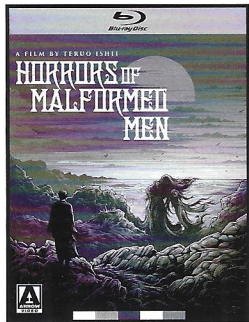


pleas that he isn't crazy, he's drugged by doctors, attacked by other inmates and finally, one night, escapes this hellhole. Wandering the streets of Tokyo, clues lead him to the Sea of Japan, after he notices that the recently-deceased head of a wealthy family, Genzaburō Komoda, could've been his twin. Faking his own suicide, Hitomi pretends to be the resurrected Genzaburō, fooling the entire Komoda clan, including wife Chioko and mistress Skizuko. As Hitomi works hard to maintain this ruse, even in the midst of unexpected tragedy, it's during the film's second half that Ishii goes totally, gloriously bonkers, when Hitomi



and his faux family visit a nearby island, where Genzaburō's web-fingered hermit father Jogoro (dancer and "Butoh" choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata) currently resides. So prepare yourself for a tapestry of hallucinatory imagery and naked women — some act like savages, others are bodypainted, a

few are glimpsed underwater — along with dancing, fire and bizarre pageantry, which is all part of Jogoro's deranged plan to create his own private society of fabulously deformed freaks. Along with the perverse truth about Hitomi's past, multiple villains, surprising twists, and particularly sadistic forms of revenge, there's even an appearance by Rambo's famed private detective Kogoro Akechi. It's an incredible, one-of-a-kind vision, with Ishii often leaving the viewer as disoriented as its damaged protagonist. The Blu-ray includes a commentary with author Tom Mes, and another with *Japan Times* film critic Mark Schilling; an interview with scriptwriter Masahiro Kakefuda; filmmakers Shinya Tsukamoto and Minoru Kawasaki discuss Ishii's influence; plus footage of Ishii and Schilling attending Udine, Italy's Far East Film Festival.

A psychopath with a heavy metal fixation fuels the low-budgeted, ridiculously entertaining **BLUE VENGEANCE (Vinegar Syndrome)**, a 1989 action-thriller from director/co-writer J. Christian Ingvordsen, the brains behind such '80s outings as *SEARCH AND DESTROY* and *COVERT ACTION*. Shot in 10 days across New York City, the film never got a US theatrical release, despite being the type of violent, weird and wonderfully half-baked idiosyncrasy that's best enjoyed in a Deuce grindhouse with a bag full of cold PBR's... When serial killer Mark Trex (John Weiner) escapes from the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, NYPD detective Mickey McCardle (Ingvordsen, credited as "John Christian") is determined to stop this sicko from his past. After making a pitstop at his mom's place for an ornate battle-axe, Trex begins tracking down and slaughtering the members of a long-dissolved metal band that he once adored. The film is a mess, but a wildly enjoyable one — blending cop-movie clichés with never-remotely-believable gore effects, loopy conversations and even a sword-and-sorcery fantasy sequence! Ingvordsen make a barely passable lead, Weiner plays a nutjob with laughable intensity, but the real find here is Garland Hunter as sexy punk-rock photographer (and Mickey's unlikely sidekick) Tiffany O'Brian. Alas, Hunter's acting career went fallow following her marriage to British artist/sculptor Matthew Ritchie, though she did appear in Lena Dunham's *LITTLE FURNITURE* [fun fact: Hunter owned the TriBeCa artists' loft where Dunham's parents lived]. Best of all, cinematographer Michael Spiller (who later shot most of Hal

Hartley's early features) incorporates exceptional location work, from the Staten Island Ferry and the New York City subway, to a foot chase on the Brooklyn Bridge and the unmistakably skanky interior of CBGBs. The Blu-ray/DVD set includes a commentary with Ingvordsen, moderated by Mike Gingold and chock full of cool anecdotes about New York City guerrilla filmmaking, plus a second track with Weiner; a making-of featurette in which crew members reminisce about '80s Cinema Sciences projects; as well as the previously-unreleased, 1997 bonus film, **THE FIRST MAN**, directed by BLUE VENGEANCE co-writer Danny Kuchuck and featuring a surprisingly impressive cast. This moody, meandering sci-fi indie stars Michael Raynor as a government operative assigned to kill aliens that are hiding on Earth in human form. His latest mission? Stop a runaway extraterrestrial who's irresistible to women. Lesley Ann Warren and Roxana Zal play fellow agents who fall under the blue-blooded being's spell, Heather Graham and Ted Raimi have their honeymoon interrupted by this bald alien, and Paul Ben-Victor turns up briefly as a supervisor. Despite its nicely unaffected performances and disorienting imagery, the film's detached approach makes it admirably ambitious yet vaguely unsatisfying.

