

THE
HOUSE

COMPANION

BY SIMON BARBER



CONTENTS

- 4 INTRODUCTION
- 6 HOUSE
- 47 HOUSE – PRESS MATERIALS
- 60 HOUSE II: THE SECOND STORY
- 81 HOUSE II: THE SECOND STORY – PRESS MATERIALS
- 84 HOUSE III: THE HORROR SHOW
- 109 HOUSE III: THE HORROR SHOW – PRESS MATERIALS
- 114 HOUSE IV: THE REPOSSESSION
- 137 HOUSE IV: THE REPOSSESSION – PRESS MATERIALS

INTRODUCTION

I was not yet a teenager when I first discovered *House* (1986) among the racks of low-budget horror, fantasy and comedy at my local video shop. Already a fan of William Katt's reluctant crime fighter Ralph Hinkley in *The Greatest American Hero* (1981-3), and with a burgeoning interest in horror, I was beckoned by a puffy, black, clamshell VHS case depicting a decaying skeletal hand pressing a doorbell. From the first frame, I was enthralled by the soundtrack's stirring cello and the stark contrast of red text on black between glimpses of Victorian gingerbread. The macabre tale of troubled writer Roger Cobb became one of my earliest experiences in the frightfully funny world of the horror-comedy. In fact, upon hearing that I was writing this companion, my elder sister did not hesitate to remind me that as a kid, the shocking reveal of the demonic incarnation of Roger Cobb's wife caused me to recoil several feet across the living room floor before breaking into fits of laughter.

The original *House* had been a hit theatrically, and so by the time I discovered the film on home video, *House II: The Second Story* (perhaps the greatest name for a sequel ever), was already available. Two further sequels, *House III: The Horror Show* (1989) and *House IV: The Repossession* (1992) followed, despite diminishing commercial and critical success.¹ With the arrival of eBay in the mid-1990s, I began to indulge my rabid *House* fandom by obtaining press kits, stills, props, and other memorabilia. I created a website called 'Roger Cobb's House', a portal for *House* fans, which allowed me to become friendly with writer/director Ethan Wiley and other talented folks involved in the films, such as Fred Dekker and Chris Walas.² My fascination with all things *House* now presents me with yet another opportunity, as the author of this companion for Arrow Video's definitive release of the *House* films on Blu-ray. You are therefore cordially invited to join me for an in-depth exploration of the entire *House* franchise, but remember, don't come alone!

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Photo courtesy of Andy Hargreaves.

1 - For reasons we will deal with later, *House III* is known as *The Horror Show* in the United States.
2 - <http://www.rogercobbshouse.com>

HOUSE



Between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, a cinematic repertoire of unrelenting villains like Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger (as well as a multitude of not-so-memorable maniacs) dominated the attention, and hard-earned cash, of moviegoers with their slash and stab antics. As the producer of Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and having directed and produced *Friday the 13th* (1980), Sean S. Cunningham was well-placed to observe, and respond to, the impending exhaustion of this cycle of increasingly violent 'slasher' films.³ "I was sure the slasher wasn't played out," says Cunningham, "but there was no point in repeating what ten other films a year were doing."⁴

3 - A notable exception to slasher trends is the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series, which became increasingly comedic with each sequel.

4 - Interview with Sean S. Cunningham, December 16, 2016.



While the slasher had proven its commercial power during this period with titles like John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980) and Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), the marriage of horror and comedy was never far from the box office either. As Hallenbeck (2009: 1) points out, films that are both side-splitting and scary have been entertaining audiences 'almost as long as movies themselves'.⁵ Indeed, during the first half of the 1980s alone, the horror-comedy subgenre had amassed such entries as *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Creepshow* (1982), *Ghostbusters*, *Gremlins* (both 1984), *Re-Animator*, *Fright Night* and *The Return of the Living Dead* (all 1985), darkly humorous tales of werewolves, ghosts, vampires, brain-eating zombies and killer critters that love Snow White. Hence, Cunningham responded quickly when Steve Miner, who had served as an associate producer on *Friday the 13th* (1980) and had directed *Friday the 13th Part II* (1981) and *Friday the 13th Part III* (1982), sent him a screenplay for a lighthearted horror film called *House*, written by a special effects technician called Ethan Wiley, which Miner hoped to direct.

5 - Hallenbeck, B. (2009). *Comedy-horror films*. 1st ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland. See also: Miller, C. and Van Riper, A. (2016). *The Laughing Dead: The Horror-Comedy Film from Bride of Frankenstein to Zombieland*. 1st ed. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.



The term 'horror-comedy', which I use to describe *House*, has been somewhat contested among critics and fans.⁶ Hallenbeck (2009) constructs an inclusive canon of what he calls 'comedy-horror' films, while others have endeavoured to articulate the 'vast gulfs' of tonal difference in this category by making distinctions between films which are 'hilariously horrifying' or 'horrifyingly hilarious'.⁷ While we could spend the remaining pages of this booklet theorising genre hybridity with respect to the horror-comedy, issues of classification will remain problematic long after we are done, and dammit, we have a whole franchise to discuss!⁸ What is safe to say is that, unlike Schneider (2004: 148), I don't view the horror-comedy as a 'corrupted' version of the horror film, nor as its 'deviant cousin'. From *Haunted Spooks* (1920) to the recent remake of *Ghostbusters* (2016), laughing at the things that scare us has been part of our collective experience since the silent movies of the early 20th Century.⁹

6 - <http://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3362332/prefer-horror-comedy-or-comedy-horror>

7 - <http://www.vulture.com/2015/10/history-of-horror-comedy-in-11-crucial-films.html>. Hallenbeck (2009) cites Washington Irving's short story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820) as the first great example of how effective this combination is as a mode of storytelling. For philosophical work on the horror-comedy, see Carroll, N. (1999). *Horror and Humor*. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57(2), pp.145-160.

8 - See Cherry, B. (2009). *Horror*. 1st ed. London: Routledge. If you're desperate to explore *House* in an academic context, consider Gorman's (2014) argument that the film is about the protagonist's rejection of masculinity: <http://www.modernsuperior.com/blog-posts/film-reviews/roger-cobbs-rejection-mainstream-masculinity-steve-miners-house-1986>

9 - Schneider, S. (2004). *Horror film and psychoanalysis*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.





Though *House* was situated broadly within the tradition of haunted house movies like *The Haunting* (1963), *The Legend of Hell House* (1973), *Hausu* (1977), *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *The Shining*, *The Changeling* (both 1980), *The Evil Dead* (1981) and *Poltergeist* (1982), *House* adopted a much lighter, more humorous tone than most of those films, and a genre-hopping style which brought together elements of the psychological, the paranormal, and the good old-fashioned monster movie.¹⁰ Kay (2008), for instance, categorises *House* under 'Zombie Movies'¹¹, while Muir (2007) situates *House* within the conventions of a number of horror film typologies, including 'Rubber Realities', 'The Vietnam Vet' and 'Ghosts'.¹² A *Fangoria* feature on *House* from January 1986 proclaimed: "It's Not Just Another Horror Comedy!", indicating not

10 - The haunted house movie persists to this day with the likes of *The Haunting* (1999), *The Others* (2001), *Insidious* (2010) and *The Conjuring* (2013). Interestingly, *House* writer Ethan Wiley had never heard of the Japanese film *Hausu* aka *House* (1977), despite the film having the same name and a conceit based around an aunt's haunted house.

11 - Kay, G. (2008). *Zombie movies*. 1st ed. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press.

12 - Muir, J. (2007). *Horror films of the 1980s*. 1st ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.



only that the film traversed stylistic boundaries, but also that the horror-comedy subgenre was well understood by the time the film debuted.¹³ I therefore locate *House* as part of the mid-to-late 1980s horror-comedy lineage which includes films like *Night of the Creeps*, *Critters* (both 1986), *The Monster Squad*, *Evil Dead 2* (both 1987) and *Beetlejuice* (1988).

With the housekeeping out of the way (no pun intended), let's turn now to the premise of the first film in the series. *House* tells the tale of Roger Cobb, a Vietnam vet who has found popular success as a horror writer. Though his novel *Blood Dance* has been a hit with fans, Roger's next book, a personal account of his experiences in the Vietnam War, has stalled amidst personal tragedy.¹⁴ Roger is grieving after the mysterious disappearance of his son Jimmy, who vanished during a visit to the Victorian mansion owned by Roger's aunt. The loss has led to a separation from his wife, the soap opera actress Sandy Sinclair, and his personal life is falling apart. With the sudden death of his aunt, Roger returns to the house seeking solitude, and to try to write his next book. However, Roger quickly begins to encounter supernatural phenomena: the ghost of his aunt warns him to leave, and terrifying monsters are on the attack. Roger begins to investigate the horrific events and comes to believe that his missing son may be located somewhere within the house. With assistance from his nosy neighbour, Harold, Roger discovers that the house has hidden dimensions and does battle with a variety of creatures, including a monstrous version of his ex-wife, in a desperate quest to find his son. Knowing Roger's deepest fears and regrets, the house brings Roger face to face with his friend and fellow soldier, Big Ben, whom he failed to save from torture by the enemy during the war. A grotesque skeletal zombie of Ben returns from the grave hungry for revenge, and reveals that it was he who took Jimmy hostage. Just as it seems like all is lost, Roger realises that the house is only powerful if he allows it to feed on his anxieties. By facing his fears, Roger can defeat Ben, liberate his son, and save his family.

13 - Timpone, A. (1986). Jason director Steve Miner dissects *House* - "It's Not Just Another Horror Comedy!". *Fangoria*, (#51), pp.21-24.

14 - There were prop covers made for one other prior novel by Roger Cobb, which had the laughable title *Sword of Bad*.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO SPEND AN EVENING
WITH ROGER COBB AND HIS FRIENDS.

DON'T COME ALONE!



A SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM Production

HOUSE

15

HORROR HAS FOUND A NEW HOME.

AN ENTERTAINMENT RELEASE

A SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM Production A STEVE MINER Film HOUSE Starring WILLIAM KATT • GEORGE WENDT • RICHARD MOLL • KAY LENZ Production Designer GREGG FONSECA
Director of Photography MAC AHLBERG Associate Producer PATRICK MARKEY Music by HARRY MANFREDINI Story by FRED DEKKER Screenplay by ETHAN WILEY Produced by SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM Directed by STEVE MINER

The casting for *House* largely comprised actors who had developed successful careers in television, and who were experienced comedic performers. The role of Roger Cobb went to William Katt, who had appeared as Tommy Ross in *Carrie* (1976) and as Jack Barlow in *Big Wednesday* (1978), but who was at that time perhaps best known for his starring role in *The Greatest American Hero*, a television series which ran from 1981-1983. Prolific television actress Kay Lenz (*Rich Man, Poor Man*) portrayed soap opera star Sandy Sinclair, while the role of neighbour Harold Gorton went to George Wendt of *Cheers* fame. Big Ben was played by *Night Court*'s Richard Moll. The house, as much a character in the film as any person, is a five-bedroom Eastlake-style Victorian mansion known as Mills View. It was built in 1887 and is located at 329 Melrose Avenue in Monrovia, California. The house was originally a wedding present for Milton Monroe, son of William N. Monroe, the namesake of Monrovia. The name Mills View became associated with the house after it was purchased in 1893 by Colonel John H. Mills and his wife, though Mills died a mere three months after moving in.¹⁵ It has been used as a shooting location in a number of film and television productions including an early episode of the TV show *Picket Fences*.¹⁶ These days, when making mention of *House*, people are perhaps more likely to call to mind Hugh Laurie's turn as the brilliant, yet misanthropic, diagnostician in the Fox medical drama. Nevertheless, the horror-comedy series of the same name has enjoyed a strong cult following since the first instalment was released to US cinemas on February 28, 1986. The first two *House* films were produced for New World Pictures, the independent production and distribution company founded by Roger Corman in 1970. Having expanded its operations in 1984 with three new divisions devoted to international content, television and video, New World's horror output around the mid-1980s included such titles as *C.H.U.D.*, *Children of the Corn* (both 1984) and *Transylvania 6-5000* (1985). *House* eclipsed them all. In fact, until the release of Steve Miner's college comedy *Soul Man* in October of 1986, *House* was the company's highest grossing film, and remained its second biggest commercial success.¹⁷ Made with a budget of around \$3 million, the film grossed just over \$22.1 million worldwide, with \$19.4 million coming from domestic ticket sales.¹⁸ In its first week of release, it was kept from the number one spot at the box office by *Pretty In Pink* (1986), the John Hughes-penned romantic comedy directed by Howard Deutch.¹⁹

Critical reception to *House* was mixed. While *Variety* described the characterisations as arbitrary and the effects as "fake and rubbery", the film did pick up some notable supporters.²⁰ Writing in *The New York Times*, Janet Maslin gave the film a positive review, describing its style as "unexpectedly snappy".²¹ The marketing for the film drew on a number of memorable



Photo courtesy of Shannon Shea, shannonsheaeffects.com.

taglines like 'Horror Has Found a New Home', 'Enter At Your Own Risk' and perhaps its crowning glory, 'Ding Dong, You're Dead!' The latter was emblazoned on the cover of its home video release in the United States and no doubt aided the uptake of the film in rental markets. The trailer for *House* managed to capture both its horrific elements ("This is a house, where no-one should live"), and its breezy comedic tone through exchanges between George Wendt as Harold, and William Katt as Roger:

15 - <http://patch.com/california/monrovia/mills-view-one-of-monrovia-premier-mansions>

16 - *Picket Fences* (1992), David E. Kelley Productions, 20th Century Fox Television, Season 1, Episode 6, "Remembering Rosemary".

17 - <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/studio/chart/?studio=newworld.htm>

18 - <http://www.the-numbers.com/movie/House>

19 - <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/chart/?yr=1986&wknd=09&p=..htm>

20 - <http://variety.com/1985/film/reviews/house-1200426903>

21 - <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A0DE5DA1F3BF93BA15751C0A960948260>

Harold: "The woman who lived here was nuts.
Wouldn't be surprised if someone just got fed up and offed her."

Roger: "She was my aunt."

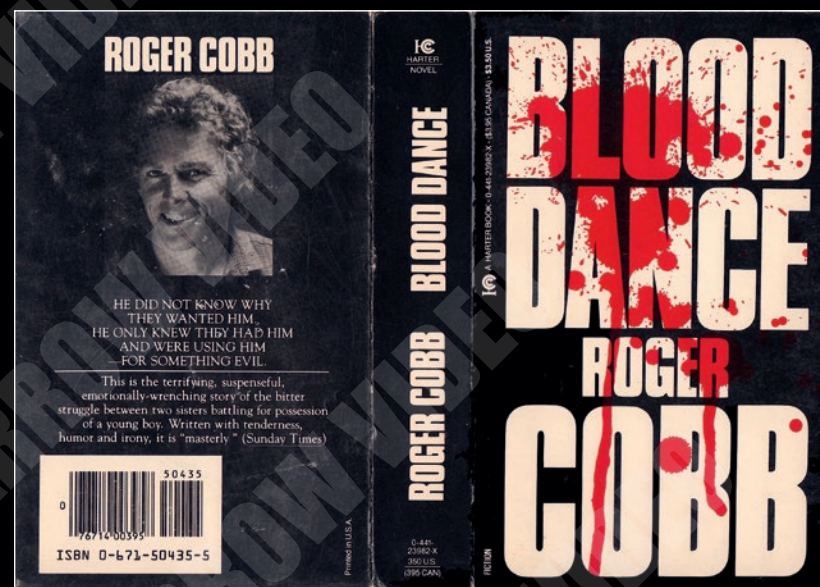
Harold: "Heart of gold though."



At the risk of sounding like Chris Farley's sycophantic interviewer from the classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch, ("Do you remember...?"), I ask you to consider the unusual inventiveness of a film that includes a reanimated wall-mounted marlin, Narnia-like access to the jungles of Vietnam, possessed garden shears, and Roger's use of a TV remote to put a ghostly image of his missing child on stand-by.²² And who could forget our protagonist's spectacular V-neck sweater?

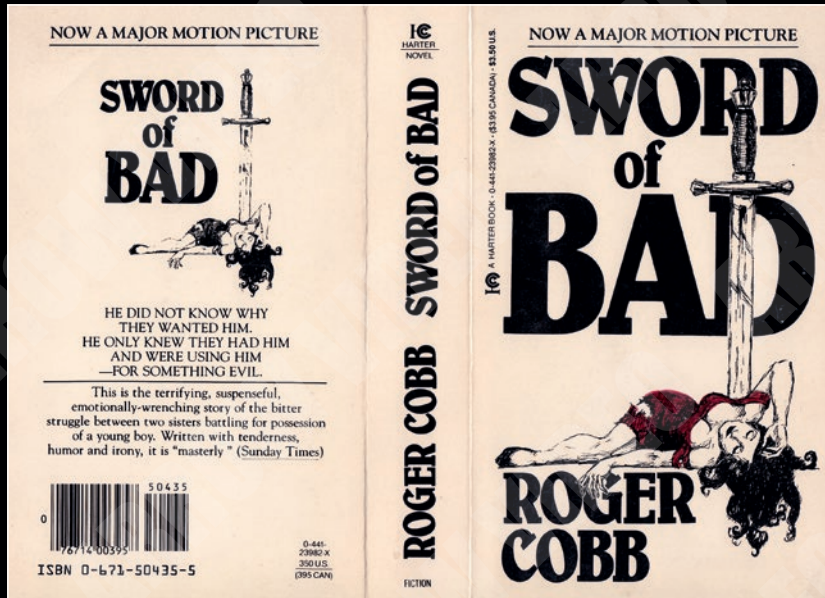
Fashion faux pas aside, one of the film's great strengths is the way in which the story transcends the confines of the house by exploring what I call *the world beyond the bathroom cabinet*. Unnatural dimensions extending through the closet, the swimming pool and, yes, the bathroom cabinet, provide the audience with an adventure that belies its (mostly) one-location premise. By creating a scenario in which Roger's wartime past could haunt his present, *House* also touches on more serious underlying issues, such as the psychological effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on veterans (it's no coincidence that the closet monster was called 'The War Demon', and that its fingers were made from bullets), the unimaginable grief of losing a child, and how such an experience can destroy relationships (Roger's estranged wife is, somewhat unsubtly, embodied by the monstrous 'Sandywitch'). Like most people who would go to the trouble of reading a companion booklet for the *House* movies, I appreciated the

22 - I see this as Roger's reluctance to engage with the tricks being played upon him by the house, and not, as some commenters have suggested, Roger's disinterest in seeing his missing son! For discussion on these points: Say You Love Satan. (2016). *Episode 21 - House*. [podcast] Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/sayyoulovesatanpodcast/episode-21-house-1986> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



film's ambition to tackle this difficult blend alongside its comedic performances and extensive creature effects. What was perhaps less explicit in the final film, and this is something that Maslin queries in her *New York Times* review, is the notion that the house is an evil entity in its own right. The rules of the film (the house rules, if you will) mean that Roger's experience in the house is entirely contingent upon who he is and what his deepest fears are. It is the house that dredges up his past and brings to life the skeletons in his closet. Another tenant would have a completely different set of experiences.

While that sounds like the perfect concept for a sequel, like most projects developed within the industrial realities of the movie business, the *House* franchise unfolded in surprising ways through the rest of the 1980s and early 1990s. Before we explore the three sequels that followed, let us first examine how *House* came to be.



“WRITING LOOKS LIKE FUN, HUH?”

House was written by Ethan Wiley (*House II: The Second Story*, *Children of the Corn V: Fields of Terror*), based on a story by Fred Dekker (*Night of the Creeps*, *The Monster Squad*). Wiley and Dekker were roommates at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Wiley was studying at the School of Theatre, Film and Television, while Dekker, despite having made amateur films since the age of 12, had been rejected from the UCLA film programme and was an English major. “As I recall, Fred wrote a very professional and polished spec *M*A*S*H* episode as a writing sample for his application,” Wiley states. “I wrote a 15-page avant-garde, absurdist Dada-influenced short play, titled, *The Greatest Play Ever* and got in. Go figure.”²³

A number of writers who went on to have successful careers in film congregated around the theatre department at UCLA in what Dekker calls “an unofficial fraternity of movie nerds”.²⁴ Along with Dekker and Wiley, the group included Shane Black (*Lethal Weapon*), Greg



23 - Interview with Ethan Wiley, December 17, 2016.

