



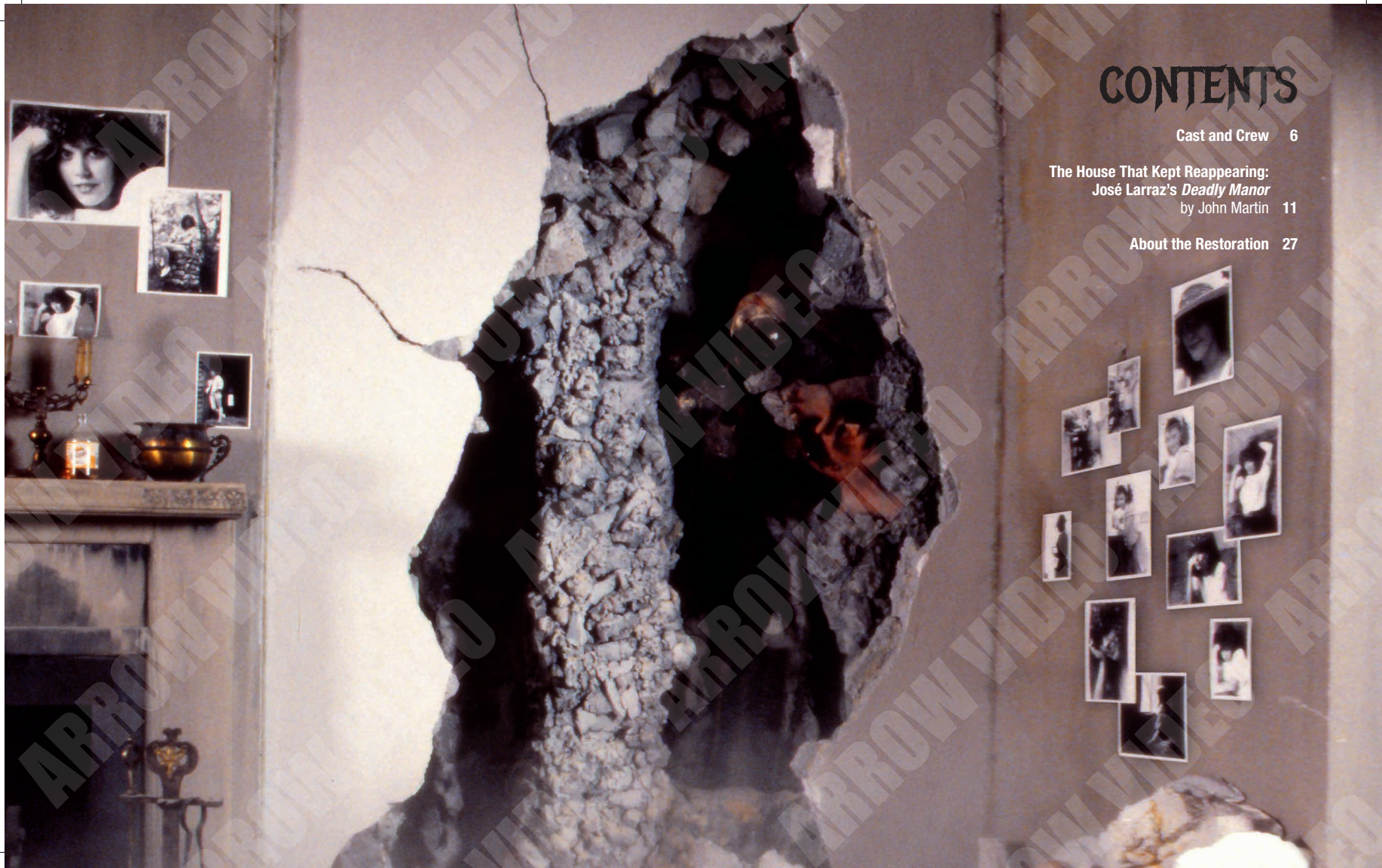


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CAST

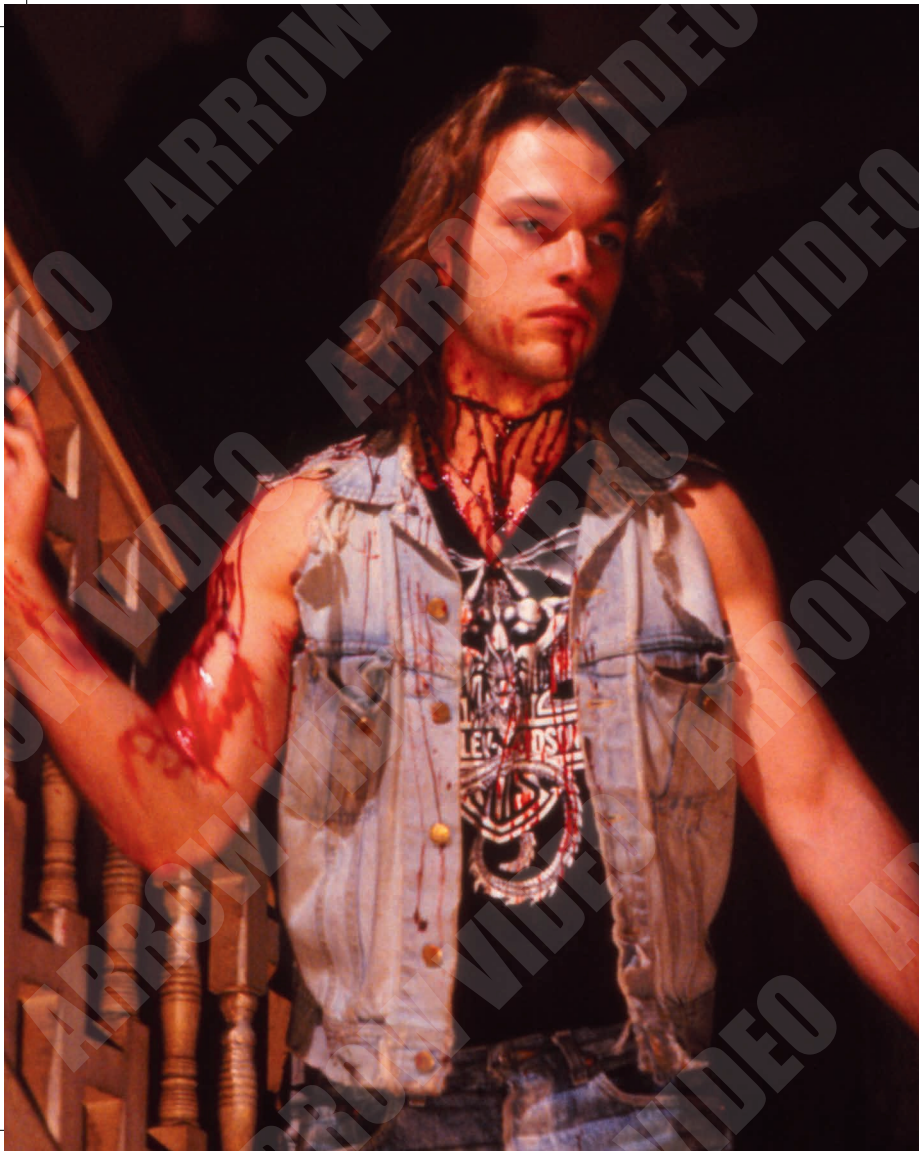
Clark Tufts Jack
Greg Rhodes Tony
Claudia Franjul Helen
Mark Irish Rod
Liz Hitchler Susan
Jerry Kernion Peter
Kathleen Patane Anne
Douglas Gowland Trooper
William Russell Alfred
Jennifer Delora Amanda

CREW

Written and Directed by José Ramón Larraz
Produced by Brian Smedley-Aston and Angel Somolinos
Executive Producers Enrique Bellot, Alexander W. Kogan Jr. and Barry Tucker
Associate Producer Stanley Bickman
Editor Sandi Gerling
Director of Photography Tote Trenas
Music by Cengiz Yaltkaya







THE HOUSE THAT KEPT REAPPEARING: JOSÉ LARRAZ'S *DEADLY MANOR*

by John Martin

“There’s a smashed car outside, coffins in the basement and scalps in the closet and you’re telling me to take it easy? What’s next... Uncle Fester on the patio?”

