bearded, self-made father of heroine Edith, feels the soft hands of aristocratic petitioner Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) before turning him down for a loan. Dismissing the model of the steam excavator that Thomas wants to invent as a 'toy', Cushing sees the weak-blooded swain as infantile, and it later turns out that Thomas has indeed spent a great deal of time manufacturing odd, creepy playthings for his smothering sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain). Strangely, this boyish streak is the thing that del Toro likes most about his supposedly fatal man, and Hiddleston plays Thomas's squirming indecision to perfection. In the end, even mad Lucille agrees with Cushing and entreats him to get his hands dirty by committing one of the murders that she has been getting away with to support their mad ménage.

Del Toro has explained that he sees *Crimson Peak* as a Gothic romance rather than a horror film. Like Daphne du Maurier with *Rebecca*, del Toro and co-scenarist Matthew Robbins scramble elements from *Jane Eyre* (which Charlotte Brontë deliberately repurposed from Ann Radcliffe and other full-blooded Gothic practitioners): a vast and many-storied old house far removed from other human habitation; a mysterious earlier marriage (here, in *Bluebeard* fashion, a clutch of them – though only the last Lady Sharpe has left a ghost, along with a collection of incriminating wax cylinders and photographs); a strangely passive master in the power of a sinister secondary woman; and an initially timid yet resolute heroine who gets to the bottom of it all and survives dire peril. All that's missing is a climactic conflagration, as if del Toro were so in love with Allerdale Hall that he can't bear to go the full approved Roger Corman *House of Usher* route and expunge the past by burning it down.

The real strength of *Crimson Peak* is its magnificent ruin, where leaves and snow flutter down through a gaping hole in the ceiling, a rickety cage lift plunges to a basement, walls drip with disgusting red clay and the particular composition of the soil stains the snow the colour of blood (hence the title, which has a vaguely menstrual connotation). Each tiny detail of art direction and set decoration adds to an environment the camera loves to explore. To preserve this, the demented Lucille commits multiple murders – bludgeoning heads against solid sinks or stirring poison into porridge – and the



true Gothic passion of the film comes not in the whirl of loves and jealousies surrounding the heroine but in the villainess's resolute commitment to her horrific home.

Mia Wasikowska, who has already played Alice in *Wonderland* and *Jane Eyre*, is a postmodern Gothic heroine: Edith has already channelled her own *Sixth Sense* visions into a novel-in-progress (a publisher suggests adding a love story) and is required to save herself and her would-be rescuer by getting into a final-girl-vs-psycho-killer confrontation with her nemesis sister-in-law/rival at the finale. Echoing the razor-cut mouth of *Pan's Labyrinth*, the tangle of conflicts is played out with horribly intimate wounds – Lucille stabs the hero in the armpit and her brother in the face, while Edith fights back with a deadly pen (a gift from her father) and finishes the job with a shovel and a quip (“I heard you the first time”) that seems more like a *coup de grâce* from an 80s slasher film (specifically, *Psycho II*) than a 19th-century Gothic. There are a few infelicities of dialogue – Edith points out Thomas's handmade shoes in an era when everyone's were – and the whole contraption of plot and setting is so intricate and symbol-studded (the house is full of butterfly-killing moths that flap even in midwinter) that the conventional tortured romance seems a touch rote. This has shocks but few scares – after all, in del Toro's world, ghosts may look alarming, but they are basically our friends. Nevertheless, this is a rich essay in the form, which takes care to evoke even the lighting cues of vintage Roger Corman or Mario Bava in the service of a rattling good melodrama.



ORIGINAL CONCEPTUAL DESIGN ILLUSTRATIONS

by Guy Davis and Oscar Chichoni

Crimson Peak boasts lavish and grandiose imagery, design and sets which truly bring the film's heightened Gothic world to life. Here we present a selection of original illustrations, produced as part of the film's development by acclaimed concept designers Guy Davis and Oscar Chichoni.