24 - The Projection Booth, (2016), *Episode 291: Night of the Creeps (1986)*, [podcast] Available at: <http://projection-booth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/episode-291-night-of-creeps-1986.html> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



Widen (*Highlander*), David Arnott (*Last Action Hero*), Ryan Rowe (*Charlie's Angels*), Robert Reneau (*Demolition Man*), Ed Solomon (*Men in Black*), Chris Matheson (*Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*), Jim Herzfeld (*Meet the Parents*) and Randall Jahnson (*The Doors*) among others. Some of its members lived together at various times in a house just south of Westwood in Rancho Park known as the 'Pad O' Guys'. Another house in West Los Angeles known as the 'Bach Pad' (short for Bachelor's pad) became another 'fertile layover and unofficial film school' for the collective.²⁵

Various combinations of the group collaborated on original theatre productions and short films within and outside the university. They even tried their hands at stand-up comedy. "Ed Solomon organised the UCLA stand-up comedy club," Wiley recalls. "Shane Black, Ed Solomon, Ryan Rowe, myself and Jim Herzfeld participated. Fred co-wrote my routines. We opened for guest comedians such as Gary Shandling and Jerry Seinfeld at sold-out UCLA shows that sometimes had hundreds of attendees."²⁶ Dekker and Wiley were frequently brainstorming grandiose plans for films they intended to make. "Fred was very savvy about cinematography and how

25 - <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ThePadOGuys/about>
26 - Interview with Ethan Wiley, December 17, 2016.



Photo courtesy of Shannon Shea, shannonsheaeffects.com.

to put shots together," says Wiley. "I was just coming out of theatre and didn't know anything about that filmmaking language, so I learned a lot from him about that."²⁷

Wiley's first opportunity in the industry came via his father, the painter William T. Wiley, who had a student that was making models for Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), the visual effects company founded by George Lucas in 1975. Through this connection, during the summer before his senior year, Wiley began working in the creature shop under director and visual effects supervisor Phil Tippett. After an induction period in which he swept the floors and made Ewok feet, Wiley joined the expansive second unit crew on *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi* (1983). His colleague, Chris Walas, the artist who was responsible for special effects on films like *Dragonslayer* (1981) and the melting Nazi in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), was looking to leave ILM to start his own company.²⁸ Wiley became his assistant and never returned to school.

After a series of false starts on films like *Starman* (1984), Walas and Wiley were hired by Joe Dante and Mike Finnell to work on a horror-comedy they were developing called *Gremlins* (1984).²⁹ Working initially out of a garage, the two-man crew was eventually expanded to 25-30 people. Wiley worked on the movie for two years and was one of the main puppeteers on the film, operating principal characters like Gizmo and Stripe. After his positive experience working with Dante and Walas, Wiley decided to go back to Los Angeles to further his writing career.

27 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].
28 - Walas won an Academy Award for his special effects makeup on *The Fly* (1986).
29 - Walas had previously worked with Dante on *Piranha* (1978).

When asked how much of *House* he is responsible for, Dekker responds: "I have to say very little, except for the idea. The basic premise was mine."³⁰ Dekker relates that he and his college pals had decided to embark on a project inspired by *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983) in which each person would direct their own segment of an anthology film.³¹ Though Dekker shot a wraparound piece at Steve Miner's Santa Monica office which starred Ethan Wiley as a writer whose word processor develops a mind of its own, Dekker's actual segment for the omnibus was never realised.



He did, however, concoct a 15-page script about a Vietnam vet haunted by a skirmish with the enemy in which one of his platoon was mortally wounded. When the soldier's agonising screams threaten to give away their position, the protagonist kills his friend, an act that continues to haunt him years after he has returned home from the war. Seeking counsel, the veteran meets a beautiful young psychologist and romance blooms. As he grows closer to the woman, he begins to experience visions of his dead, rotting war buddy who appears to have returned from the grave to sabotage the relationship. These visions increase in intensity, finally resulting in the hero's violent death. The audience is left to wonder, was he the victim of his dead friend's vengeful ghost? Or is it his own guilt – indeed, America's lingering guilt about the war – playing tricks on his mind and causing him to commit suicide?³²

30 - The Projection Booth. (2016). *Episode 291: Night of the Creeps (1986)*. [podcast] Available at: <http://projection-booth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/episode-291-night-of-creeps-1986.html> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

31 - Only two stories by Chris Maes and James Cappe ultimately made it before the cameras.

32 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.



Dekker describes the idea as a "pretentious, Rod Serling-esque allegory" and "an excuse to do rotting zombie effects".³³ At the same time, Dekker was developing an idea for his directorial debut, a straightforward haunted house movie that would require one location and one actor. He intended to shoot the film at his parents' hundred-year-old Victorian house in San Rafael, Marin County, California. "The idea was that at the beginning of the movie he'll go into the house, and at the end of the movie he'll come out of the house, and in between is just the scariest shit I can come up with for 85 minutes," Dekker recalls.³⁴ He called the idea *House*.

Soon after, Dekker realised: "What if my *Twilight Zone*-ette and my scary haunted house movie were one and the same? What if my protagonist is the Vietnam vet, and the reason he's going into the house is to exorcise his personal demons once and for all? The heck with my 'Pad O'Guys' anthology video – I had a real movie idea now!"³⁵ However, during this period, Dekker had been employed by his friend and mentor Steve Miner to write *Godzilla: King of the Monsters 3D*. Though the film was ultimately too expensive to make, this commitment combined with what Dekker claims might have been "laziness... or fear of tackling a politically dicey, thematically ambitious premise," meant that he never quite got around to writing his taut psychological horror movie.³⁶

33 - Dekker and Black later picked up this idea with *Shadow Company*, a script for John Carpenter about a zombie platoon.

34 - The Projection Booth. (2016). *Episode 291: Night of the Creeps (1986)*. [podcast] Available at: <http://projection-booth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/episode-291-night-of-creeps-1986.html> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

35 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.

36 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.



Photo courtesy of Shannon Shea, shannonsheaeffects.com.

Enter Ethan Wiley. Taken with the idea, Wiley regularly enquired about the status of the haunted house script until eventually Dekker said: "You clearly want to write it. You be the writer and we'll take it from there."³⁷ Wiley's response was immediate and enthusiastic. Dekker reports that Wiley's script was finished in "roughly the time it takes me to go to the bathroom."³⁸

Cue ethical dilemma. Though Dekker's story had finally been realised in a full-length screenplay, the script adopted a dramatically different tone from the film that Dekker had imagined. "What I had conceived as a gritty, black-and-white, William Friedkin-style character-study-cum-balls-out-horror-film was now a tongue-in-cheek, *Mad Magazine*-style, effects-heavy hootenanny with goofy neighbours and comical monsters," says Dekker.³⁹ Wiley agrees that Dekker was a little taken aback when he discovered that his serious, dark film had been turned into a horror-comedy. "He was kind of upset about it," Wiley relates. "There was a little tension between us. But I think over time, he has seen that I imprinted my personality on the project."⁴⁰ With Dekker's robust story and structure already in place, Wiley was able

37 - The Projection Booth. (2016). *Episode 291: Night of the Creeps (1986)*. [podcast] Available at: <http://projection-booth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/episode-291-night-of-creeps-1986.html> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

38 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.

39 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.

40 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01/> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

to have a lot of fun in the writing process. "I don't think I could have ever have written something that was as solid structurally without his input," says Wiley.⁴¹

In search of an outside opinion, Dekker and Wiley gave the script to Steve Miner, who, as it turned out, in the wake of difficulties getting *Godzilla* up-and-running, was looking for something of his own to direct. "Much to our surprise, Steve said 'let's do this, and I want to direct it!'" remembers Wiley. "When you're building a career you don't say no, so we said 'sure!'"⁴² Miner took the script to his *Friday the 13th* collaborator, producer Sean S. Cunningham, who promptly raised the financing. Within six months, *House* was underway. These days, Dekker is glad that the movie took a more comedic route: "Ultimately, I think it's why the movie is successful," he reflects. "It's why people like it. The humour invites you in."⁴³

"DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IMAGINATION?"

House began filming on April 22, 1985, on a shooting schedule that lasted for five weeks. Though the exterior scenes were shot on location at Mills View in Monrovia, interior sets had been built at Ren Mar Studios by Gregg Fonseca, the production designer behind films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *Critters* (1986), and later *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989) and *Wayne's World* (1992).⁴⁴ Fonseca designed the sets to function like an actual house, a two-storey space with wide corridors. "This allowed us to get a number of tracking shots and suspense oriented shots that we would not have been able to do," states director Steve Miner.⁴⁵ The Vietnam jungle set was located next door, and was small enough to require creative use of the space during the action scenes. Mac Ahlberg (*Re-Animator*), who also fulfilled the role of director of photography for *House II: The Second Story* and *House III: The Horror Show*, was the "unflappable" cinematographer who was tasked with capturing the recreation of Vietnam, the creature effects and the vast darkness of the house's fantastical netherworlds on film.



Photo courtesy of Shannon Shea, shannonsheaeffects.com.

41 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01/> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

42 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01/> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

43 - The Projection Booth. (2016). *Episode 291: Night of the Creeps (1986)*. [podcast] Available at: <http://projection-booth.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/episode-291-night-of-creeps-1986.html> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

44 - Formerly the Desilu Cahuenga Studio, the name Ren Mar was introduced in 1984. The facilities are now known as Red Studios Hollywood.

45 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.





While the look of the film is a big part of its appeal, much of its charm rests on the shoulders of director Steve Miner, and actor William Katt, particularly his on-screen relationship with George Wendt, known to audiences for his long-standing role as Norm Peterson on TV's *Cheers*. Miner's original vision for the film was to imagine Cary Grant as the lead. "That was the tone he wanted," recalls producer Sean S. Cunningham. "I loved the idea and off we went. Once we got Bill Katt and George Wendt I knew we had something special."⁴⁶ Miner's involvement was likewise an "unexpected treat" for Katt. "He is the reason that film was as successful as it was," says the actor. "I was incredibly pleased to be a part of that film."⁴⁷ Miner also welcomed writer Ethan Wiley to the set, allowing him to make small but important corrections to the tone of the comedic performances: "I was so spoiled," remembers the screenwriter. "It was a great time, a great collaboration for me to have that kind of input."⁴⁸

One of the comedic threads in *House* is the way in which Roger responds to problems. In Wiley's script, Roger's first instinct when faced with the giant War Demon is not to flee, but to order a truck full of video recording equipment. When Roger kills the 'Sandywitch', he has to spend time chopping up the body and burying it; when its severed hand re-animates, Roger flushes it down the toilet. "A lot of the comedy comes out of the practical circumstances of 'how do you get rid of the body when you kill the monster?'" Wiley says. "Do you put it in garbage bags?"⁴⁹ By approaching extraordinary circumstances in an ordinary way, Roger embodies the veteran soldier, working with the resources at hand. "What do you do?" asks Wiley, "You get the neighbour, you get a fireplace poker, you get a mattress and try to make the best of it. There's no crack team of forensic experts coming in to save the day."⁵⁰

46 - Interview with Sean S. Cunningham, December 16, 2016.

47 - Interview with William Katt. (2016). *White Ghost* special features: Code Red.

48 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

49 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.

50 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

Making all of this work demanded the skills of actors like Katt, who responded immediately to the script's sensibilities. "The scene where I am talking to Tanya and trying to bury the monster epitomises the film really, playing two things at once," he says, referring to the playfulness of his scenes with former Miss World, Mary Stavin, as Roger's alluring neighbour Tanya.⁵¹ And yet, the script also called for the portrayal of a grieving father, who has witnessed his son vanish without a trace from the house's swimming pool. When Roger is talked into babysitting Tanya's son, Robert, he has to both rediscover his fatherly emotions ("how about a nice plastic bag?"), and protect the child from meeting the same fate.⁵² Roger choosing to sleep in Jimmy's vacant bed is one touching nuance that demonstrates how the film never forgets the tragic elements of the story. For Katt though, it is his work with George Wendt that has lingered in the memory all these years: "There was a scene that I did in that film with George Wendt, who was just a delight to work with, where I take him upstairs, and I fit him with a pair of goggles on his head, and I give him a speargun and tell him that there's this big raccoon in the closet. And when I open that door, he's got to shoot that raccoon! Whenever I watch that scene, it still tickles me to this day."⁵³

Perhaps the most striking aspects of *House* are the creatures created by the special effects team led by James Cummins. *House* required a number of distinct monsters: the re-animated wall-mounted marlin (an invention of Wiley's, whose father was also an avid fisherman), the Sandywitch, three demonic kids, a flying 'void creature', the skeletal zombie of Roger's old army buddy, Big Ben, and the War Demon, a giant closet monster. The creatures were the work of 17 special effects artists who worked six days a week over three and a half months to ready them for filming. Much of the pre-production work was facilitated by Sean S. Cunningham's early investment in the movie, which enabled Ethan Wiley to assemble a team with his friend Kirk Thatcher (*Gremlins*, *Muppet Treasure Island*), another ILM alumnus, who went on to work closely with *Muppets* creator Jim Henson. Among others, Thatcher created the visual design of Big Ben and the Sandywitch before James Cummins came in to implement the original visual concepts that Thatcher and Wiley had created.

On an episode of his podcast, *The Movie Crypt*, horror filmmaker Adam Green (*Hatchet*) said: "The creature effects in *House* are so specific and that's what makes that movie so wonderful. It had such a specific tone, a specific look. It's frightening but it's fun!"⁵⁴ It's all very well to

51 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.

52 - Amusingly, some commenters have queried Tanya's willingness to use Roger as her babysitter by asking: "What woman would ever leave her kid with this guy who had a kid drown in his backyard?" See: Retro Movie Love Podcast. (2016). *New World Pictures (1984-1991)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://retromovie.com/2016/05/31/episode-30-new-world-pictures-1984-1991> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016]. Tanya's mischievous son, Robert, is, incidentally, the real-life son of director Steve Miner.

53 - Interview with William Katt. (2016). *White Ghost* special features: Code Red.

54 - *The Movie Crypt*. (2016). *Episode 158: Fred Dekker*. [podcast] Available at: <http://geeknation.com/podcasts/the-movie-crypt-ep-158-fred-dekker> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



imagine a house full of hideous heart-stopping monsters, but sculpting, moulding, building, painting and operating creatures that would work effectively on screen and maintain the essence of the film's cartoonish comedic sensibility was no small task, particularly in terms of cost. The Sandywitch, the house's nightmare reimagining of Roger's ex-wife, was performed by Peter Pitofsky, a professional clown and stand-up comic. Initially, this monster was to be much more ambitious: "The original concept for the Sandywitch was to create a monster where the folds of the flesh would be like water bags and would have that kind of movement," recalls Wiley. "But once we got into it, we realised that it would be a very sophisticated and expensive proposition."⁵⁵

As a result, the team realised some of the film's most visually arresting moments with effects that are relatively inexpensive. For instance, special effects artist Shannon Shea recalls that during the scene where Roger dumps the dismembered witch's hand into the toilet and flushes it, he wore the hand as a glove and span around on a sawhorse while pulling his hand through the pipe.⁵⁶ Jimmy's spectral appearance at Roger's window was a simple double exposure (DX) post effect, which was easy and cheap to do. The tentacles which emerge through the

55 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.
56 - <http://monsterhistory101.blogspot.nl/2011/06/part-30-making-house-call.html>



Photo courtesy of Shannon Shea, shannonsheaeffects.com.

bathroom cabinet and wrap themselves around Roger were simply shot in reverse. To give the impression that the doorways and windows in the house are portals that lead Roger to different parts of his memories and sub-conscious, the crew removed the bathroom cabinet leaving Roger illuminated in a square of light as he looked out over the stage, which was covered with heavy black fabric. "Dropping someone down a rope into a black space is scary," says Wiley, "but what could be cheaper? There's no set!"⁵⁷

However, creatures like the War Demon, the 18-foot closet monster, with its fiendishly long arms and sharp claws, whose body displayed the distorted faces of tortured Vietnam War victims, was ambitious by anyone's standards. "It required just about every one of us on the crew to bring it to set and operate it," says Shannon Shea.⁵⁸ The frame of the monster sat on a dolly that rode on tracks. Pushing the creature out of the closet required several crew members, some of whom physically puppeteered its arms, while the fingers and head could be operated via separate controls. To make the monster's entrance work dramatically, timing was critical. The team realised that the monster needed to already be moving forward on its tracks by the time the door was opened.

57 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.
58 - <http://monsterhistory101.blogspot.nl/2011/06/part-30-making-house-call.html>

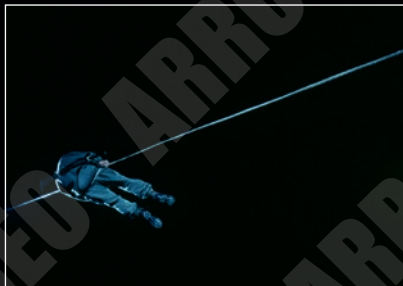


Perhaps the greatest spectacle in the film is the ghoulish appearance of Big Ben, whose imposing physicality and verbal quips are the personification of comic horror. Inside the suit was Curt Wilmot, a talented tennis player who was a friend of Steve Miner. Wilmot happened to be tall enough and thin enough to fit inside the apparatus, which was a custom-made pair of trousers with a layer of foam latex rotted legs covered by tattered army fatigues. The rib cage, made of latex reinforced with cheesecloth and nylon tubing, would then be pulled over Wilmot's head. The final touches included a foam latex neck and gloves, and the insertion of a 'milky contact lens' before the mask could be added and blended around Wilmot's eye. According to Shea, the mask caused Wilmot some physical pain during shooting.⁵⁹ In the final scenes of the movie, a dummy cast from Wilmot was filled with Fuller's earth and cork and was exploded during the scene where Roger stuffs a grenade into Ben's ribs.⁶⁰

There were also a small number of conventional techniques used to render effects in *House*, such as stop motion (in the case of the flying 'void creature'), and matte painting. The scene in which Roger hangs from the house over a cliff edge incorporated a matte painting created by ILM and Dream Quest artist Mark Sullivan, who would also contribute to *House II: The Second Story*.⁶¹ The shot took a full day to rig and shoot because it involved cranes, stunt actors and blue screen work.

Given the complex efforts of so many artists, it's no surprise that fans of *House* collect props, masks, and other memorabilia associated with the film. Though there were very few tie-ins produced by New World Video during its original promotional phase (a battery-powered light-

59 - Shea, S. (2015). *I'm Rubber, You're Glue*. 1st ed. Dark Ink, p.153.
60 - <http://monsterhistory101.blogspot.nl/2011/06/part-30-making-house-call.html>
61 - <http://nzpetesmatshot.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/restless-at-night-conversation-with.html>



up box in the shape of the house, and a *House* branded notepad are two in my collection), fans of the film have gone on to produce pins, action figures and prop replicas, particularly from the first two films. Very few original props from *House* survive to this day. Legendary monster collector Forrest J. Ackerman owned the lower half of Ben from the waist down, while artist Sam McCain of Horror Sanctum Studios owned screen-used props including a Sandywitch head, a War Demon head and a Ben head.⁶² Due to their age and the risk of disintegration, McCain produced new moulds of these items and created a series of *House* props which he painted and sold. These have been collected by *House* fans across the world.⁶³

Another distinctive visual component woven into the story and production of *House* concerns the paintings that adorn the walls of Roger's new abode. The story tells us that prior to her death at the hands of the evil house, Roger's Aunt (portrayed in the film by Susan French), who was an artist, translated her terrifying experiences into a range of surreal paintings. With the exception of the large painting located in Aunt Elizabeth's garage, which was created by fantasy artist and illustrator William Stout, the majority of the work was carried out by Richard Hescoc.⁶⁴ Hescoc is a science fiction, fantasy and horror artist, and one of the founders of the 'Imaginative Realism' movement. He has painted over 130 book covers, including over 70 paintings and ink drawings for a limited edition of George R. R. Martin's *A Clash of Kings* from the bestselling *A Game of Thrones* series. He has created advertising art and production designs for films like *The Howling* (1981), *Swamp Thing*, *E.T.*, *The Dark Crystal* (all 1982) and *The Philadelphia Experiment* (1984).

