

“One day men will look back and say I gave birth to the twentieth century.”

-- Jack the Ripper

He is fear and darkness.

The first tabloid star of the twentieth century, he remains the most notorious and enigmatic serial killer in history.

Jack the Ripper committed five heinous, ritualistic murders during a ten-week span in London in the fall of 1888, creating a frenzied atmosphere of gossip, rumor and terror. He was never caught.

Based on a popular graphic novel, *FROM HELL* puts an intense psychological spin on the horrific legend of Jack the Ripper and unravels a chilling alleged conspiracy involving the highest powers in England.

Starring Johnny Depp, Heather Graham, Ian Holm, Jason Flemyng and Robbie Coltrane, *FROM HELL* is directed and executive produced by Allen and Albert Hughes (*Dead Presidents*, *Menace II Society*, *American Pimp*). The film also is executive produced by Amy Robinson (*Autumn in New York*) and Thomas M. Hammel. The producers are Don Murphy (*Bully*, *Natural Born Killers*) and Jane Hamsher (*Natural Born Killers*).

Based on a screenplay by Terry Hayes and Rafael Yglesias, *FROM HELL* is an Underworld Pictures / Don Murphy and Jane Hamsher / Amy Robinson production. The cast features Lesley Sharp (“The Full Monty”), Susan Lynch (“Waking Ned Devine”), Katrin Cartlidge (“Breaking the Waves”) and Terence Harvey (“Prime Suspect”).

The movie’s principal locations include several historic castles outside Prague and a large re-creation of the Whitechapel district of London where the murders occurred. Constructed on a 20-acre site near the famed Barrandov Studios, the Whitechapel set is an accurate rendering of the buildings and narrow cobblestone alleys of the infamous area where five indigent prostitutes met their grisly fates.

The film’s sets were created by Academy Award®-winning production designer Martin Childs (“Shakespeare in Love”) and built by his team of seventy artists and carpenters.

There are more than sixty speaking parts in *FROM HELL*, and several scenes required some two hundred and fifty extras dressed in period

Victorian England costumes or disheveled street rags. Costume designer Kym Barrett (“The Matrix,” “William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet”) and her staff created more than four hundred outfits for the film.

Filmmakers include director of photography Peter Deming, ASC (“Scream 2,” “Scream 3,” “Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery”), who caught the Hughes brothers’ attention with his moody photography on “Lost Highway,” and special make-up effects house Millennium Effects, whose credits include “Saving Private Ryan” and “Gladiator.” Acclaimed industry veteran George Gibbs (“Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade”) is special effects supervisor. The editors are Dan Lebental (“Dead Presidents”) and George Bowers, A.C.E. (“How Stella Got Her Groove Back”) and the composer is Trevor Jones (“Notting Hill”).

While *FROM HELL* may appear to be a departure for the Hughes brothers, known for contemporary inner-city dramas, their affinity for the Ripper story stems from the climate of 1888 London. The city’s vast disparity of wealth produced masses of poor and indigent, many of whom congregated in an area known as Whitechapel. The dirty, seamy slum was a haven for drug use, prostitution, alcoholism and random street crime.

Says Albert Hughes, “This is a ghetto story. It concerns poverty, violence and corruption, which are themes we deal with in our movies because they fascinate us. These particular characters happen to be white, but all poor people have the same problems.

“What also intrigued us was the psychology of Jack the Ripper – his behavior and the hysteria he incited.”

Allen Hughes states, “Previous accounts of this story have been antiseptic, told from the eyes of the prim upper class. We’re revealing it from the perspective of the people who lived in squalor, in the neighborhood where this terror was inflicted.”

ABOUT THE STORY

FROM HELL, referring to the return address on a letter penned by the Ripper, is about people who are *in* hell, trying to survive the grimmest circumstances. At the core are five impoverished prostitutes who share a desperate friendship, drawn tighter as their ranks are terrorized by a gruesome murderer.

Mary Kelly (*Heather Graham*), Kate Eddowes (*Lesley Sharp*), Liz

Stride (*Susan Lynch*), Dark Annie Chapman (*Katrin Cartlidge*) and Polly (*Annabelle Apsion*) exist on the brink, earning a meager living with their bodies in a society that concurrently dishonors and feeds upon them. Owning virtually nothing of value, they are threatened by a monster that would steal from them their only possession: existence.

Says Heather Graham: “My character and her friends live on the edge of starvation in this horrible slum. Each day is a struggle. Having a place to sleep is a luxury. The only thing that sustains Mary Kelly is her dream of returning to Ireland, where she lived as a young girl.”

In one of the film’s establishing scenes, the women awaken after a fitful night’s sleep tied together on a bench – an uncomfortable option for those unable to afford a bed. The landlord arrives in the morning to untie the rope and return them to the streets where they must earn money for food and shelter for the coming night. It is a harsh, unrelenting cycle of survival.

“The lives of these women are gruesome and dark,” remarks Lesley Sharp. “Their day-to-day existence is always under threat – from pimps, violent johns, street criminals, disease and addictions.”

Further menacing their lives is a dangerous secret the women unknowingly share, one which threatens the Crown – and themselves.

The lone authority seemingly concerned with protecting these “unfortunates,” otherwise viewed as expendable, is Inspector Fred Abberline (*Johnny Depp*). Abberline, however, is himself aggrieved. Tormented by unendurable memories, he seeks temporary escape with opium. His addiction heightens spells of clairvoyance that lend both insight and incapacity.

