

CRUMBS (2015) 8 1/2

D: Miguel Llanso. Daniel Tadesse, Selam Tesfaye. 68 mins. (Indiepix) 11/15

This extremely odd Ethiopia-lensed fantasy plays like a backyard Jodorowsky film minus the extreme cruelty. In a post-apoc future, scattered survivors carry on like New Guinea cargo cultists, bartering such items as vintage Michael Jackson albums and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle toys, while totemizing Michael Jordan posters (well, not *too* different from our own recent past). Our primary characters, Birdy (Tesfaye) and her diminutive hunchback partner Candy (Tadesse), reside in an abandoned bowling alley, from which Candy departs on a quest that leads to encounters with, among others, a wily trader, a self-styled Santa Claus (complete with costume) and would-be Nazis in gas masks. With its genuinely haunting ghost town locations, from a decaying amusement park to rusting railroad tracks, *Crumbs* unfolds with a dream-like languor and hums with hypnotic recurrent images. Even at a brief 68 minutes, though, the film feels less like an abbreviated feature than an elongated short. Fans of surrealist cinema, from the above-cited Jodorowsky to David Lynch, Guy Maddin, Luis Bunuel, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Andrei Tarkovsky (who receives an overt sonic nod in the film), should deem this ironic, well-acted (especially by the ever-inquisitive Tadesse) item worth a look, if expectations are kept in reasonable check. Indiepix's DVD includes three featurettes—*Night in the Wild Garden*, *Crumbs Anecdotes*, and *Chigger Ale*—while the case contains an extended quotation from an African scientist that served as Spanish auteur Llanso's creative inspiration.

—*The Phantom*

DEADLY REVISIONS (2013) 8 1/2

D: Gregory Blair. Bill Oberst Jr., Mikhail Blokh, Cindy Merrill, Lise Hart, Gregory Blair, Ronny Coleman, Dawna Lee Heising. 94 mins. (SGL Entertainment) 9/15

'80s music fans enjoyed the song/music video "Money for Nothing" because rocker Mark Knopfler acknowledged that many people view musicians as self-indulgent sots. Director/writer Blair assumes that we view horror screenwriters like himself as sick, pathetic puppies. This assumption is incorporated into his tale of a troubled scribe named Grafton Torn (Oberst), who is trying to recover his memory and mobility after a fall down his stairs left him in a coma. His actor buddy Deter McMannus (Blokh) generously lends him his late father's palatial wilderness cabin, but the venue and resident hot blonde amnesia therapist Ally (Merrill) do not resolve his problems. The script's main virtue is its satirical swipes at male bonding. Deter informs Grafton that the cabin's isolated location will

enable him to wander nude and "f*ck the deer." His idea of a "CARE package" for a wounded friend is a box of porn DVDs, including one that features a "double-jointed" dominatrix. Genre hero Oberst holds his own, with an assist from Blokh, but the rest of the cast is no help. Morris is suitably decorative as Torn's amnesia therapist because male viewers will remember her. A bad vocalist sings flat; Hart, as the screenwriter's estranged wife/producing partner, gives a similar performance. Coleman (Doctor Myers) and Blair (horror show interviewer Crawford Davis) appear to be graduates of the Clay Aiken Academy of Dramatic Arts. Heising showcases scant talent and bad plastic surgery. Blair's script opens the possibility of a sequel that no one should be foolish enough to finance.

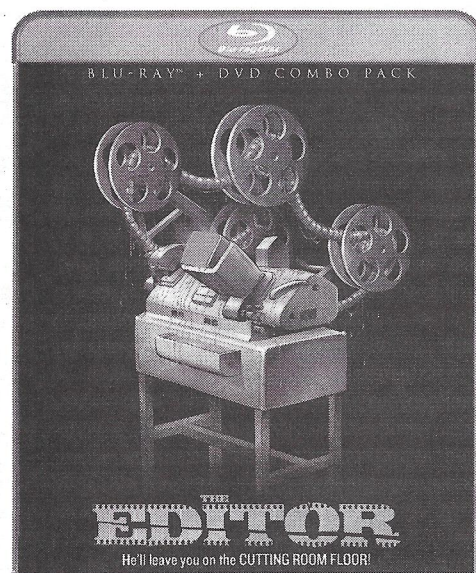
—Ronald Charles Epstein

THE EDITOR (2014) 8 1/2

D: Adam Brooks & Matthew Kennedy. Paz de la Huerta, Adam Brooks, Matthew Kennedy, Conar Sweeney, Udo Kier, Samantha Hill. 95 mins. (Scream Factory) 9/15

