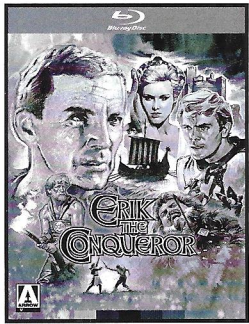


Piggybacking onto the success of Kirk Douglas' popular historical-epic *THE VIKINGS*, while shamelessly purloining a fair amount of its plot in the process, 1961's *ERIK THE CONQUEROR* [Gil Invasori] (Arrow Video) is saved by director-cinematographer Mario Bava's lovingly excessive visuals and gratuitous violence. But while peppered with colorful, costumed action and adventure, in the US, the film often ended up on the bottom half of American-International double bills, paired with drive-in hits like *BEACH PARTY*...

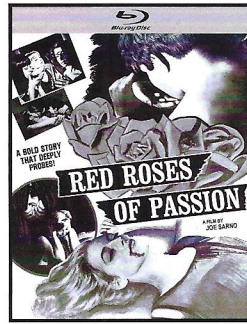


Bava opens the film in 786 A.D., with a "barbarian" Viking village on British soil graphically massacred — men, women, children — courtesy of Sir Rulford (BLACK SUNDAY's Andrea Checchi), an ambitious nationalist who despises how these "filthy" foreigners have fouled his country. Damn, this dude is so dastardly that he kills his own King after the monarch shows

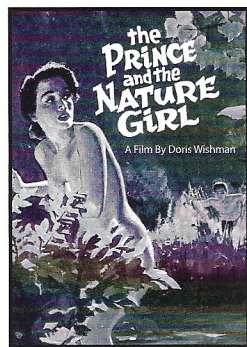
undo compassion for these savages! Two sons of a Viking warlord survive but wind up separated, with rescued Eron returned to the North, where he grows up to be a bleach-blonde Cameron Mitchell (42-years-old, but continually called "young" and "inexperienced"), while kid brother Erik is found by the widowed, childless British Queen Alice. Of course, 20 years later, Eron is leading the attacking Viking fleet, adult Erik (Italian genre star George Ardisson) is put in charge of the British sea forces, and it's soon a clash between clueless siblings. If only someone had noticed their odd matching tattoos, it would've saved a lot of hassles... Although the story sometimes gets bogged down by romance, Bava never takes it very seriously, as the two brothers (instantaneously, but separately) fall in love with twin virgin slave girls (Alice and Ellen Kessler), complete with all of the expected identity confusion. Meanwhile, back at the Viking homeland, Bava indulges in highly-stylized sets, armed dancing maidens, manly duels, and enjoyably goofy rituals, all beautifully captured by his widescreen color camerawork. Full of sweaty macho men, sultry ladies, dumbass derring-do, wildly overwrought melodrama, casual S&M, plus one of cinema's most ludicrously protracted death scenes, this Italian knock-off is often a lot more unpretentious fun than its larger-budgeted Hollywood precursor. The Blu-ray/DVD set includes a commentary by Bava-aficionado Tim Lucas, a fascinating hour-long audio conversation between Cameron Mitchell and Lucas from 1989, a video comparison between *ERIK* and *THE VIKINGS*, plus a booklet essay by Kat Ellinger.

Erotic cinema pioneer Joseph Sarno has long been respected for the style and atmosphere he brought to his prurient subject matter. And while 1966's *RED ROSES OF PASSION* (Vinegar Syndrome) might not be one of his more celebrated or costly efforts, this kinky, fantasy-fueled feature — shot in New York City and released on the heels of Sarno's widely-distributed *MOONLIGHTING WIVES* and *SIN IN THE SUBURBS* — is notable for what the guy could accomplish with some film stock, curtain-draped backdrops, fluffy peignoirs, and a few sad bodega flowers... Patricia McNair [as Laurene Claire] plays frustrated Carla, a woman who yearns for sexual gratification but is stuck living with her uptight Aunt Julie and Cousin Tracey. All of that changes after Carla encounters tarot reader Martha (Helena Clayton) and her

female devotees of the ancient god Pan, who meet for cut-rate conclaves that consist of wearing see-through nighties and teasing their bodies with roses, with a chosen "communicant" going into a back room to "converse" with Pan in an unseen "sacred ceremony" (nudge nudge, wink wink). Using one of the group's powerful aphrodisiacs, Carla secretly drugs her chaste auntie and cousin, instantly transforming them into raging, rose-obsessed nymphomaniacs who screw a hunky delivery man, keep Carla up all night with their noisy lovemaking, and literally fill their living room with horny gentlemen callers... Never very explicit, it also suffers from flat performances, tedious pacing, softcore scenes that are more silly than steamy, and an underwhelming conclusion. Still, even a middling Sarno outing has its unexpected pleasures. Unlike so many skinflicks from that era, the actresses are beautifully made-up and photographed, with crisp black-and-white cinematography by Anthony Lover (director of the hilarious 1968 Ingmar Bergman spoof *DE DÜVA*). Most remarkably, despite all of its gratuitous writhing and moaning, goofy supernatural shenanigans and lingerie-clad catfighting, Sarno somehow maintains a deadly serious tone throughout, which only adds to the film's present-day kitschy appeal. The Blu-ray/DVD includes a featurette with Sarno-biographer Michael Bowen.



