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4K scores

In the past, when people would ask us what the ‘scariest’ movie was that we had ever seen, we would reply that it was **Evil Dead**. Once home video took over and you could watch movies hundreds of times, nothing was really scary anymore, but we could still recall how we felt the first time we saw the film, which had left us even more unnerved than **The Exorcist** with its isolated atmosphere and nightmarish sense that there was nothing, really, which could stop the essentially invisible entities from possessing you or possessing the things around you. That, and the cabin’s cellar, which reminded us of our grandmother’s very scary cellar, where there was also a dirt floor. **Evil Dead** was so horrific that the filmmakers who created it (Sam Raimi and star Bruce Campbell) had nowhere to go for their sequels except to comedy. Yes, the comedy was terrific, but the scares had evaporated.

In terms of audiences, that was several generations ago. However basic it had been, **Evil Dead** was so good that its essential popularity endured—maybe not parents handing the film down to their children the way we did, but older siblings or uncles treating their younger siblings or the children of their younger siblings to the movie when more prudent parental figures were not around—and so at last, a film company (or, rather, a company within a company, which is, after all, rather like demonic possession) that specializes in horror, New Line Cinema, wrangled the rights from Raimi and Campbell to have another go, the result being a 2023 production released as a two-platter WB SDS Studio Distribution Services 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray, **Evil Dead Rise** (UPC#883929806812, \$45).

The film, which was directed by Lee Cronin and runs 96 minutes, kind of gets off on the wrong foot. It begins, using a meta-drone shot (the drone soon become a source of gore), with a prolog set in a picturesque A-frame lakeside wood cabin, where familiar **Evil Dead** mayhem ensues, followed by a title card that declares, “One Day Earlier” (see *Muna Moto* on page 6). The bulk of the film is then set in a condemned apartment building (on the thirteenth floor, natch), with the prolog left completely unexplained until the very last scene. Hence, rather than settling in with the story at hand, part of you is agitating for much of the film, wondering how everybody is going to get to that cabin and why you don’t recognize any of the players from the first scene. If you let that go and just enjoy the ongoing gore, you will have a much better time.

We shouldn’t say that the film begins with its prolog, however, since it actually begins with what is now rarely glimpsed on home video, an MPAA card declaring the film is rated ‘R.’ Don’t be fooled by this, however. This film is designed specifically to invite and then scare the pants off of unsuspecting youngsters who are not yet jaded by horror film traditions and clever applications of gore effects. There are five primary characters and three of them are below the drinking age. The other two—their mother and her sister—are not that much older. Dad left a while ago. Not only is it a stormy night, but there is an earthquake, which opens up a forgotten vault in the apartment building’s basement, where one of the kids finds the evil book (technically, it is a less elaborate version than the original, but hoary enough that you get the idea) and thinks it is sufficiently interesting to bring back up to his room. Not a wise idea.

The gore effects are suitably creative, and the kids are not spared. This is where the 4K comes into play. The presentation of the film on the standard Blu-ray included in the set is fine, with sharp images regardless of how dark it gets, and a great Dolby Atmos surround mix that has noises coming at you every which way. But the 4K presentation is even better. From the film’s opening moments, the sounds are meticulous, relentless and spatially fluid. The image is so sharp that every special effect looks valid, and the more grotesque the movie becomes, the more exciting it becomes. If you’re a jaded horror fan, the film is a great thrill ride. The effects are not exaggerated to a point of humor—the film is the least funny of any **Evil Dead** program that has appeared after the original—but they are creative enough to be legitimately amusing if you are so inclined. Now, if you happen to qualify

for that MPAA restriction, and you sneak the 4K Blu-ray out one night while the parents are out—or if the babysitter brought it with her and doesn’t care—there is just enough added precision in the 4K presentation to leave your psyche permanently scarred. It may not have the purity of the original **Evil Dead**, but **Evil Dead Rises** is what a horror movie is supposed to be, and in 4K, with the movie’s modern filmmaking tricks unleashed in full force, the innocent will be defenseless.

The picture is grandly letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. There is an audio track that describes the action (“Bridget slithers down the counter and crawls on her hands and knees towards Beth. Beth crabwalks backwards and kicks the teen into the dishwasher that knocks a cheese grater at her. Bridget snatches the four-sided box grater from the air as Beth tries to crawl off, and scrapes it across the back of her calf. Beth sees the spatula, and slugs the teen across the face with it. Unfazed, Bridget turns back toward her with a blood-dripping grin.”), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and six subtitling tracks including English. Along with those audio choices, the 4K presentation has an additional German track, a track that describes the action in German and twelve subtitling options, including English.

4K laughs

Regardless of a director’s timing or wacky production designs or whatever, the best and most enduring humor in any comedy comes from the performances. There is something so rich and all-encompassing about the human presence that it can never be entirely dissected or copied. You may not laugh the second time you hear a joke’s punchline, but watching a comedian deliver the same joke can make you laugh over and over. Often times, a fan will play a comedy until its minutia becomes tiring, but one need take a break for only a while and it will become fresh again, and funny again. That is the essence of the appeal of Terry Gilliam’s 1981 fantasy comedy, **Time Bandits**. Its ensemble cast delivers so many amusing and even riotously funny moments that the film never really becomes tiresome. It runs a challenging 115 minutes, and its second half has an entirely different premise than its first half, so that the conclusion can start to feel prolonged after an initial dozen viewings or so. But put it away for a bit and then put it on again, and the actors will seem even funnier than they did before.

This is especially true if the film has undergone some sort of general improvement, such as The Criterion Collection releasing **Time Bandits** in 4K format (UPC#715515284615, \$50). Their original Blu-ray release (Jan 15), which is also included in the two-platter set, looked and sounded terrific to begin with, so there is not that much room for improvement. But it doesn’t matter. Any little tweak—a sharper detail, a richer color, a smoother transition—enables your subconscious to concentrate all the more on what is appealing about the film (about a young boy, played by Craig Warnock, who is whisked through time and space after a group of diminutive bandits drop into his bedroom through a wormhole). For example, we’ve always enjoyed the group performances of the short-statured actors who also star in the film—David Rappaport, Kenny Baker, Malcolm Dixon, Mike Edmonds, Jack Purvis and Tiny Ross—and sure enough, this time through, we were even more aware of the bits of business each one was doing and how it added to the whole effect of their comical mayhem. But this time, as well, David Warner, who seemed in the past to be pushing the humor of his lines a little as the villain, comes across as gloriously amusing every second he is on the screen. Was it the precision of the backgrounds? The details of his exasperated expressions? Or was it just that, because of the enhanced clarity and immediacy created by the 4K format, although not obviously discernible, he is more ‘alive’ and ‘real’ on the screen, and so it becomes that much easier to connect with his performance and find delight in the actor’s energy delivering it. The same is true of Ian Holms’ Napoleon shtick. Sometimes the sequence feels prolonged and tiresome, but this time it was exquisite, and funny as all get out, thanks to the crispness of his phony French accent.

Laughs (Continued)

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. As seems to be the habit with Criterion, bright reds are a little more cherry-colored on the standard Blu-ray than they are on the 4K, but in this case the differences are so slight that the subdued red actually looks better. The DTS sound is stronger and better detailed on the 4K presentation, as well. There are optional English subtitles. The 4K version is accompanied by a commentary track with Gilliam, Warner, Warnock, and Gilliam's collaborators and guest stars, Michael Palin and John Cleese, which was available before on the BD and on Criterion's original DVD release (Jul 99).

The standard BD also has the commentary, and comes with the special features from before, including a 23-minute segment on the film's special effects, an 80-minute interview with Gilliam, a 9-minute interview with costar Shelley Duvall from *The Tomorrow Show*, a trailer and a collection of behind-the-scenes photos in still frame.

Guy Ritchie action

MGM added the director's name to the title so that potential fans would have a better idea of what to expect from the terrific 2022 military thriller, **Guy Ritchie's The Covenant**, released by MGM, WB and SDS Studio Distribution Services as a two-platter *Blu-ray + DVD + Digital Code* (UPC#883929812196, \$35). Running 123 minutes, the film is fully loaded with one exhilarating action sequence dropping into the chamber after another, but at the same time it has the engrossing and satisfying drama that the actual title implies. Set near the end of America's involvement in Afghanistan, Jake Gyllenhaal is a platoon sergeant and Dar Salam is the platoon's interpreter. The film parcels out its narrative arc carefully and dutifully, so that there are some introductory action scenes before the main mission. The main mission succeeds, but also goes terribly wrong, so that only those two characters are left standing, and must make their way back to base across a harsh landscape with every insurrectionist in the area on their trail. When Gyllenhaal's character is severely wounded after one encounter, Salam's character then lugs him stealthily the rest of the way. And that is just the first half of the film. After Gyllenhaal's character recovers in the States, he returns to search for Salam's character and his family and help them get out, with the action and the suspense not only continuing, but increasing in intensity from one scene to the next, up to the exhilarating finale.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer is fresh and precise. The Dolby Atmos sound is outstanding, and Chris Benstead's excellent musical score adds to the inherent thrills provided by the gunshots and explosions. The picture quality on the DVD is great, although it does not feel quite as riveting or as immediate as the Blu-ray's image, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is not nearly as colorful or impactful as the BD's audio options. The BD does not start up where it left off, however, if playback is terminated. Both platters have an audio track that describes the action ("Another Taliban truck arrives. As Tom swivels around to fire at them, they launch an RPG that engulfs the Humvee in flames.") along with optional English and Spanish subtitles.

Classic Eighties action thriller

Say what you will about the Eighties and the Nineties, they gave us the modern action thriller. The genre was a crystallization of components that had appeared in previous action films and previous thrillers, but not only were these components blended, they were 'modernized.' Even before computer graphics became a big thing, the technology of motion picture making was improving, while, at the same time, filmmakers could see what was working and what wasn't working with audiences in films from the past, and they just, basically, started cherry picking all of the stuff that did work and cramming it into a single narrative display. The same is true of fights and stunts, always attempting to top what had worked before. There was also a renewed seriousness regarding both the police and the military. As the animosities of the Sixties faded away, a renewed respect arose for law enforcement and for, specifically, the individuals who genuinely toil to protect our rights and our lives. While the upper echelons of both organizations could be depicted as clueless or corrupt, the heroes were often those in the lower ranks who were working their hardest, often without recognition, to do what they had been trained to do.

While John McTiernan could be considered to have kicked off the craze with his 1988 classic, **Die Hard**, Andrew Davis followed closely behind and created several indelible entries in the genre. One of Davis' initial features that found an ideal balance of narrative, suspense and action was the 1989 Orion feature, **The Package**, starring Gene Hackman and Tommy Lee Jones (whose performance is crisp perfection—he would go on to win an Oscar for another film he made with Davis). Joanna Cassidy, Denis Franz and John Heard co-star in the 108-minute thriller, which is brilliantly edited by Don Zimmerman to sustain an unrelenting blend of action and paranoia. Pam Grier is almost unrecognizable in a nicely cast supporting role. Hackman plays a sergeant pulled out of his duty in Germany to transport an insubordinate soldier played by Jones back to America. When Jones' character escapes upon landing, with help, Hackman's character discovers that the records of Jones' character have been altered or erased. As he is then himself chased by security forces, Hackman's character has to figure out what the plot is and how to prevent it. Cassidy plays his ex-wife and Franz is an

old Army buddy, the only two people that Hackman's character can trust. On paper, the plot could be from any film in any era, but it is the choices that Davis made in its execution that make it both utterly gripping and irresistibly repeatable.

MGM and Kino Lorber Incorporated have released **The Package** as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329263065, \$25). One of the film's components that sets it apart is its sound design, and particularly the music track. James Newton Howard's score is perfectly serviceable, as is its orchestration, but the audio levels at which the orchestration has been laid out are exceptional, particularly with the Blu-ray's DTS playback, which creates a compelling dimensional sound space that enhances your identification with Hackman's character at almost every moment in the film. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, there are maybe one or two scratches, and a bit of grain in some of the more wintry scenes (the film is, as the title might suggest, a Christmas movie), but on the whole, the image is slick and vivid. It is that final combination of a you-are-there image with a you-are-there soundtrack, on top of the brilliantly paced and exquisitely performed suspense drama, that makes the film one of the classics of its type and time.

Along with optional English subtitles, there are two TV commercials, a trailer, a 2-minute introduction to the film by Davis and a nice 6-minute interview with Cassidy. Davis and Cassidy also supply a relaxed commentary track, although she doesn't really speak up too often. Davis primarily focuses on identifying the locations (most of the movie was shot in and around Chicago) and supplying legitimate profiles of the many bit players in the film. He does share a little gossip, such as revealing that Hackman and Jones were not speaking to one another by the end of the shoot, but overall the information the track provides is limited.

Fabulous Losey transfers

Joseph Losey's 1948 RKO Radio Pictures fable, **The Boy with Green Hair** (his first feature), has received what is probably the best picture transfer we have ever seen for an older color film on the Warner Bros. *WB Warner Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#810134940277, \$22). Most of the film has the vivid immediacy one associates with digitally shot afternoon soap operas, and even when the image is not quite that precise, it still looks as good as the best sequences in any other great Technicolor transfer. The detail is so intricate that you can spot the work done during the film's shoot from one day to the next by the dust and loose threads on the actors' sweaters. If the full screen presentation is an indication of what the future holds for old movies, the thrills are just beginning.

