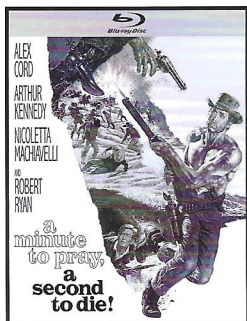


The DVD includes a director's commentary; 27 minutes of rough, behind-the-scenes footage, including a fire-stunt gone wrong; a recent interview with John Beaton Hill; plus Bessenger's early, nine-minute IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE, in which a young man has a strange encounter at his home, complete with a telegraphed twist.

Lensed in Spain and Italy, and featuring a trio of American marquee-value stars, 1968's **A MINUTE TO PRAY, A SECOND TO DIE** (Kino Lorber Studio Classics) arrived in US theatres at the height of the spaghetti western craze, but was also the sort of generic action-outing that eventually killed this sub-genre... With a \$10,000 bounty on his head, gunslinger Clay McCord (Alex Cord) has every lowlife and lawman in the region after him.



But McCord is also struggling with some personal demons — hence the flashbacks to his childhood and epileptic father — with recent, painful spasms in his gun arm convincing Clay that a similarly debilitating fate lies in his own future. Hiding out in the dusty, rundown outlaw community of

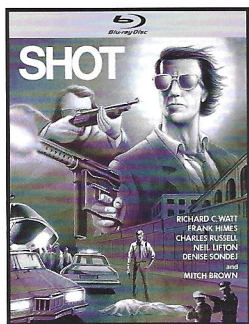
Escondido, sultry servant girl Laurinda (Nicoletta Machiavelli) tends McCord's wounds, cooks his grub and falls for this wanted lug. Meanwhile, New Mexico territorial governor Lem Carter (Robert Ryan, who doesn't show up until an hour into the story) offers a blanket amnesty to all criminals, which sounds good to McCord. Unfortunately, Tuscosa's Marshal, Roy Colby (multi-Oscar-nominee Arthur Kennedy), is blocking any outlaws from actually getting into town to take advantage of this deal... Though relatively bloodless, there's an outlandishly high body count, as McCord guns down anyone who gets in his way, and few supporting characters survive to see the end credits. Co-scripted by future Empire Pictures bigwig Albert Band (who also produced the film) and upcoming Oscar-nominee Louis Garfinkle (for *THE DEER HUNTER*'s original story), the melodrama is over-baked, its amnesty subplot is a mess, and although the direction by Franco Giraldi (*SUGAR COLT*) lacks any distinctive style, his impromptu castmembers keep it reasonably amusing. Cord is a solid presence and capably handles his role's "we can't afford a stuntman" physical demands (such as being strung up, shirtless, in the middle of town), while Kennedy and Ryan both share amusing interactions with Cord's outlaw, with all three participating in the finale's farmhouse siege. The Blu-ray includes an extended international ending — four minutes longer, and far more downbeat — plus a commentary by spaghetti-western connoisseur (and *REPO MAN* director) Alex Cox, who's knowledgeable enough about the film but leaves too many dead spots throughout his track.

Frustrated by their lack of success in '50s Hollywood, wannabe-director Charles Davis teamed up with two friends, actor Douglas Wilson and screenwriter Bob Wehling, and decided to simply make their own movie — a black-and-white, \$42,000 production, with an eight-day shooting schedule and no-name cast. **GET OUTTA TOWN** (Alpha Video) may not have been the bold calling card they'd hoped (after sneak previewing in late-1958 under its working title, *THE DAY KELLY CAME HOME*, the film was eventually double-billed with *THE AMAZING TRANSPARENT MAN*, nearly two years later), but it's an appealingly pulpy, 63-minute revenge-drama with loads of

hardboiled patter and striking urban ambience provided by the (pre-gentrification) Bunker Hill area of downtown Los Angeles... When his younger brother Tommy is found dead in a gutter, ex-safecracker Kelly Oleson (Wilson) returns to his old LA stomping grounds after three years in order to bury his sibling.

Once a highly disreputable sort, Kelly might've cleaned up his act while away, but when he discovers that Tommy was actually murdered, this former "punk" is determined to find the people responsible, reluctantly aided by ex-girlfriend Jill (Jeannie Baird). He's soon nosing about local bookie joints, running into old criminal compadres, hassled by intolerant cops, squeezing witnesses for the truth, and reconnecting with Rico (Tony Louis), who now works for the "syndicate," with Kelly eventually beaten and framed as he closes in on the truth. Plus like any good noir, nobody can be trusted. Hell, even your aged, grey-haired mother is liable to turn on you! Competently lensed and rarely dull, its story is constantly blunted by flavorless direction and hit-and-miss performances. Wilson (in his first and only lead role) is earnest but wooden, when the part required someone more unpredictably dangerous; Baird is only slightly more effective; while the supporting cast includes Marilyn O'Connor (the director's wife, in her film debut) as Rico's manipulative, man-hungry mis-sus and Tommy Holden (who later starred in the Wehling-directed bra-salesman comedy, *WHAT'S UP FRONT*) as sniveling lowlife Squirrel. Though never particularly groundbreaking, it's amusing B-movie fodder with plenty of ragged charm.

