

just 17 days. There are also outtakes that are as mixed a bag as the movie, assorted trailers and promo goodies and a likable commentary by writer/director Lowell Dean and FX creator Emersin Ziffle, which fills in specific details of a number of scenes. So...while *Late Phases* is easily the better film, the supplemental goodness comes close to evening out the ratings.

LATE PHASES:

WOLFCOP:

—Ken Michaels

Producer/director, skid row mogul and B-movie legend Charles Band never met a puppet he didn't like, and his obsession with little terrors started with 1984's wildly profitable (considering how much was spent on it) **GHOULES** (Shout! Factory). The film, which began as a typically innovative, silly Empire Pictures production called *Beasties*, is on the surface a *Gremlins* ripoff released less than a year later, and while neither it nor its superior sequel *Ghoules II* (paired on this Scream Factory Blu-ray) are in any way better than Joe Dante's film, both are certainly fun, handsomely produced examples of low-budget horror/fantasy filmmaking. In the first flick (directed by *Parasite* actor Luca Bercovici), a young twerp (Peter Liapis) inherits a house where evil dwells and inadvertently summons the titular nasty minimonsters. Filled with grating smart-ass dialogue and saddled with a lazy pace, *Ghoules* still works due to the charming John Carl Buechler-created demons

and Richard Band's typically fantastic score.

Ghoules II is considerably more fun, and sees the pack of vicious yet charismatic hobgoblins escape a vat of acid and sneak into the spookhouse of a traveling carnival owned by the late, great Royal (*Messiah of Evil*) Dano. PG-13 levels of sexual innuendo and gore ensue (nastier bits trimmed from the original R cut are included as extras), and there are more than a few amusing sequences; the cast is great, and so is the modest production design. Band's father and business partner, veteran filmmaker and producer Albert Band, served as director here, and his professional touch makes a world of difference. This nifty Scream Factory double bill exemplifies the quality and care it puts into all of its fringe fear titles, and both films—especially the atmospheric *Ghoules II*—look and sound splendid. Featurewise, the disc is stacked, with a Bercovici *Ghoules* commentary as well as interviews with the Band brothers and others. *Ghoules II* also sports interviews with Band and, most interestingly, FX artist Gino Crognale. Empire Pictures is sorely missed, and with this fine release, Scream Factory makes one miss 'em even more.

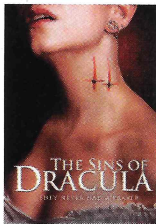
CYCLOPS RATING:

—Chris Alexander

Indie filmmaker Richard (*The Disco Exorcist*) Griffin keeps churning out quirky, microbudget genre fare, and his latest, **THE SINS OF DRACULA** (MVD), is no exception. Made for peanuts and packed with wit and weirdness, *Sins* is a wonky amalgam of Christian scare-flick satire, body-count slasher opus (imagine a skid-row, community-theater version of Michele Soavi's *Stage-fright*) and European art/vampire movie. And it works. Jamie

Dufault stars as clean Christian lad Billy, who decides to put the pursuit of his faith on hold in order to chase his secret dream of taking the local stage. There he meets a cartoonish gallery of would-be thespians (including one played by Griffin-film regular Sarah Nicklin) and a flamboyant theater director who is, in fact, a Satanist intent on pulling a Ralph Bates and resurrecting Dracula himself. The good Drac appears as erudite, bald Michael Thurber, and at that point the flick jerks gears from amusing camp trash to a frenzied, bloody and rather mad, mad movie. It's tons of cheap fun.

The widescreen transfer looks and sounds good (accentuating the great psych-rock score by Timothy Fife) and comes with a few special features, including two commentaries. The first is a back-and-forth between Griffin and writer Michael Varrati that is badly recorded but amusing, with the director enthusiastically discussing his picture and also producing a seemingly shy Varrati to speak on the story. The second features the now-tipsy writer and director (presumably these tracks



were banked back to back, with libations flowing freely) joined by stars Dufault and Nicklin, and though rowdy, it's a bit of a distracting

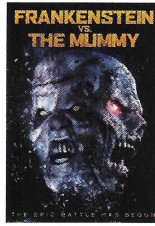
affair, again hampered by low sound quality. Go into *Sins of Dracula* understanding exactly what it is, and you'll find plenty to dig. Save for the contemporary shot-on-video look, the movie feels like something Mike Vraney and Frank Henenlotter might have discovered languishing in a New York vault to showcase on their Something Weird label. And

that's a very good thing indeed.

CYCLOPS RATING:

—Chris Alexander

Damien (*All Hallows' Eve*) Leone's second feature **FRANKENSTEIN VS. THE MUMMY** (Image) pairs two classic monsters in an



updated battle to the death. Victor Frankenstein (Max Rhyser) is a biologist with a fixation on reanimating the deceased. He falls for Naihla

Khalil (Ashton Leigh), an archaeologist who has just returned to the university where the two work with embalmed remains she has discovered overseas. As Victor progresses with his experiments, the mummy begins to awaken—and things get gory. The young, sexy re-envisioning of Victor Frankenstein is actually rather successful, and Naihla, who of course becomes the object of desire for both monsters, is stronger and smarter than the typical damsel in distress. The attempt to craft characters who are a little less archetypal for this kind of story is a key element that elevates this over the typical low-budget monster romp. Yet the movie's real star is the superb FX: Seeing Frankenstein's creature and a mummy in a complete splatterfest is utterly delightful.

Frankenstein vs. the Mummy is well-made in a way that leaves one anxious to know what a big-budget Leone film would look like. It's a little too well-lit and its sets don't always convince, but for a project on this financial scale, it's very impressive. Despite some slow patches, Leone has crafted a story that demonstrates a sincere passion for and understanding of the classic fiends and the films that fans are nostalgic for. Frankenstein's creation gets his voice back while remaining a terrifying man-monster, and the writer/director manages to infuse some life into the mummy, who looks great and indulges in a few memorable slayings. The DVD's only special feature is a commentary by Leone and cinematographer George Steuber, who have good conversational chemistry and provide plenty of entertaining insight into the film's creation, plus personal tidbits from Leone, from his feelings on whether or not aliens exist to his thoughts on puking. Having made one of the better monster flicks of the past few years, Leone is definitely someone to keep an eye on.

CYCLOPS RATING:

—Madeleine Koestner

The Sins of Dracula