In the mid-1980s, Hescoc was sharing a studio with Stout, who had been working with Steve Miner on the ill-fated 3D *Godzilla* movie.⁶⁵ Miner hired Stout to do the paintings for *House* but



because of his busy schedule, Stout asked Hescoc to do the majority of the work. After a brief conversation with Stout and Miner, Hescoc set to work. "I did four paintings and Stout did the one," says Hescoc. "All of the paintings were done in the studio we shared then, not too far from the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles."⁶⁶

Stout and Hescoc began the process by creating thumbnail sketches of the wildest ideas they could think of. Together with Miner, they picked the weirdest and most disturbing to complete for the film. You can observe Hescoc's work in scenes showing the hallway entrance to the house, the staircase, the dining room and the upstairs room where Roger battles the War Demon. "I liked the staircase placement of that one picture," says Hescoc, referring to *The Green Sky* which catches the eye of Aunt Elizabeth's grocery boy during the opening scene. "People got a good look at that painting. But, generally, my paintings were meant to hover in the background and create an ambience."⁶⁷

62 - <http://tinyurl.com/yourprops>

63 - https://youtu.be/AqI_INITEMQ

64 - <http://www.richardhescoc.com>

65 - http://godzilla.wikia.com/wiki/Godzilla:_King_of_the_Monsters_3-D

66 - Interview with Richard Hescoc, April 16, 2001.

67 - Interview with Richard Hescoc, April 16, 2001. I own one of Hescoc's original pieces of art from the film – the painting of the woman being attacked by garden tools which the policeman discusses with Roger in the hallway of the house. Told you I was a fan.





Photo of House masks (right) courtesy of Kirby R. Nelson.



Much of the creative team on *House* also worked on the *Friday the 13th* series, including, of course, Cunningham and Miner, but also composer Harry Manfredini and stunt coordinator Kane Hodder. Early advertising artwork for *House* emphasised the connections between the two franchises. Hodder, who went on to play Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13th* parts VII-X, was a stunt man on all four *House* films, and appeared briefly in *House II* and *House IV*. Actor Ronn Carroll appeared in *House* as a detective trying to locate Roger's missing son, Jimmy. He also appeared in *Friday the 13th* as Sergeant Tierney. Carroll and Dwier Brown (*Field of Dreams*),



The Green Sky. Image courtesy of Richard Hescox, richardhescox.com.

who portrayed Cobb's lieutenant in the Vietnam scenes, are the only actors who appeared in both *House* and *House II*, while William Katt returned briefly to reprise the role of Roger Cobb in *House IV*.⁶⁸ Steven Williams, playing a cop who responds to a gunshot heard at Roger's house, later took a role in *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (1993).⁶⁹

As stated at the outset, the music for *House* played an important part in setting the tone for the film. Manfredini's pitch-perfect score, with its foreboding strings and playful military-style brass and snare combinations, wrings out every drop of suspense and comedy that the movie has to offer. Synthesiser-based atmospherics on cues like 'Ding-Bat Attack' seem to increase the scale of the inky black void into which our hero descends. Two pop numbers from the 1960s, 'You're No Good' and 'Dedicated to the One I Love' augment the soundtrack and facilitate some montage scenes. By eschewing the fashions of mid-1980s pop in favour of these more retro cuts, the music infuses the film with a soulful timelessness. Manfredini went on to score the entire *House* series. His music for *House II: The Second Story* is equally

68 - Brown appeared in *House II: The Second Story* as the father of the main character, Jesse, played by Arye Gross, while Carroll played a deputy.
69 - His cop partner, actor Alan Autry, later became mayor of Fresno, California.

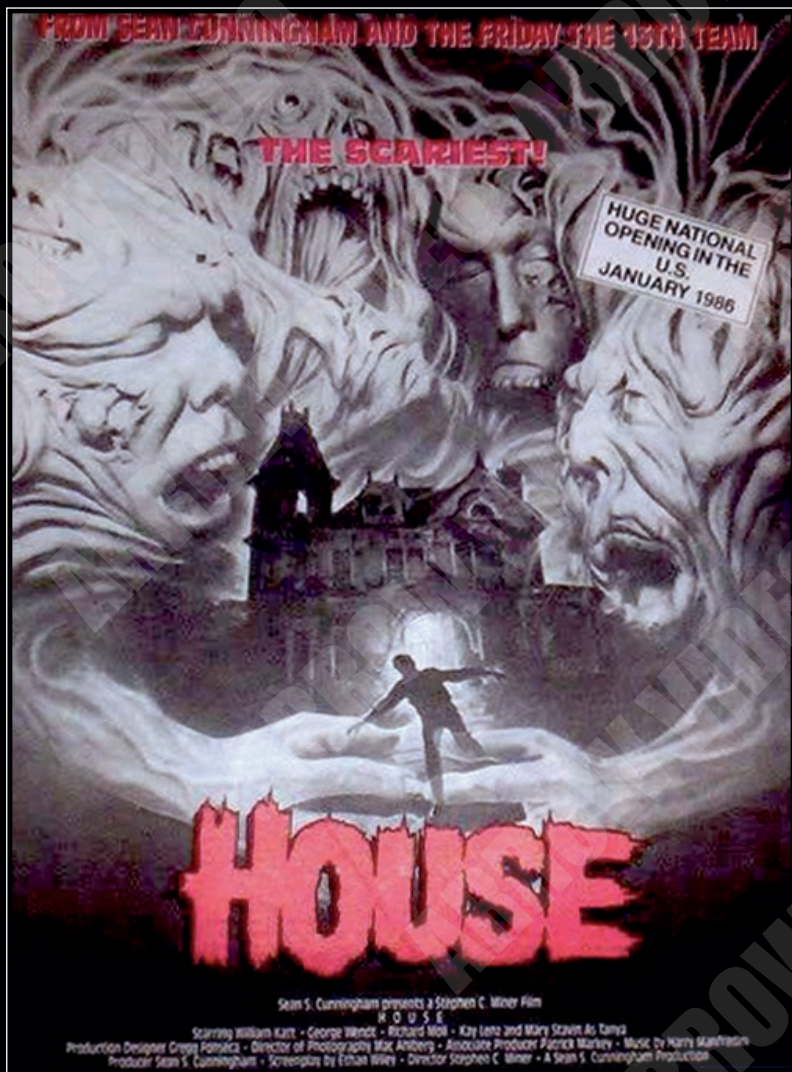


Director Joe Dante being speared by a marlin. Image courtesy of Richard Hescox, richardhescox.com.

effective and expands the existing palette by adopting fiddle and acoustic guitar motifs evocative of the film's attachment to the Western genre.⁷⁰

Though *House* was ultimately a commercial success, the film required some adjustments before reaching its final form. In the first draft of the screenplay dated April 22, 1984, Jimmy has drowned rather than gone missing, and in the spirit of Dekker's original concept, Roger (who is called Roger Gladstone), is dealing with his guilt after a mercy killing of his friend, Ben, during the war. A later version, based around the disappearance of his son, had Roger battling a monster in the swimming pool in order to save Jimmy. "We went to the Hollywood YMCA and tried to shoot it and it just didn't work," says Miner. "Plus the kid was terrified of being in this dark water." By connecting Jimmy's disappearance more closely to Roger's failure to save his friend in Vietnam, the film eventually found a satisfying climax. "Finally, we went to an NRG (National Research Group) screening, and it worked from the first shot," says Miner. "It just worked and it was greatly rewarding. It went from disaster to hit."⁷¹ The success of *House* was

70 - The original motion picture soundtracks for *House/House II: The Second Story* were released together on compact disc in 1987 by Varese Sarabande, catalogue no. VCD 47295. The soundtrack was also released on vinyl through the same label, catalogue no. STV 81324.
71 - *House*, commentary with Ethan Wiley, William Katt, Sean S. Cunningham and Steve Miner.





transformative for writer Ethan Wiley, too: “I got lucky early on in my career, this big success right out of the gate,” he says. “These movies are special to me in that they are original works and they got out there.”⁷²

In the remainder of this section, you’ll find the original press materials for *House* containing production notes and actor biographies from the period. Next, we’ll be taking a look at 1987’s *House II: The Second Story*. So long, sucker!

⁷² - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED
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ROGER COBB AND HIS FRIENDS.

DON'T COME ALONE!



A SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM Production

HOUSE

HORROR HAS FOUND A NEW HOME.

HOUSE

PRESS MATERIALS

House is a New World Pictures release starring William Katt, George Wendt, Kay Lenz, Richard Moll and Mary Stavin. Stephen Miner directs from an Ethan Wiley screenplay. Sean S. Cunningham is the producer.

SYNOPSIS

Horror novelist Roger Cobb is a man on the edge, reeling from his recent divorce, haunted by the mysterious disappearance of his young son, and struggling with his new book about his traumatic experiences in Vietnam. But when he moves into the strange house left to him by his late aunt, Roger's precarious sanity comes under siege by nightmares of his dead war friend, visits from a nosy neighbour and an onslaught of hideous creatures from another dimension.

SYNOPSIS 2

Roger Cobb, an author of horror novels, is a troubled man. He has recently separated from his wife; their only son has disappeared without a trace; and his favourite aunt has just passed away, an apparent suicide by hanging. On top of everything else, it's been more than a year since the release of his latest book and he's being pressured by his publisher to write another.

To the chagrin of his fans and publisher, Cobb plans a novel based on his experiences in Vietnam instead of another horror story. It's not so much that he's interested in the subject, it's more a way of purging himself of the horrors he experienced while there.

After his aunt's funeral, instead of selling his deceased aunt's house as recommended by the firm handling the estate, Cobb decides to live there for a while to try to write. Having spent a great deal of time in the house as a child, there are a lot of memories still there for him. His only son disappeared one day while at the House – gone without a trace from right under his father's watchful eye. It is the grief from which Cobb suffers that has driven a wedge between him and his wife.

After moving in to the house, Cobb begins to have powerful graphic nightmares. Thoughts about his army buddy, Big Ben, who died in Vietnam, come spilling out. In addition, strange

phenomena spring forth from the House itself, haunting him in his waking hours as well. He tries communicating his fears to his nosy next door neighbor, Harold, but Harold thinks he's crazy.

One night while investigating a noise coming from his late aunt's bedroom, Cobb is attacked by "something" in the shape of a horrible beast. More strange things happen: garden tools embed themselves in the door near his head; his wife turns up on the doorstep one day, and as he says hello, she transforms into a hideous witch, which he shoots, only to see it change again into his wife.

After more confrontations, Cobb finds what appears to be an entry into a sinister otherworld – through the mirror in the bathroom medicine cabinet. While looking into the void, he is pulled into the darkness by an unseen creature. In the darkness, however, he fortuitously locates his lost son, Jimmy.

Cobb manages to escape with Jimmy but, as they are leaving the House, they are confronted by the "living", partially decomposed corpse of Big Ben. Because Cobb had failed to kill him when he was seriously wounded in Vietnam, and had instead allowed him to be taken prisoner and be tortured before dying, Ben reveals that he has been out to destroy Cobb.

Cobb confronts Ben, aware that his anger over the kidnapping of his son has overwhelmed his fears. Unable to instill fear in Cobb any longer, Ben is defeated. Cobb destroys him and escapes with his son. He glances back at the House, triumphantly; he has beaten it, and regained control of his life.

SYNOPSIS 3

Roger Cobb is a thirty-five-year-old Vietnam vet whose career as a horror novelist has taken a turn for the worse. While visiting his aunt at the house a year earlier Roger's only son Jimmy mysteriously disappeared. In the past year, Roger's obsessive search to find his son has destroyed his marriage and derailed his blossoming writing career.

Since the presumed kidnapping of his son, Roger has felt compelled to stop writing horror stories and work on an autobiographical account of his experience in Vietnam instead. The sudden death of his aunt brings Roger back to the house where he decides to stay and try to write his book. At the house, Roger encounters a series of horrific monsters and ghosts that seem to relate to Roger's past with references to his son, ex-wife and Vietnam. The supernatural events lead Roger to believe that his missing son may somehow be hidden in the house. With the aid of his ridiculous neighbor Harold Gorton, Roger embarks on a dangerous quest of finding his son by battling the evil forces of the house. In one terrifying scene Roger

actually relives his experiences in the war and we learn that Roger's close friend, Big Ben, was captured by the Viet Cong as Roger fought desperately to save him. Roger's guilt and anxiety over this traumatic event have plagued him for years. At the end of his harrowing journey into his past, Roger finds Jimmy and starts to leave the house but one thing stands in the way to freedom, rotting and skeletonlike Ben has returned from the grave armed with a M60 machine gun. Big Ben has been holding his son hostage patiently waiting to lure Roger into his own mad, fiendish hell. Now it's time for him to play his trump card and personally exchange his own slow painful death at the hands of the enemy in Vietnam. A final battle between them ensues as Roger fights for his child's life as well as his own.

The battle reaches its climax when Ben grabs Jimmy and holds a knife to his throat demanding that Roger kill himself in order to spare the life of his child. But Roger has discovered the secret of the house's power. He steps towards Big Ben with a renewed confidence. The house's power is only achieved by feeding off his own fear and guilt. With the strength of this discovery, Big Ben and the house are powerless to stop Roger. Roger grabs his son from the helpless zombie, pulls a grenade off his ammo belt and stuffs it into Big Ben's ribcage. Roger leaves the house with Jimmy in his arms, triumphant as the grenade explodes blowing Big Ben into a million pieces and starting a fire that will burn the house to the ground.

BEHIND THE SCENES

An ominous Victorian house, a troubled writer, a grisly suicide and supernatural occurrences, set the stage for *House*, a terrifying tale of the macabre, released by New World Pictures.

Following his aunt's suicide, best-selling horror novelist Roger Cobb (William Katt) returns to the old Victorian house in which he grew up – the same house where his aunt hanged herself – in an attempt to purge himself of the psychological demons that plague him. The disappearance of his son, the collapse of his marriage and the persistent pressure from his publisher to produce another horror novel, all contribute to his deteriorating mental state. However, once settled in the house, Cobb's shaky grip on reality is shattered when he finds himself being terrorized by bizarre and dangerous supernatural beings. Roger Cobb's nightmare has just begun.

"Without a doubt this was one of the most exhausting roles I've ever had," says Katt. "Not only did the part require a tremendous amount of concentration and mental energy, it was also physically demanding." During the course of the story, Katt's character finds himself being pursued by a hideous witch who knocks him unconscious with a blow to the head from a shotgun butt, scrambling panic-stricken through the House fending off the vengeful ghost of his former 6'8" army buddy Big Ben (Richard Moll), and furiously eluding the claws of the war demon, a huge eighteen-foot mechanical monster.

Producer Sean Cunningham was very selective when he cast William Katt in the role of Roger Cobb. "In this picture, if you don't like the character of Cobb you haven't got a movie," states Cunningham. "It was essential to have an actor who could blend humor with pathos; and the part also required the actor to be in top physical condition. Bill was a natural for the role."

Katt began these frightful adventures on April 22, 1985 when *House* began production. The first two weeks of filming took place on location in Monrovia, California, at the home of Los Angeles firemen Brian and John Wade. The Victorian style house of these two brothers became "the House". For the final six weeks of filming, the company shifted to Hollywood's Ren-Mar Studios, once the home of Desilu Studios.

Production designer Gregg Fonseca, who was responsible for transforming the Wades' peaceful home into a place of nightmares, scouted an area in Monrovia, in which he knew existed Victorian Houses. A photographer took pictures of several likely possibilities, then collaborated with Fonseca to pinpoint the exact structure for the film.

Fonseca and his crew of five modified the Wade Victorian within four weeks, vigorously repainting the entire house, fencing the front with wrought iron and adding Victorian gingerbread and spires. The back of the edifice was changed from clapboard to brick, and landscapers were hired to plant flowers and bring the depleted front lawn back to life. The finishing touch was the construction of a sidewalk in front of the house.

The talents of Fonseca, his design and construction crew, were then utilized in recreating the interior of the Victorian house at Ren-Mar, for sound stage filming. A replica of the two-storey interior, which included a full living room, den, staircase and three upstairs bedrooms was built on a stage.

On an adjacent sound stage, Katt crawled through the dense foliage of a Vietnamese Jungle which Fonseca fabricated in three days' time for the wartime flash-back sequences. Fonseca proudly remarked that the *House* sets were some of the best work he had ever done.

Perhaps the most striking aspects of the motion picture are the demons and monsters created by special effects wizard James Cummins. *House* features a total of seven different monsters, including the remains of Roger Cobb's old army buddy, Big Ben, a witch, three demonic kids, a flying 'void creature', a marlin which comes to life while mounted on a wall, and a horrendous war demon, which menaces the unsuspecting Cobb.

The creatures are the work of 17 special effects artists who laboured 10 hours a day, six days a week over a three-and-a-half-month period to construct the creatures. Cummins notes that the goal of the work is to produce something more than hideously gory beasts.

"While we hope the creatures are frightening, we want to cut down on gore and shoot for something more surrealistic," says Cummins. "The overall feel of the motion picture is that the character of Roger Cobb is experiencing things in a surreal, dreamlike way, so we felt that in constructing the beasts we wanted to achieve a fantastic, almost cartoonish quality."

Perhaps the most awesome of the creations is the war demon, a fully mechanical creation controlled by 15 people. Construction of the creature took in excess of three months, and the result is a monster 18-foot long with massive eight-foot long arms.

Producer Sean Cunningham and Director Steve Miner located Cummins after viewing the film *Strange Invaders*, which Cummins had done the special effects for. "The film contained scenes of alien transformation that were really terrific," says Cunningham. "Not only does James have an excellent reputation, but he is able to produce a quality product within the required timetable and budget," continues Miner.

"The most significant aspect in the creation of a successful motion picture is to manage money correctly," Cunningham states. "A modest budget doesn't have to be restrictive if you know what you're doing," he says. "I personally believe that the filmmaker has a responsibility to the audience to produce a first-class product despite budget restrictions. I feel we have achieved that with *House* and we were working within the confines of a \$4 million budget."

The man responsible for the creation of these hellish creatures is screenwriter Ethan Wiley who wanted to make an exciting horror film with elaborate special effects that also had psychological depth. "I wanted to tell a concise story that would make the horror and characters blend," says Wiley, who views *House* as the story of a man whose life is "on the skids, and when he comes to the House, it feeds off his anxiety and fears and compounds them."

"*House* is not a slasher film and Steve and I worked to make a film that could reach a broad-based audience, and could be scary and fun, rather than scary and gruesome," says Cunningham. "It's kind of like when you're a child and walking home at night and someone jumps out of the bushes and says 'boo!' First you're scared and then you laugh. That's different from the guy jumping out of the bushes saying 'boo!' and then hitting you over the head with a tire iron. That's painful and not much fun. It's very important to us that people have fun with this film."

ABOUT THE CAST

BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM KATT

Handsome, blond-haired actor William Katt, well-known to audiences for his portrayal of a superman-like hero in the TV series *The Greatest American Hero*, enters a different realm with his role of Roger Cobb, an author of horror novels who finds himself caught up in a living, breathing nightmare in New World Pictures' new horror film *House*.

Born and raised in Southern California, Katt grew up in a showbusiness household – his mother is actress Barbara Hale, who played Della Street on the long-running TV series *Perry Mason* and his father, Bill Williams, was a cowboy star before switching his career to real estate.

Katt's interest in acting began when he was studying music at Orange Coast College in Newport Beach, California. It was there that he discovered theater. "I was seduced into acting over a long period of time," says Katt. "It was not a conscious choice at first."

Katt landed his first role in the West Coast production of Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* while simultaneously studying classical guitar, music theory and composition.

After winning a scholarship for the renowned Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, he embarked on a national tour as Rolf in *The Sound of Music*, followed by a succession of stage roles including the turn-of-the-century farce *Too Much Johnson* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *The Shadow Box*.

Katt doesn't subscribe to any one theory or method of acting. He merely listens for what he calls "the ring of truth." "I just say my lines, and if I believe them, then they're right," says Katt.