Dean Stockwell is the title character, telling his story in flashback to explain how the stresses and self-denial of his life as a war orphan, even after an avuncular singing waiter played by Pat O'Brien takes him in, causes his hair one morning to turn bright green. Robert Ryan, Barbara Hale and Regis Toomey costar, and Dwayne Hickman is among the youngsters ridiculing Stockwell's character after the change. It is difficult to place a finger precisely on what the story's allegorical components represent—perhaps the anxieties of war, or perhaps an early ecological alarm—or if any of it presages the situation Losey was soon to find himself facing with HUAC, but running 72 minutes, it is weird enough that both youngsters and adults will feel compelled to keep watching it, and will respond to the emotional connections the characters make with one another as they work their way through the drama.

Adding to the film's metaphorical aura, the 1947 pop hit, *Nature Boy*, not only plays in a cover version over the film's opening credits, but becomes the primary orchestral theme throughout the soundtrack. The monophonic sound is very clean and clear, and while it is not as exceptional as the picture quality, it is without any significant shortcomings. There are optional English subtitles and a 1946 black-and-white MGM *John Nesbitt's Passing Parade* short also starring Stockwell, *A Really Important Person*, running 11 minutes, about a young boy who runs afoul of his father, a cop.

Losey teamed with Harold Pinter for his breakthrough 1963 British production, **The Servant**, which has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515284714, \$40). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the black-and-white image is immaculate. Once again, you can see threads and dust on the clothing of the actors, including a hair that is clearly on the shoulder of James Fox's suit in one shot, and then disappears in the next. That said, however, the fantastically detailed and intricate transfer adds significantly to the film's impact, supported by another smooth, solidly delivered monophonic audio track and an appealing jazz and airy orchestral score from John Dankworth.

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There is a scene about halfway through the 115-minute film, where Fox's character and his fiancée, played by Wendy Craig, have lunch in a restaurant. The cast of restaurant patrons, including Patrick Magee, are singled out in the opening cast credit list even though it is the only scene they are in, and you understand why once you reach it. It is the ultimate sophisticated person's nightmare—a restaurant where everyone is speaking Pinter! The masterful direction is mind boggling, not only for the way in which the individual conversations of the restaurant patrons start and stop, but how they all seem to be fully engaged in their own little dramas, as if the overall scene were a common point shared in a half-dozen other films.

The precision of Pinter's choices are underscored by the riveting image transfer, leaving a viewer spellbound by Douglas Slocombe's cinematography and Losey's often subversive blocking and camera angles. Set in London during a seemingly perpetual winter, Dirk Bogarde stars as the title character, hired by Fox's character when he moves into a London townhouse. Taking advantage of the Fox character's youthful insecurities, Bogarde's character gradually plies him with alcohol and takes total control of his life. The film can be said to depict a palpable downward social spiral that has echoed through British society as a whole because of the changing times after the War, or it can seem like a cryptic anticipation of *Persona* and the mystical transfers of dominance and psychological subservience. From the dialog to the advancements of the characters—Sarah Miles co-stars as either Bogarde's victimized collaborator or a schemer who takes advantage of the psychic deterioration the other characters are undergoing—the film is gloriously ambiguous, and it is the precision with which that ambiguity relentlessly recurs in the dialog and in the breathtaking images that makes the film so captivating.

Along with optional English subtitles and a trailer, there is a good 21-minute piece that focuses on Losey's sense of design with clips and shots from several of his films, an excellent 29-minute audio-only interview with Losey from 1976 about making the film and the different challenges he encountered (he also dances around the film's political undercurrents), a great 23-minute interview with Pinter from 1996 talking about his love of film and his work with Losey on a number of movies, a wonderful 1992 interview with Bogarde about his experiences with Losey running 11 minutes, a thorough 48-minute reminiscence about making the film with Fox from 2013, a nice 11-minute interview with Miles about the film from 2013 and a decent 6-minute interview with Craig about the movie and her character, also from 2013.

Amazing Clément crime thrillers

A fantastic French thriller from 1964, René Clément's *Joy House*, has been released by Gaumont and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329262815, \$30). Several years before his hyper cool *Bullitt* score, Lalo Schiffrin supplied *Joy House* with a very similar jazz accompaniment, setting a tone that is so awesomely Sixties the film can really do no wrong. Alain Delon is a playboy who is being chased in the Riviera by mobsters seeking revenge for his dabbling with their client's wife. Barely escaping, he hides out in a men's shelter and is quickly hired by a gorgeous widow to be her chauffeur. Lola Albright co-stars, and Jane Fonda plays the widow's cousin, both staying at an otherwise empty mansion. Both of the women are overly attracted to Delon—although really, who wouldn't be?—and it eventually turns out that he has pretty much jumped out of a frying pan and into a sizzling fire. Running 97 minutes, the film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and is in black and white, so that as the plot twists and turns, the cinematography captures all of the eccentric art pieces in the seaside chateau, while the characters put up false fronts to hide their inner fears and dastardly plans. Sure, in a world of serious film criticism, the movie can seem a bit too playful or jokey, but if you step back and look at it as an early precursor to the triumphant stylism of murder thrillers that would in a few years enthrall European cinema, it fits right into a critic's darling box, and in the meantime, you are glued to the screen just hoping that some or any of its suave continentalism will rub off on your starved consciousness.

There is both an English track and a French track, with optional English subtitles, and either one is fully acceptable, since it is an additional bit of fun to listen to Fonda do her lines in French (Delon's English is a little weaker). The music may be pushed a little loud at times, but it still sounds fantastic on the monophonic audio track and the dialog is clear on either option. The image has no stray markings, and contrasts are reasonably clear. A wonderful French language trailer has been included.

An outstanding commentary track—you really couldn't ask for more than what they provide—is presented by Sixties movie enthusiasts Howard S. Berger and Nathaniel Thompson. Although we grew up amid them, we learn more about the Sixties every day, since the Sixties now are not the Sixties we were seeing then, especially when it comes to films. As Berger and Thompson point out, Clément, because he was a bit older than the New Wave whippersnappers, was dismissed by them as an old school director who was out of touch with the times. Critics on both sides of the Atlantic fell for that line as well, so it is only now that viewers can come to the movie with an unbiased eye and realize what a terrific work of art it is. Along with stepping the viewer through the filmmaking itself and pointing out that even though there wasn't a completed shooting script, Clément had firm ideas about what was going on in the story ("Every scene is crammed with some kind of character balance for illustration. Nothing is just out of the blue. There's nothing just to dazzle you. It's all worked out in their minds, whether it's improvised or semi-improvised or not. Clément really knows where this is heading."), they talk about the careers of the artists who made this film and how the expectations regarding all of those artists at the time are at odds with our

perspectives of those artists now. And they pay particular attention to Fonda, whose career was far more complicated and intertwined than the *Barefoot in the Park* to *Barbarella* to *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* vector that critics saw at the time. She was learning about herself as she made movies, growing and maturing with each film. "You're watching the 1964 Jane Fonda, and you're not just watching a character or an actor in a 'misfire' or whatever a critic wants to say about it. You're watching some really interesting development, human development. And who better to do that than [Clément]?"

Clément's terrific 1960 adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Purple Noon*, is available on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515090117, \$40). Again, as critics were going gaga over *Breathless*, here is a film with a criminal anti-hero that is exquisitely composed but was largely dismissed in its day as being superficial and glossy. The film is set in the summer, up and down the Italian coast between Rome and Naples. Deftly designed, there are some terrific sailboat sequences, many picturesque locations, and Highsmith's devious plotting, which essentially has you rooting for a villain from beginning to end, exploring the details of a luxury lifestyle and the avoidance of responsibility. The conclusion to the film's story had to be changed from Highsmith's conclusion to meet the expectations of the times that later adaptations didn't have to abide by, but otherwise the 117-minute film is not only a viscerally escapist pleasure, it is also morally escapist, allowing the viewer to absorb the pleasures of doing truly wicked things. Delon plays the protagonist, who at the beginning of the film has ingratiated himself with a wealthy young couple played by Maurice Ronet and Marie Laforêt. He gradually takes on more affectations of Ronet's character. We envy those who aren't familiar with the story and don't know what happens next, but regardless of what you know, the film is as intoxicating as it is intricate and beguiling.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer is certainly lovely, with accurate fleshtones and fresh hues, but the image does appear a step too far away from its source compared to the best picture transfers, and colors are a touch light at times. The monophonic sound is adequate, and there is a terrific musical score by Nino Rota. The film is in French—its original title was the preferable *Plein Soleil*—with optional English subtitles.

In the supplement, a 27-minute appreciation of the film is presented that goes over Clément's career (although he made a number of crime films, they make a point of stating that he 'never wanted to do the same thing twice') and deconstructs the film's artistry (among other things, they point out how a dead chicken aligns with a human corpse in a shot). While they do draw parallels to *La Dolce Vita*, which was being made at the same time, they fail to make the most obvious connection between the two films—Rota's music. Also featured, along with a lively trailer (which calls the film, '*Talented Mr. Ripley*'), is a great 19-minute interview in French with Highsmith from 1971 talking about her own lifestyle choices, her career, her writing strategies and the films that had been made from her books at the time, and a good 9-minute interview with Delon from 1962 talking about how his career got started and why he liked working with Clément. It seems worth noting that if you don't count Louis Malle, except for one Jean-Luc Godard film in the Nineties, Delon, who was certainly of the same generation, never worked with any of the New Wave directors, preferring instead to collaborate with Clément, Jean-Pierre Melville, and other 'older' French directors (Delon was slated to start *Breathless* in the fall after he finished *Purple Noon* in the summer of 1959, but he dropped out at the last moment).

Fighting the Mafia on their own turf

A systematically engrossing and entertaining period Italian feature from 1977 about combating bandits and Mafiosi in Sicily, *The Iron Prefect*, has been released on Blu-ray by Radiance (UPC#760137128281, \$35). Giuliano Gemma is an aristocratic prosecutor sent by Mussolini to clean up the island, which he does with a steady combination of military tactics and investigatory determination. Reminiscent of *Battle of Algiers*, right down to the pulsing Ennio Morricone musical score, the film is outstanding by any measure, including its political perspective. Based upon historical events, the film, directed by Pasquale Squitieri, moves from one sequence to the next as Gemma's character identifies informants and bandits, working with one group while busting the other. As he proves his mettle on the island, more people come forward and his attacks grow larger, until he places an entire mountainside town under siege. Yes, for a while you are rooting for the fascists to win, but by the end of the 110-minute tale, Gemma's character learns full well what that victory entails. Francisco Rabal costars, and Claudia Cardinale has a small supporting part that at first seems gratuitous but turns out to be necessary, so there is at least a grain of hope at the film's conclusion.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image transfer is excellent, without a blemish, and the monophonic sound is strong and clear. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles. There is a very good 35-minute retrospective interview with Squitieri (he says there are two types of directors—those who are good at copying, and those who are bad at it) and Gemma about making the film, the history it represents and the many challenges they encountered along the way. Also featured is a trailer, a comprehensive 40-minute analysis of the film ("None of that epicness would have been possible without Ennio Morricone's grandiose score. In a way, Morricone is the glue that joins together Squitieri's taste for socially conscious cinema but done in a big, commercially successful way with the popular style of epic Western cinema pioneered by Sergio Leone's sweeping, baroque films."), Squitieri's other movies and his artistry, and a good 11-minute summary of Gemma's career by Alex Cox.

Writing Wongs

Three full screen black-and-white Paramount productions that feature the initially forgotten Asian-American movie star, Anna May Wong, have been gathered by Universal and Kino Lorber Associates as a three-platter *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray, **Anna May Wong Collection** (UPC#73832926-2495, \$50). All three films, which also have Paramount contract player Anthony Quinn in significant supporting parts, have clearly undergone conscientious transfers. Evident weaknesses are rare, and usually there are consistently sharp contrasts and smooth blacks. The monophonic sound is reasonably clear and all three have optional English subtitles.

A remake of **White Woman** (Feb 23), the 1939 *Island of Lost Men* had to find a substitute for the eroticism that was the previous film's *raison d'être*, but otherwise the plot is the same, with J. Carrol Naish as the Kurtz-like half-Asian rubber baron who brings a nightclub singer, played by Wong, back to his jungle plantation. In a very welcome piece of casting, the wonderful Eric Blore plays his snotty servant, Quinn is one of the overseers, and a quick talking Broderick Crawford is a gambler on the run from the authorities. Since sex appears to have nothing to do with it, the reasons for Naish's character inviting Wong's character upriver are unclear, but everything else falls neatly into place with the changes (something about stolen money and a Chinese political figure whose reputation Wong's character is hoping to clear). Running just 63 minutes, the film is more superficial than **White Woman**, including Wong's performance, but that is not entirely a bad thing as the movie, relying on the overall template of the earlier film, remains an invigorating tale of adventure and intrigue, where everybody gets what's coming to them.

Film experts Bryan Reesman and Max Evry supply a rewarding commentary track, talking extensively about Wong's career and the current resurgence of interest in her films, as well as going over the careers of the other members of the cast, discussing the film's spy movie tropes and eventually getting around to comparing it with **White Woman**.

