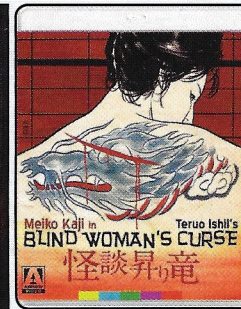
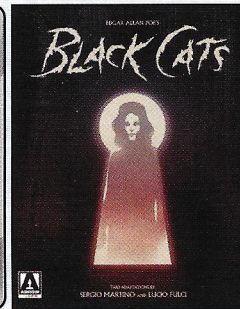
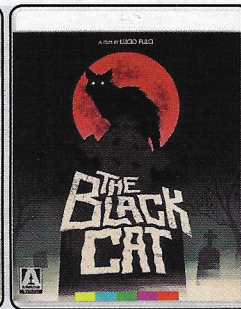
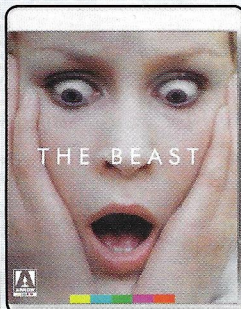
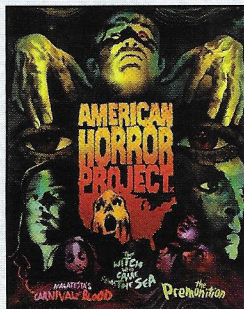


VIDEO INVASION



BY DEAN BOOR



In the horror community, there are a few things fans look for when picking up a new movie release; sometimes the casting takes front seat or maybe there's a particular director that's sought out (or avoided). Who wrote the movie could be a consideration, and then there's the producer (in lesser cases). One of the last things that could sway a fan into checking out said title is which studio or label was responsible for releasing the project. Sure, there have been times when New Line Cinema, Lionsgate, or Cannon meant something towards the quality of film in which you were about to receive. But those moments were few and far between. But when it comes to home-video releases, scrolling through the horror Blu-ray section at your local store (or nowadays, online), companies have meant more to a video release. Because some companies just seem to truly care about what goes into the production of their sets ... the quality of content. But in the last two years, one company has really struck a chord with US customers ... a company who've actually been around for years in the UK, and are just now making their impact known abroad. Of course, we are talking about Arrow Video.

Arrow releases aren't easily ignored and are instantly recognizable. If you've ever scrolled through the Arrow catalog, you can immediately relate. Their titles include *Bride of Re-Animator*, *Eaten Alive*, *Spider-Baby*, and

Driller Killer, to name a few. Not content with just releasing a stand-out classic in a DVD/Blu-ray combo pack, Arrow is known for incorporating an extensive range of special features on their releases along with specially commissioned artwork from renowned artists within the industry. Arrow is now enjoying 25 years in the business (only the last two of which have included US distribution) and

delectable artwork!

HorrorHound: Tell us a little about Arrow, how it started, and what your role has been.

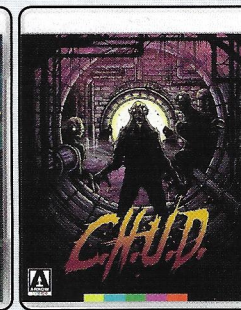
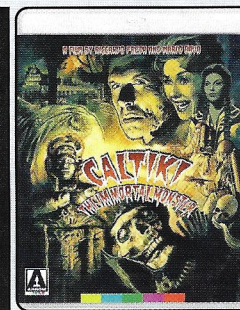
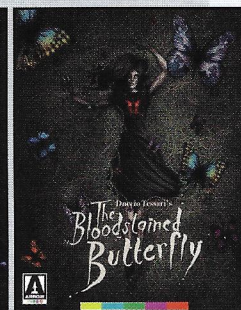
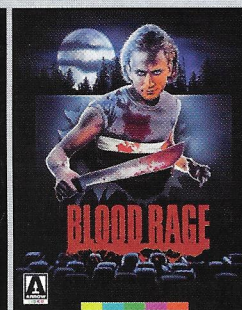
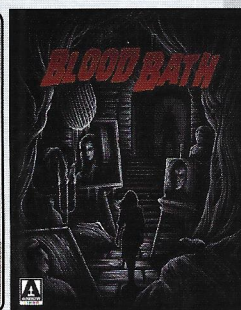
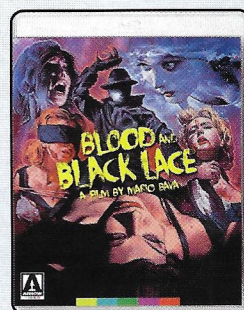
Francesco Simeoni: Arrow is a family-run business that was started by Neil and Angie Agran. At that time, it was focused on cult and world cinema on VHS. Early releases included *Cinema Paradiso* and *Hellraiser* – releases we are proud to still distribute to this day. In the early 2000s, Alex Agran became CEO and, in 2009, started Arrow Video with the aim of presenting cult films in definitive editions. This started with DVDs of Italian horror classics like *The House by the Cemetery* and *Macabre*, along with other cult titles like *Caligula*, *Dawn* and *Day of the Dead*.

