

## Chrome and leather

If it takes no effort to imagine Willem Dafoe in a remake of **The Wild One**, it is probably because of a little known 1981 film that kickstarted his career, **The Loveless**, which has been released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video (UPC#760137261384, \$40). The film was essentially a post-graduate student feature, although because of a screenwriters strike, the independent production managed to land some classy technicians and has developed a cult following, particularly in countries and places where people go nuts for black leather. Dafoe, in his first starring role, plays the member of a group of motorcyclists on their way to Daytona, who stop in a small town in Georgia to get one of their bikes repaired. As they interact with the townspeople, sex and violence ensue. It was also Kathryn Bigelow's debut feature, co-directed with Monty Montgomery, and, running 82 minutes, it is a searching blend of elliptically moody settings and sudden outbursts of drama. Since several of the technicians, as well as Dafoe, went on to work on **Streets of Fire**, **Loveless** can be said to have contributed to its inspiration, and there is a rockabilly score by Eddy Dixon that sounds absolutely wonderful on the DTS monophonic audio track. The film itself is brief enough to be tolerable, especially since Dafoe seems like he was made to play the role of a pensive, iron-willed, leather-jacketed biker, above all other roles he has had, but the movie does have its more esoteric passages and will not enthrall every viewer.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and looks reasonably slick, with accurate colors. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a great collection of production photos in still frame that includes some marvelous costume tests, a decent collection of storyboards in still frame, a good 4-minute audio-only interview with Dixon reminiscing about the shoot and explaining how he put the music together, and 65 minutes of marvelous retrospective documentaries with various members of the cast and crew, talking not only about the experience of making the movie in rural Georgia—which would make a decent movie itself, considering all the shoestrapping strategies that were being employed and how liberated everyone felt—but about the friendships that were formed and the other surprisingly lasting influences the film has had (although Bigelow is conspicuously missing from any of the BD's supplements). Montgomery provides a full commentary track of reminiscences, prompted by Arrow's Elijah Drenner. They share a few more details about different aspects of the film's creation and about what has happened to the other members of the cast and the crew since the film brought them all together. "It's a very fond memory for me. It was a great time. Pretty much everybody had a wonderful time making it. It's one of those kind of special, unique films. We all went down and just all stayed at the same time and tried to make the movie in chronological order as best we could. Everybody was there. People weren't flying in one day and flying out the next day. It was a little bit innocent. I felt like everybody was supportive of Kathryn and myself, and that everybody was just delighted to have the part in the film or the job."

## Crime collection

Nine Columbia Pictures black-and-white (mostly) crime films have been bundled together on a three-platter Blu-ray set released by Mill Creek Entertainment, **Noir Archive 9-Film Collection Volume 2 1954-1956** (UPC# 683904633781, \$50). The monophonic sound is clear on all of the releases, and there are optional English subtitles.

We reviewed the first film in the set previously, **Bait** (Jul 14), an irresistible 1954 tale running 79 minutes, about a fight over a girl and a goldmine starring Hugo Haas, John Agar and Cleo Moore, with Cedric Hardwicke in a cute prolog and voiceover as the Devil. The picture and sound transfer on the DVD were reasonably good, and the same transfer has been carried over to the BD. The full screen source material is free of damage and contrasts are sharply defined. The monophonic sound is clear.

There are some very entertaining plot twists in the 1955 *The Crooked Web*. You know something is up right away when a trappy waitress played by Mari Blanchard tells her earnest boss, played by Frank Lovejoy, that all she wants is to take care of his house and raise the kids they will have together. She and her 'brother,' played by Richard Denning, soon rope him into a scheme to retrieve a wartime treasure in Europe, but everything is not as it seems and the story's twists and turns keep the viewer fully engaged for the movie's entire 77-minute running time. The filmmakers are also adept at squeezing terrific suspense out of seemingly innocuous moments, such as a kiss on the beach. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, and the source material is in nice condition, with minimal wear.

Many of these films played to the burgeoning drive-in market, and one that seems to have that purpose in particular is the 1955 *Cell 2455 Death Row*. Framed—so it can get away with glorifying the thrills—by the character on Death Row, played by William Campbell, musing over the mistakes he made in his life, most of the 77-minute film is about how much fun those mistakes can be. As a teenager, he steals a car so he can take a very hot-looking blonde to a make out spot. Learning that it is money that will get him what he wants, he soon joins a gang and becomes involved in robberies and other crimes. Someone else, with the same kind of greasy hair and sour puss, is serially raping women and killing their dates in various lovers lanes, and when he gets picked up for acting suspicious near one of the crime scenes, he's the one who is charged. Hence, the movie has everything you love—sex, car chases, gun fights and so on, and again, it varies the menu just enough to keep things involving from beginning to end. The picture, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, has a few stray markings, but is generally in nice

condition.