Akim Tamiroff is a wealthy gangster, Wong is his mistress and Gail Patrick is a socialite he sets his eyes on as an entrance into proper society in the 1938 *Dangerous to Know*, directed by Robert Florey. Quinn has a major (and enjoyable) role as the gangster's henchman, Lloyd Nolan is a cop, and Hedda Hopper also appears. Wong has one grand scene, but even when she is in the background or has single lines of dialog, the strength of her presence is compelling. At 70 minutes, the film is the longest in the collection, and more than anything else it is a vehicle for Tamiroff, conveying his character's guarded frustrations quite effectively as a cultured individual who will forever be on the outside looking in. While not elaborate, there are a couple of viable story turns—the source material was an Edgar Wallace stageplay—and it is enough of a plot to let one enjoy the stars and their approaches to the drama.

Genre expert Samm Deighan provides an excellent commentary track, explaining at length the background to the film's story, the history of Wallace and Florey's careers, a full overview of Wong's life and importance, and how the characters played by the three principal ethnic actors reflect how ethnic actors themselves were utilized in Hollywood. “[The film] is such an important example of some of the more subtle things happening in Hollywood at the time that really showed some of these awful tragic social issues though the powerful performances of some actors who were key to the Golden Age of Hollywood, such as Anna May Wong, and through the exploration of melodrama and crime thriller genre tropes, showing that B-movies can be more than they are chalked up to be.”

Tamiroff and Naish are in the 1939 *King of Chinatown*, along with Sydney Toler doing his Asian thing as Wong's father. Although the film runs a brief 57 minutes, it actually has Wong's most substantive performance in the three features. She plays a young doctor who saves the life of a gangster kingpin played by Tamiroff after he is shot (by Quinn's character). As he convalesces, she starts bending his moral compass away from crime while, unknown to him, his underlings, including Naish's character, take over his business. She has more scenes and does more acting than in the other two movies combined. While the plot is much less accomplished, the trade-off is ideal for the collection and conveys, as the other two films do not, a sense of what Wong was like in a leading role.

Film historians David Del Valle and Stan Schaffer provide a passable commentary track. While not as thoughtful or as informed as Deighan's effort on *Dangerous to Know*, they still share lots of worthwhile trivia about the filmmakers, insights to the nature of films in the Thirties, and a wholehearted appreciation of Wong. “She's very contained. There is something tranquil about not just her beauty but about the way she interacts with the other actors. If you notice in her scenes with Akim Tamiroff, she never takes her eyes off of him. She is giving him, as another actor, the things he needs for his performance.”

If fans are perplexed by the claims of Wong's stardom after seeing the three films—in which she has a magnetic camera presence but does very little—then they should turn to the movies that shot her into stardom in the first place. (We reviewed her breakout film, *Toll of the Sea*, as part of **Treasures from American Film Archives** in Oct 04.) Milestone Film & Video and Image Entertainment released her 1929 silent feature, **Piccadilly** (UPC#0143-81214123). She plays a dishwasher at a fancy nightclub whose dancing on the countertops inspires the owner, played by Jameson Thomas, to put her in his floorshow, much to the consternation of his leading lady, played by Gilda Gray. Even as her character guards her true emotions, Wong's performance is impeccable, and her dancing is riveting. She has no bust whatsoever (which makes the jacket cover, a replication of an original poster that shows her dancing topless even though she never does within the film,

laughable—while still depicted as small, the breasts are at least quadrupled in size), but an incredible sexual presence in every frame of every shot. Indeed, looking back on her appearances in the three **Collection** films, you realize that she has an innate energy that might never actually be released, but is always there at hand. The film is highly entertaining. Like many silent ‘musicals,’ the 109-minute film has several captivating dance sequences, and concludes with a predictable but still engagingly twisty courtroom sequence. In other words, there is plenty of narrative to carry the film along, while the presence of Wong raises its value considerably as not only a fine example of well-executed silent melodrama, but a pulse-quickenning demonstration of how movies represented the future and have sustained that representation even in their antiquity.

Charles Laughton, in what was apparently his first screen appearance, has an extended comical bit as a persnickety restaurant patron. The full screen black-and-white film is tinted and is in reasonably good condition with limited wear beyond the edges. The intertitles have been replaced, but maintain a consistency with the film. There is a reasonably decent big band musical score by Neil Brand that works fine except for Wong's dance number, which ought to have a Chinese motif and does not. A 5-minute talking ‘prolog,’ which is actually an epilog, setting the film up as an extended flashback, is included in the special features, along with a very good 20-minute deconstruction of the music by Brand (he insists that he did incorporate a Chinese idiom for her dance, but we still don't hear it), a 22-minute excerpt from a symposium on Wong that is informative but has a poorly recorded audio that makes some of it a strain to hear, a good collection of still photos, and on DVD-ROM, the film's original press kit.

As a young teenager, Wong had a major part in Todd Browning's 1923 *Drifting*, part of the Kino Lorber Kino Classics Browning double bill Blu-ray release **Drifting and White Tiger** (UPC#738329251413, \$30). Her character has a crush on a mining engineer, played by Matt Moore, who is actually spying on the nearby opium production. Priscilla Dean and an unusually debonair Wallace Beery play opium smugglers. Browning's reputation as a horror director has superseded an understanding of his true talents, which were to bring very adult perspectives to crime stories of all manners. Not only is *Drifting* a really good adventure thriller, but the 1923 *White Tiger* is an outstanding crime melodrama in which Dean and Raymond Griffith play a pair of thieves who do not realize they are brother and sister. Beery also stars again, as their partner, who was, unknown to them, responsible for the death of their father and their separation (Moore also has a part). Additionally, the film includes the only surviving 10-minute reel from another terrific 1919 Browning crime film, *The Exquisite Thief*, also starring Dean, in which she plays, once again, a determined criminal.

Drifting has undergone an extensive restoration and has new intertitles. The full screen black-and-white image is tinted and looks great, with very little wear around the edges. Set in China, the production designs are impressive and the performances are entertaining. Wong certainly comes across as a child, but nevertheless delivers an elaborately constructed performance that makes her character appealing and the moral center of the film.

Dean is also quite good, deceptively presenting her character as bland and matronly so that you only gradually come to understand how wicked—or, more accurately, evilly banal—she truly is. What separates Browning's filmmaking from his peers was his unrestrained depiction of adults, and the maturity of both their emotional conflicts and their moral perspectives. The cliché is that motion pictures advanced in sophistication as they transitioned from early silent features to sound dramas, but Browning's work demonstrates that the sophistication has always been there, but has just been ignored because of the lack of spoken dialog. Philip Carli has a very good piano score that does indeed bring in Chinese motifs when Wong's character pauses to play an instrument. Early Hollywood historian Anthony Slide provides a knowledgeable commentary, talking not only about the lives of the cast and the crew, but going over the film's production history, the shortcomings of the restored intertitles and the general social atmosphere of Hollywood in 1923, while also dissecting the movie's strengths and weaknesses, such as a stunt with a horse, falling off a high stairwell, that would never be repeated today. “The most sickening moment in the film. A horse is forced to climb up a bank of steep steps and then forced to jump off the ledge to its death below. I only hope the rider was severely injured, and any respect I might have had for director Todd Browning is wiped out.”

White Tiger is not restored. Not only are the original intertitles still there, but the full screen black-and-white image is constantly speckled and otherwise subject to an appearance of wear. Nevertheless, the narrative is unimpeded and, running 70 minutes, the film has one terrific suspense or dramatic sequence after another, with its primary story hook holding each plot turn tightly to the next. The piano musical score is not as distinctive as the score on *Drifting*, but still works fine. Again, Dean's performance is a quite impressive, presenting an air of matronly sophistication that is suddenly undercut by her character's killer instincts. The same is true of her performance in the *Exquisite Thief* clip, which is so good that anybody who enjoys *White Tiger* will not want to miss it.

Film historian Brett Wood supplies a good commentary, again going over the careers of the cast and the crew (and Browning's career in particular), the history of the film's production, the state of the source material (a few inconsequential sequences appear to be missing), and the film's general thematic impact.

A luscious 1934 British musical adaptation of the irresistible *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* story, **Chu Chin Chow**, which features Wong (who had also been in the Douglas Fairbanks **Thief of Bagdad**) in an important supporting part, is available in a three-platter *Special Edition* set

from VCI Entertainment (UPC#089859840227, \$20—the film's title card reads, *Chu-Chin-Chow*). The creators of the musical clearly had Gilbert and Sullivan sitting on their shoulders and whispering in their ears, while on the other hand, Alan Menken quite clearly lifted one melodic passage for his adaptation a half-century later. In this version there is nothing supernatural and there is even an intriguing, plot-critical explanation for why the door to the thieves' den opens to 'magic' words. Nevertheless, the basic story hook of having a character discover access to the thieves' riches (if they're so wealthy, why are they content to live in a cave?) has an undeniable pull regardless of its context and, running 102 minutes, the film is great fun. The title refers to a Chinese merchant who is murdered by the villain, who then impersonates him to gain entrance to the palace. Directed by Walter Forde, there are plentiful songs, elaborately populated and costumed sets (including a couple of topless slave girls) and, while the narrative has its serious moments, lots of clowning about. On a stage full of hams, including George Robey and Fritz Kortner, Wong is the only prosciutto, and the delightful film retains a modern appeal entirely due to her presence.

The full screen black-and-white picture is generally soft and a bit fuzzy at times, but perfectly workable. The sound is aged but functional and the distortion to the music is relatively limited. There is no captioning. Also featured is a separate segment that offers all of the musical numbers in audio only, running 26 minutes; a 4-minute clip from the 1930 British vaudeville compilation, *Elstree Calling*, which features Wong as the Kate character in a lampoon of **Taming of the Shrew** that ends with a pie fight (in all likelihood, the segment was directed by Alfred Hitchcock; Wong, once again, has a precise timing and presence that adds significantly to the effectiveness of the sequence); a 2-minute montage of Wong photos; a 2-minute montage of colored lobby cards; a 3-minute montage of other memorabilia; and a 9-minute selection of Wong's scenes in **Piccadilly**. The film is also accompanied by an excellent commentary track from Jay Fenton, who oversaw the restoration and supplies a thorough overview of the film's production (including the history of the successful stage show that it is based upon), the cast and crew members, and the restoration itself, explaining how different scenes were rescued by combining audio sources from one contributor and the image from another.

The second platter contains a 1953 Lippert Productions cut for American release (although somehow, topless slave girls are still there in one shot, although they are missing in a couple of other segments), entitled *Ali Baba Nights*. Running 76 minutes, a big chunk is taken out of the film's opening, and all but a couple of the best musical numbers have been removed. While the basic plot is still effective, the removal of the decoration, as it were, takes away from the film's inherent spirit of burlesque and diminishes its effectiveness. Unless you're in a rush, the original version is preferable. The full screen black-and-white picture is still battered, but is a little sharper than **Chu Chin Chow**, and the monophonic sound, while still distorted, is also a touch stronger. Also featured are text profiles of the three stars and Forde, along with the epic 17-minute Dave Fleischer cartoon from 1937, *Popeye the Sailor Meets Ali Baba's 40 Thieves*, which is inherently colorful, although the source material is a bit worn and the hues are not as vibrant as they could be.

The third platter contains an oddball 1935 British film that is only linked to the other two by its general Islamic setting and the presence of Kortner in one of the leading roles, *Abdul the Damned*, directed by Karl Grune. It seems apparent that VCI had no idea what to do with the feature, and so they put it here. That said, it is a surprisingly good film. It begins as a docudrama set in Constantinople in 1909, delving into the three-way political split between the Sultan, the 'Black Fez' establishment, and the 'Young Turks,' who wear white fezzes and want to see more democratic reforms instituted. A dashing officer—technically, a Black Fez—witnesses an assassination committed by one of the Sultan's men disguised as a Young Turk. The Sultan, meanwhile, has fallen in love with the officer's fiancée, an attractive opera singer, and when the hero is imprisoned, she has to use her wiles to get the Sultan to free him. Running 108 minutes, the drama is entertaining and the production designs are engaging. The film also has appealing musical sequences. What is strange, however, is that although the film is rigorous in depicting Turkish politics, it places a British template over the manner of the characters. The patriotic song that the Young Turks sing is a British marching song, and the resolute way in which the characters face their fates is also very British. This undercuts the sense of veracity the film initially attempted to convey and likely prevented it from achieving the status it deserves, despite its quirks.

The full screen black-and-white picture is fairly worn, with soft contrasts and occasional displacement effects. The monophonic sound is aged but workable and there is no captioning. Text profiles are included for Kortner and co-stars Adrienne Ames and Nils Asther.

