

SCOPE BOOKSHELF

REMEMBERING HORROR FICTION MAESTRO PETER STRAUB (1943-2022)

Peter Straub was part of a trio, including Stephen King and Anne Rice, who elevated American horror fiction in the mid-1970s. He authored over 30 novels, story collections and books of poetry as well as being a seven-time winner of the Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers Association. In 1975, *Julia*, a tale of a woman haunted by the spirit of what may or may not be her dead daughter, was published to critical acclaim. An adaptation of the novel was filmed as *Full Circle* (1977), starring Mia Farrow and Tom Conti, available on streaming services and YouTube. Stephen King, who had published his breakout debut *Carrie* in 1974, was an admirer and provided a promotional blurb for Straub's next effort, *Ghost Story* (1979). Set in New England, the four members of the Chowder Society meet monthly to tell each other ghost stories—hiding a past collective crime that takes an unearthly toll on them all. King declared it a “masterwork,” and the novel was adapted to film in 1981, featuring performances by John Houseman, Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. (Paramount Home Video). At Straub's suggestion, he and King collaborated on *The Talisman* (1984), a fantasy parallel universe adventure that was optioned by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment and is in production by the Duffer Brothers (*Stranger Things*) for an extended series on Netflix. Compared to Henry James by some critics, Straub was happiest to be known as a teacher, family man and all-round *mensch*.

—Cole Ferry

A CRITICAL HISTORY AND FILMOGRAPHY OF TOHO'S GODZILLA SERIES

By David Kalat. McFarland & Company, Inc. Softcover. 278 pages. \$29.95.

This updated and revised second edition of film historian David Kalat's scholarly tome chronicles, with appreciative thoroughness and exactitude, the Big G's lineage from '50s origins up to 2005. **Rodan** and **Varan the Unbelievable** get their due in the 1954-1963 chapter, “King Kong vs. Godzilla.” Subsequent chapters trace “Monsterland” (1964-1969), a sum up of **Mothra**, **Ghidra**, **Son of Godzilla**, et al.; “Something Funny's Going On” ((1970-1975) captures the silliness of **Godzilla vs. Gigan** and its ilk; “The Return of Godzilla” (1977-1995) shows Godzilla stomping his way into comics and outer space as well as surfacing anew, taking on **King Ghi-**

dorah, **Gryphon** and **Mothra** again; and “The Godzilla Millennium” (1998-2005) delves into the Hollywood franchise and its effect in sparking a new series of Toho films. Kalat's insights into the causes of Godzilla's periodic surges—and dips—in popularity add welcome context. For example, he analyzes the causes of the collapse of the entire Japanese film industry after the 1964 Olympics (an event he ties to television) as having profound repercussions for Godzilla. The notes are particularly interesting: jam-packed with backstory and unexpected nuggets. Godzilla, like the pharaohs, has an impressive history, millions of battles, ups and downs. If you find yourself waking up at night unable to recollect the Big G's decades-long mutations, this, the bible of the epic battles, is the book you need to keep on hand.

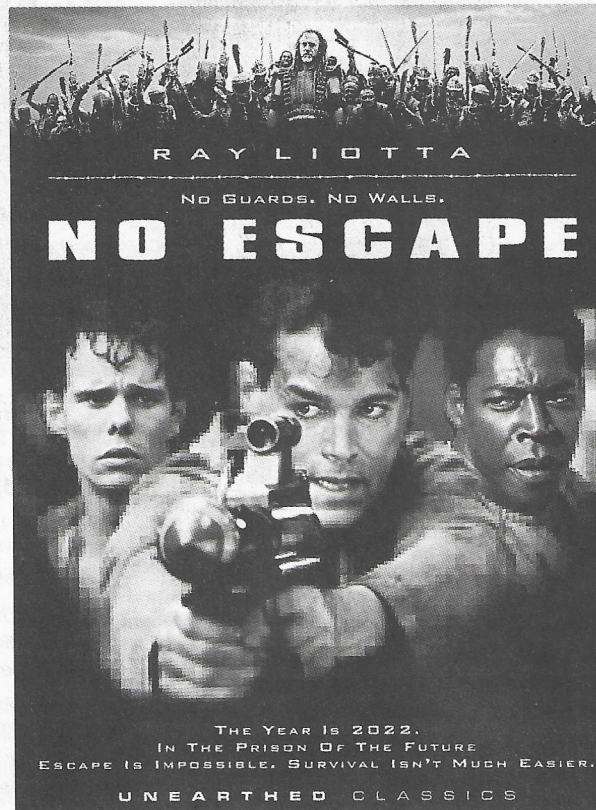
—Nancy Naglin

REMEMERING RAY LIOTTA (1954-2022)

NO ESCAPE (1994) ♂♂♂1/2
D: Martin Campbell. Ray Liotta, Lance Henriksen, Stuart Wilson, Kevin Dillon, Kevin J. O'Connor, Don Henderson, Ian McNiece, Jack Shepherd, Michael Lerner. 118 mins. (Unearthed Films) 10/22

For sheer, escapist mayhem you can't beat **No Escape**, a brutal, dog-eat-dog survival tale set in a futuristic penal colony in the year 2022, where disgraced special operations-trained Capt. Robbins (Liotta) is dumped for life after a riveting opening sequence showing him break marching formation to execute his commanding officer. The techno prison is cyber forbidding with unrelenting tortures and psychological torments, but Robbins is incorrigible, a perfect candidate for the sicko warden's (an impeccably slimy Lerner) off-the-grid, “experimental” penal island, a jungle wilderness where Robbins is tossed from a helicopter and immediately hunted by masked primitives—a tribe of degenerated ex-cons, called the “Outsiders,” led by the sadistic Walter Marek (Wilson). Cartoonish but captivating, they're like bikers who eat rat and live to be dominated. In tense, suspenseful scenes, Robbins turns the tables on his would-be killers, insults Marek by rejecting an offer to serve him, and, fleeing into the jungle, trips over a rival gang, the peace-seeking “Insiders,” led by a redemption-seeking guru called Father (Henriksen in rare contemplative mode). The young and impressionable Casey (Dillon) and Friar Tuck-like King (McNiece) glom onto Robbins, but Robbins is impervious to human contact. He could care less whether Father really killed his wife or not; all he cares about is

insinuating himself onto an escape boat once he discovers Father and his in-crowd have secretly been planning their getaway. The only problem: the craft's jerry-rigged motor needs a distributor. Robbins had seen one in Marek's camp and intends to retrieve it. Casey tags along, the Outsiders grab them and, in one of the grimmer episodes, Robbins—with Casey begging him to do it—must kill the kid in order to survive. The banter is quick and frequently highly amus-



ing in a dark comedy way, but action carries this film, especially when the Outsiders invade the Insiders' encampment. The warden wants them to fight; watching it on screen is his amusement. Liotta carries the film (plenty of close-ups of his mascara-lined eyes) and is terrific; the supporting cast, including Hawkins as the Father's loyal security guard, all have their idiosyncratic moments and turn in good work. Sure, the film has elements of **Papillon** (1973), **Escape from New York** (1981) and **Road Warrior** (1981), but that doesn't take a single thing away from the myriad jolts, including the psychological zingers. The flick packs in everything you want in a prison film, along with some unexpected emotional conundrums. The title even comes back to bite at the end with the warden caught in a trap of his own making. Extras include **Survival of the Fittest: Directing No Escape**, new interviews with the director, producer Gale Anne Hurd, and co-writer Joel Gross, alternate intro, making of featurette and promotional gallery. ♂

—Nancy Naglin