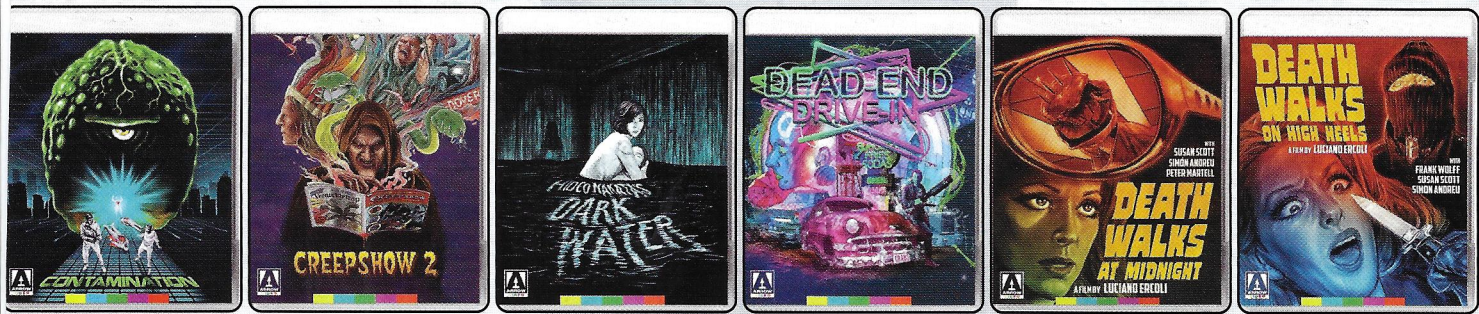
I started in 2010 and continued the label, developing releases and bringing restoration in house as well increasing our slate and ambition. This progressed with key releases like *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, *Big Trouble in Little China*, and *Videodrome*. Alongside Arrow Video, we launched a world cinema label called Arrow Academy in 2011, which touched on the heritage the company started with, focusing on world as well as cult cinema. The intentions from the start were to distribute quality film titles, and that continues through the development of the home-video marketplace, where a higher quality standard is demanded by fans, so we strive for quality



HorrorHound wanted to celebrate Arrow's 25th anniversary by looking back through their ascent to becoming one of the most important horror labels on the scene today.

To help kick off this celebration, we spoke with Francesco Simeoni, the director for content at Arrow Video, to discuss the label and also how they go about choosing all of their





across the board, both in titles and their presentation.

HH: How does Arrow go about acquiring titles or particular releases – are there certain qualities you look for in regards to such acquisitions?

FS: We don't just strive for really big titles, as we really enjoy working on titles that see less love; for instance, our release of the works of Herschell Gordon Lewis or our more obscure gialli and yakuza titles, which we shower with as much love as our flagships. Certainly this comes from our creative passion as cinephiles, as well as the feedback from our fans. Whilst many won't recognize *Death Walks at Midnight* and *Death Walks on High Heels*, I certainly feel that it's like a flagship title, but there's no denying that titles like *Phantasm* set more pulses rising!

HH: Artwork is one of the main attractions for any Arrow purchase and an obvious element that stands out from other studio releases – you want them all, and you want them to look amazing so you can show them off to other fans. It's a simple idea, have amazing artists illustrate the covers of amazing horror titles. How did this come about?

FS: I guess this was a natural progression. We just thought of the best way to do things. I believe we were the first label to really pioneer reversible sleeves as we did new artwork, but didn't want to ignore the classic originals. This was one point of difference which has now been copied. When you have success, it's hard to stay original. Having really good discs and packaging is our main goal.

HH: Truly a dream job for any fan of movies, being able to sit through hours of horror

and work with hours of footage for special features, accompanied by choosing the artists to work on the packaging for the release. How does a horror fan in the industry choose a favorite?