CRIMSON PEAK/ GREAT HALLWAY/ GUY DAVIS 11/18/13

Guy Davis



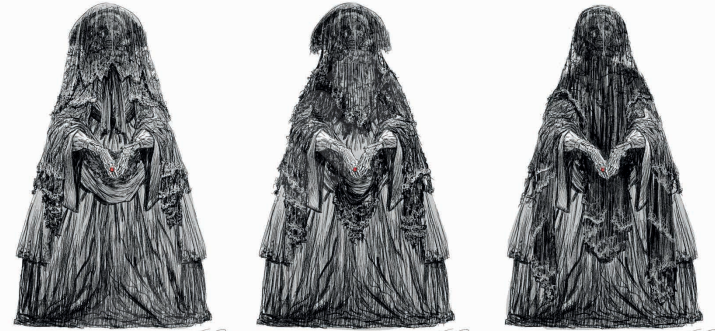
CRIMSON PEAK/BLACK GHOST (VEIL)/GUY DAVIS 9/27/13



CRIMSON PEAK/BLACK GHOST (VEIL)/GUY DAVIS 9/27/13



CRIMSON PEAK/BLACK GHOST (HEAD DETAIL)/GUY DAVIS 9/25/13



CRIMSON PEAK/BLACK GHOST (VEIL)/GUY DAVIS 9/27/13



CRIMSON PEAK/ BLACK GHOST (FULL VIEW) / GUY DAVIS 01/21/12



CRIMSON PEAK/ BLACK GHOST (DRESS FIGURE) / GUY DAVIS 01/27/12





CRIMSON PEAK / SHROUD GHOST / GUY DAVIS / #/23/13



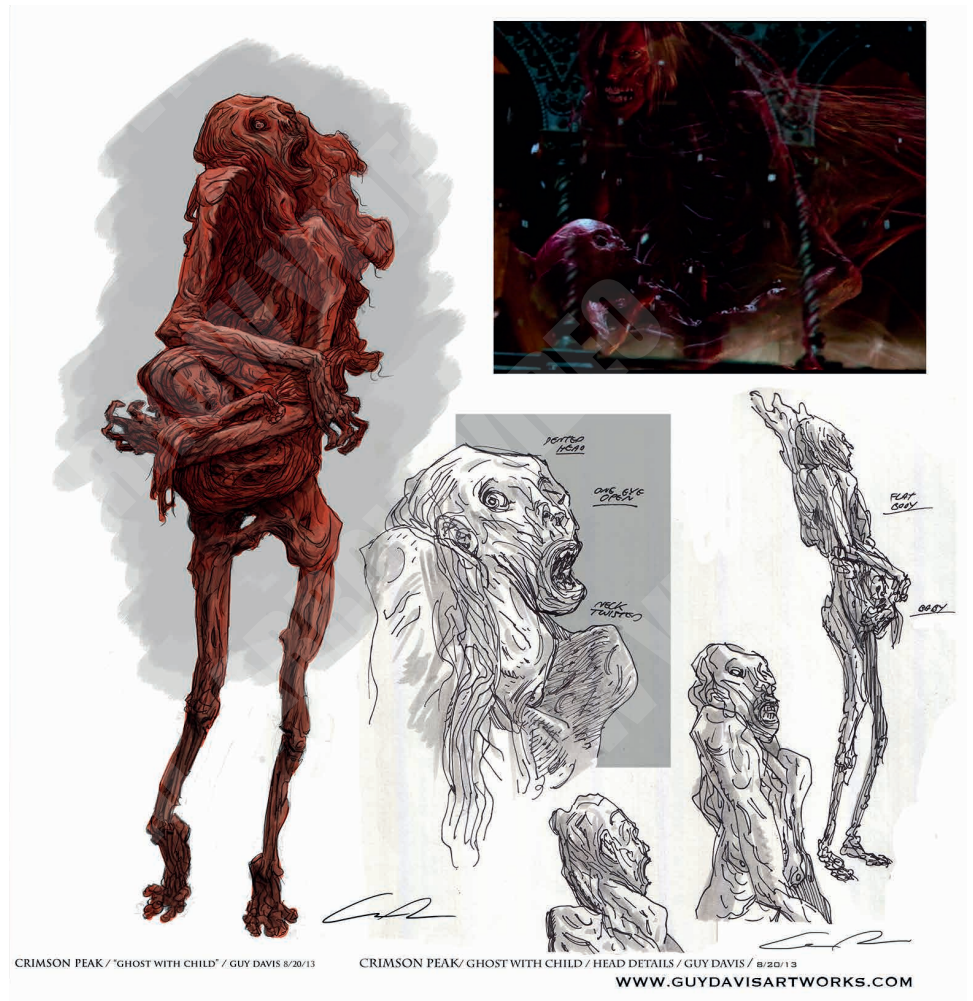
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CRIMSON PEAK / VEIL GHOST / GUY DAVIS / #/27/13