"All of the characters I play are part of me. Acting is like looking at a giant bookshelf and taking down exactly what you need."

Katt made his motion picture debut in the highly successful 1976 classic thriller *Carrie* starring Sissy Spacek and directed by Brian De Palma. His subsequent feature film credits include starring roles in the controversial *First Love*; the surfing saga *Big Wednesday*; and the prequel to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, in which he was chosen to play a young Robert Redford.

In television, Katt spent the next two years starring in the hit series *The Greatest American Hero*. Recently, he starred opposite Ben Vereen in the cable TV adaptation of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *Pippin*, directed by Bob Fosse. He also appeared in John Frankenheimer's cable TV production of *The Rainmaker* starring Tommy Lee Jones and Tuesday Weld. In addition, Katt played the pirate king in a touring production of *The Pirates of Penzance* and had a starring role in the "Thumbelina" segment of Shelley Duvall's *Faerie Tale Theatre*.

The 1980s have been a period of discovery for Katt. Professionally he discovered new talents and disciplines through the diversity of the numerous roles he has played. But the most dramatic change in the 33-year-old actor's life was getting married.

"My priorities have changed since I've been married," says Katt. "I've gone from being idealistic to being realistic. My family is first, it's the strongest influence in my life. We make all decisions together. Debbie is my own worst critic. The only thing certain about success in this business is that it won't last. Your family will always be there."

Katt and his wife Debbie live in Encino, California with their two children.

BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE WENDT

Veteran actor George Wendt, who plays the role of Harold, Roger Cobb's nosy neighbour in New World Pictures' new horror film *House*, is, in addition to being an accomplished comedy actor and writer, a keen student of current events, who reads a minimum of four papers daily. "Newspapers are in my blood," he says. "My grandfather was a superstar of yellow journalism; the equipment he used to take the famous hidden-camera photograph of the execution of Ruth Snyder is in the Smithsonian."

A native of Chicago, Illinois, Wendt earned a degree in economics from Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri. However, unsure of what he wanted to do with his life and "not motivated to do anything but have fun," Wendt spent the ensuing two years travelling throughout Europe and Africa. "I had the typical youth wanderlust," he says.

At the end of the two years Wendt decided he'd had enough and he returned to the United States. The next step was to find an occupation – so he asked himself the question "What don't I hate?" Comedy was the answer.

After attending performances of Chicago's famed improvisational company, Second City, and encouraged by his friends who were constantly amused by his comedic antics, Wendt enrolled in a Second City workshop. A year later, in 1974, he was hired by the company and became "a

professional satirist.” For the next six years, he honed his theatrical skills both as an actor and as a comedy writer with Second City, where he met his wife, fellow comic Bernadette Birkett.

Nothing But Comedy, an NBC-TV pilot featuring Second City players, brought Wendt to the attention of NBC executives. With their interest and the strong encouragement of his wife, who felt they could both do better in Los Angeles, the couple packed up their two sons and moved west.

Wendt recalls that the first six months in Hollywood were “traumatic.” The transition from Second City to sitcoms was a difficult one. “I went kind of crazy,” he says. But eventually things began to happen.

Since then Wendt has guest-starred in such TV-series as *Alice*, *Soap*, *Taxi*, *Hart to Hart*, *American Dream*, *St. Elsewhere*, *M*A*S*H* and recently co-starred in the CBS-TV series *Making the Grade*.

Wendt’s feature film credits include *My Bodyguard*, *Jekyll & Hyde... Together Again*, *Airplane II*, *Dreamscape*, *The Ratings Game*, *Fletch*, *No Small Affair*, *Thief of Hearts*, *Young Lust* and *Somewhere in Time*.

In addition to the above, it is the role of Norm in NBC-TV’s enormously popular TV series *Cheers*, which has propelled Wendt to stardom and earned him critical acclaim.

Wendt and his wife Bernadette reside in Los Angeles with their three children.

BIOGRAPHY OF KAY LENZ

Kay Lenz, who portrays Sandy, Roger Cobb’s lovely ex-wife, in New World Pictures’ new horror film *House*, has been entertaining audiences all her life. Having made her successful television debut at the tender age of two months, Kay continued to act, and while most girls her age were busy playing hopscotch and jumping rope, Kay was displaying her talents in another arena as well – that of the Rodeo.

Born in Los Angeles, Kay is the only child of producer/commentator Ted Lenz and model/radio engineer Kay Miller Lenz. While her father was producing the Al Jarvis *Hollywood on Television* show, it was decided that guest Dottie O’Brien, a Capitol recording artist, should hold a real baby while singing a lullaby. At eight weeks old, Kay’s career was launched in the arms of O’Brien, who struggled to keep her singing voice above the wails of the infant. The hilarious first time performance brought Kay her first fan mail.

From that moment on, Kay literally grew up in front of the TV cameras, appearing in many of the television commercials produced by her father, and as a guest performer on nearly every childrens’ and teenage show in Hollywood.

At the age of 11, she acted and sang in *My Genie and Me*, a little theater musical that ran for 165 showings. Two years later, she starred with Henry Darrow and Monte Markham in the Pasadena Playhouse production of *Dark of the Moon*.

Throughout her childhood, Kay’s passion for acting was split between her love of the rodeo. When she wasn’t in school or acting, Kay could invariably be found on the local rodeo circuit. However, at the age of 17, she found herself having to choose between a career in the rodeo or a career as an actress – acting won out.

Kay went on to appear in the series *The Monroes*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Ironside*, and *The Tammy Grimes Show*, before graduating from Grant High School in Van Nuys, California.

Kay is probably best known for her sensitive portrayal of a young hippie in the title role of the hit film *Breezy*, in which she starred opposite William Holden. Directed by Clint Eastwood, the role propelled her into the limelight and led to a succession of other film roles including *White Line Fever*, *The Great Scout and Cathouse Thursday*, *The Passage*, *Mean Dog Blues*, *Prisoners of the Lost Universe*, *Trial by Terror*, *American Graffiti*, and *Fast Walking*.

In television, Kay starred in the Hallmark Hall of Fame production of *Lisa Bright and Dark*, which earned her widespread critical acclaim; and in the movies of the week *Playmates* and *Weekend Nun*, in addition to *Summer Without Boys*, *Heart in Hiding*, *Journey from Darkness*, *The Initiation of Sarah*, *The Seeding of Sarah Burns*, *Father Brown*, *Detective*, and *Rich Man, Poor Man*. She has also had featured roles in the episodic TV shows *Finder of Lost Loves*, *Matt Houston* and *Cagney and Lacey*.

BIOGRAPHY OF RICHARD MOLL

At 6’8” and 240lbs, Richard Moll’s imposing stature made him a natural for the role of Big Ben, the vengeful apparition hellbent on destroying Roger Cobb in New World Pictures’ new horror film *House*.

Born in Pasadena, California, Moll’s childhood was spent in several different states including Ohio and Wyoming, before the family finally settled in Salt Lake City, Utah. Moll was a studious child, a loner who entertained himself by drawing cartoons. Much to the chagrin of the school athletic coaches, Moll always preferred academics to sports. Though he enjoyed playing the

part of the class clown, Moll was an excellent student and went on to earn a degree in history from the University of California at Berkeley.

Following a brief career as a probation officer and retail store buyer in San Francisco, Moll began studying acting at the age of 23. It was to become his passion.

In 1968, he moved to Hollywood and continued to hone his acting skills, supporting himself with odd jobs and an occasional stint at Harrah's Lake Tahoe as a slot machine key man. In 1970 he auditioned for and won an acting grant at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre and performed in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Richard II*.

Returning to Los Angeles, Moll showcased his talent at numerous local theaters. In 1975 he joined Will Geer's Theatrum Botanicum in Topanga Canyon and continued to perform Shakespeare over the next five years. During that time, he also toured with the American Living History Theater, portraying Abraham Lincoln in productions at schools in the Los Angeles area.

In 1978, he landed a role on ABC-TV's Saturday morning live-action children's show *Bigfoot and Wildboy*. Over the next five years Moll worked steadily in episodic television and feature films, appearing in *The Rockford Files*, *How the West Was Won*, *Fantasy Island*, *Happy Days*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *Nine to Five*, *Remington Steele*, *Alice*, *The Fall Guy*, and had a recurring role in *The Dukes of Hazzard*, among others. Moll is currently starring in the NBC-TV comedy series *Night Court*, in which he portrays the gentle bailiff Bull Shannon, a role which has brought him widespread recognition.

Moll's feature film credits include *Evilspeak*, *Caveman*, *Hard Country*, *Liar's Moon*, *The Sword and the Sorcerer*, *Ragewar*, *The Dungeon Master*, and *Metalstorm*, in which he portrayed the leader of the Cyclopeans, a race of one-eyed mutants.

"Because of my size, I'm often cast as the heavy," Moll states. "But, I'm not knocking the bad-guy roles. I delight in the characterization, and the villains are the juiciest characters around. But, I'm not like that in real life... honest."

Moll resides in Los Angeles and in his spare time collects antiques (he currently drives a '63 Cadillac Coupe de Ville once owned by Samuel Goldwyn's wife, Frances), lifts weight and jogs.

BIOGRAPHY OF MARY STAVIN

Mary Stavin portrays Tanya, Roger Cobb's stunning blonde neighbor in New World Pictures' new horror film *House*.

Born in Sweden and raised in London, England, Mary is a former Miss World, who, during her reign, raised an unprecedented \$5 million for charity.

On British television, Mary has appeared on such shows as *Royal Command Performance with Bob Hope*, *Star Games*, *Celebrity Squares*, *The Russell Harty Show*, *Children's Charity Telethon*, *Jim'll Fix It*, *Top of the Pops* and *Game for a Laugh*.

In film, Mary has appeared in the popular James Bond feature *Octopussy* and *Merlin and the Sword*. Her stage credits include *Make and Break* and the London production of *Who Killed William Hickey?*

A health and fitness buff, Mary recorded her own albums for Lifestyle Records entitled *Keep Fit*, and has recorded songs for the British-based Ariola Records. In addition, she has been featured in videos by Adam Ant and Julio Iglesias.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

STEVE MINER

STEPHEN MINER, director of New World Pictures' *House*, is more than qualified when it comes to the genre of horror films, having served as director of *Friday the 13th, Part II* and *Friday the 13th, Part III*.

Born and raised in Westport, Connecticut, Miner's interest in film began as a young boy, when his mother, a film librarian, would bring films home for the family's evening entertainment. Though no-one had any idea at the time, the passion of filmmaking was beginning to develop.

Miner began his career in the motion picture industry as a production assistant on an industrial film about brake linings. His next job was laying in the sound effects for *Wide World of Sports Car Racing Events* shows. He then went on to make educational films for the Time-Life Corporation.

It was while working on these films that a theatrical film crew moved into Westport to make *The Last House on the Left*. Miner wasted no time in convincing the producers and director to hire him as a production assistant. Due to his hunger to learn moviemaking and his eagerness to participate in all aspects of the film, Miner volunteered for every job possible. His responsibilities were quickly broadened and his knowledge was rapidly growing.

After the film was completed and in release, Stephen wanted to further enhance his editing skills. He hired himself out as an editor on New York art films, which led to a job editing film for the National Hockey League. By this time, he had honed quite a talent for the cutting room.

Miner next formed his own production company, making industrial films. This was not enough to harness his creative energy and feeling the need to grow and use his talent to the fullest, he moved to the movie capital of the world, Los Angeles. It was shortly after he arrived that he co-produced and edited a film called *Here Come the Tigers*. This project paved the way for *Friday the 13th, Part II* which he produced and directed, and which has gone on to become one of the most successful independent films ever made. Following *Part II*'s enormous box office figures, Miner went on to produce and direct its 3-D sequel, *Friday the 13th, Part III*.

Miner lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM

SEAN S. CUNNINGHAM, who produced New World Pictures' new horror film *House*, scored big early in his career with *Friday the 13th*, which was produced for a modest \$500,000 and has grossed well over \$70 million to date.

Cunningham graduated from Stanford University with a Master's Degree in drama and film and began his career managing theater companies around the country, including productions at New York's Lincoln Center, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and at the Mineola Theatre on Long Island. His first film was a semi-documentary entitled *Together*, followed in 1971 by the horror film *The Last House on the Left*.

Making a subsequent transition to comedy in 1977, Cunningham produced and directed *Here Come the Tigers*, followed by *Manny's Orphans*. His landmark *Friday the 13th* came in 1980, firmly establishing Cunningham in film annals. *A Stranger is Watching* followed, garnering critical acclaim and financial success. Next, Cunningham scored again with the hit film *Spring Break*, a youth-orientated comedy which brought back memories of college antics to people of all ages. Most recently, Cunningham produced *The New Kids* for Columbia Pictures.

ETHAN WILEY

ETHAN WILEY makes his screenwriting debut with New World Pictures' *House*.

Born and raised in the northern California community of Marin County, Wiley came to Los Angeles to study film at UCLA.

Wiley began his career as a special effects artist working on George Lucas' highly successful *Return of the Jedi* followed by Steven Spielberg's *Gremlins*.

Making the unusual transition from special effects to screenwriting, Wiley met Director Stephen Miner through a mutual friend, also a writer: "I originally gave Stephen the script of *House* simply to get some feedback. I was aware of his success with the *Friday the 13th* films and I knew he really understood the genre. Things happened fairly quickly after that. Stephen loved the script and wanted to do it, he introduced me to Producer Sean Cunningham and the deal was set; I guess you could say the rest is history."

HOUSE II

THE SECOND STORY



With the success of *House* at the US box office, producer Sean S. Cunningham and the team at New World Pictures recognised that there was a market for a follow-up. *House* scribe Ethan Wiley recalls receiving a phone call from Cunningham offering him the opportunity to write and direct a sequel. However, there were two conditions; to have the film ready for release in August 1987, Wiley had to write the script in two weeks, and they wouldn't be able to bring back any of the actors from the first movie because they'd be too expensive second time around. As an ambitious young filmmaker, Wiley didn't let the difficult circumstances dissuade him, and took on the project's highly compressed schedule.¹

1 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



Given that the sequel could not be a continuation of Roger Cobb's story, Wiley decided that the best way to proceed was to view the project as the second instalment in a horror anthology of sorts. Typically, titles that fall into the subgenre of the anthology (or omnibus) film consist of a number of short films helmed by different directors which are held together by a consistent theme or framing concept. *House II* would be a full-length feature with a single director; however, by returning to the idea of the multidimensional house, the sequel could, Wiley felt, support a stand-alone story featuring new locations and characters. "That may not have been a good idea," he confesses, "but it was the best idea I could come up with under those constraints."²

Although *Fangoria* described the concept as a "bold new approach to cinematic architecture"³, there were plenty of precedents to support this decision. In film, the horror anthology dates back to the silent movies of the 1920s⁴ and takes in film and television productions like *Dead of Night* (1945), *Night Gallery* (1969) and *Tales from the Crypt* (1972). The ongoing influence of EC Comics and the work of major horror figures like Stephen King helped ensure that the 1980s were no less fertile, with films like *Creepshow* (1982), *Twilight Zone: The*

2 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

3 - Rabkin, W. (1987). Moving into House II. *Fangoria*, (#64), pp.42-45.

4 - See, for example, *Waxworks* (1924).



Movie (1983) – a source of inspiration for the first *House* film – and *Cat's Eye* (1985) making an impact on audiences in the first half of the decade. Although the *House* films can only be located broadly within this subgenre, it was in the spirit of this tradition that the masterful pun in the film's title, *House II: The Second Story*, was conceived. The horror anthology remains strong to this day, having continued with productions like *Tales from the Darkside: The Movie* (1990), *Body Bags* (1993), *Masters of Horror* (2005-2007), *Trick 'r Treat* (2007), *The ABCs of Death* and *V/H/S* (both 2012).⁵

Another notable departure from the first film is the tone of *House II*, which was designed to appeal to a family audience. Though the film falls into the 'undead Western' category⁶, it can perhaps be understood more readily as a precursor to the *Goosebumps* style of entertainment that became popular in the wake of R. L. Stine's series of children's books during the 1990s. *House II* expands upon the fantastical elements of the original *House* film, particularly in terms of adventures into other worlds, but incorporates creature effects that are cute rather than grotesque: "I know that some people don't like the movie because it's too soft," Wiley concedes. "It was PG-13, not an R-rated movie like the first one, so I think people had expectations for something grittier."⁷

Wiley's screenplay was set in an old mansion inherited by Jesse McLaughlin, the great-great-grandson of a famous outlaw from the Old West. Jesse has a powerful connection to the house; not only were his parents mysteriously murdered there, but his great-great grandfather, his namesake, is buried somewhere in the grounds. While going through old papers, Jesse finds a picture of his great-great grandfather holding a crystal skull. In the background is Slim Reeser, a former partner turned bitter enemy, who also wanted the skull for its magical powers.

5 - <http://consequenceofsound.net/2015/04/a-brief-history-of-the-modern-horror-movie-anthology>

6 - See: Miller, C. and Van Riper, A. (2012). *Undead in the West*. 1st ed. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc. and Miller, C. and Van Riper, A. (2013). *Undead in the West II*. 1st ed. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

7 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



Going on the assumption that the Aztec antique remains buried with 'Gramps', Jesse's best friend, Charlie, persuades him to exhume the coffin. To their surprise, they discover that the magic of the skull has kept 170-year-old Gramps alive (even though it hasn't rejuvenated him to full health). Once the zombified 'Gramps' realises that Jesse is family, the group bonds, and together they return the crystal skull to its rightful place. Jesse and Charlie learn that the house is a Mayan temple and the skull unlocks portals to other dimensions in time. With its life-giving, time-bending powers, the skull is desired by all manner of ancient beings, and so Jesse and Charlie must stop anyone wishing to obtain it for nefarious purposes.

When the skull is stolen by a Stone Age barbarian, Jesse and Charlie embark on an adventure to recover it from a prehistoric world, returning with the skull, a baby pterodactyl, and a caterpillar dog (the 'Caterpuppy'). Unfortunately, they just can't seem to keep hold of that damn MacGuffin and soon require the help of Bill, an eccentric electrician and adventurer who has (perhaps more than) fortuitously arrived to help fix whatever problems Jesse is having at the house. Together, the three end up in a swashbuckling sword fight, thwart a virgin sacrifice, and ultimately return with the skull. With Gramps now weak and fading fast, his old nemesis Slim Reeser appears, attacks his former friend and steals the prize. Jesse learns that it was Slim that killed his parents when he was a baby and pursues him into the Old West to take revenge and recover the skull. When the gunfight ends, Gramps says goodbye to Jesse and embraces his great-great grandson. Using the power of the skull, Jesse and his pals are able to return to the Old West to bury Gramps, leaving behind the troublesome Aztec artefact once and for all.

FRIGHTENING STRIKES TWICE.

