

from a community college science lab; and even the raunchy bits are underwhelming, with a couple dull, simulated sex scenes, gratuitous nude lathering, Dildo's receptionist getting herself off to da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, plus a limp orgy climax.

With the exception of some spooky production values and a wonderfully overbaked turn by Klaus Kinski, there's nothing particularly memorable about **WEB OF THE SPIDER** (Garagehouse Pictures), a flacid Italian ghost story from director Anthony M. Dawson [Antonio Margheriti], best known nowadays for '80s Euro-schlock like *YOR, THE HUNTER FROM THE FUTURE* and *KILLER FISH*. This 1971 effort is actually a color remake of Margheriti's 1964 feature, *CASTLE OF BLOOD*, but if you're checking out the film primarily



for its mindboggling miscasting — Kinski playing Edgar Allan Poe? — you'll undoubtedly be disappointed, because after Klaus' amusing prologue full of cobwebbed catacombs, rubbery bats and gratuitous liquor-guzzling, he only appears in a handful of bookending segments, leaving us

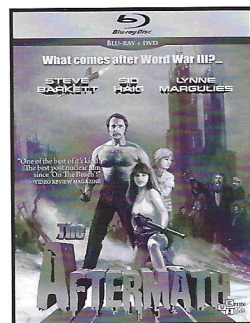
instead in the hands of Anthony Franciosa as American reporter Alan Foster. Stumbling across inebriated Poe in a London pub, Foster accepts a £100 wager to spend one night in haunted Blackwood Castle. After wandering about this eerie old place for an interminable amount of time, Foster finally runs into the castle owner's sultry sister Elisabeth (Michèle Mercier, star of the popular French 'Angélique' series). Soon additional people are mysteriously popping up or vanishing, there's the occasional murder, and a famous doctor (Peter Carsten) provides cryptic clues to our increasingly confounded journalist. The answer is actually fairly obvious — these are long-deceased, restless spirits, offering Foster glimpses into tawdry family secrets, longstanding bitchiness and past bloodshed. With the exception of a little lesbian twist, it's all relatively tame stuff though, padded out with overripe atmosphere, scriptwriter Bruno Corbucci's metaphysical mumbo-jumbo and a score by Riz Ortolani. In addition to this English-language, widescreen feature, the Blu-ray includes a pair of fun fan-commentaries (one with DVD Drive-In's George Reis and Cinefear's Keith Crocker, another with artist-writer Stephen Romano); the film's uncut, English-subtitled, Italian version in standard-def; a German, Super 8 distillation; a deleted scene; plus a Margheriti trailer reel.

The first collaboration between Michael Caine and director Mike Hodges resulted in 1971's brilliantly hardboiled *GET CARTER*, but their follow-up project, the 1972 crime-comedy **PULP** (Arrow Video) was a more difficult-to-pigeonhole outing. A blackly-comic riff on the gangster-melodrama, with Caine playing a victim of circumstance, the film suffered from dismal US distribution, since United Artists seemed clueless about how to market this unconventional tale. Caine plays Mickey King, a British hack writer residing in Malta and making a living by cranking out steamy crime novels. King's misadventure begins when he's hired for a lucrative but mysterious gig — to ghostwrite the life of former Hollywood superstar Preston Gilbert (Mickey Rooney), who "boffed every leading lady he ever worked with" and has close ties to the Mafia. Unfortunately, dangerous folks want to stop Preston's bio from being published, which leads to a priest-disguised hitman, bodies piling up and

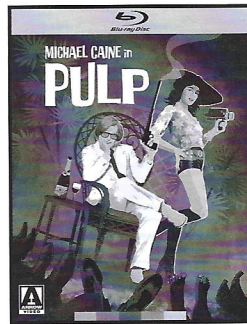
King worried that he's become a target. Caine is nicely befuddled in this decidedly non-heroic role, plus Rooney is absolutely brilliant — viciously berating underlings, fearlessly parading about in his tightie-whities and making a believably egotistical blowhard — so much so that the movie never completely recovers from his absence.

Co-stars include '40s starlet Lizabeth Scott (in her final screen appearance) as Preston's ex-wife and Lionel Stander as his assistant; Al Lettieri as a thuggish tourist who digs King's pulpy books; Janet Agren (Umberto Lenzi's *EATEN ALIVE!*) plays a publisher's sexy receptionist; Bogart-lookalike Robert Sacchi is an American lawyer; while Nadia Cassini is "introduced" (despite already starring in such Italian features as Piero Vivarelli's *THE SNAKE WOMAN*) as a tour guide attracted to King. Hodges' script is clever and unpredictable, with King's cross-country bus trip abruptly shifting from silly encounters to brutal murder, or when Rooney's tough-guy suddenly tries to crack up his friends by pretending to be an inept waiter. Its shaggy story never completely coalesces, but it's hard not to get sucked in by *PULP*'s offbeat agenda. The disc includes new interviews with Hodges, cinematographer Ousama Rawi, editor John Glen, plus Tony Klinger, son of producer Michael Klinger.