We also reviewed the 1955 *5 Against the House* previously, as part of another Columbia crime anthology (Aug 10), and we didn't care for it much, but if you are prepared ahead of time for its shortcomings—or, more specifically, for the failings of the characters—then there is a lot to enjoy about it. For one thing, it has a fantastic cast, including Brian Keith, Guy Madison, Kerwin Matthews and, quite stunningly, Kim Novak. The guys are college students, including a couple of older Korean War vets, and as much as the 84-minute film is about their perfect plan to rob a casino, it is also about coping with PTSD from combat. Basically, if you don't invest emotionally in their scheme and simply appreciate the psychological conflicts of the characters and the interactions of the stars, then there is just enough suspense to carry you along. Again, the transfer appears to be the same as was used previously, and looks quite nice most of the time. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1.

A man coming home from work picks up a hitchhiker, eventually leading to his family being held hostage by a gang of punk thugs in the 1955 *The Night Holds Terror*. John Cassavetes and Vince Edwards are among the delinquents, with Jack Kelly and Hildy Parks as their victims. At first the film seems like a half-dozen others, but running 86 minutes, the narrative takes several long but different turns, sustaining a viewer's interest by not getting locked into a single situation. Additionally, once the police get wind of what is going on, the film becomes an engaging procedural, and has a more detailed look at tracing phone calls than we've ever seen before.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is soft and grainy, and is best watched on a smaller screen, although otherwise the source material is in adequate condition.

The location footage of New Orleans is one of the stars in the 1955 *New Orleans Uncensored*, about corruption on the docks. Despite the tainted topic, the city apparently agreed to cooperate fully with the production, allowing access to all sorts of interesting places beyond the usual stock footage of the French Quarter, and even loaning out a couple of city officials to play themselves in the film. Despite the civic involvement, the film, an early William Castle effort, is still quite entertaining. Arthur Franz is an ex-serviceman who purchases a boat but needs to get a job to pay for refurbishing it, hoping to learn about the shipping business from the ground up in the process. He is also an accomplished boxer, and rapidly works his way up in the union after a few altercations. As the mobster running the docks starts to crack down, the suspense builds effectively. The two blonde actresses cast, Beverly Garland and Helene Stanton—one a good girl, one a not so good girl—are a bit difficult to tell apart, and the voiceover narrator introducing the film pronounces all four syllables in 'New Orleans,' rather than squeezing it to a syllable and a half as the locals do, but otherwise, the 76-minute film is a satisfying 'here-and-now' crime drama with plenty of action and other thrills. Michael Ansara and Ed Nelson are also featured.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Some of the documentary footage is a little grainy, but otherwise the image is solid and free of wear.

Not really qualifying as a 'noir,' *Footsteps in the Fog* is a 1955 color film set in Edwardian London. The thing is, while the film might be a forgettable trifle on its own, in the company of the other crime films, it not only fits right in, but it is more enjoyable due to the seepage from the emotional contexts of the other movies. Stewart Granger is a widower who has murdered his wife to gain her estate, and Jean Simmons is a maid who figures out what happened but is too obsessed with him to turn him in. Quite early on in the 90-minute feature, both characters place all their cards on the table—she even forgives him when he tries to murder her—and the fun in the film comes from seeing just how evil they are willing to become. Bill Travers, Belinda Lee and Finlay Currie co-star, with Peter Bull showing up as a prosecutor. Naturally, the story's true potential is restricted by the waning Production Code, but enough happens to delight any viewer who revels in displays of murder and betrayal, particularly those decorated in period decor.

The colors have halos at times and the image is soft in places, but overall, the picture, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, is fresh and fleshtones are accurate.

Lee Patterson is an electronics expert with a good right punch who goes to work for a mobster, setting up a betting wire scam in the 1956 *Spin a Dark Web*. Set in London, Faith Domergue, who has top billing, is the mobster's sister, who lures the hero into the dark side, while Rona Anderson is the good girl, the daughter of a boxing trainer whose brother is killed by one of the mobster's henchmen. Set in London and running 74 minutes, the details of the plot are a bit convoluted, and don't get sorted out all that well by the end, but the basics are there, steam practically billows from Domergue's sweater, and there are enough action sequences and criminal activities to carry the film along. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and looks a bit worn at times, although the condition of the image is in keeping with the film's mood.

Future TV star James Darren was 'introduced' as the lead character in the 1956 *Rumble on the Docks*. Set on the wharfs of Brooklyn—though for all we know it was shot in Long Beach—Darren's character is the head of a local Sharks and Jets-type gang whose rumbles are manipulated by a gangster that wants to keep control of the shipping and longshoremen's union. Laurie Carroll and Michael Granger are also featured, and Robert Blake is in there, too. Running 82 minutes, Darren's charisma is one of the film's primary

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