

Rob Freese's
BEST OF THE
SPAGHETTI WEST

WARNER ARCHIVE
(\$17.99 DVD each)

THE FIVE MAN ARMY (1969) ♂♂♂
D: Don Taylor. Peter Graves, James Daly,
Bud Spencer, Nino Castelnuovo, Tetsuro
Tanba, Daniela Giordano. 105 mins.

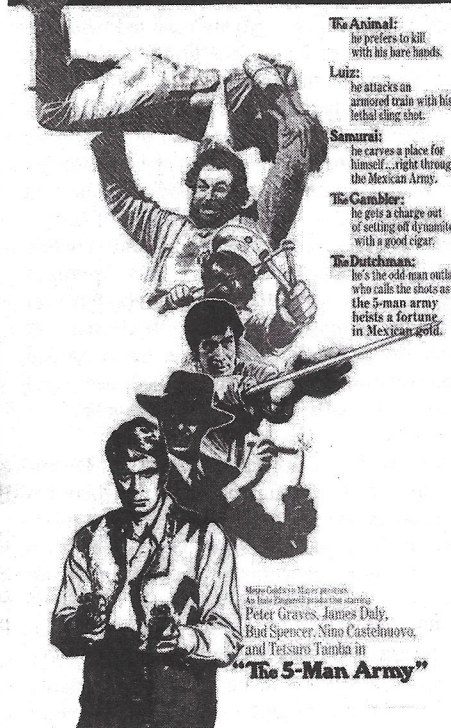
The Dutchman (Graves) calls upon cohorts from his past for an elaborate train heist. Luis (Castelnuovo), an acrobat, brings the men to the Dutchman. They include explosives expert Augustus (Daly), knife artist Samurai (Tanba) and the perpetually hungry muscleman Mesito (Spencer). After saving a man important to the Mexican Revolution, the team sets out to steal a half million dollars in gold to help support the cause. Somewhere along the way, the men forget they are hired hands and readily assume the Dutchman is joking about handing the fortune over, but all that gets sorted out in the sentimental climax. For the most part, this is a rollicking adventure as the five go through the paces of their journey together and become reluctant heroes. The train robbery is one of the most straight-up fun and inventive heists I've seen yet, with nonstop action from start to finish. There is a good amount of humor sprinkled throughout but it never intrudes on the action. The cast is completely likable, except maybe Castelnuovo as the young hothead in the group, but the characters play off one another well. Director Taylor began his career as an actor and appears briefly as a poker player here, his last on-screen appearance before resuming a successful directing career that included films like *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, *Damien: Omen 2* and *The Final Countdown*. There is some mystery re who actually completed this flick. Some sources say Taylor quit early and producer Italo Zigarrelli took over, while others claim co-writer Dario Argento may have finished the production before embarking on his directorial debut, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. The Warner Archive box provides two versions of the title; it's listed as *The 5-Man Army!* on the front cover and *The Five Man Army* on the spine and back. The disc includes the original trailer. Whoever directed what, by whatever title you want to call it, *The Five Man Army* reps a satisfying, rousing good time.

RINGO AND HIS GOLDEN PISTOL
(1966) ♂♂♂1/2

D: Sergio Corbucci. Mark Damon, Valeria Fabrizi, Vranco Derosa, Andrea Aureli, Loris Loddi, Pippo Starnazza, Ettore Manni. 88 mins.

ARCHIVE COLLECTION

The 5-Man Army!



The Animal:
he prefers to kill
with his bare hands.

Luis:
he attacks an
armored train with his
lethal sling shot.

Samurai:
he carves a place for
himself... right through
the Mexican Army.

The Gambler:
he gets a charge out
of setting off dynamite
with a good cigar.

The Dutchman:
he's the odd-man outlaw
who calls the shots as
the 5-man army
heists a fortune
in Mexican gold.