Post-apocalyptic sci-fi doesn't get any more boneheaded than **THE AFTERMATH** (VCI Entertainment), an overblown vanity project by writer-director-producer Steve Barkett, who also stars in the film, along with his two kids and then-current girlfriend Lynn Margulies. Lensed throughout the late-'70s and finished in 1981, it never played theatrically, though a screening for the Academy of Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Films went so poorly that Barkett reportedly stopped the film



midway through and threatened audience members who were laughing at it... Returning home after a year-long space mission and discovering that the Earth has been fucked by nuclear war, astronaut Newman (Barkett) lands just outside of Los Angeles, which is overrun by icky-faced mutant ragamuffins. Plus Sid Haig leads a gang of roving thugs, with Newman rescuing braless cutie Sarah (Margulies) from their clutches. Squatting in an empty mansion (a.k.a. Ted V. Mikel's LA castle), they're soon saddled with additional survivors, including a young boy (Barkett's son, Chris), as the film bogs down in dreary interpersonal bullshit — that is, until revenge-driven Newman single-handedly takes on the bad guys in the lively final reel. This whole project is jarringly schizophrenic. On one hand, it features some shockingly accomplished visuals utilizing miniatures, in-camera effects and matte paintings. But the story is numbingly clichéd, the dialogue leaden and most of the performances strictly amateurville. Barkett (one of the founding partners of LA's Hollywood Book & Poster movie memorabilia store) seems cluelessly unaware of his bland on-screen presence. It's



kinda like watching your high school gym teacher doing a shitty Charlton Heston impression. Looking vaguely lost throughout, Margulies, younger sister of cult figure Johnny Legend, later met Andy Kaufman on the set of her brother's 1982 project, *MY BREAKFAST WITH BLASSIE*, and became his girlfriend for the last two years of the comedian's life. At least Haig brings a little sleazy glee to this nonsense, chuckling as helpless children are gunned down. Forrest J. Ackerman also pops in as a dying museum curator and animator Jim Danforth plays a quickly-dispatched crewman. Despite its impressive effects, this is inane sci-fi rotgut. The Blu-ray/DVD set includes a commentary with Barkett and his son Chris, who're both *still* convinced it's a great film; extras from its 1997 laserdisc release; a promo for Barkett's 1990 follow-up, *EMPIRE OF THE DARK*; plus Dan Gilbert's 1973 student short *NIGHT CALLER*, a Ray Bradbury-based vignette with Barkett playing an end-of-the-world survivor who follows a phone call from a mysterious woman, with an obvious sci-fi twist.

Laced with dark humor, expressionistic imagery and half-baked, David-Lynchian weirdness, **STAR TIME** (Vinegar Syndrome) is an amusingly pretentious indie hodgepodge of madness, murder and the media from writer-director Alexander Cassini, a former jazz saxophonist and nephew of fashion designer Oleg Cassini. Despite premiering at the 1992 Sundance Film Festival, its boneheaded distributor ended up marketing the film like a standard serial killer yarn for its brief theatrical run...

Michael St. Gerard (dreamy Link Larkin in John Waters' *HAIRSPRAY*) stars as Henry Pinkle, a sullen young man who's contemplating suicide. Why so depressed? You see, his favorite television sitcom has been cancelled. And without it, Henry's pathetic, lonely life isn't worth continuing. Enter Sam Bones (John P. Ryan), a possible figment of Pinkle's cracked imagination, who pushes the kid to follow his deepest urges in order to become a "star." In Henry's case, that means slipping on a baby-faced Halloween mask, slaughtering people with a trusty l'il axe, then creepily posing the corpses. It's difficult at first, since Pinkle isn't exactly the brightest guy, but he soon gets the hang of it as his killings begin to saturate the local news. Meanwhile, *FAME*'s Maureen Teefy (Cassini's wife) is a social worker concerned about Henry's well being, only to become an object of his obsession. Cassini utilizes bizarre architecture and disturbing compositions throughout, with more than a hint of *VIDEODROME* in its surreal wall of television screens, and the film boasts an effectively dreamy ambiance courtesy of cinematographer Fernando Argüelles (with additional photography by future two-time Oscar winner Janusz Kaminski) and a score by Blake Leyh (music supervisor for *THE WIRE*, *TREME* and *THE DEUCE*). St. Gerard gamely tackles the type of quirky-doofer role usually reserved for someone like Crispin Glover, while Teefy brings the only emotion to this chilly film, with Cassini much more interested in his self-important meditation on celebrity and image than coherence. This disorienting glimpse into a killer's mind is beautiful to observe yet frustratingly disconnected from reality. The Blu-ray/DVD set includes a director's commentary, a half-hour interview with Argüelles, plus Cassini's 1983 short film *THE GREAT PERFORMANCE*.