CRIMSON PEAK / "HOWLING GHOST" / GUY DAVIS 8/26/13



CRIMSON PEAK / "GHOST WITH CHILD" / GUY DAVIS 8/20/13

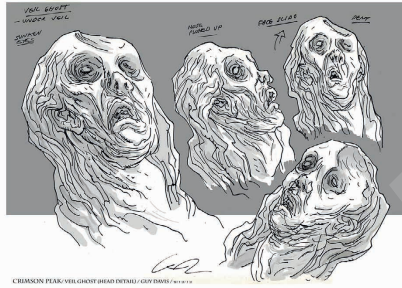
CRIMSON PEAK / GHOST WITH CHILD / HEAD DETAILS / GUY DAVIS / 8/20/13

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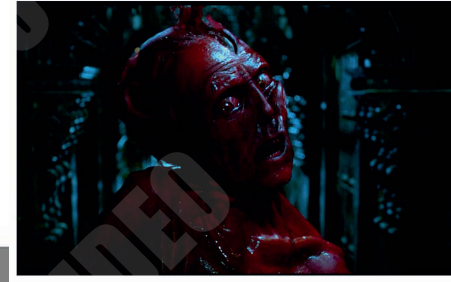


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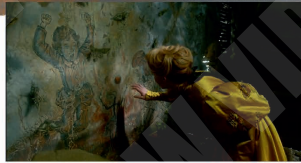
CRIMSON PEAK / VEIL GHOST HEAD STUDY / GUY DAVIS 8/27/13



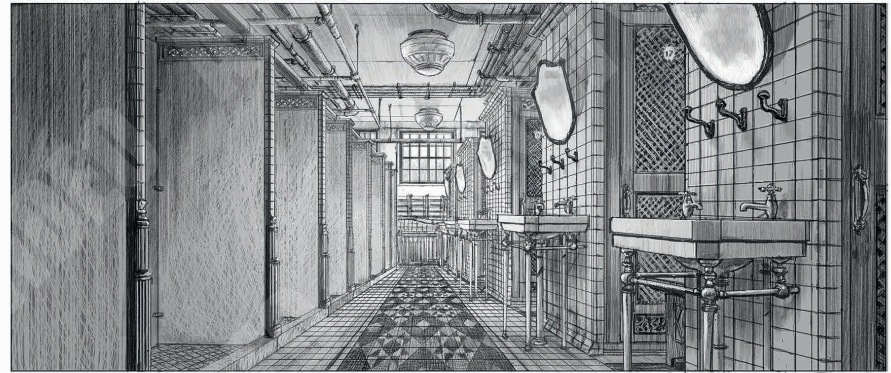
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CRIMSON PEAK/ MASTER BATHROOM (HEAT VARIATION)/ GUY DAVIS / 1-22/14



