

# DVDementia

Fondly remembered by horror fans as a late-night-TV staple during their youth, **HORROR EXPRESS** (Severin) is an exceptionally atmospheric, 1972 fright flick that mixes a bizarre premise, grisly thrills, an exotic backdrop, and the pairing of Hammer colleagues Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing. Plus this edition has a beautiful widescreen print!... In 1906 Manchuria, a frozen prehistoric humanoid unearthed by Professor Saxton (Lee) is being transported to Europe on the Trans-Siberian Express. Competing anthropologist Dr. Wells (Cushing) is also onboard and curious about this find, which turns out to be rather lively for a two-million-year-old crated fossil.

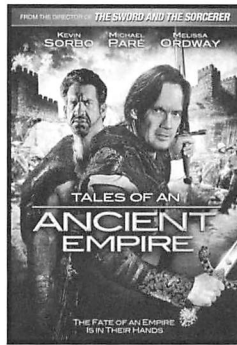


Once the Express is on the move, our defrosted creature goes on the prowl and murdered passengers with blinded, boiled eyeballs begin turning up. In its final half-hour, Telly Savalas even barrels in as a sadistic, booze-swilling, Cossack Captain. Badly hamming it up, he's the film's

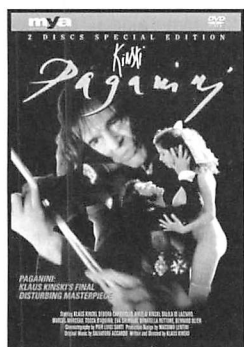
lone weak link. All of this probably sounds insanely goofy. A furry, evil-eyed, ancient ape-man of unearthly origin? Absorbing people's minds? Body swapping? Oh hell, why not toss in some reanimated zombies at the end? But director Eugenio Martin manages to keep this craziness on track, with Lee and Cushing playing off of each other marvelously and the unique script (courtesy of Hollywood Blacklist victims Julian Zimet and Arnaud D'Usseau, who also penned the UK undead-biker film **PSYCHOMANIA**) piling one colorful supporting character, intriguing discussion or wild idea on top of each other. Extras on the Blu-ray/DVD combo include interviews with Eugenio Martin, producer Bernard Gordon (who discusses his McCarthy blacklist years and subsequent work in Europe) and composer John Cacavas (on his longtime friendship with Savalas), plus an 80-minute audio interview with Cushing, circa 1973.

Albert Pyun made his directorial debut with the 1982 hit **THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER** and ended that film with the promise of a sequel. Well, it's 29 years later and the inconceivably inept, low-rent fiasco **TALES OF AN ANCIENT EMPIRE** (Lionsgate) is the best Pyun could come up with? A 12-minute prologue unveils a half-baked backstory about a sorcerer and his vampire-daughter Xia running amok in the kingdom of Abelar, with mercenary Oda (Michael Paré, sporting a silly samurai-top-knot wig and incapable of suppressing his Brooklyn accent) called in to save the day, joined by Olivier Gruner (star of Pyun's *only* decent film, **NEMESIS**) and Sasha Mitchell. Two decades later, resurrected Xia (Whitney Able) and her ship of pirate-vampires return to Abelar, as Princess Tanis tracks down her outlaw-rogue half-brother Aedan (Kevin Sorbo, wisely playing it for laughs) and persuades him to help stop Xia from opening a door to the netherworld during the full moon and destroying humankind. The film's biggest problem isn't its blatant stupidity or amateurishness; it's the soul-numbing boredom that this rotgut inflicts on the viewer! There are lots of

cheap fake vampire fangs, but little in the way of genuine action or exciting fight choreography. It's mostly people tediously searching for other people, as Aedan amasses various female relatives for battle and locates his semen-scattering dad (Paré, now with an even lousier *white wig*). Worst of all, just as our heroes prepare to kick some ass, the film abruptly ends — pledging big thrills in the *next* installment and tacking on *thirteen minutes* of snail-paced end credits. Phooey on that shit! Originally shot in 2008, with additional footage lensed in 2011, **TALES** boasts cheap-ass computer effects, deplorable green-screen work and a pointless cameo from aging **SWORD AND THE SORCERER** hunk Lee Horsley. In addition, whole sequences seem to be missing, as if the producers solved any cash problems by simply ripping pages out of the script. It's hypnotically, hilariously awful and the DVD includes a 38-minute making-of featurette.