Hollywood discovers dogs

MGM had a lion, but no cat ever rescued a studio from bankruptcy. That accomplishment can, however, be attributed to the dog, Rin Tin Tin, whose string of boxoffice hits literally saved the Warner Brothers studios from insolvency as the company was just attempting to establish itself in the days of silent films. Motion pictures were invented in the Nineteenth Century, but it was the Twentieth Century innovation—editing—that turned them from a curiosity into a narrative artform and entertainment industry behemoth. Along with piecing together a story, editing could give normal actors the illusion of superhuman abilities, and in the Twenties, some clever filmmakers working at Warner Brothers discovered that editing could also give a dog the appearance of intelligence and dexterity that dogs don't really have. Intertitles could also clarify what the dog might be thinking. This was not anthropomorphization. It was simply tweaking reality just enough so that it looked like the dog could jump a little further, run a bit faster, solve simple puzzles without greater effort, and understand human interactions a little more

precisely than any dog is actually capable of doing with any sort of spontaneity or consistency. You have to realize that from the perspective of audiences in the Twenties, this was astounding. Everybody had dogs, or at least knew dogs, and among the many other magical things that the movies were bringing to human consciousness, they suddenly brought the exploits of a dog that everybody wished their dog could be. Warner Brothers was back in the biscuits in every time.

Two of those silent Warner Brothers Rin Tin Tin features from the Twenties have been released by Library Library of Congress and Kino Lorber as a Kino Classics Blu-ray, **Clash of the Wolves & Where the North Begins** (UPC#738329262990, \$30). Both films may epitomize silent movie entertainment, but they do so for a reason, as they are both as fully entertaining as they are manipulative. The full screen black-and-white presentations have some age-related shortcomings, but are not only viewable, but emotionally rousing even a century after the films were originally created. It might also be worth noting—or not—that the dog's popularity cannot have been hurt by the near constant view of his genitals during his many profile shots in both films.

In *Clash of the Wolves*, directed by Noel M. Smith, Tin portrays a half-wild wolf called 'Lobo' who is cared for by a young borax miner, played by Charles Farrell, when the animal gets a cactus needle stuck in its paw. They bond, and Tin's character saves Farrell's character when a villain tries to steal his claim. The dog (who is also credited as 'Rin-Tin-Tin') also watches over the young man's romance with a rancher's daughter, played by June Marlowe. Running 68 minutes, the 1925 feature has a number of slapstick sequences, mostly involving the ranch foreman, played by Heinie Conklin, but also a few with Tin, in which the dog has to wear the 'disguise' of a false beard so that townspeople will not recognize what they believe to be a marauding wolf. The film parcels out its fun and excitement in a suitable and efficient manner, and is as good of an example as any at how well the formula was being executed. The stunts are impressive, the humor is tolerable, the action is brisk and the dogs—Tin's character has a family of his own—are adorable.

The picture is a bit battered around the edges by age, but is generally in good shape, with clear contrasts and smooth details. The film is accompanied by a subdued monophonic pipe organ musical score that supports the action effectively. There is also an alternate commentary track by silent film expert Anthony Slide, who provides a full history of the dog and his trainer, Lee Duncan, as well as going over the backgrounds of the other members of the cast and the crew, and interpreting what is on the screen. "Further to the potential ill treatment of animals within the film, there's a later scene where the pack attack a horse, and there is no question that that poor horse is absolutely terrified." Even Slide is a bit amazed by the filmmaking and dog training tricks at work. "Look at this. He tries to get up and he can't. How do you get the dog to do this?"

Although it runs a little longer at 73 minutes, the 1923 *Where the North Begins*, directed by Chester M. Franklin (and edited by Lewis Milestone), is a more compact feature, with fewer comedic intrusions, and is essentially the better of the two. Set in the wilds of Canada, a French trapper, played by Walter McGrail, hoping to earn enough money to get married, agrees to transport a load of furs (not a very impressive load, mind you, but that was the movies then) across a perilous pass in the winter. A corrupt trader who wants the trapper's fiancée arranges to have him assassinated on his journey so he can get a twofer by also grabbing the furs to sell again. The assassin botches the job, however, and a wild dog, played by Rin Tin Tin, instinctively rescues the trapper, while also foiling the assassin's return for a second shot. The trapper brings the dog back to his cabin and domestic bliss ensues, until the dog gets another whiff of the assassin, which none of the dumb humans on the screen understand until it is almost too late. The final chase is as typical of a silent movie final chase as you could hope to find—demo worthy, in some ways—and the film, if you can get past the attempts in the intertitles to give the trapper an accent, is highly entertaining from start to finish.

The picture is in much poorer condition than the *Clash of the Wolves* picture. While still watchable, it is riddled with speckling in places and has several damaged segments that not only sport blatant splices, but also slip the sprockets in a couple of spots. Conversely, the musical score, a nice piano and strings concoction, is newer and fresher, while still underscoring the action and drama effectively.

Colorful African adventure

It opens very disturbingly on the shooting of an elephant, but if you can get past that heartless sequence, the 1950 MGM adventure film, **King Solomon's Mines**, released on Blu-ray by Warner Bros. as a *WB Warner Archive Collection* title (UPC#810134940307, \$22), is a highly engaging journey across Africa, particularly with the superb picture and sound transfer it has received. Stewart Granger, Deborah Kerr and Richard Carlson star in the 103-minute feature directed by Compton Bennett and Andrew Marioni. The full screen picture has an almost window-like vividness, and even when the hues, because of the shooting conditions, are more compromised, the image is still solid and sharp. Additionally, the monophonic sound welcomes amplification, taking full advantage of indigenous musical instruments and environmental noises. The audio is smooth and free of distortion. Granger's character is hired as a guide to venture into an uncharted area because Kerr's character is searching for her missing husband. The film has a terrific array of unique wildlife and tribal dance footage, which steadily accentuate the narrative and aid in moving it forward. The performances are regal, the action is rousing, and even decades and innumerable travel and wildlife documentaries later, the setting remains exotic and captivating. The program has optional English subtitles, a trailer and a great 10-minute featurette that is as intent upon promoting the now ancient Dodge trucks and buses that carted the production crew through the African wild as it is in promoting the film itself.

Globe trotting (and time traveling)

The pleasures of the Criterion Collection's **Martin Scorsese's World Cinema** releases (Sep 17 and Jun 22) go beyond the films themselves. What each box set provides is the excitement of visiting different places and experiencing new things, and it is that excitement of discovery that enriches the auras of the films themselves. As with the previous sets, **Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Project No.4** (UPC#715515276610, \$125) comes with nine platters. Two films are included on each of the three Blu-ray platters, and then each film is presented separately on a DVD platter. Scorsese supplies a 2 to 3-minute introduction to each film. All of the films are monophonic and are accompanied by optional English subtitles.

The collection begins with an utterly transporting feature that exemplifies the appeal of the series perfectly, the 1972 *Sambizanga*. Set in Angola (it was shot in the Congo), the film is about the political arrest and incarceration of a construction worker. It plays out, in a way, like a thriller. When he is picked up, word gets out that he has been taken, just as word gets out later, many miles away in a large city, that a new prisoner has been brought in. The film then follows the efforts of those in the city to find out who the prisoner is, while the members of his family, and especially his frantic but determined wife, try to find out where he has been taken. And the viewer looks on in amazement at how different the life in Angola that is depicted is to the life experienced by anyone who owns a Blu-ray player, anywhere. Nobody wears shoes, regardless of what they are walking on. The kids play soccer in the dirt in bare feet. Carrying heavy loads on one's head is the norm, and so on. The clarity with which true daily life is depicted is so expertly woven into the narrative you are barely aware that with just a little judicious cutting, the show could be a documentary instead.

Directed with astonishing skill by Sarah Maldoror (it was her only feature-length film, but for obvious political reasons that have nothing to do with her filmmaking skills), the 98-minute feature is outstanding in its blend of narrative intrigue and setting exposition. Its genuineness is enhanced by the untrained actors filling in many of the supporting roles. Regardless of how stiff or disrupted their line readings are—and regardless of how many times the extras stare straight into the camera—there is a compelling feeling that the viewer has been given the opportunity to peek at a reality genuinely existing somewhere far away and different. It is as fascinating as it is moving, and as fulfilling as it is vital.

The full screen picture has wonderfully fresh colors. Yes, the grain can be heavy at times, but that is part of the shooting conditions and otherwise, the transfer essentially adds to the film's verisimilitudinal thrills. The sound is also reasonably clear and sharp. The film is in Portuguese and various local dialects, and comes with a very good 26-minute piece about Maladoror (although she passed away in 2020, there is a decent amount of interview footage with her) and the film's significance.

Argentina has a long tradition of quality cinema and, until recently, no tradition whatsoever in preserving that cinema. Hence, every old Argentine film that you come across can seem like a gem. Mario Soffici's 1939 *Prisioneros de la Tierra* is essentially a melodrama and has a familiar story, although it is laced with a political awareness and social specificity that intensifies its emotions and the depth of its thematic impact. Running 87 minutes, part of it is set on a plantation in the northern, tropical area of the country (in the panhandle between Brazil and Paraguay), where the owner forces his workers to get their supplies and sustenance from the company store, so that the ones he wants to keep are forced to come back to work season after season to pay off the debts they incur while they are there. The owner takes a fancy to the daughter of an inebriated doctor, but she falls for a rebellious worker closer to her own age. The film has several evocative musical passages and is in fact based upon several short stories, so it has a bit of an episodic feel despite the attempts to weave its components together. The genuine Argentine locales (the first actor cast in the lead died after coming down with appendicitis on location) and the film's atmosphere of adventure are compelling, as is its social conscience and aura of romance, but it is more of a worthy title for the collection than one of the gathering's standouts.

The full screen black-and-white picture is soft around the edges, but is reasonably clean. The monophonic sound is a bit scratchy but workable and the film is in Spanish and a local dialect. A 20-minute piece supplies a full history of the film's production, an introductory analysis of Soffici's artistry and a detailed summation of the efforts that went into its welcome restoration.

A 1976 Iranian film that deserves to be released on its own, Mohammad Reza Aslani's *Chess of the Wind* is an impressive and beguiling thriller. Set in Iran during an undetermined time, it is about a battle of wits between a woman confined to a wheelchair, who has inherited her mother's mansion and possessions, and her stepfather, who has been systematically embezzling the estate. Most of the film is set inside the mansion, which is absolutely gorgeous—there are goldfish swimming in the hanging lamps—with a half-dozen cutaways to women doing their laundry in a garden pond. It is the conversations of these servants while they are washing that fill you in on the details of the narrative, but each of these sequences is also more anarchic and apparently modern than its predecessor, as the women in the later segments also speak about their country's militarism and police state. Running 100 minutes, the film is most reminiscent of a Peter Greenaway feature and, based upon the timing of the plot revelations, definitely takes more than one viewing to comprehend everything that is happening, but Aslani's exquisitely measured screen compositions and the cast's cryptic performances, not to mention Sheyda Gharachedaghi's unique and spellbinding musical score, almost guarantee that you will want to watch the film many times more than that.

The film contains dialog references to male gay sex and has an

ambiguous but reasonably clear scene of lesbian eroticism, which, along with its steady lambasting of the patriarchy, led to almost an absolute assurance that it would never be released to the public. Indeed, not only was the film suppressed (its one festival screening was repeatedly sabotaged), but it was thought to have been lost until Aslani's son came upon the complete and undamaged camera negative in a flea market several decades later (he literally rushed home and said, 'Look what I found, Pop!'). At least, that is the story they tell.

Restored in 2020, the presentation is immaculate. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, colors are precise—a box of jewels is emptied onto a table, and they are dazzling—and the image is sharp and spotless. The sound is also very strong and clear, and the mono itself adds to the film's thrills, when the heroine thinks she hears a ghost and you have no idea which direction the noises are coming from. The film is in Farsi and comes with an outstanding 53-minute retrospective documentary that includes extensive interviews with Aslani and other members of the cast and crew about the film and its remarkable resurrection. Aslani visits the house where the film was shot and walks down the hallways and stairs as a split screen shows the film's amazing single-take climax.

The 1975 Dikongué-Pipa feature shot in Cameroon, *Muna Moto*, opens with what appears to be documentary footage of busy streets in a city. The camera continually returns to one individual, however, a tall husky man, but it goes on just showing the activities on the streets and the sidewalks until suddenly the man does something very surprising and a chase ensues. Then, in the tradition of practically every other TV episode these days, flashbacks explain how the characters got to that point. Running 90 minutes the film, like a number of memorable African features in the Sixties and Seventies, is about love and marital discord. Pipa deftly makes use of his limited budget, often avoiding the direct recording of sound, and can therefore use the editing to empower the performances. Amid the narrative, the documentary views of life in a small village enhance the richness of the setting just as they did in *Sambizanga*, and they are just as fascinating and enlightening. And like *Sambizanga*, the narrative is integral with the documentary footage, so that the latter never feels like such passages are disjointed insertions. The full screen black-and-white feature builds to a compelling conclusion that matches the promise of its opening sequence, exploring not only the challenges of romance amid poverty, but the threats that come from even the smallest imbalances of power.

The picture is heavily grainy at times, but still crisply focused, with well defined contrasts. As with so many of the films in the collection, the musical score is highly appealing, and even though the sound is mostly structured after the fact, it never feels disengaged from the images. The film is in dialectic French and other local languages, and comes with a good 18-minute segment that combines a general analysis of the film's themes and a terrific interview with Pipa talking about his love of movies and what he wanted to accomplish.

