

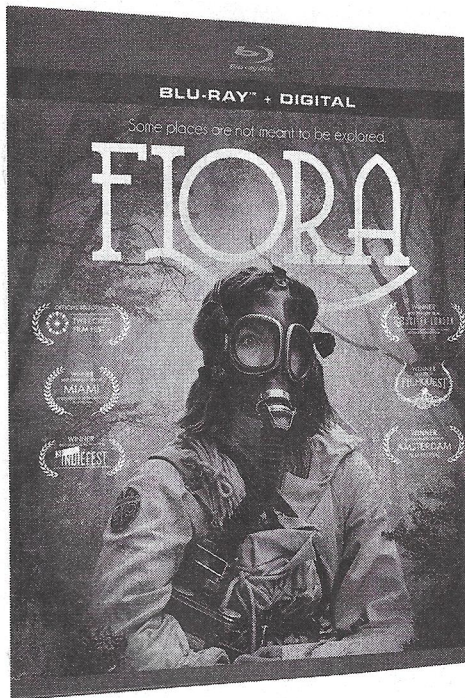
## FLORA (2017) 8/8

D: Sasha Louis Vukovic. Teresa Marie Doran, Dan Lin, Sari Mercer, Miles G. Jackson, Caleb Noel, William Aaron. 105 mins. (Mill Creek Entertainment) 8/18

A solid premise, brilliant cinematography (by Eric Irvin), and excellent soundtrack score (by Nathan Prilliman) are fatally undermined by a flat, redundant script (by debuting director Vukovic) enacted by what looks like a cast of weekend cosplayers. Our story sees a team of young Ivy League botanists chart unexplored territory in 1929 to study the local flora. In the midst of their mission, they unearth a mysterious, unseen deadly organism that sets them on a desperate path for survival. Unfortunately, this potentially intriguing addition to Flora and Fauna Film-dom, which encompasses everything from the inventive Quatermass-like sci-fi invasion tale *Day of the Triffids* to the notoriously risible killer tree romp *From Hell It Came* (VS #106), grinds on far too long, with our amateur thespians, clad in overly researched period garb and enthralled by awful approximations of '20s tunes emanating from their tinny victrola, endlessly speculating re the nature of the threat and the best way to escape it. As noted at the top, tech credits are above average, so maybe the filmmaking crew can take another crack at it with a professional cast and better scenario. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, cast and crew commentary, deleted scenes, and trailer.

## FREE AND EASY (2017) 8/8

D: Geng Jun. Xu Gang, Zhang Zhiyong, Xue Baohe, Zhang Xun, Gu Benbin, Wang XuXu. 99 mins. (Film Rise/MVD Visual) 7/18