Long considered a dream project by legendary egomaniac Klaus Kinski, 1988's **PAGANINI** (*MYA*) was more than just an opportunity to portray celebrated 19th-century musician-composer Niccolò Paganini. It was also Kinski's sole stab at scriptwriting and directing. Klaus obviously felt some type of personal identification to Paganini's life and tormented soul, and stuffed the script with everything close to his own heart: family, art, fame, and screwing a long procession of horny young ladies. Klaus is riveting, as usual. His film? Not so much. Approaching the material like a humorless, self-important Ken Russell, the film paints Paganini as a superstar whose skill with a violin sent



women into uncontrollable spasms of ecstasy, and resembles a CliffsNotes bio written on crystal meth. It begins at Paganini's death bed (as he unceremoniously tosses Catholic Church reps out of his home), then hurls the viewer through a tilt-a-whirl interpretation of his life, pumped full of incessant music, gratuitous slo-mo, writhing naked groupies demanding sex from poor exhausted Niccolò, horses screwing, and Kinski strutting about in a black cape and top hat. Of course, every female in sight swoons over this pork-chop-sideburned, craggy-faced cad, including Klaus' 21-year-old fiancée Debora Caprioglio (Tinto Brass' **PAPRIKA**) as lover Antonia Bianchi, with the story veering into sappiness during scenes with Kinski and real-life son Nikolai (playing Niccolò's kid, Achilles). Awash in hyperactive camerawork, it's a deliriously-overwrought mess. Then again, I wouldn't have expected anything less from certifiably-mad Klaus... This 2-disc set

includes a beautiful print of the English-dubbed, 84-minute theatrical cut, as well as Kinski's "version originale" — a scratchy, muddy, 98-minute workprint substantially different from the final release — plus *unsubtitled* bonus features such as a clip from Klaus' nutty Cannes press conference and 55-minutes of behind-the-scenes footage.

Packed with campy, unintentional laughs, **420 TRIPLE FEATURE** (Apprehensive Films) is a hour-long celebration of marijuana propaganda, consisting of a trio of classic anti-grass shorts. So kick back, light up a fatty and enjoy... First up is 1969's preachy **KEEP OFF THE GRASS** from producer Sid Davis, which begins with a housewife discovering weed belonging to her college-age son while vacuuming. When his parents demand an explanation, Tom accuses cigarette-smoking, cocktail-swilling dad of hypocrisy, but his father counters by lecturing about marijuana's adverse effects (which, the square narrator informs us, include "an uncontrollable feeling of hilarity." Oh, no!). Tom then visits a "garden pot party" and a head shop, watches a dude busted for buying grass (since the film was made with the cooperation of the Santa Monica Police Department, rest assured that all of the cops are friendly and helpful) and eventually learns the error of his ways when it comes to "blowing pot" (since it leads to psychological addiction, crime and general laziness). Plus look at all of the groovy colors! Oh wait, those are just trippy green emulsion scratches... 1951's **DRUG ADDICTION**, from Encyclopedia Britannica Films, is a b&w warning about the "grave danger" of drugs. Unlike the first short, this clatrap lacks any pretense of subtlety, as we follow an average kid-turned-junkie named Marty on his road to ruin. He starts with heroin, quickly followed by "another depressant," marijuana, then it's onto cocaine. So if you want "profound mental and emotional disturbances," join in, losers! We get braindead reefer fiends swallowing broken glass, Marty becoming a dealer to pay for his habit, plus it's *all* funded by organized crime. So what's the only solution to drug addiction? Harsher laws and committing addicts to federal hospitals, of course! Damn, this one's a real buzz-kill... Finally, 1968's **MARIJUANA** tried to appeal to a young-pothead demographic by hiring future-Republican-Congressman Sonny Bono as its host. Lounging about in a hilarious shiny-gold suit and sounding like he's completely baked, Sonny urges his fans to examine the 'facts' about weed before partaking, while we watch the fuzz busting up a peaceful party and hauling everyone off to jail. As Sonny picks apart various pro-grass arguments, we see a girl driving off a cliff while "tripped out" on marijuana, "weedheads" busted for robbing a store, plus a young stoner's inevitable "bummer" (that makes him look like an old man in the mirror). And don't forget that the "emotionally unstable and immature" will go batshit crazy if marijuana was ever legalized! Sigh. It's unfortunate that so many people still believe this hogwash nowadays.