In the 1950s and early-'60s, nudist camp films managed to sneak past puritanical US censors due to their purported educational value. Director Doris Wishman made a string of these cut-rate outings, and her last was 1965's long-lost, pathetically no-budget *THE PRINCE AND THE NATURE GIRL* (Retro-Seduction Cinema). Barely an hour long, this threadbare tale of love and deception (scripted by Andrew J. Kuehn, future founder of the innovative movie marketing firm Kaleidoscope Films and director of the 1984 horror compilation *TERROR IN THE AISLES*) is padded out with stock footage and b-roll leftovers from Wishman's earlier nudist efforts — naked sunbathing, gardening, swimming, contemplative posing — with much of its new footage shot at New Jersey's dreary, long-shuttered Sunny Heights Lodge. The bare-bones "plot" involves handsome Mr. Prince (Jeffrey Niles), who works in a Manhattan office building and spends his weekends basking in healthy sunshine at a nearby nudist camp. We also meet twin sisters Eve (a blonde) and Sue (a brunette), both played by Joni Roberts, who're new to town and both end up working for Prince. Of course, even though the pair are nearly identical looking, Prince asks out the shallow blonde and barely notices her more level-headed brunette sibling. Eve and Prince eventually run into each other at this nudist camp, enjoying a day of horseshoes and long walks in the woods, but when Eve goes out of town, lovesick Sue slips on a handy blonde wig and poses as her sister for



their next nature excursion (oddly, Prince is the only guy who never removes his swim trunks). All the while, Wishman doesn't even try to conceal her quick-cash-grab intentions. The same clip of a passing plane is chopped up and used in three different sections of the film. Shots of tropical Florida palm trees and flowers are sloppily intercut with our two stars wandering about the outskirts of NJ's Pine Barrens. Plus a sequence of Prince getting into his convertible and heading to the nudist camp is shot at the exact same location where he eventually gets back into his car to leave the place. Fuck continuity! Best of all, the twins reside in Wishman's old East Village apartment (dig that red, wall-to-wall carpeting and groovy bar set-up!). This release is a bit of a patchwork reconstruction as well, combining a German-dubbed 35mm print with newly-recorded, English-language dialogue taken from a transcript kept by the New York Censor's Board, but it all fits perfectly with Wishman's original, blatantly slapdash approach. The DVD includes a commentary with Michael Raso, John Fedele and Wishman-historian Michael J. Bowen; an "Atomic TV" segment with Doris at 1999's Maryland Film Festival; the b&w short *NATURE GIRL*, with the lovely Joan Arnold; and a 1941 visit to the Rock Ridge nudist club in Stockholm, NJ.

Christopher Michael has been acting for over 30 years, and while he's appeared in films such as *NEW JACK CITY* and *THE CABLE GUY*, his best known gig was a recurring role on TV's 7th *HEAVEN* as Glenoak, California's helpful Police Sergeant Michaels (who was promoted to Detective, then Captain, and finally Police Chief over the show's 11-year run). But in his free time, Michael has mixed horror, sex and rude humor in such do-it-yourself projects as 1996's *TERROR OF BLOOD GYM* and *LIMP FANGS: THE ADVENTURES OF COUNT MALT-LIQU-ELA* (reviewed, respectively, in SC#9 and #10). Well, director Michael has returned to his underground roots with *PURGATORY* (Creep Production), his first digital short film... Jerome Jackson (Chris Michael, reviving his old "impoverished street negro" character, The Creeper) is murdered by his pissed-off girlfriend after accusing her of stealing the last corn meal biscuit, only to awaken in a strange room, accompanied by several equally-confused individuals — a lawyer, a nun, a bluesman (Joe Romersa, from Michael's 1998 anti-drug short *THE BLUESMAN*) — with all of them soon realizing that they're in *Purgatory*. Awaiting judgment from a magenta-wigged "Las Vegas showgirl lady" (Diane Chernansky), sleazy lawyer Stan Greenblatt (Ken Stirbl) and blubbering, pleading Jackson end up the last remaining two, only to discover that you never know what a little kindness will lead to in your future... Only 15 minutes long and featuring last-minute cameos by a pair of surprisingly cordial divine figures, this is little more than a vignette featuring a handful of actor-friends, Hell, some scenes make John Waters' earliest work look positively slick and extravagant (e.g., Michael is first glimpsed in blackface, wearing a thrift-store wig and ass-ripped sweatpants; his "girlfriend" is an ugly dude in a frizzy wig and dress that barely covers his junk; and the pair live in a tiny, backyard garden shed). Most importantly, while most home-brewed productions have gotten substantially more polish-

