

= White Zombie (film) =

White Zombie is a 1932 American Pre-Code horror film directed and independently produced by Victor and Edward Halperin . The screenplay by Garnett Weston , based on The Magic Island by William Seabrook , tells the story of a young woman 's transformation into a zombie at the hands of an evil voodoo master . Béla Lugosi stars as the antagonist , Murder Legendre , with Madge Bellamy appearing as his victim . Other cast members included Robert W. Frazer , John Harron and Joseph Cawthorn .

Large portions of White Zombie were shot on the Universal Studios lot , borrowing many props and scenery from other horror films of the era . White Zombie opened in New York to negative reception , with reviewers criticizing the film 's over-the-top story and weak acting performances . While the film made a substantial financial profit as an independent feature , it proved to be less popular than other horror films of the time .

White Zombie is considered the first feature length zombie film . A sequel to the film , titled Revolt of the Zombies , opened in 1936 . Modern reception to White Zombie has been more positive than its initial release . Some critics have praised the atmosphere of the film , comparing it to the 1940s horror film productions of Val Lewton , while others still have an unfavorable opinion on the quality of the acting .

= = Plot summary = =

On arrival in Haiti , Madeleine Short reunites with her fiancé Neil Parker , with imminent plans to be married . On the way to their lodging , the couple 's coach passes Murder Legendre , an evil voodoo master , who observes them with interest and manages to grab Madeleine 's scarf . Neil and Madeleine arrive at the home of the wealthy plantation owner , Charles Beaumont . Charles 's love of Madeleine prompts him to meet Murder secretly in Murder 's sugarcane mill , operated entirely by zombies . Charles wants to convince Madeleine to marry him and solicits Murder 's supernatural assistance . Murder states that the only way to help Charles is to transform Madeleine into a zombie with a potion . Beaumont agrees and surreptitiously gives the potion to Madeleine . Shortly after Madeleine and Neil 's wedding ceremony , the potion takes effect on Madeleine and she appears to die . After her funeral , Murder and Charles enter Madeleine 's tomb at night and Murder revives her as a zombie . Drunk and depressed , Neil imagines ghostly apparitions of Madeleine and goes to her tomb . Finding it empty , Neil seeks assistance from the local missionary , Dr. Bruner , who recounts how Murder turned many of his rivals into zombies , who now guard his estate . The two men journey to Murder 's cliffside castle to rescue Madeleine .

At the castle , Charles has begun to regret Madeleine 's transformation and begs Murder to return her to life , but Murder refuses . Charles discovers he has been tainted by Murder 's voodoo and is transforming into a zombie . As Neil enters the fortress , Murder senses his presence and silently orders Madeleine to kill Neil . She approaches Neil with a knife , but Bruner stops her . Neil follows Madeleine to an escarpment , where Murder commands his zombie guardians to kill Neil . Bruner approaches Murder and knocks him out , breaking Murder 's mental control over his zombies . Undirected , the zombies topple off the cliff . Murder awakens and eludes Neil and Bruner , but Charles pushes Murder off the cliff . Charles loses his balance and also falls to his death . Murder 's death releases Madeleine from her zombie trance , and she awakens to embrace Neil .

= = Cast = =

Béla Lugosi as ' Murder ' Legendre , a white Haitian voodoo master who commands a crew of zombies .

Madge Bellamy as Madeleine Short Parker , the fiancée of Neil who is turned into a zombie by Murder Legendre .

John Harron as Neil Parker , a bank employee .

Robert Frazer as Charles Beaumont , a plantation owner who is in love with Madeleine .

Clarence Muse as the coach driver , who leaving Madeleine and Neil in Haiti .

Joseph Cawthorn as Dr. Bruner : a missionary who later helps Neil Parker save Madeleine .

Brandon Hurst as Silver , Beaumont 's butler .

George Burr Macannan as Von Gelder , a formerly rich man who has fallen under Legendre 's spell to become a zombie .

Frederick Peters as Chauvin , a former executioner who has become a zombie under Legendre 's control .

Annette Stone as Maid .

John Printz as Ledot , a zombie .

Dan Crimmins as Pierre , a witch doctor .

Claude Morgan as zombie .

John Fergusson as zombie .

Velma Gresham as Tall Maid .

= = Production = =

White Zombie went into development in early 1932 . The Halperins leased office space from Universal Studios to get their film (then titled Zombie) underway . The film 's zombie theme was inspired by the Broadway play by Kenneth Webb titled Zombie . The screenplay for White Zombie was written by Garnett Weston . Weston 's screenplay focuses more on action than dialog . To aid the Halperins , producer Phil Goldstone helped secure funds for White Zombie as he had for other independent films at the time .