Back in 1973, University of Illinois grad students Mitch Brown and Nate Kohn had the seemingly-crazy idea to make a feature-length film, but damn if they didn't pull it off with **SHOT** (Vinegar Syndrome), an enjoyable, ambitious, **FRENCH CONNECTION** pastiche that's littered with multi-car chases, shoot-outs and hard-assed cop antics. Filmed in and around Champaign, Illinois, Brown tackled its direction, Kohn produced, the entire crew was college-affiliated, plus the 92-minute feature's \$15,000 budget was raised from

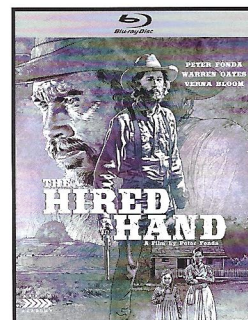


proceeds from the pair's on-campus film screenings... Richard C. Watt is Ross, a plainclothes cop who shoots first, checks his facts afterward, proudly considers himself a "pig", and brings his badge and gun on a date, so that he can bust an art-house film-snob for smoking a joint. Mind you, he's our good guy! Ross and his partner Wilson (Chuck Russell) are "hot dogs" in the department, and whenever they aren't busting two-bit dealers, the duo are annoying their by-the-book Captain. Meanwhile, a local crime syndicate is peddling drugs and gunning down pot growers who get on their nerves, lowlife Blasi (Frank Hines) plans to fly a private plane full of dope in from Canada, and Ross is close on his trail, killing a staggering number of people in the process. The student actors

are green but enthusiastic, and its amateur roots are occasionally evident (e.g., its uniformed cops all look like typical '70s college kids playing dress-up), but the production's roughness is a big part of its scrappy charm. Despite the obviously freezing weather conditions, it's easy to imagine the fun they had running about the streets while brandishing firearms, driving barely-roadworthy old taxis converted into police cars, or showing off their demolition derby skills in the film's climactic showdown. They even snagged a plane and a helicopter for a few set-pieces and aerial shots! Laced with surprisingly well-composed action, smart use of authentic locations, and moments of offbeat humor — Blasi's dim-witted entourage, Wilson's fondness for porn, or the irony that the local drug rehab clinic is secretly run by the city's biggest pusher — *SHOT* is ingenious, gritty and amusingly half-baked fun. The Blu-ray/DVD set includes a new interview with Brown, an audio interview with Kohn, plus ads, stills and promotional articles.

In the wake of *EASY RIDER*'s unexpected success — topping the US box-office for six weeks in the summer of 1969 — Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper became hot commodities. While Hopper's follow-up project was the blow-addled vanity project *THE LAST MOVIE*, Fonda parlayed his new-found clout into his directorial debut, 1971's poetic, character-driven period-western **THE HIRED HAND** (Arrow Academy), written by Alan Sharp (ULZANA'S RAID)...

Disenchanted with his rootless lifestyle, grizzled drifter Harry Collings (Fonda) returns home after seven years — to his wife Hannah (MEDIUM COOL's Verna Bloom) and young daughter Janey, who's been told that her father is dead, with longtime traveling companion Arch



(Fonda's future *RACE WITH THE DEVIL* co-star, Warren Oates) accompanying Harry on the trek back to his remote farmhouse. Justifiably bitter at her estranged husband, Hannah refuses to simply take Harry back, but allows the pair to stay on as hired hands, with Harry eventually contending with gossip around town that his lonely wife slept with some of her previous help. Bloom has a severe look to suit Hannah's proud, independent streak, Oates is quietly commanding, and the three leads share a strong chemistry without resorting to hackneyed drama. A bit of gunplay and bloodshed bookends the contemplative central story as well, with Harry and Arch losing a colleague during an early pitstop (courtesy of Severn Darden's sadistic asshole) and getting revenge, which only leads to dangerous repercussions in the final reel. But any violence is sudden, chaotic and ugly, without a hint of cheesy heroism. Gorgeously captured by cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond (just before heading north to shoot Robert Altman's *MCCABE & MRS. MILLER*), it's filled with lovely little throw-away details, dreamy montages and intimate moments. Too quietly elegiac for its era, *THE HIRED HAND* has only gotten better with age, and this Blu-ray is packed with fascinating extras. In addition to a commentary by Fonda, there's an hour-long 2003 documentary on the film, featuring Fonda, Bloom and many of its crew members; deleted scenes, including Larry Hagman's excised role as the town sheriff; a 76-minute audio recording of Fonda and Oates attending the 1971 London Film Festival; plus a 1978 profile of various Scottish writers, including scriptwriter Sharp.