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IN STORES NOW

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Alfred Hitchcock: Master Of Suspense (1995/Legend DVD)/**Murder University** (2012/Wild Eye/MVD DVD)/**Passion** (2012/De Palma/E1 Blu-ray)/**Shiver** (2013/Image DVD)

Picture: C/C+/B-/C Sound: C/C/B-/C Extras: C+/C-/C-/D Main Programs: B-/C-/C/C-

Concluding the cycle of the many Halloween 2013 releases, here are some of note that don't always work, but you might just hear about because they are all at least curios.

Alfred Hitchcock: Master Of Suspense (1995) is an older compilation documentary about the entire career of the massively successful filmmaker whose influence continues large to this day. Though footage looks old and dated often, there are some solid facts, rare stills and rare clips included that makes this worth a look for all serious film fans. Since this release, many documentaries and featurettes have been done on his films, but some spots here have not been repeated enough and with the extras, this is a solid DVD release.

Extras are the best of all the releases here including a special alternate promo for *The Birds*, A Will Rogers Promo Hitchcock made for the charity, two sets of special film clips to go with reruns of his TV anthology show: one set in color with color TV in mind and the other for daytime broadcasts aimed at housewives and *The Cheney Vase* episode of his series.

Trying to be like a 1980s independent horror film, Richard Griffin's **Murder University** (2012) is a slasher film set at a school and at first, the makers have captured the look and feel of such films, then it slowly starts getting sloppy, starts making mistakes and turns into just another bad HD-era horror mess with the same old tired jokes, splatter and predictability. Too bad, because they were on the right track, but blew it after about the first half hour. What a shame!

Extras include an Original Theatrical Trailer, Deleted Scenes and two (!!!) feature length audio commentary tracks that don't say much.

So could we expect more from Brian De Palma, one of the most important thriller filmmakers in Hitchcock's wake? **Passion** (2012) starts with a promising premise that has Rachel McAdams as a back-stabbing executive



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 > Robert Altman's Nashville (1975/Paramount/ABC/Criterion Blu-ray w/DVD)
 > Waking The Dead: Season Eight (2009/BBC DVD Set)
 > Touched By An Angel - The 9th & Final Season (2002 - 2003/CBS DVD Set)
 > Horror Stories (2012/Artsploitation DVD)
 > The Mortal Instruments - City Of Bones (2013/Sony Blu-ray & DVD)

promising premise that goes rather flat, reads as a back stabbing executive who will use her sexuality and anything else at her dispose to get ahead, befriending a creative employee (Noomi Rapice) until things start to go wrong and lead to murder.

A remake of a French thriller that most people in the states never heard of, the scrip[t is weak, predictable, two-dimensional and recycles in a tired way everything we have seen De Palma do before. The camera likes the leads and there is potential here, but it is light years from being realized. Part of the problem is that De Palma lost his touch four films ago after a decent showing with **Snake Eyes** (1998), but his films since have been very forgettable and disappointing. The French conventions of the story play counter to his freer, bolder style and wins out over him. At least you get a few good moments, but not enough to justify the film.

An interview featurette is the only extra.

Finally we have a a run-of-the-mill abduction/serial killer flick in Julian Richards' **Shiver** (2013) with a frustrated older man kidnapping young, pretty women and having sex with them after just killing them and worse. Unfortunately, it has more cliches than blood and guts (which is a good bit), so it plays out very badly. Rae Dawn Chong and Casper Van Dien show up as investigating detectives, but they are not given much to do and by the time the 91 minutes is up, you wonder why anyone bothered. Danielle Harris plays the main gal the killer keeps going after under any circumstances as his next victim. Yawn...

There are no extras.

The 1.33 X 1 image on the **Hitchcock** compilation is an old NTSC compilation made up of some materials that are not in the best of shape, looking even worse in the face of most of his films now on Blu-ray and 18+ years old, so be tolerant, yet the anamorphically enhanced 2.35 X 1 image on **Shiver** is so soft and over-darkened for so-called style that it looks just as bad and almost worse!

The anamorphically enhanced 1.78 X 1 image on **Murder** fares better in its attempt to approximate the look of a 1980s Horror release, but it has more than its share of flaws, softness and other issues in this and does not always work, especially when it gets sloppy.

That leaves the 1080p 1.78 X 1 digital High Definition image transfer on **Passion**, shot on 35mm film in the Super 35mm format, looking the best of all these entries, but still having some softness on the edges for whatever look De Palma and Director of Photography (and Pedro Almodovar veteran) Jose Luis Alcaine try to have it both ways by doing what we would think of De Palma shots, yet in a light, non-edgy way that tries not to be what it is trying to be. This approach does not work either, but the DTS-HD MA (Master Audio) 5.1 lossless mix on the film is well-recorded, yet is towards the front speakers that I would have liked. Pino Donaggio's score is more of the same too, unfortunately. Why play it so safe?

The lossy Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo on **Murder** has a compression issue that makes it sound artificially louder than it should and holds back what could have been a nice audio presentation, but the lossy Dolby Digital 5.1 in **Shiver** is actually worse badly recorded, mixed and presented with a screwy soundfield when we get one and has some issues that are not a disc defect, so the lossy, old Dolby Digital 2.0 Mono on the **Hitchcock** compilation (as worn sounding as it is) has no trouble matching it.

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