While Generalissimo Francisco Franco maintained his stifling grip over Spanish society (1939–75), filmmakers wanting to make anything but the most anodyne statements were obliged to tread warily. Horror directors like Leon Klimovsky and Paul Naschy stuck to variations on the themes of the great Universal and Hammer cycles... no shortages of boobs and blood, for sure, but strictly fantasy stuff and nothing remotely resembling any kind of critical social comment. More imaginative souls had to adopt different approaches. Although the undead Knights Templar in Amando de Ossorio’s *Blind Dead* quartet (1972–75), for example, suggested nothing so much as Iberian reruns of George Romero’s zombie schtick to the casual viewer, no less shrewd a pundit than Lucio Fulci identified them as “the perfect embodiment of fascism, because they are both soldiers and priests.” De Ossorio took the further precaution of setting much of these films’ action in Portugal. Jorge Grau shot *The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue* aka *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (*No profanar el sueño de los muertos*, 1974), an obvious allegory of authoritarianism, in various British locations and, although the previous year’s *The Legend of Blood Castle* (*Ceremonia sangrienta*, a variation on the Erzsébet Báthory legend) and *Pena de muerte* (another 1974 effort, which questions the ethics of capital punishment under a dictatorship) were lensed in Spain, they were set in a historical “Eastern Europe” and contemporary France, respectively.



Like the Generalissimo's near namesake Jess Franco, José Ramón Larraz (born in 1929 and raised in the Republican stronghold of Barcelona) chose outright exile. A comic book artist frustrated by censorship, he relocated to the UK ("where they would not cut one more tit from my panels!"), his mother's favorite country on account of the role played by British anti-fascist volunteers during the Spanish Civil War. From his unlikely base in Tunbridge Wells, Larraz turned filmmaker at the suggestion of Sam Lomberg, a veteran British producer who was trying to put together a sexploitation vehicle for the pneumatic talents of British Page 3 star, Vivian Neves. The resulting film, *Whirlpool* aka *She Died with Her Boots On* (1970), kicked off an extraordinary series of low-budget horror / sexploitation films, continuing in *Deviation* (1971) and *Scream... and Die!* aka *The House that Vanished* (1973), wherein Larraz displayed a knack (rivalled only in fellow Catalanian Grau's *Manchester Morgue*) for digging beneath the picture postcard prettiness of the English countryside to unearth something significantly more troubling, a bucolic dystopia more idolatrous than idyllic, in which obsessive sexual misfits (usually Larraz's screen alter ego, Karl Lanchbury) have retreated to country hideouts to indulge their secret passions: porn photography, voyeurism, scopophilia, gerontophilia, taxidermy, occult rituals, sexual assault, murder... all manner of stuff you'll never find in a National Trust guide book.

Deploying a decaying property as an allegory of a frazzled mind and / or fossilized social relations dates at least as far back as Edgar Allan Poe, but the most apposite comparator for Larraz is probably Narciso Ibáñez Serrador's startling *The House That Screamed* (*La residencia*, 1970). In *Symptoms* (1974) Larraz restated his signature concerns with malaise and madness in less lurid, more Arthouse style and with a higher caliber cast (Angela Pleasence, Lorna Heilbron, Peter Vaughan) than he'd ever previously had at his disposal. Respected pundit David Pirie averred that *Symptoms* outstripped its obvious avatar, Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). "Like Polanski..." Pirie wrote in the July 1976 issue

of *Monthly Film Bulletin*, "... Larraz seems able to utilize the atmosphere of the English landscape more effectively than native filmmakers." When *Symptoms* pipped Ken Russell's *Mahler* to become the UK's first official entry at the Cannes Film Festival in 1974, a "respectable" career seemed to be threatening. Instead, Larraz accepted an offer from *Symptoms* editor Brian Smedley-Aston (whose varied CV included cutting Donald Cammell and Nic Roeg's 1970 film *Performance* into a shape that Warner Bros executives could watch while holding down their lunches) to finance a "let's make money" proposition, the lesbian blood-sucking epic *Vampyres* (1974). Pirie waxed equally enthusiastically about that one: "It is rare for sex and violence to be so completely and graphically integrated in a British movie (left surprisingly intact by the censor)." In actual fact shorn of over three minutes of sex and violence by censor Stephen Murphy, *Vampyres* had gathered dust on a shelf for two years before being picked up by Rank to support Bob Fuest's *The Devil's Rain* (1975) in UK theatres.