“Abberline has been beaten up by life,” says Johnny Depp. “He lost his wife and child, and relies on self-medication to get through the day.” The Inspector, promoted out of Whitechapel after years of service, finds himself assigned once again to the seedy district to lead the Ripper investigation.

Says executive producer Amy Robinson, “Abberline is a character reminiscent of the protagonists of classic nineteenth century novels. He is a flawed hero enduring an enormous internal struggle while trying to cope with horrendous unfolding events.”

The Inspector is aided in his troubled investigation by the imposing Sgt. Godley, played by Robbie Coltrane (“The World Is Not Enough”).

Godley is a loyal friend who takes a strong hand in caring for Abberline when he “chases the dragon.”

“Godley is a straightforward Scottish cop who draws conclusions from concrete evidence,” says Coltrane, “such as a blood-stained knife and eyewitness accounts. He’s intrigued by Abberline’s intuition and unorthodox methods. It’s contrary to Godley’s nature, but he accepts Abberline’s visions as genuine and feels compelled to act on them.”

Says Johnny Depp: “Godley is the only person in the world that Abberline listens to and respects. Godley keeps him alive, watches over him. He’s his closest friend.”

As the Whitechapel murders escalate, the two men are thwarted by superiors more interested in sweeping the crimes under the rug than finding the killer. The sole exception is the renowned Sir William Gull (*Ian Holm*), a physician to the royal family, and a powerful enough figure to assist the shunned Inspector.

“It is certain to Gull that these murders are being committed by someone with medical knowledge,” states Ian Holm. “The killer possesses surgical skills beyond those of a butcher or laborer. His killings involve bizarre, terrible ritual.”

Gull advises Abberline on the instruments likely being used and the probable manner in which the murders are being conducted. With his guidance, Abberline is able to deduce that the killings are part of a menacing conspiracy involving the Order of Freemasons, who are in turn acting on behest of the monarchy itself.

The Freemasons are an enigmatic, cult-like organization whose members throughout the years have included some of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the world. Freemasons have been the subject of numerous conspiracy theories, owing to their mysterious initiation ceremonies and sworn oaths of secrecy.

The notion of a Crown conspiracy in the Jack the Ripper murders has long been advanced by various factions in Europe, where the case holds as much fascination for the British as does the JFK assassination for Americans. Royal responsibility is espoused in Alan Moore’s acclaimed 1999 graphic novel From Hell, originally published as a ten-part series in the anthology periodical Taboo. The strips, which feature drawings by artist Eddie Campbell, were optioned by producer Don Murphy (“Natural Born

Killers”).

Says Murphy, “Alan Moore is the dean of graphic novelists. I am a comic book fan and have admired his work for years. I was immediately hooked by From Hell without even realizing at first that it was about Jack the Ripper. It’s a brilliant, complex and obsessive story, well documented with extensive research and pages of footnotes.”

Moore’s novel was adapted into a screenplay by Terry Hayes and Rafael Yglesias, with the latter viewing the conspiracy angle more metaphorically.

“Whether the British monarchy was literally involved in the Ripper murders doesn’t diminish the power of the accusation leveled at the ruling class,” says Yglesias. “That the authorities refused to even consider the possibility the suspect might be wealthy speaks volumes about the Victorian era. Society’s ills were viewed exclusively as the fault of the poor and the lower class.”

As a member of that lower class, as well as a prostitute, Mary Kelly is unaccustomed to the company of “respectable” men, at least when she’s not working. Distrustful and wary of being used, she initially rebukes Abberline’s investigation.

“Girls working the streets had their guard up,” says Allen Hughes. “Mary Kelly views Abberline as just another guy who wants to use her. His decency and sincerity eventually break down her defenses and she begins to trust him.”

As their relationship deepens, a far more threatening barrier than social mores and class distinctions stands between them. A dagger of conspiracy and ruthless intent is pointed at their hearts, and it is held by the hand of a butcherous madman destined for the pages of history.

In retrospect, the Ripper’s claim that he gave rise to the twentieth century, ushering in a new era of pulp press and cult of celebrity, has been borne out. British tabloids were instantly enamored with the story, which has since become legend.

Johnny Depp, who is very familiar with the case, remarks, “Before Jack the Ripper, there were a few hundred newspapers in London. At the height of his murder spree, thousands of additional papers emerged.” Jack the Ripper, created in part by the press, became its first “tabloid star.”

The Ripper case also advanced police forensics, which was in its

infancy in the 1880s. Says Allen Hughes: “At that time, if the police didn’t catch you near the body with blood on your hands they couldn’t likely convict you. There were no standard procedures for fingerprinting or blood tests. But this case helped bring about the development of new scientific procedures and tools for apprehending criminals.”

Jack the Ripper, of course, was never apprehended. It is the mystery of his identity, his daring to commit heinous murders in public places, and his ability to slip back into the night that has intrigued the public for more than a century. “He’s the perfect nemesis for a movie,” admits Robbie Coltrane.

Albert Hughes remarks, “The challenge and attraction for us is taking a well-known mystery rich with legend and using our imagination to give it added dimension.”

Says Allen Hughes: “The victims of Jack the Ripper have never been humanized. We want to give them life. They weren’t just casualties. They were human beings.”