

# Frankenstein Unbound

USA | 1990 | 82 minutes

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	Roger Corman
<b>Screenplay</b>	Roger Corman, F.X. Feeney (novel by Brian Aldiss)
<b>Music</b>	Carl Davis
<b>Photography</b>	Armando Nannuzzi, Michael Scott

## Cast

Buchanan	John Hurt
Victor Frankenstein	Raul Julia
The Monster	Nick Brimble
Mary	Bridget Fonda

## In Brief

The ultimate weapon which was meant to be safe for the mankind produces global side effects including time slides and disappearances. The scientist behind the project and his car are zapped from the year 2031 to 1817's Switzerland where he finds Dr Victor Frankenstein and his contemporaries.

Adapted from Brian Aldiss's novel this is Corman's last directorial effort to date.



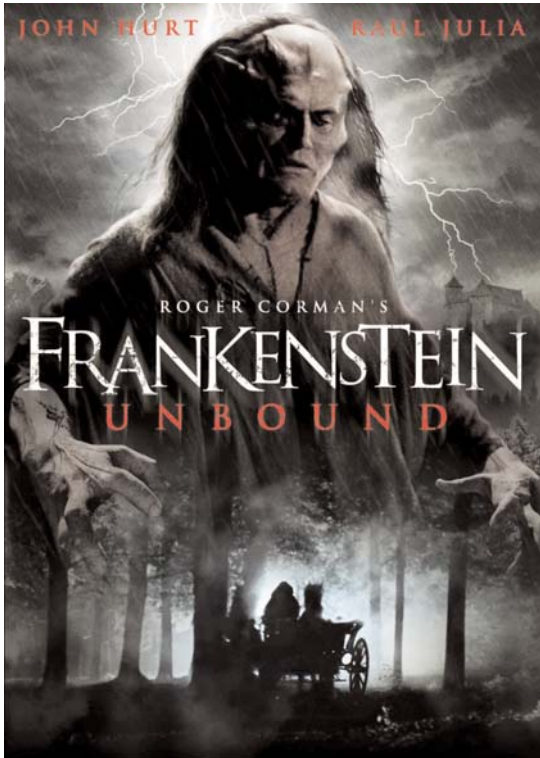
In a way, Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* is the most faithful adaptation of Mary Shelley's classic parable ever made. It doesn't follow the events in the Gothic novel as closely as other versions; indeed, it even adds time travel, nuclear war, Mary Shelley herself, and a climactic laser battle. It does, however, understand the theme that Shelley created with her work—the quest for knowledge going too far—and expands on it in a way that takes her novel more seriously than it has ever been taken before. Corman directs, bringing the same type of visual flair and eye for horrific images that distinguished his low-budget Poe adaptations. He still hasn't quite figured out how to direct human beings, but the power of the story prevails despite this flaw.

The film is narrated by Joe Buchanan (played by John Hurt), and like Shelley's novel, it opens and closes with its narrator trapped in icy desolation. In the book, this snow-covered wasteland is quickly established as the Arctic, but we only come to find out in the film's closing scenes where the narrator is trapped. The viewer's discovery of what this place is might be the most crucial development in the film, so I will not give it away. I will, however, disclose the single clue that Buchanan himself reveals in the opening moments: "Einstein said that if he had known exactly what the nuclear bomb could do, he never would have become a watchmaker." This doesn't give away nearly as much as you might think, and I shall leave it at that.

The rest of the film is really a buildup for Buchanan's final journey to this desolate place. It begins in the not-so-distant future. Buchanan is a scientist trying to develop a new type of atomic weapon that will still take countless lives but spare the environment from desolation. This weapon is finally invented in the film's first few moments, but its side effect is a temporal tornado that blasts the scientist back to the early nineteenth century, where he encounters not only Victor Frankenstein (Raul Julia) and his hideous Creation (Nick Brimble), but Mary Shelley herself (Bridget Fonda), along with the other members of her free-loving party, Percy Shelley (Michael Hutchence) and Lord Byron (Jason Patric). With both of these parties co-existing in the same story, we are forced to conclude either A) The film speculates that Shelley wrote her novel based on events that she witnessed, or B) Buchanan has not been sent back through time, but rather, to a completely alternate-universe. The film never says which it is, but no matter. It makes for a genuinely intriguing idea either way, and since we know that the icy desolation at the beginning is caused in part by Buchanan, we understand the film's metaphor: Buchanan horrified at Frankenstein's achievement is kind of like Joseph Stalin shuddering at Jim Jones. We significantly realize this paradox before Buchanan.

Most of the film's flaws come in the interaction between Buchanan and these bizarre characters. Films like this require the viewer to suspend their disbelief, but the actors have done so as well, which makes for scenes between them that never quite add up. When Buchanan meets Victor Frankenstein and states that he knows of his work, Frankenstein replies with an aloof, "No one knows my work." Fair enough, but when Buchanan meets the Creature and proceeds to tell Frankenstein exactly what his secret work has been in vivid detail, the mad scientist still remains underwhelmed. I fail to see why Frankenstein never sees Buchanan as a threat, as the man realizes that innocent people have died because of his own meddling with science—a fact that could destroy Frankenstein if it went public. Nevertheless, Frankenstein remains brooding and apathetic throughout the entire film, with little concern for Buchanan. I'm not sure why Julia chose to portray Frankenstein this way, but it was a poor acting choice. It is as if his mind has wandered off into another movie.