One of André de Toth's Hungarian films made before he emigrated to Hollywood, the 1939 *Two Girls on the Street*, plays like a pre-Code melodrama, about two young women who have had sexual experiences, but befriend one another and turn their lives around through their friendship. Shot on location in Budapest, which is part of the film's appeal, the script is both edgy and a bit sloppy—one of the heroines goes from working in an all-girl band in a dive to becoming a famed concert pianist, the progress of which occurs entirely off screen—but its cinematic framing is consistently involving (and did Billy Wilder see the film? The all-girl band looks awfully familiar...). It is not just the visual attraction, but the dynamics of each scene that sustain a momentum of interest in what will happen next. Running 80 minutes, Bella Bordy and Mária Tasnády Fekete star, with the male lead, Piri Vaszary, coming across so consistently as a refined jerk that you are perhaps purposely supposed to wonder how either of the women could possibly be interested in him.

The full screen black-and-white picture is somewhat aged—it also looks like a pre-Code feature—but is free of overt wear and has well defined contrasts. The film is in Hungarian and is accompanied by a very nice 11-minute interview with Toth from 1994 talking about directing (and mostly speaking about **House of Wax**), explaining that it is really the characters that direct the film, because they can only act in one way (he also shares an amusing anecdote about John Ford's driving skills).

Even in black and white, Uday Shankar's 1948 *Kalpna*, from India, is a 154-minute head trip, a constant, rhythmic undulation of monochromatic phantasmagoria. The film has one foot in Bollywood and one foot in the cosmos. Shankar (Ravi's brother) also stars as a leader of a traveling performance troupe, who incorporates the dramatic events of his life into his dreams and his dances. Often in the film, an event will begin as a dream, or as reality, and then with just a turn of the camera it will become a wildly costumed dance routine, or another dream. Shankar's character, who resents his society's economic disparities, often sabotages his career with his righteousness. His two main female disciples are jealous of each other, slapping and hitting one another in several dandy cat fight scenes. The performances are usually arch or otherwise exaggerated, but rather than undermining the drama, the over-played expressions and poses simply blur the lines between what is real and what is in the hero's head, spewing out of his brain and onto the screen. Eventually, backers see past his grandstanding and he is able to open a utopian school and cultural center in the mountains. He then holds a culture festival, so that the final half hour of the film is pretty much like Busby Berkeley on acid. The film tries to have everything—political discourse, social awareness, spiritual insight, an appreciation of the arts, an exploration of literature and myth, a celebration of Indian nationalism and so on—and it pretty much succeeds, so that its audaciousness is truly part of its strength and not a shortcoming.

The full screen black-and-white picture has speckling and is often soft, but has likely undergone a Herculean restoration effort to look as good as it does. Presented in Hindi, the film is accompanied by a terrific 24-minute retrospective documentary that goes over Shankar's career and the impact the film had upon Indian cinema as a whole. It also includes interview footage from 2015 with Shankar's wife and co-star, Amala.

Universal crime sprees

The only guaranteed crowd pleaser of the three Universal productions collected in the Universal Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* release, **Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema XIII** (UPC#7383292-60781, \$50), is the 1950 George Sherman feature, *Spy Hunt*. Impossible to dislike, the film is a unique suspense adventure in which the heroes and the villains—you don't entirely know who is who—are hunting a pair of black panthers in the Swiss Alps after the animals escape from a train wreck. One of the panthers has important microfilm sewn into its collar. Howard Duff stars, with Marta Torén, Philip Friend, Robert Douglas, Walter Slezak and others. The film is appealing as a basic thriller, but the premise of hunting wild tropical game in the Alps is also a fresh movie idea, and the shots of the panthers bounding over the mountainous countryside with hounds on their tails are consistently impressive and involving. It is 74 minutes of pure escapist bliss.

Each of the three black-and-white movies appears in a separate jacket, and each is accompanied by optional English subtitles. The monophonic sound on all three is consistently workable. The full screen image on *Spy Hunt* has a few flurries of speckles and some questionable day-for-night sequences, but the image is very sharp and when the speckles subside, it is quite smooth. Film experts Bryan Reesman and Max Evry supply an excellent commentary track, covering the backgrounds of the cast and crew, assessing the film's artistry (they don't like the day-for-night shots either), sharing many details about the production and the challenges of shooting the panther sequences, discussing the history of mistreating animals during filmmaking, pointing out that Torén is actually the action hero of the film while Duff's character is more of the victim hero, and arguing as to whether the brightly lit film can be considered 'film noir' at all, although you'd have a hard time convincing its two four-legged stars otherwise.

Universal produced Alfred Hitchcock's **Shadow of a Doubt** in 1943 and then went back to the same source novel by Gordon McDonell in 1958 to knock off a B-movie thriller with an overly literal quality assessment title, *Step Down to Terror*. Directed by Harry Keller, the story is different, but not so different that you don't recognize the links to the Hitchcock film almost immediately. Charles Drake stars, his character ducking out of a city apartment that men are watching and traveling to his mother's suburban house. His character's brother had died, but his sister-in-law, played by Colleen Miller, is living with his mother, along with a son. They welcome him with open arms, and Miller's character is smitten, but soon the men start showing up again in the shadows, including a character played by Rod Taylor, and there are references to a killer who has been preying upon wealthy widows. Running 76 minutes, the film has a couple of pretty good scares and a reasonable amount of suspense. It is completely lacking in the texture that Hitchcock brought to his tale by shooting on location (in contrast, during the opening 'city street' introduction of the apartment, you can see the California hills in the window reflections, rather than the buildings that are supposedly across the street), but for double bill filler, it introduces you to some interesting characters, gives you a passable amount of tension and excitement and then wraps everything up without ambiguity or élan.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and while a speckle pops up here and there, for the most part the image is clean and sharp, which adds to the film's strength of presence. A trailer is included. Reesman and Evry provide another excellent commentary, again covering the backgrounds and legacies of the cast and the crew, but also going into great detail about Hitchcock remakes (comparing this version not only to the original, but to a couple of other re-dos), the precarious fiscal problems Universal was having in the late Fifties and, once again, whether or not the movie really qualifies as 'noir.'

The script for the 1957 melodrama, *The Night Runner*, could not be better directed than it has been by Abner Biberman. The story is challenging, since the hero, an unemployed drifter played by Ray Danton, is schizophrenic and prone to violence, but there is never a moment when you don't feel sympathy for Danton's character, regardless of his actions or their consequences. He checks into a seaside motel and falls for the owner's daughter, played by Colleen Miller, and she returns his affections. The script is not the kind of surefire entertainment that, say, *Spy Hunt* is, but how it has been executed is both viable and commendable. Without going overboard, the images are consistently stimulating, to the point where they can convey much of the turmoil going on inside of Danton's character. Equally impressive, the sound mix is also modulated to reflect his attentions and concentration, and is deliberately different than the standard sound mix found on most movies from its era, such as the other two in the collection. It is because the movie is so well made—and we would also recommend watching it after *Step Down to Terror* rather than beforehand, so you are oriented toward a problematic protagonist—that it is able to keep a viewer caring about the characters and intrigued about their fates for its entire 79 minutes.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. It has more speckles than *Step Down to Terror*, but way less than *Spy Hunt*, and is, like the other two, sharp and smooth, with finely detailed contrasts. A trailer is included. Film historians Lee Gambin and Eloise Ross supply a commentary, on the one hand comparing the film to the teen monster movies

of the Fifties, but on the other, praising the narrative's restraint when it comes to explanations and justifications. They speak a lot about the transition that was happening after the War in the treatment of mental patients generally, and point out the different symbols being incorporated by the filmmakers as representations of normalcy in America, but they don't really touch on how technically superb Biberman's approach to the material is, even as they acknowledge the effects of what he accomplished.

The stars come out for Universal and Kino's **Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema XIV** (UPC#738329260798, \$50). James Mason, Dan Duryea and William Conrad are all featured in the 1950 Hugo Fregonese feature, *One Way Street*, which also stars *Spy Hunt*'s Torén. It is precisely the sort of movie that is ideal for the **Film Noir** anthology, because its ending is ridiculous—the heroes are in a very sweet place, but they go back to face fate for absolutely no logical reason—but the film's atmosphere of adventure, romance and danger, along with the overpowering allure of its stars, make it irresistible regardless of the necessary impositions a supposedly moral society imposes upon its characters. Mason is a doctor who steals money from gangsters played by Duryea and Conrad. Seeing her chance, Torén's character tags along to get away from Duryea's character, infuriating him all the more. They make it out of California, but while flying to Mexico City their plane has to make a stop for repairs at a small seaside village, and the two kind of settle into an idyllic life, while Mason's character re-discovers the rewards of his profession. Running 79 minutes, the entire film is a contrivance, but a brief one, and as part of a larger collection—just as the movie undoubtedly once served as escapist filler on a double bill—it is fully a satisfying blend of narrative compulsion and movie star radiance.

Rock Hudson has a brief speaking part. The full screen picture is generally in very nice condition, with minimal wear and glossy blacks. All of the films in the collection are in black and white and come with optional English subtitles. A trailer is included on *One Way Street*, and there is a commentary with Gabin and costume expert Elissa Rose. She of course talks about the strategies behind the clothing the characters are wearing, as well as the transitions that movie costuming was going through after World War II, and they also talk about the story's structure, the wonderful cast, Mason's stardom and the adventures of Fregonese, an Argentine director who came to Hollywood (this was his first American film) and his relationship with other Hispanic-American filmmakers.

Call it a story hook, call it a plot turn, call it a surprise but something happens halfway through the 1958 *Appointment with a Shadow* that changes the film from being a thoughtful drama about a struggling alcoholic reporter and to become, instead, a rip-roaring suspense thriller, while retaining the credentials it had earned before to deliver an ending that is even spiritual in its satisfactions. George Nader is a reporter who gets a scoop about the upcoming arrest of a gangster and has to sober up by the end of the day if he is going to get his story. Joanna Moore is another reporter, his girlfriend, who has given him one last chance to quit the bottle or she quits him, and Brian Keith is her brother, a police lieutenant who passed along the tip about the upcoming arrest. Virginia Field is also featured, as the gangster's moll. The black-and-white film was shot in Cinemascope, which essentially widens the impact of its excitements. It has been letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and is generally crisp and spotless, although once in a while a speckle or two pop up. In any case, while the beginning of the 72-minute feature, which was directed by Richard Carlson, looks like it is being serious about exploring alcoholism (Nader's performance is really good) and draws on the fascinating entanglement such drinking dramas have with film noir, after that halfway point a viewer is too distraught with anxiety and frustration to think about anything except hoping that the hero will succeed. You may need to stop the film and pour yourself a drink to get through it.

A trailer is included, and there is an excellent commentary by film enthusiasts David DeCoteau and David Del Valle, talking not just about the film, but about the cast (particularly Nader, who had a fascinating closeted life) and about Universal—their crime films, their 'factory,' the advantages of experience this gave their actors and how they were transitioning to TV. "The studio system, the Universal-International cookie-cutter factory, whatever you want to call it, it worked. And we're examining these movies today because they're holding up. I would rather watch these, what they thought of as 'programmers,' with these kind of people, than anything really that's on Amazon Prime right now. They're far more entertaining, I see far more value. It's not an old movie if you've never seen it."

If there ever was an actress who was always a woman and never a girl, it was Alexis Smith, who is nevertheless cast as the title character in the terrific 1950 procedural directed by Joseph Pevney, *Undercover Girl*. Smith is a policewoman recruited to infiltrate a gang of drug dealers, and Scott Brady is her handler. Smith, as she did in most of her parts, dominates the screen. The 83-minute film is a solid blend of drama, character (one of the villain's enforcers wears a neck brace) and suspense, with some good performances (Regis Toomey has a brief but compelling part; Richard Egan, Gladys George, Connie Gilchrist and Royal Dano are also featured) and a fairly decent depiction of the deception, anxiety and trickery required to work undercover. The full screen black-and-white picture is generally spotless and smooth, adding to the film's sense of immediacy. Film expert Julie Kirgo provides a genuine running commentary, slipping in biographical information about the cast and the crew but basically reacting to the film in an intelligent and informed manner as it unfolds. "This is very beautifully lit, this scene, with the firelight and the way their eyes are picked out. Boy, are there key lights on these two. Fantastic. That's [cinematographer] Carl Guthrie again."

School age

The end of the school year is a significant psychic demarcation in the lives of many people because it represents a palpable shift in situation, an unavoidable change in how a person will conduct daily life or prepare for life in the future. George Lucas' **American Graffiti** brought this to the fore by coordinating a story about a community of teenagers facing this shift in their lives with a time setting that represented the coincidental shift in consumerism to the younger demographic. Richard Linklater's 1993 **Dazed and Confused** has the same template—following different characters around as they cross paths on a celebratory night of makeshift parties—but advances its period setting by a decade to reveal how destructive and anarchic that demographic shift had become (we are still feeling its effects). Set in Texas in 1976, the delight of the Universal film is its array of characters—you knew somebody exactly like this one or that one back when you were in school. The performances are consistently terrific, and the film is peppered with budding actors who would later become stars and even Oscar winners, including Matthew McConaughey, Ben Affleck, Milla Jovovich, Parker Posey and Adam Goldberg, among others. But the film belongs to a wonderful, charismatic actor who sadly never became a star, Wiley Wiggins, playing a freshman who gets his first taste of what his next four years hold in store. The film is meticulous in its exploration of the social strata in high school, and how some manage to cross from one level to another while others do not. Running 102 minutes, in many ways it is a very specific snapshot of a very specific time and place, but it is also universal in its feel for the manners and mores of 'modern' teenagers, regardless of the era from which they are anxiously looking to break free.