White Zombie was filmed in eleven days in March 1932 and was shot at the Universal Studios lot and Bronson Canyon on such a small budget that it had to film at night . Other than Béla Lugosi and Joseph Cawthorn , the majority of the cast in White Zombie were actors whose fame had diminished since the silent film era . By the time Lugosi appeared in White Zombie , he was already popular with contemporary audiences after his starring role in the hit 1931 film , Dracula . Sources vary about Lugosi 's salary for White Zombie . Claims range between US \$ 500 to \$ 900 . Richard Sheffield , who was his close friend in the 1950s , reported a payment of \$ 5 @, @ 000 for White Zombie on Lugosi 's tax returns . The cast and crew 's reaction to Lugosi on the set was mixed . Madge Bellamy recalled her collaboration with Lugosi positively , stating that he was very pleasant and that he used to kiss her hand in the morning when they would come on to the set . In contrast , assistant cameraman Enzo Martinelli remarked that " Lugosi wasn 't really a friendly type " on set .

Phil Goldstone had previously worked with Bellamy and offered her the role of Madeleine Short for a salary of \$ 5 @, @ 000 . For the role of Dr. Bruner , the Halperins looked for an actor with name value and decided to cast Joseph Cawthorn , who was then known to audiences only as comic relief in stage and film roles . Set designer Ralph Berger utilized the rented sets of previous Universal Studios films . These sets included the great halls from Dracula , pillars and a hanging balcony from The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923) , the dark corridors from Frankenstein (1931) and chairs from The Cat and the Canary (1927) . In addition to Berger , assistant director William Cody and sound director L.E. " Pete " Clark earned their first film credit by working on White Zombie . Jack Pierce , Lugosi 's make @-@ up artist on White Zombie , had been responsible for the make @-@ up of several other famous horror films of the era including Frankenstein , The Wolf Man , and The Mummy (1932) .

The music of White Zombie was supervised by Abe Meyer . Instead of using pre @-@ recorded music , Meyer had orchestras record new versions of compositions for each specific film he was involved in . The music in White Zombie draws from works including Mussorgsky 's " Pictures at an Exhibition " , Gaston Borch 's " Incidental Symphonies " , and Hugo Riesenfeld 's " Death of the Great Chief " . Other pieces on the White Zombie soundtrack include music written by Richard Wagner , H. Maurice Jacquet , Leo Kempenski , and Franz Liszt . The film begins with " Chant " , a composition of wordless vocals and drumming , created by Universal Studios employee Guy Bevier Williams , a specialist in ethnic music .

= = Release = =

White Zombie experienced distribution problems from the beginning , and went through several film studios including Columbia Studios and Educational Pictures before its initial release . United Artists had been distributing several independent and foreign films that year and bought the rights to release White Zombie . A preview of White Zombie 's first cut was shown on June 16 , 1932 , in New York City . This print of White Zombie had a running time of 74 minutes , whereas the regular distribution prints ran for only 69 minutes .

= = = Critical response = = =

Most critical reviews focused on the poor acting and over @-@ the @-@ top storyline . William Boehnel of the New York World @-@ Telegram stated : " The plot ... is really ridiculous , but not so startlingly so as the acting . " Thornton Delehaney of the New York Evening Post wrote , " [T] he story tries to out @-@ Frankenstein Frankenstein , and so earnest is it in its attempt to be thrilling that it overreaches its mark all along the line and resolves into an unintentional and often hilarious comedy . " Irene Thirer of the New York Daily News wrote , " Many fantastic and eerie scenes are evolved , but most of them border on ludicrous " . Industry trade reviews were more positive . The Film Daily wrote : " It rates with the best of this type of film [...] Bela Lugosi is very impressive and makes the picture worthwhile " . Harrison 's Reports wrote , " [The film] is certainly not up to the standards of Dracula or Frankenstein , but the types of audience that go for horror pictures will enjoy it " .

National media outlet reviewers were generally negative . Frederic Smith of Commonweal opined , " [The film is] interesting only in measure of its complete failure " . Liberty wrote , " If you do not get a shock out of this thriller , you will get one out of the acting " . In Vanity Fair 's " Worst Movie of 1932 " article , Pare Lorentz wrote about a " Terrific deadlock with Blonde Venus holding a slight lead over White Zombie , Bring ' Em Back Alive , and Murders in the Rue Morgue " . In the United Kingdom , press was mixed . The Kinematograph Weekly thought the film was " quite well acted , and has good atmosphere " but thought , too , it was " not for the squeamish or the highly intelligent " . The Cinema News and Property Gazette thought the film was for the " less sophisticated " and that the " exaggerated treatment of the subject achieves reverse effect to thrill or conviction " . Years after the film 's release , Victor Halperin expressed a distaste for his horror films : " I don 't believe in fear , violence , and horror , so why traffic in them ? " .