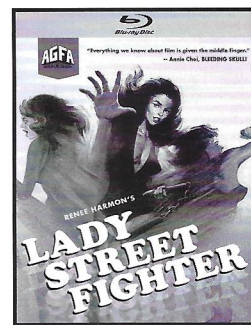
A returning veteran faces death, deceit and being framed for murder in **TIGER BY THE TAIL (Kino Lorber Studio Classics)**, a lightweight crime-thriller with a colorful supporting cast and so much picturesque footage of New Mexico's Ruidoso Downs Race Track that you'd think it was a promotional film for the place. Shot in 1968 under the title *DEAD HEAT*, this was the final feature by director R.G. Armstrong (a veteran of 1940s and '50s B-westerns), and his flat, workmanlike style often makes it feel more like a made-for-TV effort. Appropriately enough, the film popped up on networks only eight months after its perfunctory, early-1970 theatrical release... **THE RAT PATROL's** Christopher George stars as Steve Michaelis, a hot-headed war hero recently back from Vietnam. Returning home to New Mexico, he



hooks up with older brother Frank (Dennis Patrick), majority owner of the area's ritzy horse race track, just as its bookkeeper (Lloyd Bochner) coordinates an elaborate heist — stealing a million dollars from the track, with unplanned bloodshed and Steve becoming the prime suspect. As the track's minority stockholders (led by Dean Jagger's bigwig banker) plot to take control, Steve begins his own investigation into the crime, assisted by old pals (State Policeman R.G. Armstrong, firearms-expert Glenda Farrell, and Tippi Hedren as Steve's ex-lover). Charles Wallace's script is fairly routine stuff, but it provided George with a role perfectly suited to his limited, TV-rooted acting range, as Steve barrels through this convoluted mystery, searching for the stolen cash. Hedren and Jagger both receive prominent billing, but have relatively

little to do, while John Dehner is a stand-out as the local Sheriff, an ex-NYPD cop who now holds court at a kitschy cocktail lounge. In her first major acting role, Charo (who caught the attention of the US public in 1966, when the 21-year-old Spanish singer/musician married 66-year-old bandleader Xavier Cugat) plays barmaid Darlita. Though given the opportunity to sing, dance and squeeze into a skimpy bikini, the only element that stands out is her excruciating lack of acting talent. Also look for Alan Hale, Jr. as a blustery local businessman and Burt Mustin as Steve's comic-relief jail cell roomie. It's nostalgically quaint but also utterly disposable. The Blu-ray includes a commentary by Howard S. Berger and Nathaniel Thompson.

Arriving on Blu-ray from the schlockholics at **American Genre Film Archive**, director James Bryan's **LADY STREET FIGHTER** is a showcase for Renee Harmon, who married an American military colonel stationed in Germany, moved with him to Texas and tirelessly followed her passion for the movies, despite being one of the lousiest actresses I've ever witnessed — producing, writing and appearing in such wrongheaded projects as *FROZEN SCREAM*, *NIGHT OF TERROR*, and this disjointed trainwreck... When Linda Allen (Harmon) arrives in LA to avenge her murdered twin sister, she's promptly chased through the airport parking garage by two creeps, who're no match for this chick's painfully clumsy action skills, since Linda is a professional killer. Its braindead story involves an escort service pimp, microfilm



with a "master file" of international assassins, plus bloated, bearded Jody McCrea ('Deadhead' from the Frankie & Annette beach-movie franchise) as FBI agent Rick Pollard, who either wants to kill Linda or screw her. Meanwhile, she's closing in on her sister's killers — burning one guy alive in an auto fire — with both Linda and Rick winding up on the bad guys' hit list... Primarily shot in 1975, with a few inserts added several years later (hence its anachronistic shots of toga parties and a Van Halen T-shirt), this slapdash mess trickled into theatres during the late-'70s and early-'80s. Harmon was pushing 50 at the time and looks more like a dried-up truck-stop waitress, but keeps taking off her clothes or lounging about in provocative attire, while every character reacts like she's some sort of goddess. And her thick German accent was so unintelligible that I needed to turn on the disc's optional English subtitles. We also get over-the-hill Liz Renay stripping; a fake acting credit for "Trace Carradine"; plus much of its supporting cast consists of Renee's acting students, who actually *paid* her to appear in this shitty movie. It's an astonishingly inept must-see... The Blu-ray includes a director's commentary, moderated by Joe Ziemba and Sebastian del Castillo; kick-ass action trailers from AGFA's collection; plus the bonus feature, 1990's **REVENGE OF LADY STREET FIGHTER**, a shameless rip-off that recycles the *entire* original film and contains only 20 minutes of fresh material. Linda Allen (Harmon, appearing in barely three minutes of the new footage) is preparing to sell her hit-lady memoir, while her niece (Ruth Peebles) is picked up by Feds intent on stopping Linda's story from going public. As various unlikely government agents fill the young woman in on her aunt's past, lengthy chunks of the original film are spliced in as flashbacks. Trust me, it's fucking interminable.