Production on *House II: The Second Story* began in the summer of 1986 with a budget of around \$2 million, based on a shooting schedule of 44 days. Written and directed by Ethan Wiley, the film was produced by Sean S. Cunningham for New World Pictures. Cinematographer Mac Ahlberg returned, as did production designer Gregg Fonseca, stunt coordinator Kane Hodder, and composer Harry Manfredini. Chris Walas designed special effects and makeup for *House II*, while James ('Jim') Isaac, who had worked with Walas on *Gremlins* (1984) and *Enemy Mine* (1985), acted as special effects coordinator to execute the designs.⁸ Stop motion work was handled by Phil Tippett and Mark Sullivan, with Sullivan also contributing matte paintings, as he had for *House*.⁹

Melissa Skoff was responsible for casting both *House* films. The role of Jesse went to Arye Gross, who had recently worked with Steve Miner on *Soul Man* (1986), the film that would



eclipse *House* as New World's biggest box office draw just a few months later. Jesse's best friend, Charlie, was played by Jonathan Stark (*Fright Night*), a comedian and Groundlings alumnus who later wrote for the television series *Ellen* (which Gross also acted in), and co-created the long running sitcom *According to Jim* (2001-2009). Gramps was portrayed by Royal Dano, the respected character actor who had appeared in John Huston's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951) and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) among a myriad of other screen credits. The part of electrician and adventurer Bill Towner went to John Ratzenberger, who gave a memorable performance as the swashbuckling handyman. It was, however, pure happenstance that another member of the *Cheers* cast should provide



8 - Isaac went on to do special visual effects for Sean Cunningham's *DeepStar Six* (1989) and directed both *House III: The Horror Show* (1989) and *Jason X* (2001).
9 - Ethan Wiley and James Isaac also had a long relationship prior to Isaac's untimely death in 2012. They met when Wiley moved to Woodacre, California in West Marin Country when they were both eight years old. They started doing plays together in grade school and continued performing through high school and into their mid 20s with theatre productions, Super 8 and 16mm short films, and original plays. Wiley introduced Isaac to ILM and later convinced Chris Walas to hire him on *Gremlins*. Wiley and Isaac's final collaboration was when Wiley created several soundtrack cues for Isaac's *Jason X* (2001).



comic relief in the sequel, following George Wendt's turn as nosy neighbor Harold Gorton in the first film. Rounding out the cast were Lar Park Lincoln as Kate, a record company employee, and Jesse's girlfriend¹⁰, and Amy Yasbeck as wannabe pop star Lana, and partner to Charlie. TV's Bill Maher also appears in an early acting role as John, Kate's smug record executive boss. Dean Cleverdon was the actor behind the zombie cowboy makeup of villain Slim Reeser, a name that Wiley chose because it "sounded like a strange version of 'sleazy'".¹¹ Incidentally, it was Chris Walas who decided that Reeser should have long, red, Willy Nelson-style hair.¹² A player and lover of music, Wiley named principal characters Jesse McLaughlin, Charlie Coryell and Bill Towner after jazz guitarists John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell and Ralph Towner respectively.¹³

10 - In a further connection to the *Friday the 13th* series, Lincoln also appeared in *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood* (1988).
 11 - Interview with Ethan Wiley, June 27, 2016.
 12 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.
 13 - Interview with Ethan Wiley, June 27, 2016.







House II: The Second Story was released on August 28, 1987, grossing \$7.8 million at the US box office.¹⁴ Though it did not achieve the commercial or critical success of *House*, the film turned a respectable profit, a fact which would ultimately lead to two further sequels bearing the name. Relations with New World executives like Jeff Schechtman, who was in charge of production during this period, were highly productive, and thus there was no interference with the making of the film. “I was given enough rope to hang myself,” jokes Wiley, although given that he was just 25 years old when he made *House II*, the film represents a considerable achievement for the young writer/director.¹⁵ The majority of the negativity towards the film cited how far the tone of *House II* had diverged from the R-rated horror-comedy blend of the original, played, as the *Washington Post* put it, “strictly for laughs”.¹⁶ Likewise, Muir’s (2007: 33-34) critique of the sequel found that its “nonsensical” interpretation of the rules of so-called “rubber reality” films resulted in a situation where “terror gives way to whimsy and horror is replaced by fantasy”.

In my view, although the first two films establish the trope that the main character must try to hide the insanity of the house from others, there is little to counterbalance *House II*’s farcical tone, and as such, it comes off as a markedly different type of film than the first. Taking *House II* on its own merits, it’s a likeable caper, even if it felt like a missed opportunity that the story was not set in the original’s distinctive Victorian dwelling. Wiley rationalises such decisions in the context of his growth as a filmmaker: “I think the first movie is a better movie,” he says, “but when people ask me, I tell them that I learned more about writing than directing on *House II*. There were time constraints, but I was wildly ambitious and more into creating this fantastical world than I was creating a good, solid story to hang it on.”¹⁷

Despite any misgivings, Wiley’s story for *House II* was the only one in the series to receive a comic book adaptation. Marvel Comics (which had been sold to New World Pictures in 1986) published a book in October 1987 which is readily available to this day from collectors and auction websites. In Italy, *House II* became part of the *La Casa* series, a catch-all franchise containing several otherwise unrelated horror films. *House II: The Second Story* was renamed *La Casa 6*, while *House III: The Horror Show*, which suffered its own identity crisis in the United States, was released as *La Casa 7*.¹⁸ To add further confusion to the matter, despite the numbering, both films were originally released prior to *La Casa 5* (1990’s *Beyond Darkness*).¹⁹

14 - <http://www.boxoffice Mojo.com/movies/?id=house2.htm>. The film had been released a few months earlier in the UK, on May 15, 1987.

15 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

16 - http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/houseiithesecondstorypg13harrington_a0aa64.htm

17 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

18 - The *La Casa* series included *La Casa 1* (a.k.a. *The Evil Dead*), *La Casa 2* (a.k.a. *Evil Dead II*), *La Casa 3* (a.k.a. *Ghosthouse*), *La Casa 4* (a.k.a. *Witchery*), *La Casa 5* (a.k.a. *Beyond Darkness*), *La Casa 6* (a.k.a. *House II: The Second Story*), *La Casa 7* (a.k.a. *The Horror Show*). For a detailed explication of the remaining complexities of this series, see: <http://www.popmatters.com/column/170551-books-of-the-dead-the-followers-and-clones-of-the-evil-dead>.

19 - Retro Rocket Entertainment. (2015). *Video Night! The House Franchise*. [podcast] Available at: <http://retrorocketentertainment.libsyn.com/video-night-the-house-series> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2016].

Such strategies are not uncommon in the distribution and marketing of horror films; similar practices can be observed in the history of the *Zombi* franchise, which is comprised of copious questionable “sequels” to Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Fulci’s *Zombi 2* (1979).

“LOOKS LIKE YOU GOT SOME KIND OF ALTERNATE UNIVERSE IN THERE OR SOMETHING...”

The focal point of *House II: The Second Story* is the visually arresting Stimson House, a mansion in the Richardsonian Romanesque style located on Figueroa Street north of West Adams in Los Angeles. The 12,800-square-foot, 30-room residence was designed by Carroll H. Brown and was completed in the early 1890s as the home of Thomas Douglas Stimson, the lumber and banking tycoon.²⁰ Its striking façade, made from Arizona red sandstone, is just one of the features that have made the building attractive to film and television companies, along with its four-storey octagonal tower, stained glass windows, and Gothic arches.²¹ The *Los Angeles Times* described the so-called ‘Red Castle’ as a “shrine to lumber” because of its eclectic mix of ash, sycamore, birch, mahogany, walnut, gumwood and oak.²² Despite its elite qualities, over the years the house has played host to a variety of occupants including student fraternities.

As with the first *House* film, exterior shooting was done on location and the interiors were built on a stage. In this case, sets were erected at Laird International Studios, now known as Culver Studios. On a nearby stage, Fred Dekker was directing *The Monster Squad*. “It was like college all over again,” he says. “If I had a few spare moments, I’d nip over and watch Arye Gross battling a gun-slinging zombie, then Ethan would follow me to my soundstage and watch us blow up the Wolfman. It was a time I remember with great fondness.”²³ On set, Gregg Fonseca stretched the film’s modest budget to provide a detailed, spacious environment for the actors to work in. With its mix of Inca columns and stone-carved dragons, Fonseca aimed to blend the Gothic style of the house into a more Western theme. In contrast with the Vietnam flashbacks from *House*, the scenes requiring jungle foliage were shot on location at Griffith Park in Los Angeles, with some interior set decoration brought to the location, rather than recreating a jungle on the soundstage.²⁴ Scenes set in the Old West were all filmed during one night at the Paramount Ranch, where there is a recreation of a Wild West town. It was also the first day of shooting, which turned out to be a trial by fire for Wiley. The prop truck broke down and so Wiley’s first hour as a motion picture director was spent dealing with having no props to work with. The final graveside scene was shot the same day, just before losing the light.

20 - <http://www.iamnotastalker.com/2011/10/04/the-stimson-house-from-house-ii>

21 - The house has appeared in films like *After Midnight* (1989) and television shows like *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009) and *Mad Men* (2007-2015).

22 - http://articles.latimes.com/1994-01-02/news/ci-7989_1_stimson-house

23 - Interview with Fred Dekker, April 16, 2001.

24 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

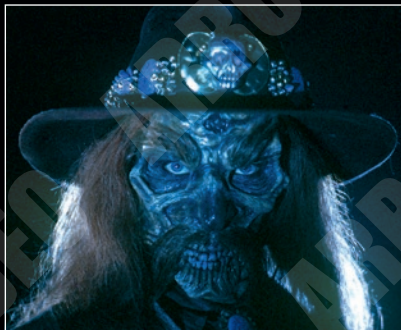


Since the budget was relatively low for a horror-comedy/adventure-fantasy, and because Wiley’s directorial debut was going to include a lot of effects, scenes were storyboarded extensively. “Part of the challenge with *House II* was really planning every single shot,” Wiley states. “There was no other way we could have done it financially, so we maxed out our resources to the utmost with every scene.”²⁵ As a result of this meticulous planning (and perhaps for budgetary reasons), there were no reshoots on the movie. However, Wiley still felt that the storytelling could have been more efficient in the final cut of the film: “Going into this, directing for the first time, one of the things you learn is you can always move things a little faster along. Next time out I was better at pacing scenes.”²⁶

The special effects for *House II* incorporated everything from cutesy creatures, to stop-motion animation, to zombie makeup. Wiley’s experience as an effects artist (with films like *Gremlins* and *Return of the Jedi*) and his history working with actors as a theatre major at UCLA, helped keep the talent, the crew, and the budget on track. Chris Walas’s detailed work on Royal Dano’s ‘Gramps’ makeup took hours to prepare and required time and attention on set to maintain.

25 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

26 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.



Following the pioneering work of artists like Dick Smith, Walas used small reusable pieces of foam latex to afford Dano more flexibility for expression.²⁷ "I think that the Gramps makeup job is one of the best makeup jobs ever in a movie," Wiley enthuses, "It's just phenomenal!"²⁸ Appearing unencumbered beneath rubber and costumes is an under-appreciated skill, and this is one of the reasons why Dean Cleverdon's performance as Slim is also worthy of praise. Emerging through the serving dish at the family dinner table, Slim cuts an imposing figure, and yet because the production was running low on money, they couldn't afford to have Slim open his mouth and speak. As a result, all of Reeser's lines take place off-screen. Nonetheless, Cleverdon manages to imbue Slim with a physical panache that makes the mysterious villain worth watching.²⁹

Though the film benefitted from numerous talented creature creators and visual effects artists, it was Wiley who originally initiated the idea for the 'Caterpuppy', the caterpillar/dog hybrid that Jesse and Charlie bring back to the house. Chris Walas had been teaching the young upstarts in his charge how to draw creatures and this concept was among Wiley's designs. "Chris Walas took my design and made it so adorably cute you just wanted to crush it," says Wiley.³⁰ The fabled crystal skull relied on a system of laser light fibre optic effects created by Gary Platek of Industrial Light and Magic. Since people were handling the skull on screen, it would have been prohibitively expensive to infuse a magical glow via optical effects in each scene. As a result, Platek's solution was installed, which involved a flexible wire that went into an acrylic or urethane skull made to look like crystal. The team could then infuse the mystical cranium with different coloured lights.

27 - <http://www.tested.com/art/movies/458874-how-foam-latex-spawned-horror-makeup-revolution>

28 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

29 - In the original script, it was intended that Slim would kill the more obnoxious characters in the house, but this fell by the wayside due to the shooting schedule.

30 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].



When it came to effects like the barbarian-eating dinosaur, the production called on stop-motion experts Randy Dutra and Phil Tippett. The scene in which Jesse climbs the tree was also accomplished with a stop-motion armature. By employing Mark Sullivan's exquisite matte paintings, the effects team didn't have to make miniature models of the trees or incorporate blue screens and live elements in each of those shots, which saved time during production. When Jesse reaches the nest, it was Jim Isaac who puppeteered the baby bird while Mark Sullivan animated the large bird. All of the monster voices for these creatures were created by Frank Welker, an Emmy Award-winning voice actor. Though they had initially planned to use synthesisers to create layers of unusual animal sounds, the more organic approach was favoured by the creative team, especially when exposed to Welker's broad palette: "He could mimic just about anything you wanted," Wiley recalls. "When we saw how versatile Frank was we asked him to incorporate all kinds of monster noises. We had very little to do with the sound effects in post-production because he just did it all."³¹

Collaboration on set was equally fruitful thanks to the talents of actors like John Ratzenberger and Royal Dano. Ratzenberger worked in a highly improvisational way, trying out new ideas during every take, and Wiley gave him free reign to experiment. A number of the lines in the final movie came from Ratzenberger's ad libs. Wiley was also surprised by his skills as a physical actor. When time came to do the fight sequences, stunt coordinator Kane Hodder offered to provide a stand-in, but Ratzenberger refused. "He'd learned stage fighting at the

31 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.



Royal Shakespeare Company,” Wiley says. “It turned out that he was great at sword-fighting and kicking and all that stuff. You just don’t expect the mailman from *Cheers* to be really good at stage combat.”³²

Royal Dano was also a memorable figure on set. Standing 6’2”, the seasoned actor had graced the films of many a legendary director during his career, and had plenty of stories to share. One in particular involved Dano’s time in the army as a young man. While stationed in Burma, a British officer picked Dano to perform in a variety show they were staging. “That officer turned out to be Sir Alec Guinness,” says Wiley. The *House II* director remembers Dano as charming, funny and “the hippest guy on the set”.³³ At the time, Dano had recently undergone quadruple bypass surgery and was uninsurable. “We really fell in love with him when he came in and auditioned, and we felt that he embodied the character, so we took our chances.”³⁴

As with the first *House* film, there are a few smaller roles and other cameos to look out for. The Aztec virgin was played by *Playboy* centrefold Devin DeVasquez. The party scene contains appearances by writer David Arnott (*The Last Action Hero*) and stunt coordinator Kane Hodder. Hodder plays a guy in a gorilla suit who gets into a fight with the Stone Age intruder ‘Arnold the Barbarian’.³⁵ In the final gunfight with the police, Jim Isaac, Chris Walas, and producer Stuart Cornfeld (*The Fly*, *Tropic Thunder*) all appear as cops firing at Slim Reeser. *House* alumnus Ronn Carroll also returns as a cop, while Dwier Brown appears early on as Clarence, Jesse’s father.

In the remainder of this chapter, you’ll find press materials for *House II: The Second Story*. Next, we’ll move on to the most controversial entry in the series, *House III: The Horror Show*. It’s getting weirder!

32 - Natsukashi. (2009). *Episode XXXV: House (with its writer Ethan Wiley!)*. [podcast] Available at: <https://natsukashi.wordpress.com/2009/01> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2016].

33 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

34 - *House II: The Second Story*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham and Ethan Wiley.

35 - This actor, Gus Retzwich, went on to appear twice with the real Arnold in *The Running Man* (1987) and *Twins* (1988).

IT'S AN ALL NEW HOUSE
WITH BRAND NEW OWNERS.

HOUSE II

THE SECOND STORY
PRESS MATERIALS

SYNOPSIS

Jesse McLaughlin, and his girlfriend Kate, arrive at the house he's recently inherited from his long-lost family. As he begins exploring his family's roots, Jesse discovers that his great-great-grandfather, a notorious outlaw in the Old West, stole an extremely valuable crystal skull that supposedly possessed magical powers. The skull was buried with him.

Charlie, Jesse's best friend, persuades Jesse to dig up the coffin and its treasure. To their surprise, they find both the skull and Jesse's great-great grandfather! 'Gramps' is 170 years old, alive and kicking, thanks to the magic of the skull. They all return home.

The house was built as a temple for the skull and when the skull is brought into the house, magical and strange phenomena begin. Since the skull has the power of giving its owners immortality, it is constantly coveted by a wide variety of characters from bizarre worlds.

During a wild halloween party, a giant Barbarian from the Stone Age appears and steals the skull. Jesse and Charlie charge after him into a pre-historic world of pterodactyls and dinosaurs. After battling assorted fantastic monsters, Jesse and Charlie return safely only to have Aztec thugs from yet another time attack Gramps and take the skull. With the help of an eccentric electrician, Jesse and Charlie find their way through caves and tunnels to an ancient Aztec temple where a virgin sacrifice is in progress. A swashbuckling fight enables Jesse and Charlie to return with the skull.

Gramps, weak and dying, hardly has time to recover when skeletal Slim Reeser, his old partner, takes the skull. Jesse must follow him into an Alice in Wonderland version of the Old West to rescue the skull and save Gramps' life. Jesse is pitted against the powers of darkness in the story's sensational and unexpected climax.

HOUSE II
THE SECOND STORY

It's getting weirder!

ABOUT THE CAST

ARYE GROSS

ARYE GROSS (Jesse) recently received rave reviews for his role as a wise-cracking law student in the comedy, *Soul Man*. Born in Los Angeles, Gross has been working at his craft for more than ten years, performing in the South Coast Repertory Theater, and Luis Valez' Northern California Theater. He has appeared in the motion pictures *Just One of the Guys* and *Exterminator II* and the television series *Knight Rider* and *Remington Steele*.

ROYAL DANO

ROYAL DANO (Gramps) is one of today's most respected and versatile character actors. A native of New York City, Dano performed on the Broadway stage and received his first national recognition for his portrayal of Abraham Lincoln in a five-part *Omnibus* series. Dano was also the model for the animatronic Lincoln at Disneyland and Walt Disney World. He has appeared in dozens of motion pictures including *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Moby Dick*, *The Trouble with Harry*, and *The Right Stuff*.

JOHN RATZENBERGER

JOHN RATZENBERGER (Bill), a native of Connecticut, stars in the hit NBC series *Cheers* as the know-it-all mailman, Cliff Clavin, a character not unlike his *House II* electrician, Bill. He spent several years in Europe, where he formed a popular improvisational group named "Sal's Meat Market." He has appeared in over twenty motion pictures including, *The Ritz*, *The Falcon and the Snowman*, *Gandhi*, and *Reds*.

JONATHAN STARK

JONATHAN STARK (Charlie) grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania where he received a degree in education. A member of the well-known Groundlings improvisational troupe, Stark has appeared in the television series *Moonlighting* and the TV-movie *The Prince of Bel-Air*. He made his motion picture debut in *Fright Night*, where he portrayed the evil assistant to a vampire, and appeared opposite Matthew Broderick in the recent *Project X*.

LAR PARK LINCOLN

LAR PARK LINCOLN (Kate) was born in Ft. Worth to a military family. After modelling for several years, Lincoln moved to Los Angeles and landed a role as a teenage prostitute in the television film *Children of the Night*. She has also starred in the big-screen fantasy, *Princess Academy*.

AMY YASBECK

AMY YASBECK (Lana) attended the University of Detroit where she studied art and theater. She has appeared in over 200 sketches as one of the blackout players in *The New Love American Style*. *House II* is her motion picture debut.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

SEAN CUNNINGHAM

SEAN CUNNINGHAM (Producer) has produced and/or directed films in almost every genre. His *Friday the 13th* is one of the most popular horror films of all time and has spawned five sequels. Other directing credits include the comedy *Spring Break*, the thriller *A Stranger is Watching* and *The New Kids*. He created Cunningham Productions in 1984.

ETHAN WILEY

ETHAN WILEY (Director) was born in Marin County and studied theater arts at UCLA. He has worked on *Return of the Jedi* and spent two years on Steven Spielberg's production of *Gremlins*. Wiley wrote the screenplay for *House*. *House II*, for which he also penned the screenplay, marks his feature film directorial debut.

HOUSE III

THE HORROR SHOW



By the late 1980s, America was in the final stretch of the Reagan presidency, an era in which responses to a near decade of conservatism had been writ large in the cinematic excess of the slasher film.¹ However, it was primarily entries in the major franchises like *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (1989), *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood* (1988) and *Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* (1989) that propped up the 'quintessential '80s horror subgenre' as it limped, like one of its victims, towards the end of the decade.²

While Sean S. Cunningham is well known for his contribution to the canon with the seminal *Friday the 13th* (1980), his career has also incorporated comedies like *Here Come the Tigers* (1978), *Manny's Orphans* (1978), *Spring Break* (1983) and the teen thriller *The New Kids* (1985). These diverse sensibilities meant that the *House* series was not limited in its ambition to mix horror and comedy, but it also meant that the franchise wouldn't be governed by a single stylistic vision. "With 20/20 hindsight, my problem was that *House* wasn't really branded," says Cunningham, "the audience didn't know in advance what to expect."³

1 - <http://flavorwire.com/422455/why-the-slasher-movie-was-the-quintessential-80s-horror-subgenre>

2 - Wes Craven's *New Nightmare* (1994) and *Scream* (1996) are the films credited with the postmodern revival of the slasher in the 1990s.