Modern critical reception has been mixed , with critics praising the film 's atmosphere while deprecating the acting . Time Out London wrote , " Halperin shoots this poetic melodrama as trance ... The unique result constitutes a virtual bridge between classic Universal horror and the later Val Lewton productions . " TV Guide gave the film three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half stars out of four , comparing the film 's atmosphere to Carl Dreyer 's film Vampyr . However , the magazine described the acting as " woefully inadequate " , with the exception of Lugosi . Edward G. Bansk , a Val Lewton biographer , identified several flaws in White Zombie , including poor acting , bad timing and other " haphazard and sloppy " film aspects . Bansk wrote , " Although White Zombie is a film with courage , a film difficult not to admire , its ambitions overstep competence of its principal players . "

= = = Box office = = =

White Zombie premiered on July 28 , 1932 , in New York City 's Rivoli Theatre . The film received a mixed box office reception upon its initial release , but was a great financial success for an independent film at the time . In 1933 and 1934 , the film experienced positive box @-@ office numbers in small towns in the United States , as well as in Germany under the title Flucht von der Teufelsinsel . White Zombie was one of the few American horror films to be approved by the Nazis . The popularity of the film led Victor Halperin to a contract with Paramount Studios .

Opening on July 29 , 1932 , in Providence , Rhode Island and Indianapolis , Indiana , the film grossed \$ 9 @,@ 900 and \$ 5 @,@ 000 , respectively , following one @-@ week engagements .

Frankenstein and other contemporary horror films had grossed more in Providence , and the Indianapolis theater " wasn 't too happy with White Zombie , but what audiences saw it were pleased enough . " In Cleveland , Ohio , White Zombie sold a record 16 @, @ 728 tickets its first weekend on its initial release in August . In Montreal , Canada , the film opened August 3 at the Princess Theatre . The facade had been transformed into a " House of the Living Dead " and " zombies " walked atop the marquee . The film failed to gross its estimated \$ 8 @, @ 000 and earned only \$ 6 @, @ 500 following a one @-@ week run at the Princess Theatre . In comparison , Dracula had grossed \$ 14 @, @ 000 at Montreal 's Palace Theatre during its first week in March 1931 .

= = = Home video = = =

White Zombie was transferred from poor quality prints to VHS and Betamax in the 1980s . The film has been released on DVD from several companies ? including K @-@ Tel and Alpha Video ? with varying image quality . The book *Zombie Movies : The Ultimate Guide* described the Roan 's later DVD release of the title as the best available . The online film database Allmovie features a positive review of the Roan Group 's transfer , stating the film " has never looked better " . The film was released on Blu @-@ ray on January 29 , 2013 , from Kino Video .

= = Aftermath and influence = =

White Zombie is considered to be the first feature length zombie film and has been described as the archetype and model of all zombie movies . Not many early horror films followed White Zombie 's Haitian origins style . Other horror films from the 1930s borrowed themes from White Zombie , such as people returning from the dead and other elements of zombie mythology . These films include : *The Ghost Breakers* (1940) , *King of the Zombies* (1941) , *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) , and *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966) . These films all contain elements from White Zombie including the blank @-@ eyed stares , the voodoo drums , and zombies performing manual labor .

Victor Halperin directed a White Zombie sequel , *Revolt of the Zombies* , which was released in 1936 . Béla Lugosi was considered for the role of villain Armand Louque , but the part went to Dean Jagger . Cinematographer Arthur Martinelli and producer Edward Halperin returned for the sequel . Modern critical response to *Revolt of the Zombies* is generally unfavorable . In a review from *Zombie Movies : The Ultimate Guide* , the review declares that " [T] here 's no experimentation here , only dull composition shots and flatly lit shots of yakking characters in a by @-@ the @-@ numbers plot . " Allmovie rated White Zombie three stars out of five , while it gave *Revolt of the Zombies* only one star and deemed it far inferior to the original .

Scenes from White Zombie have appeared in other films including Curtis Hanson 's *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* , Michael Almereyda 's *Nadja* , and Tim Burton 's *Ed Wood* . The heavy metal band White Zombie appropriated their name from the film . The group 's vocalist Rob Zombie said of the film , " [It 's] a great film that not a lot of people know about ... It amazes me that a film that is so readily available can be so lost . " In 1997 , the Janus company released a model kit based on the Murder Legendre character .

In 2009 , it was announced that Tobe Hooper would direct a remake of White Zombie . Screenwriter Jared Rivet worked on a script in 2007 with Hooper . The project was halted due to rights issues . Rivet explained that White Zombie " is clearly public domain , but there were question marks about uncredited source material . "

In 2013 , Walkabout Publishing released Stephen D. Sullivan 's adaptation of White Zombie . No stranger to adaptations , Sullivan told *Monster Kid Radio* , " Waitamminute , there are movies in the public that I can do an adaptation of , the same way I did *Iron Man* ... and White Zombie was right at the top of the list of public domain films that I thought would be a good adaptation . "