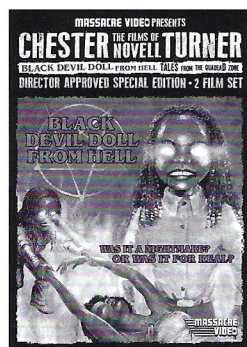


# DVDementia

Ever feel like revisiting the dregs of '80s DIY filmmaking, from the days when VHS rental stores were so desperate for product that *any* steaming pile of home-made horseshit could get released? If so, welcome to the warped realm of Chester Novell Turner, whose two horror efforts — **BLACK DEVIL DOLL FROM HELL** and **TALES FROM THE QUADEAD ZONE** — are now available as a 2-disc DVD set from **Massacre Video**. The most notorious of the pair, 1984's **DEVIL DOLL**, is a \$8,000 blaxploitation variation on **TRILOGY OF TERROR**, with uptight, ultra-religious Helen Black (Shirley L. Jones; no exaggeration, one of the louisiest actresses you'll ever witness) getting a



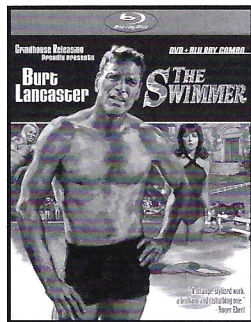
rude awakening after purchasing a creepy thrift store puppet. Soon this black, braided-haired doll springs to life and plays peeping tom while Helen is in the shower, as our Bible-thumping virgin fantasizes about getting screwed by this perverse puppet. Helen is eventually strapped to her bed by this foul-mouthed li'l

deviant, with a majority of the film devoted to her rape and subsequent sexual addiction — trashing all of her holy bric-a-brac, seducing a few neighborhood studs, but realizing that only the doll can quench her “burning need.” All of this is so unapologetically cheap and offensive that it's no surprise the film has acquired a rabid cult following over the years. Just how technically inept is it? The picture goes in and out of focus, jumpy edits abound and although the print was struck from Turner's VHS master, it still looks like a bleached-out, ripply, 7th-generation bootleg. In addition to his uncut 87-minute version of the film, the disc includes the original, 74-minute Hollywood Home Theatre video release (which, ironically, has superior picture quality)... 1987's **QUADEAD ZONE** is just as inconceivably crude and tedious, but also remarkably tame, with Turner offering up two half-baked horror tales (a white, religious, dirt-poor family slaughters their own kin in order to stretch their limited groceries; a guy plans to humiliate his recently-deceased brother, only to end up fleeing from an undead clown). Shirley L. Jones appears in wraparound segments, reading to the ghost of her dead little boy (portrayed by the breeze from an off-camera hair dryer) and stabbing her abusive beau with a spring-loaded, 99¢ plastic knife. Though mercifully brief, it's still interminable, laughably incompetent slop. Both films have rambling audio commentaries by Turner and Jones, plus there's a new, 35-minute conversation with the pair, sprinkled with anecdotes about this penny-ante production and its makeshift distribution.

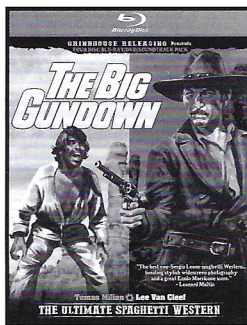
Sergio Sollima's 1966 spaghetti western **THE BIG GUNDOWN** [La Resa Dei Conti] boasts a pair of charismatic leads, gorgeous cinematography and a cynical undercurrent, but was hacked down to only 90 minutes for its US theatrical run. Thanks to **Grindhouse Releasing**, this outstanding EuroWestern finally receives the proper respect with a spectacular four-disc set. In post-Civil War Texas, Mexican outlaw Cuchillo

Sanchez (Tomas Milian) is accused of raping and killing a 12-year-old white girl and politically ambitious bounty hunter Corbett (Lee Van Cleef, hot off of **FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE**) agrees to track him down, with a sleazy railroad magnate promising to fund his Senate campaign in exchange. This cat-and-mouse pursuit across the wilderness leads to an encounter with a Mormon wagon train, a stopover at a remote monastery, plus both men seduced by a manipulative farm widow and stuck in adjoining Mexican jail cells. Corbett is the very best at his job, yet so driven by his desire for justice that he's often an asshole (e.g. stealing an innocent family's horse), while quick-witted Cuchillo talks his way out of most predicaments. The two actors make fine adversaries and Milian is particularly winning as this wily, knife-slinging rogue, with the script taking several strange twists and building to a pair of desert showdowns, as Corbett realizes that he's merely a pawn in an even bigger, dirtier game. The set includes a DVD and Blu-ray of the extended 95-minute, English-language print; a 110-minute, Italian-with-subtitles director's cut Blu-ray (which adds character-driven scenes that obviously weren't action-packed enough for US ticket buyers); an Ennio Morricone soundtrack CD; plus over 100 minutes of assorted interviews with Sollima, Milian and co-writer Sergio Donati.