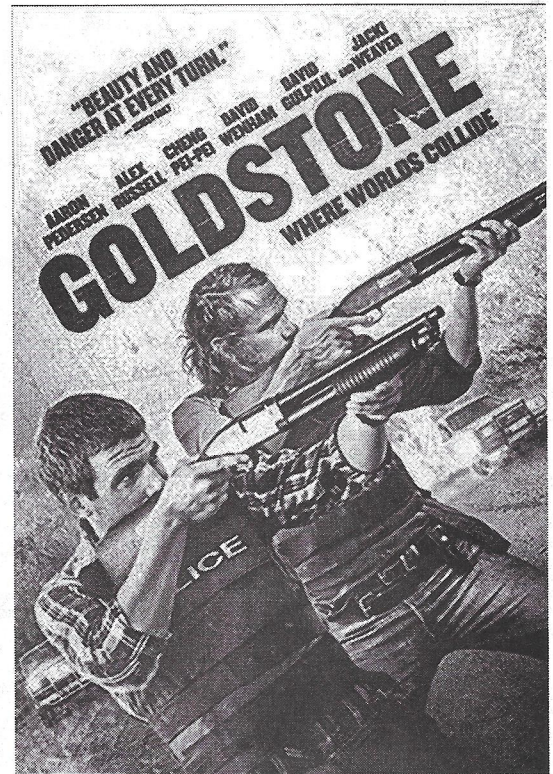
8 VideoScope

Geng Jun's *Free and Easy* reps China's contribution to the Loco Locale subgenre, films, like the Coen Brothers' *Fargo* (VS #49), Oliver Stone's *U-Turn* (VS #26), David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (VS #1), Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (VS #20) and Takashi Miike's *Gozu* (VS #54), that put the city in eccentricity. Of the above, *Free and Easy* shares its closest ties with *Gozu*. As in Miike's shaggy Yakuza story, *Free and Easy* opens with a stranger (Xu Gang), a traveling soap salesman, entering a remote, apparently all but abandoned industrial town. His is no ordinary soap, though—a deep whiff renders unwary sniffers unconscious, allowing our peddler plenty of time to relieve them of their goods. Soon, we encounter the city's oddballs—a hustler disguised as a monk, a pair of clueless cops, a troubled couple who run a ramshackle boardinghouse, an obsessive forest ranger on the trail of a suspected tree thief, et al. Director Jun Geng moves his idiosyncratic pieces at a leisurely pace, filling his film with cryptic deadpan interactions rich in offbeat wit and irony as his characters wander resolutely through this obscure Northern China circle of Hell. The action intensifies a mite when a murder occurs, but smooth resolution remains elusive. *Free and Easy* boasts the sonic talents of one of China's most popular rock bands, Second Hand Rose, who conclude with an extended Chinese rap outro.

## GOLDSTONE (2016) 8/8 1/2

D: Ivan Sen. Aaron Pedersen, Alex Russell, Cheng Pei-Pei, David Wenham, David Gulpilil, Jacki Weaver, Michelle Lim Davidson. 110 mins. (Lightyear Entertainment/MVD Visual) 9/18

An excellent Australian entry in the modern wasteland western subgenre (see also Taylor Sheridan's *Hell or High Water* [VS #101] and *Wind River* [VS #106]), one-man wonder Ivan Sen, who scripted, directed, photographed, edited and composed the score, *Goldstone* brilliantly weaves all the major threads of a traditional frontier tale into a tense contemporary tapestry. Pedersen embodies weary cool as Jay Swann, a mixed-blood detective who makes an inauspicious arrival in the titular Outback town (more of a trailer-based settlement really) when he's busted for drunk driving by decent but compromised cop Josh Waters (Russell). Jay, who harbors his own tragic backstory, is on a missing persons case that threatens to interfere with corrupt locals looking to acquire aboriginal lands, by any means necessary, to ensure a lucrative construction deal. In the course of his investigation, Jay runs afoul of deceptively cheery matronly mastermind The Mayor (Weaver, of *Animal Kingdom* fame), crooked contractor Johnny (Wenham), a gang of heavily armed thugs on board to enforce "progress," along with a human traf-



ficking prostitution ring run by Mrs. Lao (Cheng Pei-Pei), distressed captive May (Davidson), and endangered indigenous holdout Jimmy (a rather grizzled Gulpilil, looking a long way from his youthful *Walkabout* days) who helps Jay reconnect with his native roots. Sen successfully maneuvers his assorted pieces in a steadily steam-gaining thriller on an inevitable path to a violent showdown. Oz star Pedersen, who previously teamed with Sen for the 2013 Outback-set *Mystery Road*, handily sells his troubled, laconic lawman, while his fellow thespians lend solid support. Extras on Lightyear/MVD's Blu-ray edition include the featurettes *The Corruption of Goldstone*, *Detective Jay Swann*, and *The Indigenous People of Australia*, along with profiles of actors Russell and Weaver and filmmaker Sen. *Goldstone* received a limited Stateside theatrical release in May '18 and is well worth seeking out on Blu-ray.

—The Phantom

## BEST OF THE OUTBACK WEST

### **The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith** (1978)

D: Fred Schepisi (Industrial)

**Mad Dog Morgan** (1976)

D: Philippe Mora (Troma)

**Ned Kelly** (1970)

D: Tony Richardson (MGM)

**The Proposition** (2005)

D: John Hillcoat (First Look)

**The Tracker** (2002)

D: Rolf de Heer (New Line)

**Utu** (1988)

D: Geoff Murphy (Kino Lorber)