Over successive decades *Vampyres* has fought its way back to cult acclaim, but Larraz couldn't hang around for that, returning to his homeland in the mid-70s to take advantage of the rapidly thawing Spanish cultural climate in the wake of Franco's death. Most of his subsequent films never made it onto UK screens, large or small, with the "honorable" exceptions of 1978's *The Coming Of Sin* (*La visita del vicio*) and the following year's "coming of age" comedy ...*And Give Us Our Daily Sex* (*El periscopio*), starring Laura Gemser. Many of them wouldn't, frankly, have travelled that well, comprising broad sex comedies tailored to specifically Spanish tastes and social satires whose allusions would probably elude Anglo audiences, both strands being present and politically incorrect in e.g. *La momia nacional* ("The National Mummy," 1981). I'd certainly welcome (are you listening, Arrow?) a decent release of Larraz's 1979 oddity *The Golden Lady*, a *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) take off which boasts a cast including Suzanne Danielle, June ("Jeanine Pettibone") Chadwick, assorted Page 3 girls and Hot



Gossip, as well as a title song by The Three Degrees... they don't make 'em like that anymore! Larraz paid a brief return visit to British shores for *Black Candles* (*Los ritos sexuales del diablo*, 1982), in which the *de rigueur* rural swingers (presided over by gracefully ageing Euro-horror icon Helga Liné) have extended their repertoire of disreputable activities to include carnal knowledge of goats!

In 1985, Larraz directed all six episodes of an upmarket TV mini-series about the life of the artist Francisco Goya, another Spaniard who had felt obliged, towards the end of his life, to leave his homeland. After doing his damndest to pass the Spanish-shot haunted house horror comedy *Rest in Pieces* (*Descanse en piezas*, 1987) off as a piece of American product (down to acquiring a new American sounding pseudonym, "Joseph Braunstein"), Larraz took his film making career off on its final significant tangent... *Edge of the Axe* (*Al filo del hacha*, 1988) was partially shot in the States, whereas the totality of *Deadly Manor* was filmed there in an apparent (and very late) attempt to grab a piece of the lucrative stalk and slash action. Why would Larraz do such a thing at this stage of the game? Well, why wouldn't he? The killing-by-numbers craze that defined US horror production in the '80s was not itself an intrinsically American affair, owing much to such European precedents such as Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964) *A Bay of Blood* (*Ecologia del delitto*, 1971) and Sergio Martino's *Torso* (*I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale*, 1973). Consequently, criticisms of e.g. Ruggero Deodato's 1986 effort *Body Count* (*Camping del terrore*, admittedly not, by any stretch, a great film) "ripping" off *Friday the 13th* (1980) have a disingenuous ring to them. Much earlier Iberian incursions into this territory had been made by Jess Franco and Juan Piquer Simón with the sleazy, delirious likes of (respectively) *Bloody Moon* (*Die Säge des Todes*, 1981) and *Pieces* (*Mil gritos tiene la noche*, 1982). *Edge of the Axe* is a slicker piece of work than either of those, but *Deadly Manor* is something else again...

After enigmatic opening glimpses of mutilated bikers, we find ourselves in the company of identikit teenagers taking a leisure trip into the Great American Outdoors. Smoking dope and copping a feel are, of course, higher on the collective agenda than taking any country walks or bracing dips. After they've picked up shady hitchhiker Jack (Clark Tufts) and Peter, the fat boy joker of the pack (played by Jerry Kernion) has nearly been caught smoking a doobie by highway patrol officers, their van breaks down "fortuitously" close to a deserted mansion where they shelter for the night. Sensing the place's bad vibes, Helen (Claudia Franjul) leaves with the intention of hitching her own way back to civilization while her boyfriend Tony (Greg Rhodes) and co start exploring the derelict property, most of whose walls are plastered with sexy shots of a mysterious dark-haired woman. Further discoveries include slithering snakes, the wreckage of cars and bikes in the grounds, coffins in the basement and a collection of scalps in the cupboards ("What the hell have we gotten ourselves into?!"). Helen's butchered body turns up and the remaining kids respond in the time-honored tradition of wandering off on their own to meet similar fates. After dreaming or hallucinating a sexual encounter with the woman in the photos, Tony makes a further discovery... a glossy photo album containing shots of those briefly glimpsed, massacred bikers. Then a mysterious white masked figure arrives at the house...