Universal and The Criterion Collection have released **Dazed and Confused** as a two-platter 4K Blu-ray (UPC#715515281416, \$50), with the film and a commentary track on the 4K platter, and the film with the commentary and other features on a standard Blu-ray, which is also available separately (UPC#715515088411, \$40). The commentary and features originally appeared on Criterion's two-platter DVD release (UPC#715515018425, \$40). The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. We reviewed Universal DVDs in Aug 98 and Mar 05, the latter an improvement over the former, with fresher, brighter colors. The Criterion DVD is pretty much a replication of the second Universal DVD. Not only are the hues bright, but fleshtones are accurate and the DTS sound has a decent punch. While the film's sound mix is not exceptional, particularly when it comes to the pop hits on the soundtrack, there are some nice separation and directional effects that give the film a decent atmosphere. The Blu-ray playback is sharper than the DVD playback, which has, in comparison, softer edges and less detail. However, it may be too crisp, as there is chromatic noise at times within those otherwise solid colors, which look smoother on the DVD. And surprisingly, the DTS sound on the BD is no better than the DTS sound on the DVD. And that brings us to the 4K presentation. The image on the 4K presentation eliminates the chromatic noise, which is a good thing, while it is still much sharper than the DVD, which is also good, but the entire image is also darker, messing with many of the colors. Although it has the smoothest image, the 4K presentation is the least satisfying—not only do the cars not have their true colors, but even the American flag doesn't look right. The DTS sound on the 4K presentation also feels a little weaker than the other two audio tracks, although the differences are less compelling.

All three presentations have the same special features. The 14 minutes of deleted scenes that originally appeared on the Universal DVD have been expanded to 26 minutes, containing more sequences that didn't belong in the film but give the cast members more opportunities to show off their characters. A terrific 46-minute retrospective documentary from 2003 includes footage that was shot behind the scenes, plus reminiscences by many members of the cast, and it is supplemented by what one assumes are outtakes—a fantastic 119 minutes of interviews and off-hand moments with the cast and the crew, which essentially convey this weird convergence of Seventies and Nineties vibes while delving even deeper into the details of the movie's creation. Along with a trailer, there is also a nice 23-minute collection of audition footage with the various cast members as they close in on their characters. The deleted scenes and the trailer appear on the first DVD platter with the film, and the other special features appear on the second DVD platter.

Linklater's commentary is excellent, as he provides a history of the production (although he never mentions **American Graffiti**, which we cannot believe did not come up in the pitch meetings—structurally, the two films have, politely, a lot in common), discusses the extensive casting challenges (sometimes the best performer couldn't be hired because of similarities to another performer), explains his motivations for making the film, shares how events in the movie were and were not drawn from his own experiences, goes over the low points—he couldn't get Led Zeppelin to release the title song for him—and the high points. "My favorite letter I ever got—you know how you get something, you know, writes to you, they like your movie or something—I got one from a guy who'd been in an accident and had lost a lot of his memory. I guess he was around my age. He thanked me for the movie, that it filled in his memory of a lot of stuff he knew he had lost. People all over the country say, 'Hey, that was my high school.' And I was like, 'Where'd you grow up?.' 'Oh, New York City.' I'm like, 'What do you mean it's your high school? You don't ride around in pickup trucks and go to beer busts.' 'Yeah, but it was sort of like it.' I'm like, 'No it wasn't. It's about high school. Of course it's like your school. You went to high school, great. This movie's about high school. That's what that has in common.'" He's selling himself short, however, because he composed and gave life to such a rich and distinctive panoply of characters that every viewer immediately, both consciously and subconsciously, recognizes the commonalities from personal experiences, which go way, way beyond place or even time. As he explains later on, "My whole working premise was like, nothing really

changes in teenage worlds. You know, there's a continuum that goes from the entire post-War era to the present day, that the dilemmas are the same, the relations are very similar. Nothing really that different. The pop culture landscape changes a little bit, but what it's like at that age range, in relation to your parents, friends and school, team, you know, whatever, that's kind of a constant."

Set in Chicago in 1964, the 1974 American International Pictures production directed by Michael Schultz, **Coolie High**, was marketed as an inner city alternative to **American Graffiti**, and to that end—of these three films reviewed here—it has the most awesome soundtrack album. According to Schultz in the supplement on the Criterion Blu-ray (UPC#715515280013, \$40), not only was the time such that they were able to acquire the rights to all of the Motown songs for a reasonable price (because executives were still dismissing the value of black music), the tide changed so much that the film never came out on VHS because the rights became prohibitive. But truth be told, other than the at-the-time still rare wall-to-wall pop hit musical score (augmented by a few nice riffs from Freddie Perren), the film does not have an **American Graffiti** template. Based quite a bit upon the experiences of the screenwriter, Eric Monte, it depicts the adventures of two friends, a star athlete played by Lawrence-Hilton Jacobs and a more intellectually inclined troublemaker, played by Glynn Turman, over the course of a couple of weeks as they constantly play hooky from school, get into scuffles and flirt with the coeds. From the apparent energy the characters exhibit every moment they are on the screen, the admirable performances must have been exhausting. Cynthia Davis co-stars and Garrett Morris (who was actually teaching at the time, but still had trouble getting hired for the part) plays a teacher. Running 107 minutes, the film is spirited and comical, but it is also grounded in the realities of the streets, to the point where its climax is a notable contradiction to its marketing and a certification of its enduring quality as something greater than an AIP targeted audience concoction.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Again, this was a film made by AIP in the Seventies in an urban environment, so there is an inevitable tone of grime and dreary lighting in the cinematography, but that said, the transfer is clearly meticulous and accurate, with solid hues and crisp details. The monophonic sound is strong and the temptation to amplify it for the music can be fulfilled without drawbacks. There are optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, 112 minutes of excellent retrospective interviews have been included with Schultz and other members of the cast and crew, going over not just the experiences they had making the film and what it has meant for their careers, but what it meant for the motion picture and television industry, as well.

Two young overachievers don't realize, at least consciously, that they were meant for each other in Paul Thomas Anderson's subversive 2021 romantic comedy produced by MGM, **Licorice Pizza**, a Universal release (UPC#191329214251, \$20). Set in the early Seventies in Los Angeles—and more specifically, in Encino—the film has an outright bizarre collection of period pop songs (though, yeah, they were probably among the cheapest that could be pinned down) and a number of sweet looking automobiles (although not as many as **Dazed and Confused** had—they're getting harder to find). The film could also be looked upon as the third part of an exquisitely comical trilogy about Los Angeles in the Seventies, following Anderson's **Boogie Nights** and **Inherent Vice**. Cooper Hoffman is a high school student who uses his income from acting gigs to invest in get rich quick schemes, such as a waterbed franchise and a pinball arcade. He meets and immediately connects with a school portrait photographer's assistant, played by Alana Haim (one of the delightful ambiguities in the film is that you can never pin down how old she is supposed to be), and the film, which runs 133 minutes, then chronicles in various episodes their continual coming together and breaking apart as they dive into each project. The period setting is intricately designed and allows for some wonderful comedic embellishments (Bradley Cooper does a marvelous turn as Jon Peters). There are absurdities in the film that don't entirely work—particularly a running gag about the owner of a Japanese restaurant—but Anderson's masterful command of technique creates a mesmerizing framework to settle back with the unique and engaging characters as they learn about life and their places in the world.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks great although there is an inherent softness in the image, a result of the DVD's limitations that is not enough to dampen the compelling effects of Anderson's imagery. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a terrific dimensionality and reasonably clear tones. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Gary shifts his concerned eyes to Alana, who meets his gaze. With a gleam in his eyes, he eyes the end of the hose connected to the bed's inlet. He yanks it out. Alana goes slack jawed. Then they both hurry off, letting water drench the carpeted floor."), an alternate French audio track, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and 18 minutes of deleted and behind-the-scenes footage that convey a viable sense of the atmosphere on the set and the appeal of the players.

Five Empire classics

A superbly curated gathering of five quintessential Eighties schlock features, **Enter the Video Store: Empire of Screams**, has been released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video in a grand five-platter boxed set (UPC#76013125327, \$100) that also includes posters, postcards and a gorgeous 80-page booklet. All five films were originally produced by Empire International Pictures (the eventually bankrupt precursor to Full Moon Features), mostly in Rome, where producer Charles Band had bought a studio, and are now under the aegis of MGM. We can't get over how liberating it is to sit back with hours of such meticulously composed mindlessness. These are the films that viewers turned to in the video store when they got there late and all the premium titles were already rented for the weekend. Despite the nudity and the gore, the target age for the films seems to be about twelve, but that never stopped those with two or three or twelve times more years on them from popping the movies in and having a good time. A big budget

movie does not aspire to be awful, but a low budget movie doesn't care. So long as it checks the boxes that its target audiences are interested in, bottom line efficiency is all that matters. Nevertheless, the five films are, in their own way, among the cleverest and most adeptly realized of their ilk, and unless one is in a grumpy mood to begin with, it is almost impossible to watch them and not have a good time. All of the films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and all are accompanied by optional English subtitles.

The first feature, *The Dungeonmaster*, was originally created as *Ragewar*, and three versions of the film are included on the platter. The film is unusual in that it is episodic, with its different sections having been written and directed by different artists, including Band (who also did the connecting sequences), Dave Allen, Steven Ford, Ted Nicolaou and others. The hero, played by Jeffrey Byron, is zapped into a fantasy world where his girlfriend, played by Leslie Wing, is held in chains by a demonic being, played by Richard Moll. To win his love back, he must face different challenges in different worlds—hence, the different episodes, most of which are horror related, including a kind of wax museum segment, a zombie segment, a slasher thriller segment, a bloodthirsty rock concert segment and a post-apocalypse segment. The first version, presented as *Ragewar* and running 78 minutes, is not only the longest, it has the most female nudity. The second version, also known as *Ragewar*, is a half-minute shorter, but also moves the interior segments around, pushing Allen's terrific stop-motion monster statue segment to be the first challenge rather than one of the later ones. The official American release, *Dungeonmaster*, drops more of the nudity by losing an intriguing prolog and runs just 74 minutes, moving the segments around some more, although the Allen one still comes up first. We found the first version to be the most satisfying, however, not just for the flesh but because it doesn't give away its best moments right off the bat. With Moll's enjoyably silly, domineering performance, the tone of the film is already set. In contrast, Byron and Wing give nicely reserved performances that anchor the film effectively amid its craziness. The movie has a decent fantasy premise—although it is set in the Eighties, Byron's character has an AI computer program that helps him, and Wing's character is a little jealous of it. The vignettes are so short that even when they don't amount to much (and most of the time, they don't), they don't wear out their welcome. Hence, in the first version, you're bopping along with the stupidity of it all and suddenly the ante gets raised ever so slightly by the stop motion sequence. Having that segment on first just means that the pieces go downhill afterwards.

Although the image is grainy in some segments, the colors are consistently strong and the transfer adds to the film's pleasures. The monophonic sound is fine. In addition to a 15-minute interview with Byron talking about how he landed the part and his experiences making the film, there is also a terrific commentary where a pair of fan writers interview him about the movie and his career (he was minor Hollywood royalty and a major child actor, going on to have a decent career both in front of the camera and behind it). They cover almost all of the information shared in the featurette, but also go into more detail about shooting each sequence and his recollections of the other members of the cast and the crew. Also featured are two trailers and a nice collection of memorabilia in still frame.

For all of its amusements, *Dungeonmaster* is far and away the worst movie in the collection. Stuart Gordon's 1986 *Dolls* is not only more coherent, but creepier, with a few decent thrills and lots of great horror indulgences. It is a dark and stormy night when a man, his new wife and his young daughter from his previous marriage are stranded during a vacation and knock on the only house in the woods next to the road, where an elderly couple allow them to wait out the weather. It is a big house and the owner is a dollmaker, who has filled almost every room with disturbing dolls of every shape and size, much to the delight of the little girl. The stepmother is less than pleased, and can't stand the kid to begin with, while the father just tries to keep the peace. Another driver and two female 'punk' hitchhikers he picked up also get stranded, and everyone is then in for a very long night of nasty toys coming to life. Running 77 minutes, the performances are arch (except for the nice turn by Guy Rolfe as the dollmaker) but that doesn't really matter since the movie is one gnarly sequence after another using a variety of effects and, after the premise is established, a steady parade of thrills. A handful of scenes are grainy, but otherwise the color transfer looks fantastic, with bright, accurate hues. The Ultra-Stereo DTS sound has a pretty basic mix, but there are a few good directional effects and a tolerable dimensionality. Along with three trailers and another good memorabilia still collection, there is a passable 8-minute storyboard comparison segment, a 17-minute interview with editor Lee Percy and a great 39-minute retrospective piece that has interviews with many members of the crew and the cast.