3 - Interview with Sean S. Cunningham, December 29, 2016.





When *House III: The Horror Show* (1989) arrived, a mix of slasher and splatter with overtones of the supernatural thriller, it felt like a late entry in an already weary subgenre, and was so far removed from the tone of the first two *House* films, that its connection to the series seemed tenuous at best. *House III*'s identity crisis was not just a question of style; the film weathered problems during production which saw director David Blyth replaced by James Isaac, one of its writers took an 'Alan Smithee' credit, and the final product was disassociated from the *House* franchise in the United States when it was released there as *The Horror Show*.⁴ This situation led many to believe that the use of the *House* moniker outside of the US had been nothing more than a cynical afterthought, however, this was not exactly true. The film had been financed through pre-sales of foreign distribution rights using the title *House III*, and so by the time production began, it was understood that the film they would deliver would be the third instalment in the *House* series.⁵ "I had pre-sold the title *House III* in several foreign markets," confirms Cunningham, "and I had to make good on my commitment to deliver it. United Artists liked the script for *House III*, but for marketing reasons thought *The Horror Show* would be a stronger title in the US. Ergo *House III* and *The Horror Show*."⁶

4 - Alan Smithee is the official pseudonym adopted when disowning a film.

5 - Biodrowski, S. (1991). *The Doors Reopen for House IV. Fangoria*, (#104), pp.28-30.

6 - Interview with Sean S. Cunningham, December 29, 2016.



The fact that *The Horror Show* was made for United Artists and distributed by UA/MGM Home Entertainment, rather than New World, only served to further distance the film from the *House* series, despite the return of a few stalwarts of the *House* crew like Mac Ahlberg, Kane Hodder and Harry Manfredini. By this time, New World Pictures had become New World Entertainment. They had financed part of the cost of the first two *House* films, in exchange for which they had the rights to the United States and other English speaking territories, and Cunningham had the rest of the world. "After the second one, the whole company changed and they didn't have any particular interest in doing a third," states Cunningham.⁷

House III was not the first horror threequel to try something different. Tommy Lee Wallace's *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982) is often cited as a major departure from the first two instalments in the *Halloween* series because it is not a slasher film, does not feature the villain Michael Myers, nor takes account of any prior story elements.⁸ The violent and gory nature of *House III* was a response to feedback on *House II*, which Cunningham felt had "gotten too soft".⁹ The third film became an attempt to do an intense, scary movie, "without any overt

7 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

8 - <http://grimgata.com/the-aberrations-5-halloween-iii-season-of-the-witch>

9 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.





cuteness”.¹⁰ If there was an overarching concept, it was that as long as Cunningham used the word *House* and had a haunted house connected to the film, he could tell any kind of story, regardless of continuity between the individual films. “That was probably a mistake,” he confides. “I think I’d much rather have been consistent. Not necessarily the same characters, but the same kind of tone and the same kind of movie.”¹¹ Indeed, aside from the most serious horror fans, when *House IV: The Repossession* was released in 1992, American audiences were largely confounded by its title because they did not realise that they had already received the third part of the series back in 1989.¹²

“LUCAS, I’M COMING BACK TO TEAR YOUR WORLD APART...”

House III: The Horror Show is the story of Lucas McCarthy, a burnt-out police detective played by Lance Henriksen (*The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Near Dark*). For years, Lucas was on the trail of Max Jenke, aka ‘Meat Cleaver Max’, the most prolific mass murderer in history, portrayed with relish by Brion James (*Blade Runner*). After a terrifying pursuit, in which Lucas comes face

10 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

11 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

12 - As detailed in the previous section, *House III* was released in Italy as the seventh film in the *La Casa* series.



92

to face with the killer, Jenke is finally apprehended. When the killer is sentenced to death by electric chair, Lucas hopes that his work is almost done. However, at the execution, Jenke demonstrates an incredible resistance to electricity, bursting forth from his restraints and attacking Lucas. Before his fiery demise, Jenke promises that he will return to have revenge on the detective that caught him.

Recovering from the ordeal, Lucas tries to spend some quality time with his wife Donna (Rita Taggart) and his children Bonnie (Dedee Pfeiffer) and Scott (Aron Eisenberg), but he is soon subjected to waking nightmares that test his very sanity, visions of Jenke back from the grave to terrorise the McCarthy family in their own home. With a dead boyfriend in the basement, and a Jenke baby writhing in his daughter's womb, Lucas must accept Jenke's reality, relive the moment Jenke was apprehended, and take down the relentless mass murderer once and for all.

"ALL THAT DID WAS GIVE ME A HARD-ON!"

House III: The Horror Show was filmed in the autumn of 1988 at various locations around Los Angeles, including scenes at a power plant in Long Beach, San Pedro, California. However,



93





the house itself was nondescript in comparison with the previous films. The shoot lasted for approximately six weeks based on a budget of around \$3 million. Reactions to the film were largely negative and it became the first *House* film that did not make a profit, earning just \$1.7 million.¹³ Critic Roger Ebert found some things to like, such as the film's emphasis on Brion James's actual face and voice (as opposed to the legion of silent, faceless maniacs populating horror films) and Jenke's execution scene, which he described as "shocking and funny".¹⁴ However, the film's predictable 'three-beat' routine (scare, false alarm, real scare) wore out its welcome and the film was awarded just one star.

Bearing in mind the complexities of its production and marketing, *House III: The Horror Show* features affable performances from the always-committed Lance Henriksen, and Brion James, who was given to citing serial killer Max Jenke as his favorite role.¹⁵ Jenke's relentless cackle will no doubt echo in the memories of fans and critics alike. Ultimately though,

13 - <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=horrorshow.htm>

14 - <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/horror-show-1989>

15 - *House Mother*, interview with actress Rita Taggart, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.





House III was released in the wake of more interesting films of its kind, like Tom Holland's *Child's Play* (1988), and six months prior to *Shocker* (1989), a film written and directed by Cunningham's former collaborator Wes Craven. *Shocker* bore a strikingly similar serial-killer-executed-in-electric-chair-returns-to-take-vengeance-on-detective premise but grossed \$16.5 million from a \$5 million investment.¹⁶ As such, *House III*'s legacy as a curio in the annals of horror B-movies is unlikely to receive a great deal of reappraisal beyond our attempts here.

"It was a pretty cheap production," says Rita Taggart, who starred as Lucas's wife, Donna, and who took the role when she heard that Henriksen was also working on the picture. "Lance and I didn't have our own space, just an area with a folding curtain, so we got to talk a lot about life and acting."¹⁷ Working with co-stars like Lance Henriksen and Brion James was the best part of the experience for Taggart. "Brion was as sweet as could be, but he was as extreme as the characters he played. He was a bigger than life person who was fun to be around."¹⁸ Stunt coordinator Kane Hodder also has fond memories of Brion James and Lance Henriksen, particularly in regard to the electrocution scene in which Hodder performed a fire stunt as a double for James's crazed killer. "Lance Henriksen used to tell a story about acting with me in

16 - <http://www.boxoffice Mojo.com/movies/?id=shocker.htm>. *The Last House on the Left* (1972) was written and directed by Wes Craven and produced by Sean Cunningham.
17 - *House Mother*, interview with actress Rita Taggart, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.
18 - *House Mother*, interview with actress Rita Taggart, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.



that scene," says Hodder. "He thought it was amazing that I was looking right at him, pointing and acting while I was engulfed in flames."¹⁹

Hodder, whose stunts are highlights in the film, was plagued with "the worst sprained ankle he ever had" during the making of *House III*.²⁰ The injury didn't occur on set, but during a day off while Hodder was playing football. "It was what they call a third-degree sprain," he reveals. "The doctor said 'you definitely would have been better off breaking it.'"²¹ Despite his injury, Hodder also performed a tricky high fall doubling Brion James as he runs into a rail and flips over the side of a stairwell. "I thought I was going to flip and fall feet first," he says. "But if you look at the movie, I flip a second time in the air before I hit my landing area. Because I went an extra half a revolution on the way down, which I couldn't control, I landed face first and it wasn't nearly as comfortable as landing on your back. It still looked cool!"²²

The story for *House III* had been in development for a couple of years by the time Leslie Bohem (*Daylight*, *Dante's Peak*) was invited to work on the screenplay. The first writer on the project didn't like the direction that the finished film took and was credited with the pseudonym

19 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.
20 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.
21 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.
22 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.



Alan Smithee. “I got Les Bohem to come in and work with us on it and he’s the one that really made the whole thing come together. He turned it into a movie,” Cunningham says.²³ Bohem, who was part of the new wave pop group Gleaming Spires, also had a song included on the soundtrack of the film.²⁴

Although they were happy with Bohem’s script, *House III* continued to be beset by problems during production. Director David Blyth was hired after Cunningham saw his film *Death Warmes Up* (1984). Cunningham found the New Zealander very personable and the studio also liked him a great deal. Blyth shot for about a week, but according to Cunningham, the footage was not coming together in the desired way. “It’s one of those things where it’s very subjective,” he says. “He certainly would have made a very different movie. It might have been better or worse, I don’t know. It’s one of those judgement calls you have to make sometimes.”²⁵ Blyth’s vision for the film was more of an intellectual drama. “He didn’t respond to the visceral parts,” recalls Cunningham. “Somehow or other he wasn’t comfortable with the material, or didn’t seem to be, and so I was concerned what we were going to end up with.”²⁶ “I loved David Blyth,” says Rita Taggart, “he was a very good communicator and I felt he understood actors. I don’t know what happened. They didn’t like what they were getting. It created a lot of insecurity for us, because if they don’t like what they’re getting, they probably don’t like what we’re doing as actors.”²⁷

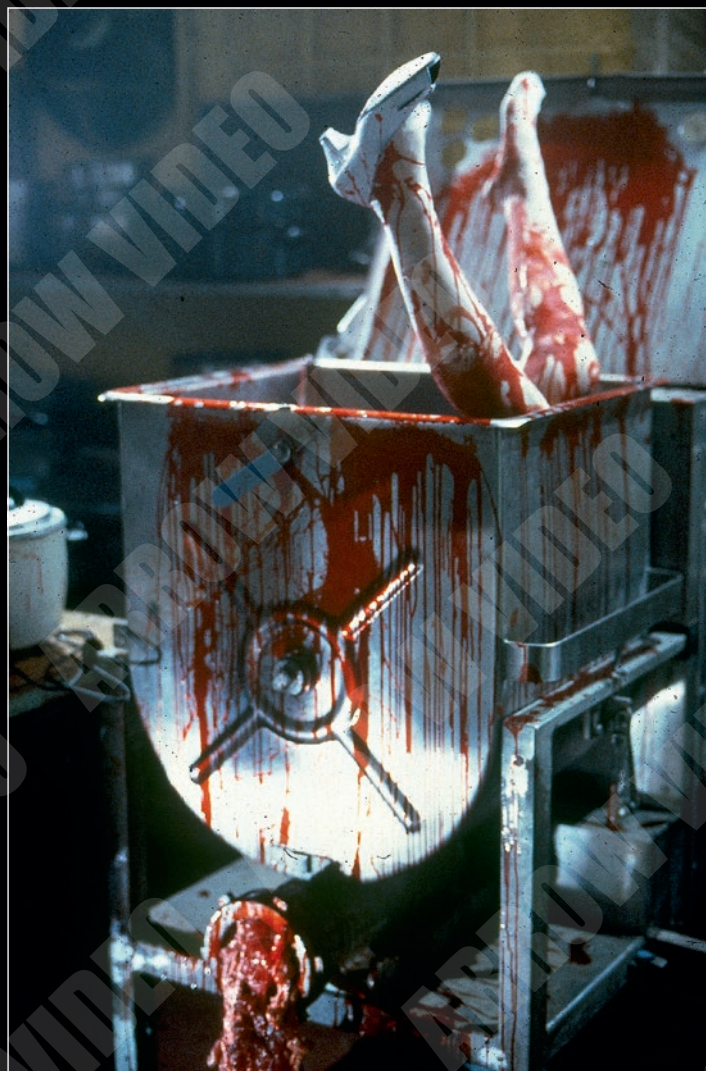
23 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

24 - ‘The Things I Have Done To Our Love’, written by Leslie Bohem (as Les Bohem) and David Kendrick. Performed by Gleaming Spires.

25 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

26 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

27 - *House Mother*, interview with actress Rita Taggart, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.





Changes during shooting can be distressing for both the cast and crew. James Isaac, who was working on visual effects, stepped in to help out and complete the film. As a result, *House III* became his directorial debut. "Boy, he had a rough few days," remembers Cunningham. "Ultimately they liked him a lot, but he had to be the guy on the front line and it was difficult for him, but he did it well."²⁸ In 1989, Isaac told *Fangoria* what it was like to step into the director's seat after the sudden departure of Blyth: "I certainly didn't want to be told on Friday that this is what's going to happen, and walk onto a set Monday, shooting. I felt it was very difficult for the actors to accept me, and it did take time. My only concern was the change-over, the transition period" (1989: 66).²⁹

To smooth the transition, Isaac relied on *House* veterans like cinematographer Mac Ahlberg. "He's incredible," said Isaac in 1989, "He's been very helpful to me on this."³⁰ Cunningham echoes Isaac's opinion about Ahlberg: "It was not just that he did good stuff. It was his presence on the set. People liked to be around him."³¹ Ahlberg had been a guiding force for director Stuart Gordon on *Re-Animator* (1985) and had photographed Cunningham's sci-fi

28 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

29 - Warren, B. (1989). Step Right Up for The Horror Show. *Fangoria*, (#81), pp.36-39, 66.

30 - Warren, B. (1989). Step Right Up for The Horror Show. *Fangoria*, (#81), pp.36-39, 66.

31 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.





104



horror *DeepStar Six* (1989), which, like a lot of Cunningham's films, employed familiar faces like *House IV* writer Lewis Abernathy, composer Harry Manfredini, and special effects experts Chris Walas and Jim Isaac. "I think he had a hand in me being hired for *House*, the first film I did with Sean Cunningham," says Kane Hodder when asked about the venerable DP. "Some DPs don't have a good sense of action. Mac was not afraid to listen to my suggestions. Sometimes he said no, but at least he listened to me."³²

32 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.

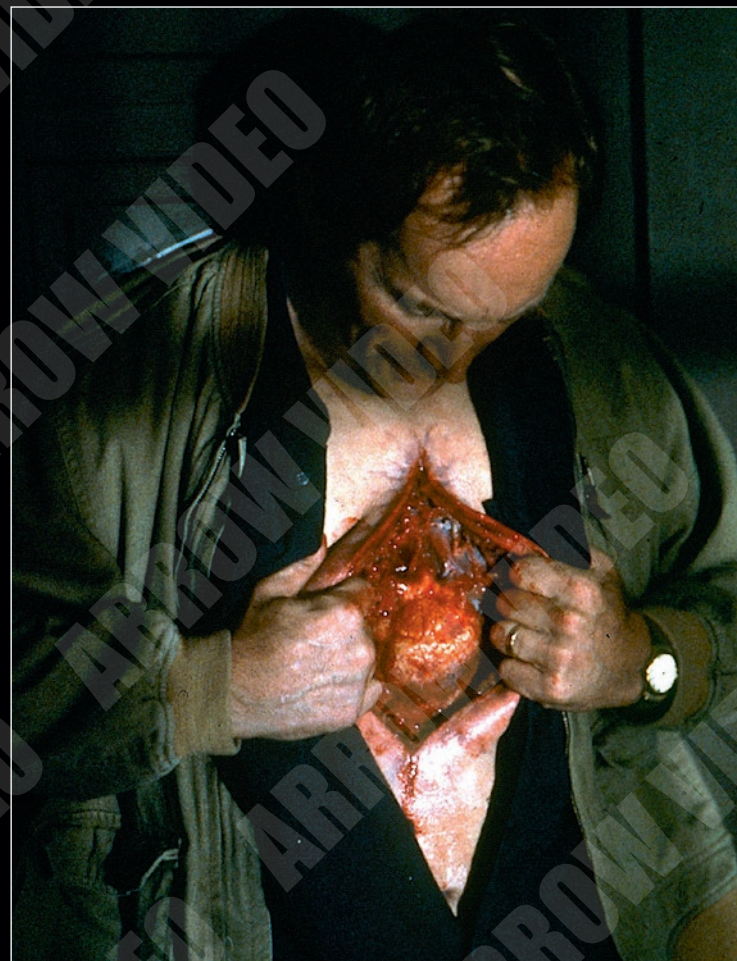
105

The supernatural elements in *House III* took the film beyond standard slasher fare and into the realm of the so-called 'rubber reality' film, which includes the likes of *Phantasm* (1979), *Videodrome* (1983), the 'Freddy' films and *Paperhouse* (1988) among dozens of others. Muir (2007: 34) claims that there are three criteria that distinguish rubber reality films from slashers: the personality of the killer (like Freddy Krueger, Jenke likes to crack wise); swapping straightforward knife-kills for elaborate fantasy-based special effects sequences (witness Jenke's talking turkey), and finally, such films posit the existence of alternate, dreamlike realities, which the characters accept as real.

To realise these elaborate ideas on screen, Cunningham hired KNB EFX Group, the company founded by Robert Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger, who also worked closely with Jim Isaac on *DeepStar Six*. *House III: The Horror Show* became one of the earliest projects for the company, which went on to deliver makeup and effects for an array of film and television projects including *Ghostbusters II* (1989), *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (both 1989), *Tremors* (1990), *The People Under the Stairs* (1991), *Army of Darkness* (1992), *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Scream* (both 1996), *Hostel* (2005), *Masters of Horror* (2005-2007), *The Mist* (2007), *Drag Me to Hell* (2009) and *The Walking Dead* (2010).³³

From the brutal execution scene – Jenke's skin bubbling as the voltage surges through his body – to dead cats, dismembered heads, deformed babies, gory grinders, cleaver cuts and possessed poultry, KNB provided a smorgasbord of gruesome delights for the film. "All the effects that KNB came up with were better than I expected they would be," states Hodder. "I think that's part of their talent and why they are so sought after even today. They pull off things in a different way to other companies and they are very easy to work with."³⁴

Though *House III: The Horror Show* was passed uncut in the UK, censors were less relaxed in the United States, where the MPAA demanded numerous scenes be edited to reduce excessive violence and gore.³⁵ Because censorship is antithetical to horror culture, this caused consternation among American fans of the film.³⁶ A scene in which Lucas pulls back the skin around a chest wound in order to reveal his still-beating heart was seemingly excised from all versions of the film prior to certification, despite the fact that publications like *Fangoria* had teased this visual effect as a reason to see the film (1989: 39).³⁷ There are, however, some still images that exist. I should also point out that the scene in which Lucas is reading the British tabloid *The Sun* remained uncut. Now that's an image with the potential to corrupt.



Below you'll find press materials for *House III: The Horror Show* (1989). In the final chapter, we'll look at the last film in the series, 1992's *House IV: The Repossession*. Glad you could make it, cop!

33 - http://classic-horror.com/masters/knb_efx

34 - *The Show Must Go On*, interview with actor/stuntman Kane Hodder, *House III: The Horror Show* special features.

35 - <http://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=1735>

36 - <http://www.cultmovieforums.com/forum/threads/house-3-horror-show-dvd.8437>

37 - Warren, B. (1989). Step Right Up for The Horror Show. *Fangoria*, (#81), pp.36-39, 66.

“HOUSE” was spooky.
“HOUSE II” was weird.
“HOUSE III” is scary as hell.



A Sean Cunningham Production

HOUSE III

This time we're not kidding.

HOUSE III

THE HORROR SHOW
PRESS MATERIALS

SYNOPSIS

Lucas McCarthy thought his troubles would end with the execution of Max Jenke. Jenke was the worst mass murderer in history. Lucas, a young police detective, had been working on the Jenke case for three years when he finally captured Jenke, but the price was high – Lucas was badly wounded and his partner was killed.