Shot in Suffern, NY with a largely US cast and crew, *Deadly Manor* comes across as American as apple pie (just check out all the fast food acknowledgments in its credits) and there are obvious parallels with the likes of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *Friday the 13th* in terms of plotting, location and such incidentals as the menacing hitchhiker, the irritating fat kid, the vehicular grave yard, the masked killer and so on... but Larraz was probing a rural English Gothic before Tobe Hooper ever got to rev up his first chainsaw and the abiding impression is very much that this time out, having forced open the door with *Edge of the Axe*, he's keen to restate the themes of his fruitful UK period on a larger canvas. It's an



impression reinforced by the return of producer Brian Smedley-Aston. Since their collaboration on *Vampyres*, Smedley-Aston had continued his eclectic career, editing Jeff Lieberman's *Squirm* (1976) and *Blue Sunshine* (1977) and producing a trilogy of films starring UK soft core queen Fiona Richmond, including the only "home grown" video nasty, James Kenelm Clarke's *Exposé* (1976). Perhaps not surprising then, that the opening glimpses of a massacre recall the pre-titles sequence of *Vampyres*. The isolated country house, complete with murky history, is a given, likewise the seedy "glamor" photographs, paranoia, overwhelming sense of stifling morbidity, of dangerous secrets and the suggestion that some tragic history is playing itself out all over again... emergent psychosis in a milieu of sexual indulgence... we've been here before. Even the film's clumsy retitling, in certain territories, as *Savage Lust* echoed the indignities suffered by such prime time Larraz offerings as *The Coming of Sin* (which became *Violation of the Bitch* for its UK theatrical and VHS releases) and *Black Candles (Hot Fantasies* in UK cinemas).

DP Tote Trenas (who also shot *Edge of the Axe*) renders the outdoor scenes crisply, though the interior gloom made much of certain earlier editions nigh-on unwatchable. Thankfully Arrow have rectified that in this release. Cengiz Yaltkaya's synclavier score is a bit lightweight and the same could certainly be said of the film's forgettable cast (with the notable exceptions of de-sashed beauty queen Jennifer Delora from Frank Henenlotter's *Frankenhooker* [1990]). Maybe they were never meant to be anything more than wheel-em-on-and-chop-em-up cyphers anyway, and as *Vampyres* star Marianne Morris intimated to me when I interviewed her, Larraz preferred to direct more malleable players. Of course, brought up in an ultra-catholic milieu, he had an intuitive handle on the "have sex and die" narrative that drove the American slashers. Rather than the awful paninaro horrors perpetrated in the '80s by Lamberto Bava, Umberto Lenzi and Lucio Fulci in career free fall, *Deadly Manor* (sample line of dialogue: "You

watch too many creepy movies!") seems to be anticipating the irony of Wes Craven's *Scream*, which revitalized the whole stalk 'n' slashing match in 1996.

The killer's motivation, when finally revealed, has more than a whiff of *Friday the 13th* and *The Burning* (1981) about it (if you want to trace these films back to their giallo roots, you could also invoke e.g. Sergio Pastore's *Crimes of the Black Cat [Sette scialli di seta gialla, 1972]*), but when *Deadly Manor* ends with that glamor girl staring out at us from a monochrome photo, it's impossible to miss the connection with Viv Neves at the end of *Whirlpool*. Wherever and whatever he was filming, the signature obsessions of José Larraz would always bubble to the surface, no more deniable than the corpses that are literally bursting out of the walls by the climax of *Deadly Manor*. It's this that makes Larraz more of an auteur than any franchise director of slasher remakes, sequels, reboots et al. could ever hope to be.

John Martin has been a prolific commentator on genre films since the heyday of the UK fanzine scene. He co-founded the influential Samhain, edited Giallo Pages and is the author of Seduction of the Gullible: The Curious History of the "Video Nasties" Phenomenon.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Deadly Manor is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono audio.

An original 35mm Interpositive element was scanned in 2K resolution on a 4K Arri at OCN Digital Labs, CT. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London.

The original mono mix was remastered from the optical negatives at Deluxe Audio Services, Hollywood.

All materials for this restoration were provided by Films Around the World.