Mario Costa's Masterpieces
An Italo Zigarrelli production
Peter Graves, James Daly,
Bud Spencer, Nino Castelnuovo,
and Tetsuro Tanba in
"The 5-Man Army"

Johnny Ringo/Oro (Damon) is a devil-may-care bounty hunter who goes after any man with a price on his head. He melted down a good bit of gold to fashion the golden pistola he uses to gun down his bounties. Arriving in town during the eldest Perez brother's wedding, Ringo shoots three wanted Perez brothers and spares the life of the youngest, Juanito (Derosa), because there is no warrant for his capture. Enraged, Juanito hires some professional gunslinging types and swears revenge on Ringo. Ringo has little time to worry about Juanito as he is busy collecting more gold and tomcatting around the saloon, using insults to court the ladies. Sheriff Bill Norton (Manni) has to lock Ringo up for his reckless use of explosives when dealing with the men Juanito sends to kill him. This is a top-rate shoot-em-up that entertains from start to finish and even features a mariachi with a deadly guitar. It took me a bit to warm up to Damon as Ringo (I'm a huge fan of Giuliano Gemma's "angel-face" Ringo in *A Pistol for Ringo* and *The Return of Ringo*), but once I did I was totally into the character and the movie. There's some corny humor along the way but Damon sells it and makes it kind of cool. Corbucci delivers a fun but tough flick that is not as hard-edged as his earlier *Django* but shows a slightly lighter side of the filmmaker. (After an impressive run in the western genre, Corbucci spent his later years directing successful comedies for the Italian market.) The original theatrical trailer supplies the disc's lone bonus. Spaghetti westerns fans will enjoy immensely. ♂

The Phantom's
BEST OF THE WEST

KINO LORBER FILMS

(\$24.95 Blu-ray) 4/18

SINGING GUNS (1950) ♂♂♂
D: R.G. Springsteen. Vaughn Monroe, Ella
Raines, Walter Brennan, Ward Bond, Barry Kel-
ley, Jeff Corey. 91 mins.

Kino unearths a reel curio for sagebrush buffs with *Singing Guns*. When popular baritone crooner Vaughn Monroe, who'd already dipped into the popular singing-cowboy well (following the likes of Gene Autry and Frankie Laine) with major western-flavored hits like "Mule Train" (which he renders here) and "Ghost Riders in the Sky," one might have expected a light-weight Roy Rogers-style oater, especially with that *Blazing Saddles*-type title. Instead, Monroe steps into a flinty frontier adventure that seems tailor-made for gritty contemporaneous Republic Pictures star Wild Bill Elliott—it even features Wild Bill's *The Showdown* (1950) costar Walter Brennan and a naturalistic script by the latter film's screenwriter Stuart McGowan. Monroe impresses as Rhiannon, a vengeful bearded outlaw whose bigtime gripe against a crooked mining company has already led him to horde a million bucks worth of stolen gold. After reluctantly shooting sheriff Jim Caradac (Bond) during a fracas, the masked brigand brings the seriously wounded lawman to local doc Jonathan Mark (Brennan), who transfuses Rhiannon's blood to save the sheriff's life. While the plum-tuckered outlaw sleeps, Doc takes the liberty of shaving his beard, inadvertently hiding his identity. As plot twists would have it, our warbling antihero temporarily fills in for the recovering lawman, a task to which Rhiannon soon takes a liking, just as he takes a similar shine to attractive, tough and independent-minded saloon gal (and Sheriff Caradac's squeeze) Nan Morgan (Raines). Torn between his old thieving ways and a fresh chance to nail his mining combine enemies, Rhiannon rides a thin legal line the rest of the way. Adapted from a novel by reliable Old West writer Max Brand and directed by Republic action ace Springsteen, *Singing Guns* emulates the best of Bill Elliot's films, wedding a B-western sensibility with slicker production values, all brought to you in the magic of glorious Tru-color. Look for future *Father Knows Best* siblings Elinor Donohue and Billy Gray as unrelated town tykes. Extras include an audio commentary by film historian Toby Roan, along with bonus Kino trailers. ♂

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