When Jenke is about to be executed in the electric chair, he sees Lucas there among the witnesses. Just as the current surges through his body, Jenke curses Lucas, promising never to rest until he has his revenge.

Before Lucas is able to resume his normal life with his wife, Donna, and their teenage children, Bonnie and Scott, Jenke comes back from the dead to terrorise them. At first Lucas believes that he may be losing his mind, that he is hallucinating. But quickly events begin to escalate and Lucas realises that this is *not* a dream. Jenke is alive, somehow back from the grave to exact his hideous revenge. The horrors he performed before his death pale next to the circus of evil he now unleashes on the McCarthy family.

The McCarthy house becomes the doorway to and from Jenke's own private hell. The terror escalates until Lucas must enter that hell to save his family. Here he must relive the night of Jenke's capture... the night of his deepest fears. And here he must kill once and forever the most terrifying villain in years.

SYNOPSIS 2

The third in Sean Cunningham's *House* series is, like the two previous films, based on the horror that afflicts a family in their own home. Unlike the other films however, this focuses on the vengeful acts of a vicious serial killer, Max Jenke – more commonly known in his trade as "Meat Cleaver Max".

Lance Henriksen, best known for his roles in James Cameron's *Aliens* and *Terminator*, plays Detective Lucas McCarthy, a tough police officer who successfully apprehends Max after he has murdered over 100 people.

McCarthy watches on as the serial killer is sent to meet his fate with the electric chair, believing the execution would put an end to the terror. Little does he know that the worst is yet to come. Strange hallucinations and nightmares draw the police officer into a new level of horror that wreaks havoc with not only him, but his house and family. When it transpires that mad Max may have something to do with the attacks, McCarthy is forced to face questions of his own sanity. Killing the beast may have been the most dangerous decision of all...

Enlisting much-needed help from a jaded college professor, Lucas tries, with frustrating difficulty, to overcome his posthumous tormentor. Finding the body of his daughter's boyfriend in the basement further fuels the flames of the chase. The fight to save his family, and indeed his spirit, is at the heart of the drama of the third episode of the *House* films. When it becomes quite clear who is at the helm of this motivated reign of terror, it is up to Lucas and his sidekick to make sure, this time, the killer is well and truly wiped out.

It is one of the few films to feature Henriksen and Brion James (most notably the star of *Blade Runner*) as the leads. The film was originally to have been directed by David Blythe, but after a few days of filming, he was replaced by James Isaacs. Isaacs went on to direct the 10th film in the hugely popular *Friday the 13th* series, *Jason X*. The less-famous of the Pfeiffer family, Dedee (Michelle's sister) plays Lucas McCarthy's traumatised daughter, opposite Aron Eisenberg, her screen brother – best known for his role in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

Another familiar famous actor takes the role of Lt. Miller – Lewis Arquette, father of Rosanna, Patricia and David. Completely different stylistically from the other three *House* films, *House 3* was even marketed under another title in the USA – *The Horror Show*. The black comedic adventures of *House 1, 2* and *4* temper the haunted horror; inanimate objects spring into action and chase the house dwellers, pterodactyls try to attack, and a take-away pizza metamorphoses into a singing monster... There is however, no such light relief in number three. Fans of darker, more terrifying entertainment will prefer it all the more for that.

ABOUT THE CAST

BIOGRAPHY OF LANCE HENRIKSEN

"Just because the characters I play are eerie and somewhat menacing, I don't necessarily perceive them as evil," Lance Henriksen told *Shivers* magazine. "A director once convinced me there are no good guys and bad guys. It's never that clear cut. Instead there are only those people who are good some of the time, while goodies also have their bad moments."

Henriksen has forged a career playing characters that blur the line between good and evil. His heroes are often brooding and intense, but warmed with occasional hints of compassion and decency. His rugged looks and unique voice lend weight to even the slightest roles, and have helped make him one of the most recognisable character actors working today. "I get offered a certain type of role because of this face," he commented.

The actor's deeply lined features and world-wise demeanour were earned from a hardscrabble childhood and a colourful past. Henriksen was born in New York City on May 5th, 1940. His father was a merchant marine and spent little time at home, while his mother was left to juggle various jobs along with caring for her child. They separated when Lance was two, and he spent his formative years avoiding school, running away from home and dreaming of becoming an actor.

"I always wanted to be an actor," Henriksen recalled, "even when I was a little kid. When I used to run away from home, I'd go to movies and sit all night watching Kirk Douglas. When I was 16, I tried getting into the Actors Studio and they told me to get lost." Having been summarily rejected by the Actors Studio, Henriksen left home for good and made his way across the United States by hitching rides, hopping freight cars and taking odd jobs to fill his stomach.

Not yet ready to settle down, his itinerant lifestyle didn't end when he reached the California shores. With little money, and even less education, Henriksen decided to broaden his horizons by embarking on an odyssey to retrace his father's path across the world's oceans. He spent years circling the globe on freighters, tankers and fishing vessels before returning to New York in 1969, when he successfully re-applied to the Actors Studio.

Henriksen began to find work in the local theatre scene, but the 30-year-old actor had to contend with a significant gap in his education. "I couldn't read," he confessed. "I got a friend to read my scripts on tape and I memorised everyone's parts." Eventually, through a period of intense study and perseverance, he brought his reading skills up to speed. During this time, he formed a friendship that would lead to his first high-profile film role.

Al Pacino, a leading light on the New York stage, took Henriksen under his wing and helped him to land a small role in Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). "It was my first real movie," Henriksen told *Uncut* in 2001. "I was excited to be there. Oh yeah, man, I was bitten so bad it was like getting bit by a 90-pound mosquito. I didn't want to live any other way after that."

Lumet was impressed enough with Henriksen to cast him in two subsequent films, *Network* (1976) and *Prince of the City* (1981). The actor began a fruitful creative partnership with another director in 1981, when he was cast in James Cameron's *Piranha II: The Spawning*. "It was an early movie for everybody," Henriksen told *SFX Magazine*. "[Cameron] felt it was his only chance – life or death – so he was obsessed. And I was obsessed as an actor about my part, so we hit it off."

Henriksen made a mainstream breakthrough when he won a coveted role as astronaut Schirra in *The Right Stuff* (1983). He drew upon his training in method acting to fully immerse himself in the role. "My mom really liked Wally," he related in a *Starlog* interview. "Here she has this son who was really attentive to her, didn't swear around her, took her out to dinner, expressed concern about his wife, career and all. I think she wishes Wally would have stayed around!"

The following year, Henriksen was set to star as the title character in James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), but eventually had to settle for a key supporting role, while the more bankable Arnold Schwarzenegger took over as the unstoppable killing machine. Cameron made it up to Henriksen by casting him as the android Bishop in *Aliens* (1986). "I've never had a chance to play an innocent before," he told *Starlog* in 1986. "I have a streak of that in me which I never get to play."

Henriksen reunited with *Aliens* co-stars Jenette Goldstein and Bill Paxton for *Near Dark* (1987), a film that offered the actor yet another opportunity to invest his own personal experience into a role. "I remember thinking about my mother," he told *SFX*. "Her family was dead, all her friends were dead, she had no contact with anybody that she knew from her past. It clued me in on a piece of Jesse Hooker. I loved doing that guy. I would love to do a prequel to that movie."

By the time he made *Pumpkinhead* in 1988, Henriksen had earned a reputation as a sci-fi/horror star whose dedicated performances could elevate the most uninspired material. "I realised, this is my life, make the most of it," he said. "Even if the people around me are bullshitting, I'm not. You do your work as fully as you can, and the ones who hear the sound join in. And some of those B-movies turned out pretty good."

Some turned out better than others, and although his filmography is dotted with direct-to-video clunkers in which Henriksen's presence is the only redeeming quality, he has managed

to work with an impressive roster of exceptional directors. The latter part of his career has been highlighted with strong turns in the films of Walter Hill (*Johnny Handsome*, 1989), John Woo (*Hard Target*, 1993), Sam Raimi (*The Quick and the Dead*, 1995) and Jim Jarmusch (*Dead Man*, 1995).

Henriksen's public recognition rose to new heights when he appeared in *X-Files* creator Chris Carter's television series, *Millennium*. He tackled the emotionally demanding role of Frank Black – a troubled ex-detective with an uncanny talent for crime solving – with such commitment and enthusiasm that, in the minds of countless devoted fans, the actor and the role soon became inseparable. When the series was cancelled in its third season, Henriksen took note of the toll the character had taken on his psyche.

"Man, it took me a year to get out of that...with effort," he told *Uncut*. "The first thing I did was to go to Hawaii and get two tattoos. One is a shark, the other dolphins. I felt attached, and I felt like a beast. It was dark stuff. I think if we had gone on another year, it really would have taken hold."

When speaking to *Fangoria* about the series, he stressed his love for the character and admitted an interest in returning to the role for a feature film: "I never gave up on Frank Black. I was creating a guy I really liked. He had a code of ethics I really respected. I wish I were more like him, but I'm not." Although the proposed feature never materialised, Henriksen made a brief return to the role in a later episode of *The X-Files*.

Although the episode attempted to provide closure for the abruptly cancelled series, Henriksen didn't feel that it did his show justice. "I had no idea what they were doing with that," he confided to *Entertainment Weekly*. "I thought it was going to be the close of it all, but it turned out it had nothing to do with ending *Millennium*. It was a little disappointing for me because I wanted it to be something a little more."

Henriksen has returned to the realm of direct-to-video genre films since the 1999 cancellation of *Millennium*, but maintains creative interests outside the world of film as well. For the past 35 years, he's been an avid painter and a prolific potter.

HOUSE IV

THE REPOSSESSION



In the final part of *The House Companion*, we'll look at 1992's *House IV: The Repossession*, the last entry in the *House* franchise, and the second to make use of a delicious pun in its title. Produced by Sean S. Cunningham, who was still trying to recapture the blend of horror and comedy found in 1986's *House*, the film reunites audiences with horror writer Roger Cobb, played once again by William Katt. Directed by writer/actor Lewis Abernathy, the film attempts to create a sequel of sorts to the original; however, in a story point more akin to the films of David Lynch, Roger does not appear to be the same horror writer that we came to know in the first film. He's now married to Kelly (Terri Treas) and has a 12-year-old daughter named Laurel (Melissa Clayton). He owns a rickety old mansion (not the one from *House*, in case you were wondering), which has been in his family for decades. "I can't put a price on my roots," says Roger when he comes under pressure from Burke (Scott Burkholder), his ne'er-do-well step-brother, to sell the house to shady real estate Mafia types.



In keeping with his family's blood oath to protect the house, Roger remains steadfast and accuses Burke of having no sense of family (one could argue the same about him). However, soon afterwards, Roger, Kelly and Laurel are involved in a horrific car accident. Roger is killed in a fiery blaze and his daughter Laurel is paralysed. Kelly and Laurel uphold Roger's wishes and move back into house. However, they are soon plagued by terrifying visions and supernatural phenomena, including a bloody shower, a singing pizza, and action replays of Roger's cruel demise, all of which brings them to the brink of leaving. Meanwhile, Burke is still harassing Kelly to sell the house because he has made a promise to a diminutive industrialist gangster named Mr. Grosso (Mark Gash), who wants to use the land for the illegal dumping of toxic waste. To close the deal, Mr. Grosso force feeds Burke a glass of mucus hoovered from his mouth by his henchman (stay with me, now). Kelly consults with Ezra (Ned Romero), a Native American shaman and friend of the family, who helps her to understand that the house is built on a sacred spring, a "shelter for spirits". To preserve its power, a Great Seal was placed over it, and to hide the seal a house was built. Roger's spirit is trapped in a kind of limbo and is embodied by the house. It is Roger that is helping the family with their troubles, and Kelly's visions of the accident are his way of showing her that he was murdered by Burke and his associates. With help from the house, and undercover FBI agent Verna Klump (Denny Dillon), Kelly and Laurel must strive to overcome the evil forces that face them and benefit from the healing powers of the sacred spring.



116



Director Lewis Abernathy attended the University of Southern California, and is a graduate of the Peter Stark Producing Programme. He was an effects man on the original *House*, working under Tassilo Baur, and also did some script doctoring for Cunningham on *House III*. “For years my bread and butter was as a ghost writer and script doctor,” says Abernathy, who wrote the first drafts of James Cameron’s *True Lies* (1994) and *Titanic* (1997) and appears in a small role in the latter.¹ “I would come in and fix things, which generally meant that you didn’t get credit and you weren’t supposed to talk about it.”² Though he had sold a couple of screenplays as a writer, which were never produced, it was Cunningham’s sci-fi horror *DeepStar Six* (1989) that represented his first big project. Abernathy had wanted to direct the film, but given the scale of the picture and Abernathy’s lack of experience, the job eventually went to Cunningham after Robert Harmon (*The Hitcher*) departed the project. As a result, Cunningham and Abernathy had a handshake agreement that Abernathy would direct something after *DeepStar Six*, and *House IV* was about the right level of risk for a first-time director.³ “I think Sean took my pulse and said ‘Ok, you’re in!’” he jokes.⁴

1 - Abernathy also wrote a spec script for *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003) which he sold, but hardly any of it was used in the final version of the film.

2 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

3 - Biodrowski, S. (1991). *The Doors Reopen for House IV*. *Fangoria*, (#104), pp.28-30.

4 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

117



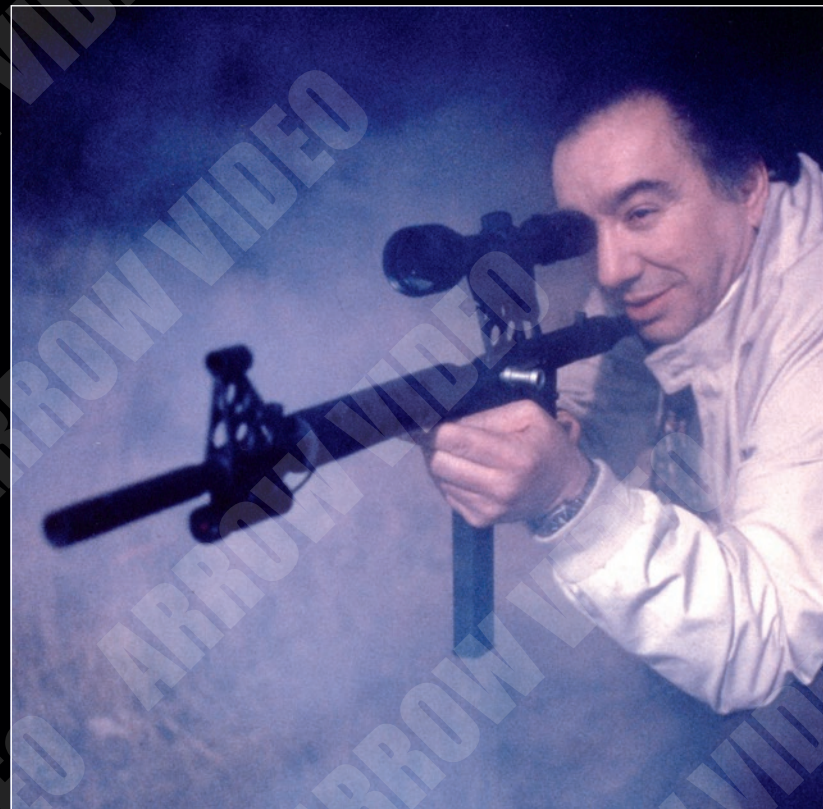
HOME SWEET DEADLY HOME.

Like the previous film in the series, *House IV: The Repossession* has something of a convoluted history. The story was originally developed and written by Jim Wynorski (*Chopping Mall*) and R. J. Robertson.⁵ Abernathy was hired six weeks before principal photography, and his first action was to order rewrites from Geof Miller (“an old crony from USC”) and Deirdre Higgins.⁶ Miller, who had collaborated with Abernathy on the script for Cunningham’s *DeepStar Six*, was tasked with bringing it all together: “It was my job to marry various disparate viewpoints between participants,” Miller told *Fangoria*. “It’s a hybrid movie – part haunted house, part gangster, all comedy” (1991: 29).⁷ Miller also acknowledges the artistic license taken with Katt’s character: “At the end of the first movie, he was hugging Kay Lenz and a little boy; at the beginning of this movie, he’s hugging Terri Treas and a little girl,” says Miller. “So I guess in the intervening years, he broke up with Kay Lenz, married someone else, and had a daughter who grew up to be 12 in the space of six years!” Two weeks prior to shooting, Abernathy did his own pass on the script, introducing a number of memorable sequences (for better or worse), which we’ll look at in more detail later.

5 - Eventually, Wynorski and Robertson won an arbitration and had their names added to the opening and closing credits of the film.

6 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

7 - Biodrowski, S. (1991). *The Doors Reopen for House IV*. *Fangoria*, (#104), pp.28-30.



By 1992, audiences were still two years out from the postmodern resurgence of the slasher with Wes Craven’s *New Nightmare*, and four years away from the seminal *Scream*.⁸ Horror-comedies like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Army of Darkness*, and *House IV* provided some light relief from the bleaker tone of horror films released that year, such as *Candyman*, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* and *Hellraiser III: Hell on Earth*. For Abernathy, the *House* films were not so much about terror, but more about an offbeat blend of the weird, unusual and gross.

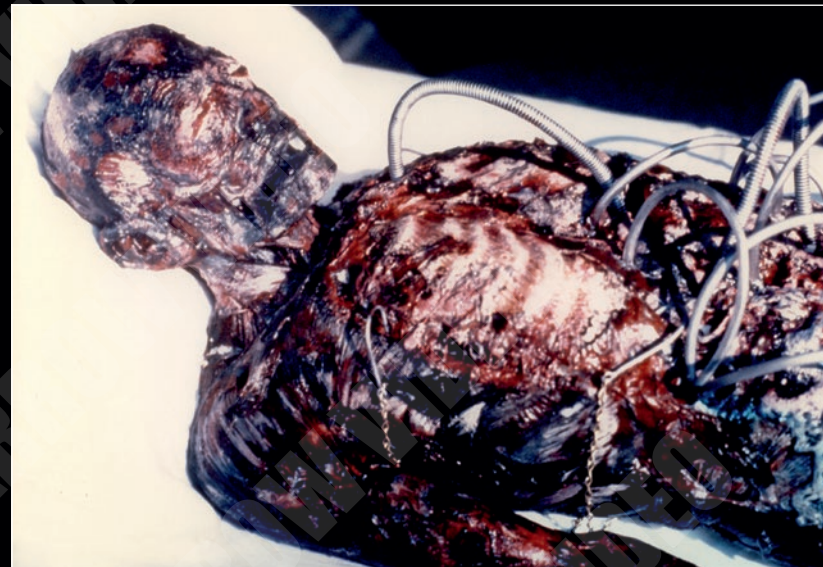
8 - Incidentally, *New Nightmare* was dedicated to the memory of Gregg Fonseca, the production designer for *House* and *House II*, who had a long history with the ‘Freddy’ franchise.





Abernathy wanted to rekindle the notion of the feel-good horror movie with a film that would speak more to the original *House* than to parts *II* or *III*. One way to accomplish that was to hire actors that could elevate the material. Abernathy insisted on Terri Treas, who had appeared in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982) and a number of Broadway musicals, as well as horror fare like *The Nest* (1988) and *The Terror Within* (1989).⁹ Following the *House* tradition of having a comic actor from television play a supporting role, Denny Dillon appeared as Verna Klump, the undercover FBI agent trying to stop Grosso's nefarious plot. Dillon had been a cast member on the 1980-1981 season of *Saturday Night Live*. "She was very funny and kept me in stitches the whole time," says Abernathy. "The only direction she ever asked for was how to handle a gun."¹⁰ Experienced television and film actors Scott Burkholder (*Crimson Tide*, *Gone in Sixty Seconds*) and Melissa Clayton (*The Wonder Years*) were worthy additions to the cast.