Also odd is the interaction between Buchanan and Mary Shelley. Fonda emits a certain charm as Mary - wide-eyed, intelligent, and



certainly capable of writing the greatest piece of Gothic fiction ever written in the English language. But she is equally underwhelmed by this strange man claiming that he is from the future, who knows about her life and the novel that she is working on. He even takes her for a ride in his futuristic car, and she is more excited than shocked. Perhaps the film is arguing that Shelley's mind was open to such possibilities, but I couldn't help thinking that her reaction was a little too restrained.

On the other hand, I suppose we could argue that because all of this could very well be an alternate reality or a dream, it doesn't matter how Frankenstein or Shelley react to Buchanan. All that matters is Buchanan's own revelations. Fair enough, but I defer to Roger Ebert (as I often do, and you should too), who wrote in his review for *Labyrinth*, "I have a problem with almost all nightmare movies: They aren't as suspenseful as they should be because they don't have to follow any logic. Anything can happen, nothing needs to happen, nothing is as it seems and the rules keep changing." I agree; some sort of consistency should have been followed to make Buchanan's interactions more engaging. Many literary scholars have argued that in the original novel, Captain Robert Walton (who Buchanan replaces here) narrates a story that could very well be a hallucination as well, but his story (of Frankenstein and his Creature) is so grounded in horrific reality that we accept the premise without ever wondering whether or not it is all real until after we have finished the book and reflect upon Shelley's narrative strategy. This would have been a good example for Corman to follow.

Despite the shortcomings among the characters, *Frankenstein Unbound* still works because of the understanding of Frankenstein's theme and its application to

modern society's scientific developments. Buchanan, like Frankenstein, is not guilty of sin because he wants to know the secrets of the universe. He is guilty because he refuses to take responsibility for his actions, and because his goals of scientific discovery reflect his own selfish drive to leave a mark in history instead of a genuine desire to bring value to his society. In addition, the entire cast, sans Julia, is excellent; particularly Brimble as the Creature, who never seems to comprehend that the world around him is anything but, like himself, a creation of Frankenstein. Thus, he kills relentlessly because he believes that Frankenstein can simply bring his loved ones back from the dead, and he does not understand why the scientist is constantly frustrated at all of the deaths.

In Shelley's novel, there were three rings of narrative: Ship Captain Robert Walton on the outer ring, whose journey to the Arctic was slowly driving him and his crew mad. In the center ring, Victor Frankenstein himself had his tale of terror and the unknown. In the inner ring stood the Creature, whose isolation and rage moved the entire story along. In the novel, as Walton interacted with both Frankenstein and the Creature, he was forced to see his own face and voyage as on the same deadly path as Frankenstein's. The same story-telling frame is here in *Frankenstein Unbound*, only it is Buchanan on the outer ring. As the Creature's revenge on Frankenstein destroys everything the scientist loves, Buchanan is forced to draw parallels to his own monstrous creation, and he comes to realize that Frankenstein is not the only person who has created "an abomination in the eyes of God."

As a result of this revelation, the closing scenes pack a powerful punch, as Buchanan understands that, like Frankenstein, he must take responsibility for his actions, which have created a path of destruction as "unbound" as the Creature himself. The final shot in *Frankenstein Unbound* creates a brilliant conclusion—subtle, reflective, truly horrific, and with a message to today's advances in weaponry that is just as profound as Shelley's warning towards the scientific advances of her generation.

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edinBURGH  
FILM  
GUILD

Roger Corman Directs

Frankenstein Unbound is a 1990 horror movie based on Brian Aldiss' novel of the same name. This film was directed by Roger Corman, returning to the director's chair after a hiatus of almost twenty years. The primary character is scientist Joe Buchanan, played by John Hurt. The supporting characters include Ra'ñl Juli'j as Frankenstein and Bridget Fonda as Mary Shelley. Nick Brimble plays the Monster. Frankenstein Unbound is one of those movies that is almost impossible to categorize. Part horror, part science fiction, part fantasy, and part comedy. And what is even more interesting is the cast of all stars. Frankenstein Unbound begins in the summer of 2020, in a series of letters from Joseph Bodenland—a liberal presidential adviser ousted by right-wing extremists and now staying at his ranch in New Houston, Texas—to his wife in Indonesia. The world is at war, but Joe hopes that the news of a space-time rupture will stop further conflict. Frankenstein Unbound book. Read 64 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Joe Bodenland, a 21st century American, passes through a times... We'd love your help. Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Frankenstein Unbound by Brian W. Aldiss. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Frankenstein Unbound is a 1990 science fiction horror film based on Brian Aldiss' novel of the same name, starring John Hurt, Raul Julia, Bridget Fonda, Jason Patric, and Nick Brimble. Buchanan engages security devices and the monster is burned to death by lasers. Buchanan makes his way to the nearby city through the snow. As he walks, the monster's voice is heard saying that he cannot truly be killed, for now, he is "unbound."