Director Frank Perry's early career was littered with eccentric, underrated works, and **THE SWIMMER** (Grindhouse Releasing) — based on John Cheever's 1964 short story and scripted by Eleanor Perry — is a flawed yet utterly unique, allegorical masterpiece... It's Sunday morning in ritzy Connecticut and tanned, middle-aged, swim-trunked Ned Merrill (Burt Lancaster, looking damned good for 52 years old) has the bizarre idea of making his way back home, across the county on foot, through the backyards of his affluent neighbors. While swimming this “river

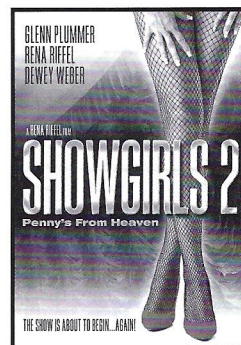


of pools,” Ned encounters old friends, receives concerned looks and angry warnings, and cavorts with a bikinied young blonde (bland newcomer Janet Landgard) who once babysat his daughters. All the while, Ned has a weird gleam in his eyes, like a man obsessed, as he meets a boy with an empty pool, crashes a groovy party, visits a bitter ex-lover (Janice Rule), and endures a packed public pool. As Ned's journey spirals into increasingly disturbing directions, his once-glowing mood is stripped away, with the hard truth exposed and Lancaster bravely playing against type as this broken, delusional individual. Hypnotically lensed by



David L. Quaid (**PRETTY POISON**), even a simple task like crossing a highway is transformed into a test of will. No surprise, this deeply melancholy, often wildly surreal film was too ‘out there’ for US audiences of that time. The DVD/Blu-ray combo includes Cheever reading his original short story, promotional materials, storyboards, and (best of all) Chris Innis' 2-1/2 hour(!) documentary on the often-turbulent making of this film — detailing the friction between the Perrys and Lancaster, which led to Frank being fired during post-production and Sydney Pollack brought in for radical re-shoots — including interviews with Landgard, co-star Joan Rivers (who was longtime friends with the Perrys), Burt's daughter Joanna, the film's editor and assistant directors, soundtrack composer Marvin Hamlisch, and even Burt's swimming coach! It's a must-see for any fan of this extraordinary film.

Want to hear an asinine idea? An unofficial sequel to one of the most ridiculed movies of the 1990s, **SHOWGIRLS**, but *without* the original's top stars and on a budget that wouldn't cover the first film's waxing bill. But that's precisely what Rena Riffel chose to do by directing, writing and starring in **SHOWGIRLS 2: PENNY'S FROM HEAVEN** (**Wild Eye**), a tsunami of bitchy backstabbing, overwrought acting and sub-Cinemax After Dark production values. You don't remember Ms. Riffel from Verhoeven's much-reviled camp-fest? That's no surprise, because she was 15th-billed and played an annoying airhead. Well, it's been 16 years since the first film, and fortysomething Penny (Riffel) is now wiggling her ass in seedy dive-bars, yet still dreams of being a star. The gal doesn't have a lick of discernible talent, is as dumb as a stump and happily bares



her tits for anyone who still cares, but soon she's on her way to Hollywood, renames herself Helga, hooks up with a musician who's engaged to a catty ballerina, becomes an unwitting whore, takes part in a lesbian water ballet seduction and bedroom foursome, and is even suspected of multiple murders. Plus when the lead of the popular TV-show **STARDANCER** injures herself, how far will pea-brained Penny go to seize her dream? A few other **SHOWGIRLS** alumni join Riffel for this idiocy, with Glenn Plummer returning as wannabe-choreographer Jimmy, who's still Penny's boyfriend; Dewey Weber continues to offer desperate women rides, only to steal their luggage; and Greg Travis now runs a pawn shop. It's all rather exhausting (did I forget to mention that the film is 144 minutes long?), amateurish and laughably pathetic, but at least you get an inkling that Riffel and her old pals were in on the joke. Often masochistically enjoyable and occasionally just plain weird (e.g. one tripped-out stagemore resembles a **FORBIDDEN ZONE** outtake), it's difficult not to admire Riffel's misguided chutzpah. The DVD includes behind-the-scenes/unused footage and a commentary track with Riffel, who admits that her inspiration for this “micro-budget, independent, art film” was **VALLEY OF THE DOLLS** (which says it all).