

THE

NINTH CIRCLE

BOOKS

CULT CINEMA: THE ARROW VIDEO COMPANION

Anthony Nield, ed.
Arrow Films

Arrow Video is well known to genre film buffs as a DVD and Blu-ray distributor of horror and cult cinema, but now the company has taken that love a step further. *Cult Cinema: The Arrow Video Companion* is a richly illustrated king-size hardback in which genre experts delve into all things cult, with a strong emphasis on horror: at least eighteen essays out of 30 are horror-related.

Ben Wheatley's lacklustre autobiographical intro is followed by twenty essays previously featured in Arrow's booklets or discs, while ten have been specially commissioned for this 246-page book. The quality of writing is uniformly high, as is to be expected from such well-established authors. Although brief, the essays are crammed with information and insight, and are certain to bring new and worthy material even to seasoned cinephiles.

The material is divided into five chapters. The first, on key cult movies, contains some of the

best writing in the book: "The House is the Monster" (Tim Lucas on Roger Corman's use of colour in *The Fall of the House of Usher*), "Murder

Set Pieces" (Alan Jones on *Deep Red*), "A Battle Without End" (Tom Mes on *Battle Royale*) and, especially illuminating, "American Giallo" (Maitland McDonagh on *Dressed to Kill*).

It's followed by the entries on Directors, in which Caelum Vatnsdal writes on David Cronenberg, Mike Sutton on Wes Craven and John Kenneth Muir on George A. Romero; Actors, in which David Del Valle sheds light on Vincent Price, and Vic Pratt on Boris Karloff; Genres (and Sub-genres), which includes an all-too-brief introduction to Giallo by Michael Mackenzie, a solid mini-essay on Canuxploitation by *Rue Morgue's* Paul Corupe, the always reliable and exhaustive Kim Newman on Christmas Horror and an unexpectedly fun one on Food Horror by Joel Harley (inspired by, but not limited to, Larry Cohen's

The Stuff). Finally there's Distribution, with fine reminiscences of the Early Days of Cult Cinema, Video Nasties and Horror Festivals, Fanzines and *Nekromantik*.

The essays in this compendium prove that valuable writing is often found in liner notes and DVD booklets. Arrow's *Cult Cinema* does them justice by its all-around lavish treatment, which also includes another stunning cover illustration by Graham Humphreys.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THE KAIJU FILM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF CINEMA'S BIGGEST MONSTERS

Jason Barr
McFarland

There's nothing short of a Godzilla-sized pile of books devoted to giant monster movies – it's probably the most covered genre film trend this side of classic Universal horror franchises. The latest work to take the big-screen beasts head on is Jason Barr's *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters*, a well-written and thorough peek at the phenomenon, that also delves into a variety of possible social, historical and political interpretations of these films.

All the usual suspects are represented, from Godzilla and Gamera to King Kong and King Ghidra, but Barr's scholarly analysis also highlights lesser-known kaiju such as Daimajin and Gappa alongside modern American depictions (2008's *Cloverfield* and 2013's *Pacific Rim* are covered). Arguing for kaiju to be recognized as its own distinct genre, Barr performs a good dissection of the influences and context under which these films have flourished. Starting at the birthing ground of Japanese mythology and theatre, he looks at kaiju film history through various lenses, including monsters as atomic allegories and as physically manifested anxiety about scientific advancement. He also delves into the 1970s push to put environmental issues at the forefront, and harsh criticisms of American imperialism, as well as the genre's take on gender politics and what got lost in translation as giant monsters made their way to North America.

Intended more for academics than casual readers, it's convincingly argued, if occasionally overly serious – Barr decries those who dwell on the "cheese" of the genre, and draws a distinction between serious kaiju works and films for "entertainment only." In truth, this line doesn't need to be absolute – it's certainly possible to enjoy the films as spectacles while simultaneously appreciating their deeper themes. Likewise, an afterword that lays out the author's concerns about the future of kaiju films hews perilously close to enthusiast handwringing. Still, it's not enough to sully this otherwise thoughtful appraisal of Godzilla and friends, which reveals just how poignantly many of these films stomp their way through Japan's rich historical and cultural landscapes.

PAUL CORUPE

SUDDEN STORM: A WENDIGO READER

Curated by Larry Fessenden
Fiddleblack

Given the importance of the wendigo to North American First People's folklore, and how many films, novels, TV shows and comic books have incorporated the entity, it's shocking that it hasn't been explored more in non-fiction. So credit to Larry Fessenden for curating *Sudden Storm: A Wendigo Reader*, a collection of essays, interviews, historical accounts and pages of scripts from his own wendigo-themed movies. Like the mythical beast itself, however, a proper wendigo remains elusive.

Without a doubt, *Sudden Storm* boasts some very illuminating essays, such as Chris Hibbard's previously published "The Many Faces of the Wendigo: An Examination," which gives the monster vital historical, cultural and even pop-cultural context, and Carter Meland's "It Consumes What It Forgets," which specifically places the folklore within the stories of the Anishinaabe Indian people to explain how it functions as both a cautionary tale and a teaching tool. So if you're unfamiliar with the wendigo, the book offers all the necessary background, much of it genuinely horrific, such as the descriptions of the slow, torturous process in