There are three commentary tracks. Gordon and screenwriter Ed Naha are on one track, reacting to the film as it unfolds while discussing the movie's technical challenges, their day-to-day production experiences, the effectiveness of using different types of special effects (and different effect houses) to create a variety of fantasy moments, the skills of the cast members and various idiosyncratic aspects of the film. Another commentary has several members of the cast, who carry on a light conversation during the film, reminiscing about their experiences. The last commentary features David DeCoteau, who worked at Empire and talks about the history of Empire and Full Moon, as well as a lot about Band (who wasn't a very good money manager) and Gordon, although he doesn't talk very much about the film at hand.

Some real movies stars, namely Yvonne DeCarlo, Vince Edwards and Jeffrey Combs, appear for varying lengths of time in the 1987 *Cellar Dweller*. The film, which vaguely—very vaguely—echoes *Suspiria*, is about a comic book artist played by Debrah Mullowney entering a remotely situated art school to hone her trade, having learned that the school building was once the home of her favorite comic book artist, who died under odd circumstances. Once she gets there, she

discovers that drawings of a demon come to life if a certain chant is uttered. Since the stars are on board, the acting in the film by everyone is a little stronger than in *Dolls*, and their exchanges add significantly to the entertainment. Running 78 minutes, the film is also another viable mix of nudity, gross monsters and periodic thrills. It shreds even its own internal logic, but is over before it runs out of steam.

Very few scenes have any grain at all, and the color transfer looks slick and unblemished, adding to the film's appeal. The DTS Ultra-Stereo sound is also really nice, with a very strong dimensional presence. In still frame, there is a nice collection of production and sales materials, as well as a good set of photos. Also featured is a trailer, a 16-minute appreciation of director John Buechler filled with terrific photos and clips, and a good 16-minute piece with the effects artist who embodied the creature in the film, Michael Deak. Deak expands his talk as he is interviewed by two horror enthusiasts on the commentary track, speaking about his career (including his work with Michael Bay and others), his experiences with Empire as a whole, and, here and there, how he did the effects in the film at hand.

The final two films are literally light years beyond the other three. Directed by Peter Manoogian, the 1988 *Arena* (not to be confused with a half-dozen other schlock films from the same era with the same title and the same plot) is set on a huge space station that hosts inter-species boxing matches. The human hero, working as a fast food cook, punches out a rude customer and learns that he has kayoed a major contender, pulling him into the ring and pitting him against the match's corrupt organizer. Paul Satterfield stars, with Hamilton Camp (playing a Burgess Meredith character with a Peter Falk accent), Claudia Christian, Marc Alaimo and Shari Shattuck. The story is perfectly fine, and the decoration is outstanding. The filmmakers don't skimp on the extras, and every scene is populated by wild creatures and costumes. Sure it is derivative of *Star Wars*, but if you can lift the cantina scene and do something at least mildly substantive with it, fans will be more than satisfied. Running 97 minutes, the film has virtually no nudity, but it is consistently imaginative and highly enjoyable, with a genuinely rousing climax.

An alternate presentation is offered in full screen format, adding a bit of picture information to the top of the image while removing somewhat more from the sides. The fight sequences work better with the wider screen. The color transfer is okay on either version. Unlike the first three films, the original source material could not be accessed, so there is a bit more grain from time to time, with softer edges and a stray scratch or two, but colors are still bright and fresh and the film is too entertaining to begrudge minor imperfections. You will want to hold the volume down to a modest level, however, as some of the music can come across harshly, and on the whole, the audio mix is not one of the film's stronger components. Although the Ultra-Stereo surround still has a number of enjoyable separation effects, the bass is inelegant and bleeds way too much. Along with two trailers and a passable collection of memorabilia in still frame, there is a 15-minute interview with scenarist Danny Billson who spends most of his time recounting his irritation with Band and his fiscal habits (he also hates what they did with his script), and another 16-minute interview with Deak talking about the challenge of doing the fights and stunts inside the creature suits and other memories he has of the shoot. Manoogian is interviewed by a pair of fan writers on a commentary track, occasionally mentioning the movie at hand but speaking more generally about his entire career and his experiences making movies. He has a lot to say about working with Band and no matter what the topic turns to, it is always a reasonably interesting talk.

With even better special effects and a more complex story, Gordon's 1989 *Robot Jox* is the best and most entertaining film in the group. Cast against type—with his ingrained sneer he looks more like a villain than a hero—Gary Graham plays the pilot of a gigantic robot—this was a couple of decades before *Pacific Rim*—who has to fight another gigantic robot, several times. He is also going to be replaced by a young genetically altered female pilot—impressively embodied by Anne-Marie Johnson—and finds himself attracted to her even as they compete for the same position. Running 84 minutes, the climactic fight is exhilarating, and everything else is grand fun, so don't use up all of your popcorn before you get to it. The color transfer looks terrific and the image is very crisp (yeah, you can see the wires on some of the robots). The DTS Ultra-Stereo sound is fully engaging and adds to the entertainment. While it still lacks the delicate shadings that more sophisticated sound mixes can provide, the bass is nicely constrained, delivering some appealing thumps without getting in the way of everything else the way it does on *Arena*.

There are interviews with cast members Graham, Johnson and Paul Koslo, running a total of 41 minutes, in which each one shares stories about the shoot and the impact the film has had on his or her's subsequent career. There is also a terrific reminiscence by several of the effects technicians, running 27 minutes, about Allen, their own lives and careers, and the different tasks they performed on a number of films Allen worked on, including *Robot Jox*. Also featured is a terrific 8-minute piece on the film's memorabilia, a trailer, and some good still frame collections of more memorabilia and sales promotions. Two very rewarding commentaries are also included. One track has more special effect technicians, who speak in great detail about the many different effects done in the film and the challenges they encountered, such as doing stop motion outdoors, where the process is vulnerable to the weather. The other track features Gordon, who has since passed away, sharing nice anecdotes about the production (both stars lied on their resumes about how tall they were—she was taller and he was shorter), speaking in detail about the way various scenes were executed and talking with great satisfaction about the impact the film has had since it was completed. "I think its true of a lot of my films. They go from being, you know, theatrical flops to classics, with not much in between. That's one of the things that's wonderful about movies is that they stick around."

Plenty to see here, folks

Set in Victorian England, the marvelous Amcomri 101 Films International release, **Fear the Invisible Man** (UPC#843501040966, \$16), compensates for its modest budget with modern special effects. The film is not a direct retelling of the H.G. Wells story, but placing the tale in that era is a wonderful inspiration, accomplishing as much in tone as it does in science-fiction suspense. The film is also part of a newfound trend to cast actors of color in significant parts in period British films—Wayne Gordon plays the police inspector—but that in no way diminishes the appeal of the costume, carriage and mansion settings. Mhairi Calvey, whose performance is very appealing, plays the young widow of a deceased scientist who is having difficulty holding onto his bankrupt estate until his former partner, played by Mike Beckingham, shows up—or rather, doesn't show up—seeking her help. Directed by Paul Dudbridge, the film is modern in another important way, regarding the character's nakedness, which again, unlike contemporary invisibility tales, makes a wonderful and even metaphorical juxtaposition to the Victorian milieu, where nudity in proper circles would be steadfastly disregarded. Not only is the film a good deal of fun, but its conclusion, although resolute, leaves everything very ripe for a sequel, and so its popularity should be encouraged at all costs.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The image is deliberately soft, especially during the foggy nights (where the protagonist is not entirely without form) and so the picture can look a little fuzzy or smeary at times. The colors are fresh and fleshtones are accurate, and there are optional English subtitles. The musical score has a pleasing dimensionality on the fairly loud 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack, but other effects, including the dialog from an unseen speaker, are unfortunately centered and unwavering. Maybe next time their budget can spring for it.

Peckinpah television

Hollywood typecast Sam Peckinpah from the get-go just as readily as they would typecast an action star. Every time he tried to do a project that was a little different from his violent successes, the boxoffice wasn't interested. There were other dramatic films that he wanted to do, but they got turned over to directors like Frank Perry instead, because typecasting. Of course, Peckinpah was a bad boy, too, and between the time he made the boxoffice disaster, **Major Dundee**, in 1965, and the time he roared back into boxoffice glory with **The Wild Bunch** in 1969, he got fired from one major film and had to relegate his talents to TV dramas to get by. Well, television got the good end of that deal.

Originally broadcast in 1966 on an episode of ABC's dramatic anthology series, **Stage 67**, Peckinpah wrote and adapted a story by Katherine Anne Porter, **Noon Wine**, which has now been released serendipitously by Liberation Hall (UPC#089353406622, \$15). It is bleak, but it is special in many ways, from Peckinpah's deft, budget conscious direction to the lovely, penetrating performances. Set before the Turn of the Century, Jason Robards is a somewhat lazy farm owner who takes a chance on hiring an itinerant and emotionally brittle hand played by Per Oscarsson, and sees his gamble pay off over the subsequent couple of years as his bounty prospers, until a stranger comes looking for the hand and a tragedy occurs. Olivia de Havilland plays the farmer's sickly wife, Theodore Bikel is the stranger and Peckinpah favorites Ben Johnson (who is particularly wonderful) and L.Q. Jones have supporting parts.

You know the program is going to be unique from the very first shot, since that shot includes a bare rear end, which was generally unheard of on television by that point in time. Peckinpah manages, over the course of an hour, to create a rich portrait of madness, guilt and frustration, while taking advantage (as westerns do) of the simplicities that the setting has to offer to strip away the distractions of civilization from the truths of the characters' souls. The program is an enriching experience, as was most everything Peckinpah directed.

The full screen color program was shot on video tape and is very soft, with bandings that alter in the tones of hues in discernible ways. The show is viewable, and it looks better on a smaller screen than it does on a larger one, but the rarity of its existence is underscored by the shortcomings of its presentation. The monophonic sound also has a limited range, although just having Robards voice come through as it does is a definite treat, and there is a serviceable musical score by Jerry Fielding. There is no captioning. The program runs 50 minutes, but it can also be watched with the original commercials included, which stretches it to 59 minutes, and the nostalgia of doing so is well worth the extra time.

Peckinpah's short-lived 1960 television show, **The Westerner The Complete Series**, has been released in a rewarding two-platter *Collector's Edition* by Shout! Factory (UPC#826663170139, \$20). Peckinpah served as what today would be known as the 'show runner,' the central creative force behind a series, and he also wrote and directed several of the episodes. Additional episodes were written by Bruce Geller and others, and directed by Ted Post, André De Toth, Tom Gries and others. Each of the twelve episodes is only 25 minutes long, but several accomplish an appreciable amount of action and drama within that time frame. The show is also as close to personal expression as a TV show could get in its day. The feeling of Peckinpah's presence and sensitivity is in almost every frame.

Brian Keith plays an illiterate cowhand wandering through the west with his horse, his dog, and a fairly powerful rifle. The pilot episode was actually a 25-minute 1959 episode of *Dick Powell's Zane Grey Theater*,

entitled *The Trouble at Tres Cruces*, which is included as a bonus at the end of the second platter but is best watched first, as it serves as a good introduction to Keith's character and situation. Interestingly, although the show was cancelled after just the dozen episodes, the last scene of the final episode has a pointed feeling of closure to it, making the series as a whole even more worthwhile to sit through.

But, on the other hand, not every episode is a gem. Some are outstanding. It seems that no matter who directed the episode, the action scenes, though sparse, are riveting. The dramas are, for the most part, very adult and even innovative. In the opening episode of the series itself, the hero tries to extract an old girlfriend from an abusive relationship, but discovers that she is too psychologically bound with her abuser to leave. In another, a hotheaded kid is just itching to try out his quick-draw skills, as much as Keith's character and a companion try to cool him down. And in another, Keith's character is accused of killing a teacher because he's the only stranger around. And so on. These episodes are interspersed, however, with episodes of comedy, several of which were directed by Peckinpah, and as much as they concern the run-ins Keith's character has with a rival played by John Dehner in a recurring role, they are also concerned with one of Peckinpah's favorite topics, alcohol consumption. How funny is it that the two men are constantly wrecking whatever prospects they have because they are fighting with each other while inebriated? Not as much as the filmmakers seem to think it is.

Throughout the show, Keith is outstanding, consistently delivering a performance that is as good or better than anything else he ever did. Notable guest stars delivering terrific performances include Michael Ansara, Katy Jurado, R.G. Armstrong, Joseph Wiseman, Robert Culp and John Anderson. Future Peckinpah favorites such as Dub Taylor, Warren Oates and Slim Pickens also show up here and there. Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The full screen black-and-white picture is in good condition, and the monophonic sound is fine. There is no captioning.

The six episodes, including the pilot, that were directed by Peckinpah have commentaries featuring Peckinpah experts Paul Sydor, Garner Simmons, David Weddle and Nick Redman. As with their talks on Peckinpah's various films, what they have to say is always thoroughly researched and highly informative. They have a solid feel for Peckinpah's artistry, and often find themselves defending the sensitivity in Peckinpah's works, especially when it is at odds with the general categorization of his output.

Still, we cannot agree with everything they have to say. Not only do they love the comedy episodes, but the one that they feel is the worst of the three—the final episode—is the one that we liked the most (although they all warm up to it was they watch it again, after bad mouthing it during earlier commentaries). They also point out that alcoholism, particularly in art, has always had a mystique.