CRIMSON PEAK/ MEN'S CLUB (LANDING)/ GUY DAVIS / 02/14/14



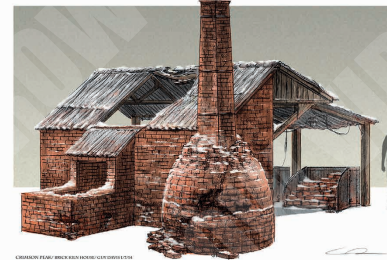
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CRIMSON PEAK/ WOODS KILN BUILDING/ GUY DAVIS 1/714





CRIMSON PEAK/ MANSION ETCHING (FINAL)/ GUY DAVIS 1/17/14



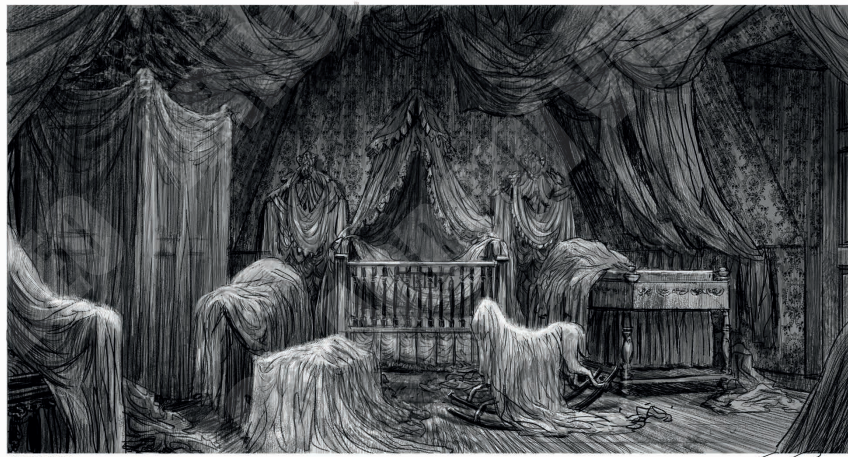
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CRIMSON PEAK/ PHOTOGRAPHY STORE/ GUY DAVIS 1/17/14



CRIMSON PEAK/ MASTER BATHROOM (HEATER VARIATION)/ GUY DAVIS 1/18/14



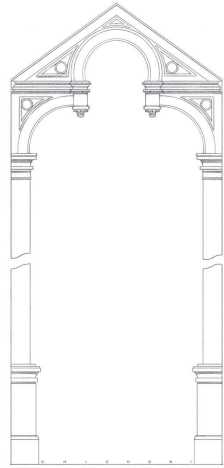
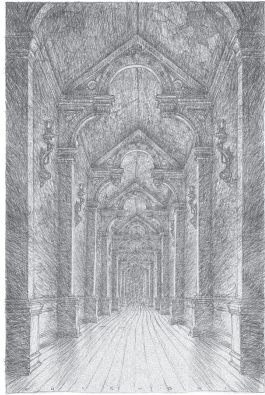
CRIMSON PEAK/ NUMBER ONE HALL/ GUY DAVIS 1/20/14



CRIMSON PEAK / WORKSHOP / GUY DAVIS 10/2/13

Guy Davis

ALLERDALE HALL CONCEPTUAL DESIGNS BY OSCAR CHICHONI



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Crimson Peak is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 7.1 DTS:X and 2.0 DTS Headphone: X audio. The High Definition master was made available for this release by NBC Universal.

NBC Universal Tim Naderski, Jefferson Root, Peter Schade

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**
Subtitling and Blu-ray Authoring **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**
Artwork **Guy Davis**

SPECIAL THANKS

Simon Abrams, Alex Agran, Pat Bauman, Michael Brooke, Oscar Chichoni, Liane Curje, Guy Davis, Guillermo del Toro, Mar Diestro-Dópido, Kat Ellinger, David Jenkins, Michael Mackenzie, Ian Mantgani, Marc Morris, Anthony Nield, Kim Newman, Jon Robertson, Javier Soto, Rob Winter



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