Rey Cisco (Brooks) was the greatest editor motion pictures ever saw, until a self-inflicted accident left him nearly fingerless on his right hand. Now he works with hack directors and producers editing trash pictures under unbelievable hardships with wooden prosthetic fingers. A black-gloved killer starts slashing away on the cast and crew of Rey's current film, and Rey becomes the number one suspect since he always seems to be the last person to see the victims alive. The killer continues his slayathon as each person involved in the production is shown to have a motive but is then summarily murdered by the unseen psycho. Rey races to prove his innocence and nab the killer. To be honest, I was not that keen on this flick before I sat down to watch it. A spoof on giallo films, made in Canada—how good could it be? I'm happy to report that co-directors Brooks and Kennedy are not only filmmakers but true film historians. I was immediately won over not only by the film's look but also the poor dubbing many giallos (foreign films in general, really) are known for. The jokes come fast and furious, even when you might be unaware the filmmakers are making a joke. Between jabs, they pay serious homage not only to the likes of Mario Bava and Dario Argento but re-stage a number of scenes from Lucio Fulci films. *The Editor's* power lies in the fact that the directors play it straight. The photography is great, especially in its use of color à la Bava and Argento. Darker scenes are stark and ominous. Not every riff works, but the film offers more hits than misses. Extras include commentary, documentary, featurettes, deleted scenes, trailers and more. *The Editor* will be best enjoyed by those who have a decent knowledge of giallos, as many jokes aren't specific to a particular movie but to the genre as a whole.

—Rob Freese



THE GIFT (2015) 8 1/2

D: Joel Edgerton. Jason Bateman, Rebecca Hall, Joel Edgerton, Allison Tolman, Tim Griffin, Busy Philipps. 108 mins. (Universal Studios) 10/15

We don't want to risk getting cyber-bullied like the IMDb poster who drew comparisons between *The Gift* and Chan-wook Park's *Oldboy* (VS #56), but we also see similarities between Edgerton's tale of belated revenge and any number of like-plotted Korean thrillers, from *Oldboy* to Joon-Ho Bong's *Mother* (VS #76). Which is not necessarily a bad thing; indeed, Edgerton's slow-boiling suspense achieves a level of brilliance rarely seen onscreen (in addition to Park's masterwork, we can cite Michael Haneke's *Cache* [VS #60] and Claude Chabrol's *This Man Must Die* [VS #47] as films that soar to equal heights). As our story opens, all seems well with smug biz wiz Simon (Bateman) and his pregnant wife Robyn (Hall) as they settle into their spiffy new California digs, until a chance encounter with Simon's former high-school acquaintance Gordo (Edgerton) sets in motion a series of increasingly harrowing events that will peel the skin off festering wounds and shake the yuppie couple to their foundations. Like the above-cited films, *The Gift* eschews standard triangular erotic thriller moves to explore nothing less than human nature's deepest, often rotten core. Kudos to triple-threat Edgerton: the Aussie emigre not only pens a brilliant screenplay and directs same with enviable precision but turns in a searing performance as the emotionally damaged Gordo. Bateman and Hall likewise carry their thespian weight in what's essentially a three-hander—and one of the most profoundly disturbing films of 2015. Bonus features on Universal's double-disc Blu-ray + DVD + Digital HD set include an audio commentary by auteur Edgerton, an alternate ending (wisely excised from the final cut), deleted scenes, and the featurettes *Karma for Bullies* and *The Darker Side of Jason Bateman*.

—*The Phantom*