Though William Katt's screen time amounts to little more than a cameo in the finished film, his presence became an essential part of the film's marketing plan. "Sean came into my office two weeks before we began shooting and said 'Is there any way we can get Bill Katt into this movie?'" Abernathy remembers. "I'm sure it had something to do with marketing it



or selling it overseas. With a little rewriting, we worked Bill into the picture."¹¹ While Katt has positive memories of the original *House*, he doesn't have any particular fondness for the fourth film in the series: "I don't know why I did *House IV*," he remarks. "Sean Cunningham called me and said 'Hey Bill, would you come do this?' and he offered me a bunch of money so I said 'What the hell', you know? There are several films that I've done that I wish I hadn't done!"¹² Other interesting smaller roles in the film include a cameo by Dabbs Greer (*The Green Mile*) as Kelly's father, and a brief appearance by Steve Vinovich (*Mannequin*) as a yard sale customer.

9 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.
10 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

11 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.
12 - Interview with William Katt, *White Ghost*, (2016), [Blu-ray] Code Red.





126



“I’M YOUR PIZZA MAN...”

The budget for *House IV: The Repossession* was around \$1.5 million. Though the film was released direct to video, Abernathy claims that the film did get some theatrical exposure, particularly in Italy where it was briefly popular at the box office.¹³ Critics found that despite its low budget and some substantial leaps in logic, the film marked an effective return to the horror-comedy formula of the first film. Binion describes the film as a “distaff retread” of the original *House*, which benefits from a “strong female heroine” and “emotional involvement for the leads amid the barrage of slimy effects and over-the-top humor”.¹⁴ Indeed, the strong central performances from Treas and Clayton, who get to overcome the obstacles facing them, rather than die at the hands of a crazed killer, are commendable. Although Abernathy describes his pass of the script as a “midnight hack-job” designed to reduce the running time from two hours to 90 minutes, he did contribute some of the film’s more unusual and memorable moments, such as the Bug Man, the Snake Man, the ‘phlegm scene’ and the Pizza

13 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

14 - <http://www.allmovie.com/movie/house-iv-home-deadly-home-v23326>

127





Man, including his relentlessly catchy theme song.¹⁵ Combine this with the Rottweiler lamp that comes to life to protect Laurel and you have a mix of imagery that Abernathy admits “just makes no sense at all”.¹⁶ Of course, without Abernathy’s contributions, the film would be much more generic; however, *House IV* does struggle to accommodate these wackier ideas alongside Native American curses, the rules of the haunting (the house seems to both attack and protect its tenants), and real-world intrusions by Grosso’s cronies from the Chemical Plant.

House stalwart, composer Harry Manfredini, who enhanced the lonely landscape of *House IV* with his wonderfully breathy score, also co-created the ‘Pizza Man’ song with Abernathy. In what must have been a moment of hubris, you’ll notice that this earworm of a ditty is listed in the credits just above Mozart. See if you can read the lyrics without getting the song stuck in your head:

15 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.
16 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

*I'm your Pizza Man, I'm your Pizza Man,
And I'm deliverin' your favorite pizza pie!
I'm your Pizza Man, I'm your Pizza Man,
And I'm everybody's favorite take-out guy!*

You never have to worry that your pizza will be cold, 'cause I keep it heated up, on my engine's manifold.

*So the next time you are hungry for a pizza in a pan...
Don't forget to call your favorite Pizza Man! Ha!*



Are you singing it now? The same thing happens to Laurel in the movie. The mood changes rapidly when Kelly hears the song rehearsed by the sinister voice of the pizza itself and is forced to obliterate it with a knife. Let's hope that doesn't happen to you.

The exterior view of the old Cobb mansion was a façade erected at the Veluzat Motion Picture Ranch in Santa Clarita Valley about 30 miles north of Los Angeles. Ezra's church, also located there, was part of the set built for the Walter Hill film *Extreme Prejudice* (1987). The interiors were shot at the Thomas W. Phillips residence located at 2215 South Harvard Boulevard in Los



Angeles, the same house used in Wes Craven's *The People Under the Stairs* (1991). The scene featuring the Cobb family's horrific car crash was shot on Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles. Kane Hodder again supervised the stunt work, which involved one of his team driving over a ramp and off the road. "I always wanted to do an insert shot to show that Bill was having trouble with the seatbelt, to sell the fact that he couldn't get out," muses Abernathy. "I never got around to it because we were on a tight schedule."¹⁷ With little money and time on set, Roger's home video footage that we see projected in Kelly's room was shot independently by producer Sean Cunningham.

In terms of the special effects, KNB EFX Group returned for *House IV* to provide the singing pizza, the Snake Man and Bug Man, and Roger's corpse. The charred body was a dummy that was laid out at an abandoned mental hospital. The location was also used for the effective dream sequence featuring Burke in drag as a nurse, and orderlies smashing up the room with bats. In the scene where the house forces two gangsters to hallucinate and then shoot each other, KNB created full suits with slipover heads: "The Snake Man had claws, a nose and a six-foot tail," details KNB founder Robert Kurtzman. "The Bug Man had antennae, six arms and pinchers on the front of his mouth. The arms were foam constructed" (1991: 30).¹⁸ When it came to the singing pizza, Kane Hodder provided the face for the pie. The spitting effect was accomplished with a fire hose filled up with goo. In search of a distinctive overall look for the

¹⁷ - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

¹⁸ - Biodrowski, S. (1991). *The Doors Reopen for House IV*. *Fangoria*, (#104), pp.28-30.



movie, Abernathy asked the film's transportation person to locate some old cars for the bad guys to drive. He also requested an old-fashioned wheelchair for Laurel, and a hat for Burke. The effectiveness of the Great Seal, which Abernathy refers to as 'the hubcap', was also the subject of some debate on set.¹⁹

The scenes featuring Mark Gash (*To Live and Die in L.A.*) as Mr. Grosso were shot mainly at a power plant in Los Angeles. In the stomach-churning scene mentioned previously, Burke is force-fed a glass of Grosso's sputum. To accomplish the effect, Gash's mouth was filled with Green Goddess dressing, which doubled as a viscous pudding-like phlegm. "This scene with Mark Gash was the single grossest scene ever made," says Abernathy. "James Cameron mentioned this scene in front of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, and Steven had seen the movie and concurred that it was."²⁰ During the commentary track for *House IV*, Abernathy calls the *Terminator* director by phone, who concurs: "The phlegm scene is the single most disgusting scene I've ever seen in a movie. It's not often a low budget movie achieves something that is the world's best. It's the best at being the worst!"²¹

Despite the fact that *House IV* made a valiant attempt to return to the tone of the original *House*, with hindsight Abernathy considers the film a disappointment and believes that they ran the *House* series into the ground with *House IV*. "You make a lot of mistakes on your first movie," he says. "Everybody does."²² Cunningham believes that any failings with the franchise result from his inability to create a solid stylistic identity. "The audiences didn't know what to expect and I didn't know what to bring them," he says. "So the fact that we did four was surprising, and I was happy to leave it there."²³ That said, those pesky ghosts can be persistent, and Cunningham has discussed the possibility of a remake of the first film, but with the added dimension of a gender swap. In the new version, it would now be a woman who inherits the haunted abode and tackles the terrifying monsters.²⁴ As a long-time *House* fan, all I can say in response is: "I've waited years for this, Roger!"



19 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

20 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

21 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

22 - *House IV*, commentary with Lewis Abernathy.

23 - *House III*, commentary with Sean S. Cunningham.

24 - <http://bloody-disgusting.com/news/3370530/sean-s-cunningham-to-remake-haunted-house>

An all new adventure with the unique blend of suspense, humor and drama that made the original HOUSE a worldwide favorite.



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HOUSE IV

HOUSE IV

THE REPOSSESSION PRESS MATERIALS

SYNOPSIS

In the tradition of the original *House*, *House IV* once again puts a new twist on old haunts – serving up eerie batches of humour, horror, and state of the art special effects.

Kelly Cobb doesn't understand why her husband, Roger, loves the rickety old house he inherited. Neither does Roger's step-brother, Burke, who will pay Roger a hefty sum to sell it. But Roger feels a mystic union with the house, perhaps because of the blood oath his grandfather swore never to sell it. Roger won't sell, either.

But suddenly everything changes. There is a terrible car crash in which Roger is killed and his daughter, Laurel, is left paralyzed. Kelly moves from her suburban home to the deserted old house that Roger loved so much. Here she will raise her daughter with the memory of her lost husband.

But something is wrong at the house. A pervasive evil seems determined to force her out. Roger's ashes fall from the mantelpiece and his dead fingers grab at her. The slime oozing from the bathroom faucet, the inhuman groans from the basement, the menacing talking-pizza-from-Hell in the kitchen – is she losing her mind or are these visions real?

At the same time, Roger's jealous step-brother is relentlessly determined to get Kelly out of the house. But Roger loved this house, dammit, she's not going to leave!

Undeterred, Burke sends two goons to frighten her out. They push Laurel's wheelchair down the stairs, but her bedside lamp, shaped like a snarling dog, suddenly comes to life, takes a bite out of the seat of their pants, and send the crooks crashing through a second story window.

The house continues its war against Kelly. Blood runs from the shower faucet, then disappears. Another vision? Laurel's bed starts to swallow her up. Frantic, Kelly grabs a knife to stop the

heaving, smothering mattress from suffocating her daughter, but “wakes” to find herself about to plunge a knife into Laurel’s heart!

Desperate, Kelly goes for help. An old family friend tells her of the sacred Indian spring under the house, which the house protects. But the house can’t rest. Roger’s spirit is trapped inside... because he was murdered. It was Roger’s step-brother, Burke, who was responsible for Roger’s death!

What Kelly doesn’t know is that Burke has made an agreement with a gangster industrialist, a sickening stump of a man, to use the house site as an illegal dump for his toxic waste. If Burke doesn’t get that property, the gangster will see that he doesn’t live long enough to regret it. But Kelly won’t leave!

In a last desperate attempt to drive them out, Burke sets fire to the house, trapping Laurel and Kelly inside. It looks like all is lost when Roger’s spirit intervenes. He helps Kelly save Laurel and at the same time releases the healing waters from the ancient spring under the house. Laurel can walk, Kelly is freed from the burden of guilt that made her life a living hell, and Burke gets his just desserts.

In a last vision, Roger and Kelly share a goodbye kiss. His spirit is finally at rest.

SYNOPSIS 2

The fourth and final episode in the *House* series of films, *House IV*, like the other three, is produced by Sean Cunningham, but directed by Lewis Abernathy. Stylistically similar to *House I* and *II*, the concluding act in this reign of terror manages to retain the careful balance of comedic drama and horror of the first two films. The original *House* film, released in 1986, was such a hit it became a cult classic. The subsequent films are based loosely on the same concept as that of the first; a family is terrorised by mysterious or evil forces in a spooky mansion.

The mansion in question is the family residence of Roger Cobb, who *House* fans will remember as the first film’s tortured protagonist, played by William Katt. Despite appearing in *House IV* as Roger Cobb, Katt’s Cobb this time is not the same character... he has a daughter, not a son; the house is not connected to the first and he is not married to the same wife – he also meets an altogether different fate.

The family home has been entrusted with the male representative of each generation; so much so that when Cobb’s avaricious step-brother Burke suggests there might be economic value in selling the ruined heirloom, Cobb is adamant to the contrary. Little does he know what events are to unfold...

Following a tragic car accident, Roger is killed, his daughter Laurel left paraplegic and wife Kelly distraught. Intent on retaining the wishes of her late husband, Kelly decides to move with her daughter into the old house – with a view to renovating. Of course, human consternation afflicts the pair in the shape of Burke, who is still lurking in the shadows, determined to sell the house off to a local chemical plant. With the help of two foolish aides, he sets about trying to destroy their chance of living in peace.

Soon, Kelly begins to encounter more frightful horror fare in more unusual forms... Visions, waking dreams, phantom hands and mysterious voices haunt her day and night. Burke’s henchmen metamorphose into horrid snakes and cockroaches and the shower sprays blood. The boundaries between reality and fantasy eventually become so incredibly blurred that even Laurel’s life is soon being threatened at the hands of her own mother.

The most celebrated “character” in *House IV* has to be the terrifying manifestation of a singing pizza, which comes to life on delivery. Will our leading ladies overcome the human and animal forces of evil that have been set upon them? And what will happen to the House?

Whilst not directly consequential from the third in the series, *House IV* is a lively, dark, tongue-in-cheek conclusion to classic *House* horror.

ABOUT THE CAST

BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM KATT

William Katt was born on February 16th, 1951, in Los Angeles, California. He began performing from an early age – so early in fact, that he made his debut before being born. While pregnant with her son William, Barbara Hale starred in *Lorna Doone*. This was not their only joint acting experience – mother and son went on to co-star in the periodic *Perry Mason* television films, which began in 1987, after the original run. Hale resurrected the legal secretary character of Della Street, whom she'd played in the sixties, whilst Katt appeared as detective Paul Drake Junior.

Katt's father is the actor Bill Williams, who began his career as a professional swimmer. He made the crossover into acting in 1943, and was signed by RKO Pictures after the war. Here he met Katt's mother and, as RKO contractees, they starred in a number of films together, including *A Likely Story* (1948). Both Hale and Williams worked steadily and successfully throughout their lives, but it was music that first captured the heart of their son William.

After attending Orange Coast College, Katt made a living as a musician, but eventually turned to acting in small TV parts and minor film appearances. In 1977, he was listed in John Willis's *Screen World* as one of twelve "Promising New Actors", and his career began apace. In the same year as receipt of this accolade, Katt co-starred with Sissy Spacek in the famous horror flick, *Carrie*, playing a typical high-school jock date to Spacek's introvert and disturbed student. Katt's next role allowed him to draw on some of his father's acting experiences – Williams having appeared in a number of westerns towards the end of his career. *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days* (1979) told the story of how Cassidy and the Kid (Katt) managed to form their infamous alliance. Katt's career since has been nothing if not varied.

In 1981, Katt starred as the eponymous hero of *Pippin: His Life and Times* (1981), and in the same year, landed one of his best-known roles: Ralph Hinkley – more commonly known as *The Greatest American Hero*. Katt's liberal high school teacher character (whose name was promptly changed to Hanley following the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan by a John Hinkley Junior) was given superhuman powers to fight crime. He also lost the instruction manual and thus, the knowhow to use his superhero suit. The immensely popular series ran until 1983. Just a few years later, in 1986, Katt made the first in his *House* film series' appearances, as author Roger Cobb, a respected horror writer who moves into his late aunt's house to write his next best-seller. Katt returned to the cult favourite *House* fold in 1992 to play another, completely different, Roger Cobb.

Katt worked steadfastly throughout the nineties, in popular TV series such as *Murder, She Wrote* and *Models Inc.* and was a regular against Farrah Fawcett in the sitcom *Good Sports*.

Adding more strings to his bow of talent, Katt wrote scripts for several of the *Perry Mason* episodes, and even wrote the screenplay for 1997 action film, *Bladeboxer*. He continues to act, having appeared more recently in *Snake Island* and *Descendant* (2002).

The famous son also has two of his own – Clayton Alexander and Emerson Hunter.

BIOGRAPHY OF TERRI TREAS

Terri Treas is most recognisable in a very different guise – as Cathy Frankel, the "Tenctonese" biochemist with a Ph.D and an oddly shaped head in *Alien Nation*. The hugely popular television show that charted the lives of Alien slaves trying to adjust to life in Los Angeles made Treas a science fiction star. Treas's character is intellectual, but encounters difficulty conversing with humans, having no knowledge or comprehension of the complexities of intimate relationships. With Matthew Sikes, who lives nearby, she begins to understand real, previously "alien" emotions. A hit with sci-fi buffs and TV fans alike, the show comprised "Tenctonese" intellect and strong morals – clearly a recipe for a hit.

Treas was born on the 19th July, 1957 in Kansas City, Missouri. She first appeared on Broadway, in a production of *Pal Joey*, directed by Ted Mann, in the mid 1970s. She subsequently starred in a number of theatrical productions with some of America's most illustrious names; Richard Rodgers (whose eponymous theatre on 46th Street stands as a permanent honour to his work), Jerome Robbins, Herb Garner, John Dexter and Jule Styne.

With a sturdy theatrical and musical background, Treas eventually branched out into television and film, albeit of quite a specific type. Apart from roles in mainstream movies, such as *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1989), she found her niche in science fiction and horror. She appeared in genre films such as *The Nest* (1988) as Dr. Morgan Hubbard, *The Terror Within* (1989), *Nightmare on the Thirteenth Floor* (1990) and as Captain Lorraine Hanover in 1992's *Ladykiller*. All of these credits stood Treas in good stead to play the terrorised and eventually rather disturbed widow of Roger Cobb, the dead heir of a haunted, unusual mansion in the final sequence of the horror series of *House* films, in *House IV* (1990).

As well as playing Cathy Frankel in the *Alien Nation* TV series, Treas reprised her role in all five of the films of the same name. The final movie, *The Udara Legacy*, was the best showcase of all the *Alien Nation* features for Treas's talents. Treas later took to writing, and has an impressive list of credits so far, including *Felicity* (1998), *The Pretender* (1996) and *Silk Stalkings* (1991).

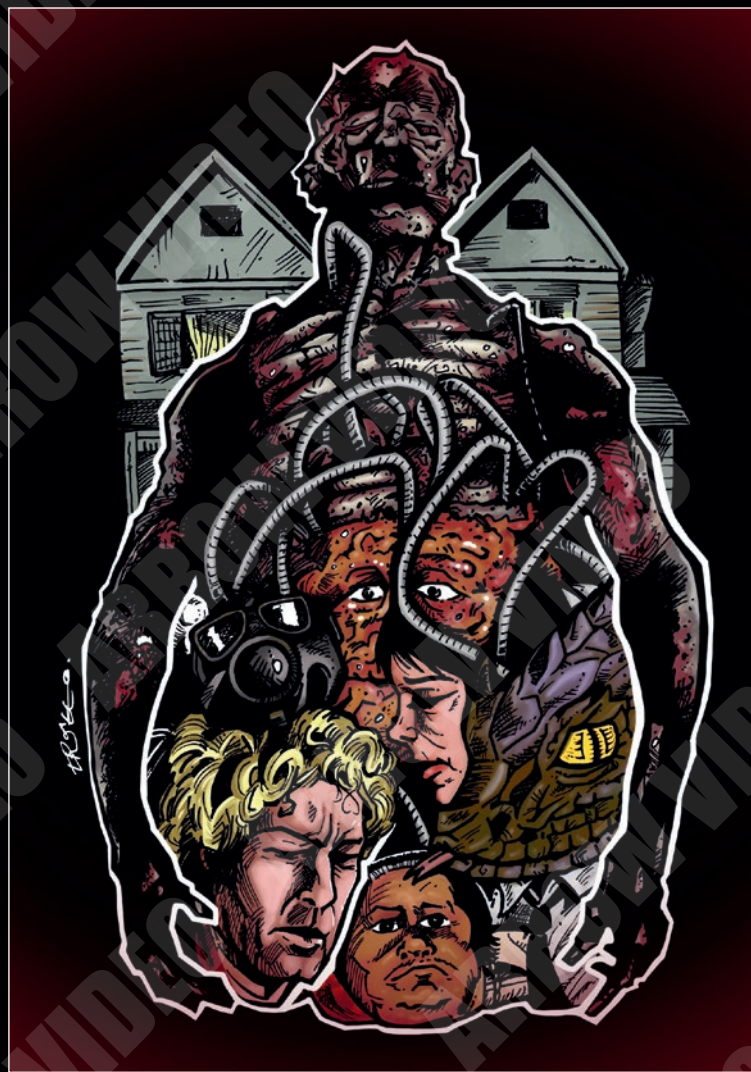
Not content with acting and story-telling credentials, Treas cut her teeth in the director's chair with her debut feature film, *Play Nice*, in 1992. Clearly drawing on her vast experience in subgenres, the film follows a detective on the hunt for a homicidal lunatic. But there is an intriguing twist in the film. From the directorial debut of such a well-versed horror and science fiction star, one would expect nothing less.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Barber is a researcher, writer, lecturer and *House* fan from the UK. In addition to his academic work on songwriting, popular music and the music industries, Simon is also a musician and co-presents the popular *Sodajerker* songwriting podcast, which has been featured in *Esquire*, *Slate*, *NME*, *The Guardian*, and on BBC radio. You can reach him via: <http://simonbarber.com>.







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