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

R3Store Studios: **Jo Griffin, Gerry Gedge, Andrew O'Hagan,
Rich Watson, Jenny Collins**

OCN Digital Labs: **Joe Rubin**

Deluxe Audio Services: **Jordan Perry**

Films Around the World: **Kris Alicea**

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

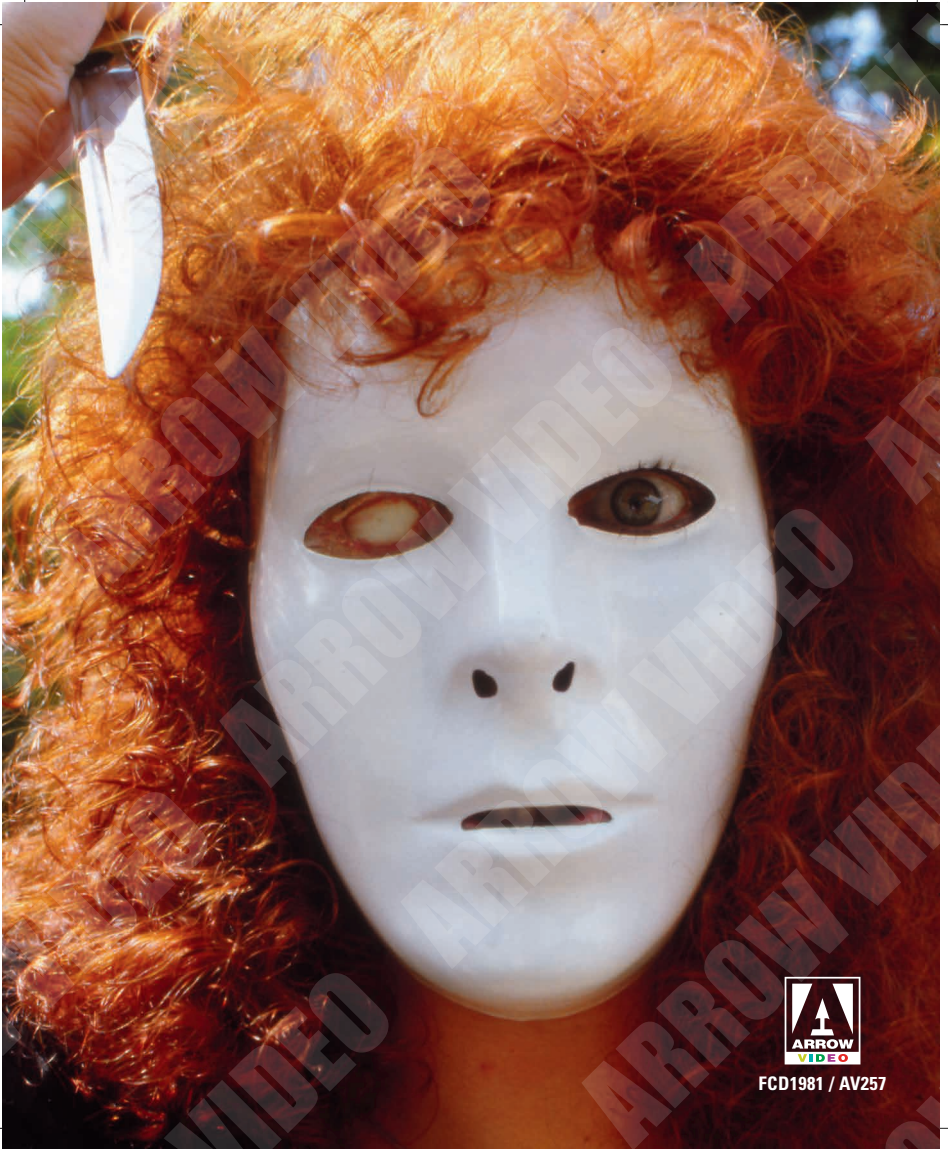
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Design **Obviously Creative**

Artwork by **Adam Rabalais**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Kris Alicea, Brian Smedley-Aston, Jennifer Delora, David K. Ginn, Carol Kogan, Jon Robertson, Joe Rubin, David Sikora, Pete Tombs and Paul Zamarelli / VHSCollector.com.



FCD1981 / AV257