"The plot totally stops to do the bender. We all know Sam Peckinpah himself was an alcoholic, and the part about alcoholism that's rarely looked at is the romanticism of it, which he grew up with, and that cowboys and people working on ranches would talk about benders, and go on them. There was a whole kind of romantic vision of them."

"In that sense, you wouldn't ordinarily think of applying an adjective like 'lyrical' to an episode like this, but in fact that is sort of what lyricism is all about. You immerse yourself in mood or character or feeling or whatever it is, and the rest of it be damned."

Rewarding silliness

Kaley Cuoco, previously best known for her work on **The Big Bang Theory**, stars as an alcoholic stewardess who awakens one morning in Bangkok next to a dead man and has no memory of how that could have happened in the 2020 HBO Max series, **The Flight Attendant**. As she tries to piece things together, while avoiding the Thai police and the killer, she also goes about her job and continues to drink. At the same time, her inner consciousness carries on a conversation with the dead guy as the two also attempt to figure out what happened, as well as explore her problematic childhood. The show depends upon Cuoco's acting skills to get by on its precarious mix of comedy and suspense thrills, and fortunately she is more than talented enough to pull it off. Not only is the program—which does at least a little bit of location work all around the world while centering its action in New York City—full of nice plot twists, stylish décor, groovy costumes and decent thrills, but its portrait of alcoholism is adeptly constructed and effectively played out. The latter is so well done, in fact, that it justifies everything else.

HBO, WB Home Entertainment and SDS Studio Distribution Services have released **The Flight Attendant The Complete Seasons 1 & 2** (UPC#883929803064, \$40) on four platters, two platters and eight episodes to a season. Although there are cliffhangers at the end of the first season (Rosie Perez has a supporting part as a fellow stewardess who has become involved with Korean spies), the primary mystery is solved with reasonable satisfaction. If the first season was, to some extent, a bit far fetched, the second season, from 2022, pushes the absurdity even further, although since the show's basics are by then well established, it is easy enough accept the more ridiculous aspects of the premise for the thrills and the humor they provide. Still working diligently for an airline, Cuoco's character has also taken on a second job during her international stops, observing and reporting upon targeted individuals for the CIA. When one of her targets is killed, she

becomes embroiled in intrigue that appears to stretch back into her normal life, which is now based in Los Angeles, while at the same time trying to rescue Perez's character. She has sobered up, but her inner conversations are now with her former self, again working out the murder she has witnessed, but also chastising her for not being more of a party girl. As outlandish as the plot turns become, they do eventually work out in a logical fashion, but more importantly, Cuoco's performance anchors the season in a brilliantly effective manner. As silly as the spy stuff and the murders may seem, it is all excused by the stunningly real emotional catharsis Cuoco's character experiences when she becomes sober enough long enough to finally recognize her own flaws. Since the story is wrapped up even more completely than it was at the end of the first season, the collection as a whole is both satisfying and different, offering a fanciful escape, but one with valid spiritual rewards.

Some of the locations in the second season, including Reykjavik and Berlin, are highly appealing. Running a total of 720 minutes, each platter has a 'Play All' option and the chapter encoding takes you reliably past the nicely animated opening credits. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. As befitting the glitzy locations, the picture is slick and sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a satisfying dimensionality and a reasonable amount of detail. There are optional English subtitles. Along with 8 minutes of deleted scenes that were sensibly removed, but would have spelled out a lot more of the story that you otherwise have to figure out by reading between the lines, there are 64 minutes of basic promotional featurettes, most of which are for the second season.

Gender gap

The gap between men and women has never seemed wider than it does in **A Question of Silence**, an enigmatic 1982 Dutch film released on Blu-ray by Cult Epics (UPC#881190020692, \$35). Directed by Marleen Gorris, Cox Habbema is a psychiatrist who has been assigned by a court to weigh the sanity of three ordinary women who have been charged with the brutal murder of a boutique manager. The three, who had never met one another, had just apparently had enough when the manager accosted one of them for shoplifting, and they all let him have it. Running 97 minutes, there is no real mystery to the crime, but the narrative remains wholly engrossing. From her husband to her supervisor, to the judge and prosecutors in the courtroom, everyone—or, rather, every man—expects that the psychiatrist will make an obvious conclusion about the case, but she is not so sure that they are right. The more she explores the details and conducts here cryptic interviews, the more she begins to see that the men around her have a total psychic disconnection from what women want and feel, and she essentially begins to sympathize with the suspects. The film could be considered a satire, and it is ever so slightly preposterous in its details, but the way that it builds up to its absurdities is subtle and rather sneaky. For a long time you think you are simply watching a typical and absorbing procedural, and it isn't until you are really far into it that you realize you might actually have been pulled into a different world. And there are plenty of feminists who would insist that you have not.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The source material is worn, with many scratches and speckles, and a few splices. Additionally, colors are light and drab. It is only because the film is so brilliantly conceived that the presentation remains worthwhile despite the weak transfer. The monophonic sound is adequate and the film is in Dutch with optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is a nice collection of memorabilia in still frame, a minute-long clip of the film winning Holland's equivalent of a Best Picture Oscar, a basic 11-minute interview with Gorris (although much of it is clips from the film) and a more thoughtful 16-minute interview with Habbema about the role, her approach to acting, the culture scene in East Germany (where she did a lot of work) and a number of interesting other topics. Film expert Patricia Pisters provides a periodic commentary track. She supplies a few insights, but often just describes what is happening on the screen or goes on to describe in great detail the other films that Gorris made and the brief explosion of Dutch hits with strong sexual content in the early Eighties—all of that and there are still longish gaps between her comments.

DVD News

INDEX AVAILABLE: Our annual Index to the DVD and BD reviews in The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter, identifying all titles reviewed between Apr 97 and Jun 23, can be obtained for \$24 by writing DVD-LDN Index, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542. You can also receive a downloaded version of the complete Index for free. Just email dpratt@dvdslaser.com and indicate if you would like the Index in PDF format or Microsoft Word format. A complete set of Back Issues, from Sep 84 to last month, is available on two DVD-ROMs for \$74.95 plus \$4 S&H US, \$15 S&H foreign. Write to: Back Issues, DVD-LDN, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542

CRITERION CORNER: Orson Welles' **The Trial** is being released by The Criterion Collection in 4K format with a commentary featuring film historian Joseph McBride; **Filming The Trial**, a 1981 documentary about the film's production; and archival interviews with Welles, Jeanne Moreau, and director of photography Edmond Richard. Brett Morgen's David Bowie rumination, **Moonage Daydream**, will be in 4K format and will have a commentary featuring Morgen; a Q&A with Morgen, filmmaker Mark Romanek, and musician Mike Garson at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood; and an interview with rerecording mixers David

Giammarco and Paul Massey. A 4K presentation of Nicholas Roeg's **Walkabout** will incorporate a commentary featuring Roeg and Jenny Agutter; interviews with Agutter and actor Luc Roeg; and **Gulpilil—One Red Blood** (2002), a documentary on the life and career of David Gulpilil. A 4K version of Rob Reiner's **The Princess Bride** will feature a commentary with Reiner, screenwriter William Goldman, producer Andrew Scheinman, Billy Crystal and Peter Falk; and edited audiobook reading of Goldman's novel *The Princess Bride* by Reiner; a program about Goldman's screenplay; a program about Goldman's tapestry based on his novel; interviews with Reiner, Goldman, and Crystal, Cary Elwes, Christopher Guest, Mandy Patinkin, Chris Sarandon, Fred Savage, and Robin Wright; an interview with art director Richard Holland; programs about makeup, fencing, and fairy tales; an on-set video diary filmed and narrated by Elwes; and five behind-the-scenes videos with commentaries by Reiner, Scheinman, and Crystal. Luis Valdez's **La Bamba** will come with commentaries featuring Valdez, Lou Diamond Phillips and Esai Morales, and producers Stuart Benjamin, Taylor Hackford, and Daniel Valdez; an interview with Luis Valdez; a conversation between Valdez and filmmaker Robert Rodriguez from El Rey Network's *The Director's Chair*; a making-of program featuring cast and crew; and audition footage.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently released on Blu-ray—Acid Bath Productions V.8. Hollywood Werewolf, Mind Melters X, Mind Melters XI (Acid Bath); Dracula The Dirty Old Man (AGFA); Skinamarink, Tales of the Walking Dead Season 1 (AMD); Last of the Grads, Ping Pong The Triumph, Rehearsal, The Turn of the Screw, Unleashed, Vulnerables, The Wasted Times (Bayview); Mad House (Bounty); Avatar The Way of the Water, Mickey & Friends V.2, The Sword in the Stone (Buena Vista); Starstruck (Burning Bulb); The Surveyors (Butler); Lamento, Night Out (Capital Motion); Dr. Caligari, Irresolvable, Sick of Myself, The Witches Mountain (CAV); Medicine for Melancholy, Private Parts, Shaw Brothers Classics, The Strangler, The Wedding Veil Inspiration (Cinedigm); Hi Diddle Diddle (Classicflix); Medicine for the Melancholy, Pasolini 101, The Servant (Criterion); Debbie Does Demons (Culture Shock); Bog plus Mako The Jaws of Death (Dark Force); The Tale of Tsar Saltan (Deaf Crocodile); Mafia Mamma (Decal); At the Video Store (ETR); Young Bodies (Factory 25); Trouble Every Day (Film Desk); Kindness Matters (FilmHub); Creating Rem Lezar, Driver 23 / The Atlas Moth (Found Footage); Survive (Freestyle); Movern Callar (Fun City); A House Made of Splinters (Giant); Todd Tarantula (Hollinsworth); Bang Bang Betty (Indie Rights); Midnight Son (Jinga); A New Old Play (Kani); The Bridges at Toko-Ri, Caliber 9, Clash of the Wolves & Where the North Begins, The Draughtsman's Contract, Duet for One, The Great Train Robbery, La Chèvre, Les Comperès, Mr. Wong Collection, The Oyster Princess and Meyer from Berlin, The Package, Prison Girls, The Severing, Sex Power and Money Films by Beth B, Tales from the Gimli Hospital Redux, Tommy Guns, The White Buffalo, Will Penny, A Zed & Two Noughts and The Falls (Kino); John Wick 4, One Ranger (Lionsgate); Zombie Ass (Media Blasters); Millennium Mambo (Metrograph); The Event Complete Series, Ultraman Battle Kaiju Series 01 Ultraman vs Red King (Mill Creek); Attack of the Demons, Whisper of the Heart (MPI); Please Baby Please, Rodeo (Music Box); Alien from the Abyss, The Comic Strip Presents... Complete Channel 4 Films; Enter the Video Story Empire of Dreams, Extra Terrestrial Visitors, Game Trilogy, Killzone, Project ALF, A Question of Silence, Red Sun, Warriors Two, Witchtrap, You Can Live Forever (MVD); In Corpore (Nexus); Claydream (Oscilloscope); Assassin Club, Tulsa King Season 1 (Paramount); Cold Eyes of Fear, From Hollywood to Heaven The Lost and Saved Films of the Ormond Family, Mexico Macabre Four Sinister Tales from the Alameda Film Vault 1959-1963 (Powerhouse); The Legend of Glynn Turman 2023 (Rainbow); The Barefoot Contessa, Lawman, One Man's Hero, A Prayer for the Dying, Romeo Is Bleeding, Scorpio, The Secret of Santa Vittoria (Sandpiper); Hung Jury (Saturn's Core); Big George Foreman, The Man from Toronto, The Pope's Exorcist (Sony); Lawless Range (Syndicado); Get My Gun, Horror Workout (Terror); Spirits of the Air Gremlins of the Clouds (Umbrella); Raymond Griffith The Silk Hat Comedian (Undercrank); The Sound of Summer (Unearthed); La Brea Season 2, Parenthood Complete Series, Polite Society, Quantum Leap Season 1, Renfield, The Super Mario Bros. Movie, Sweetwater (Universal); Theta States (Vipco); Angel Face, Best Seller, Caged, City of Ghosts, The Damned Don't Cry, Dangerous When Wet, DC's Stargirl Season 3, Deal, Diary of a Hitman, Evil Dead Rise, Golden Gate, Guy Ritchie's The Covenant, The Land of the Pharaohs, The Old Man and the Sea, Stormy Monday (Warner); I Am T-Rex, Sakra, The Tank (Well Go); The Saragossa Manuscript (Yellow Veil)

NEW IN 3D: The following Blu-ray titles were recently released in 3D format—Avatar The Way of the Water (Buena Vista); Prison Girls (Kino)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently released in 4K format—Avatar, Avatar The Way of the Water (Buena Vista); Creepshow, Motel Hell (Cinedigm); The Rules of the Game, Time Bandits (Criterion); Scream (Dark Force); The Manchurian Candidate, Ronin (Kino); John Wick 4 (Lionsgate); Daughters of Darkness, Dead and Buried, Rain Man, Mallrats, Waterworld (MVD); Clear and Present Danger, The Firm, Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Arc, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, M:I Mission Impossible, M:I-2 Mission Impossible, Star Trek Strange New Worlds Season 1, Vanilla Sky (Paramount); Cold Eyes of Fear (Powerhouse); Insidious (Sony); The Mummy Trilogy, The Super Mario Bros. Movie (Universal); Evil Dead Rise, National Lampoon's Vacation (Warner)