FS: We all really enjoy the creative process, so every title gets a lot of love. I've been personally blown away by so many artworks, and it's such a thrill when you work with an artist that each subsequent one you say that they've topped themselves. We are very fortunate to work with so many talented artists. I couldn't really pick any one or two – there are too many! When a release is physically bigger, it necessarily gets more artwork, so they potentially stand out more, like the artwork to the Herschell Gordon Lewis box or *Donnie Darko*, for instance, only hint at the wonders within.

HH: In this day and age, with so much talent in the world of art, it is understandably difficult for an artist to get their work noticed by the likes of industry favorites such as Arrow. Does Arrow choose artists or have artists contacted Arrow directly? What is the process in this selection?

FS: It's a combination; we find a lot of artists, seeking out people by the style of their work who we think will fit the [film]. Sometimes there are contractual requirements ... for instance *Blow Out* needs to have the title and John Travolta and Nancy Allen all in the same size and style on the cover, so anything like that needs to be communicated to the artist in advance. In other cases there are requirements like if you have one actor's likeness, you need to include another, so sometimes this might push the artwork to being more conceptual if you want to focus on one element. We have also been contacted by vari-

ous talented artists that we have worked with based on their submissions to us.

HH: What takes priority – the artwork or the special features?

FS: We will always try and deliver in all ways, but sometimes you can't do everything. For example, when we released *Withnail and I*, we felt the artwork was so iconic and had two great variants; it would have been stupid to do it again. The original [had] amazing Ralph Steadman pieces which couldn't be bettered, so we focused on the disc extras and the packaging (a 200-page book), but this is a priority by choice rather than limitation, I feel. As I say, we always try to deliver on all fronts!

HH: Arrow boldly decided to venture into distribution and release Region 1 (U.S.) Blu-rays and DVDs in the US. What led to that jump?

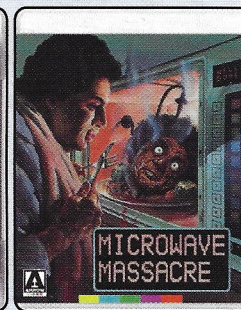
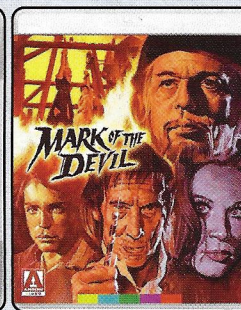
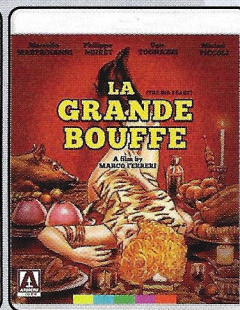
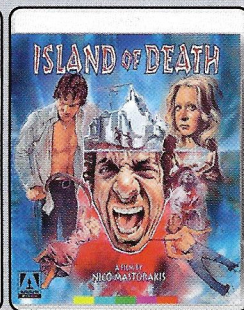
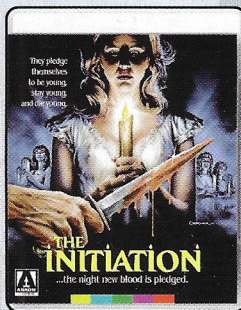
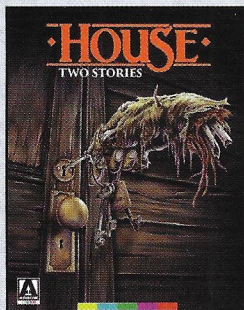
FS: At the time we [made] the decision, we felt that there were not any distributors doing what we were doing. When we started, Kino and Scorpion and others were not very active. In the time it took us to set up and acquire our catalog, they came on, so it's a more competitive marketplace, but that competition, I believe, has been good for all. Firstly, for the customer who gets higher quality releases, but also for the industry itself, which is spurred on by the excitement of these fans who are perpetuating the life of physical media. We felt that if there was a lack of people doing gialli and yakuza pictures and blaxploitation and Euro horror, then that's something that would be easy for us to do.

We already knew that there were fans out there who wanted it, as they were asking us to make our releases region free (something we can't always contractually do). It also enabled us to be able to restore certain films



Arrow Video: Among Arrow's other innovations, they have brought many films to US release for the first-time ever – including *Blood Rage*, *Caltiki*, *the Immortal Monster*, *The Mutilator*, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Miss Osbourne*, and *Wolf Guy*.

VIDEO INVASION: ARROW VIDEO



we couldn't do as a small UK-only distributor. Sharing the costs over two territories makes it much more viable to give smaller releases like *Blood Rage* or *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* a chance to be released in definitive editions.

HH: We're already aware that the UK didn't really have anything else like Arrow until recent years, whereas the U.S. has a few similar distributors.

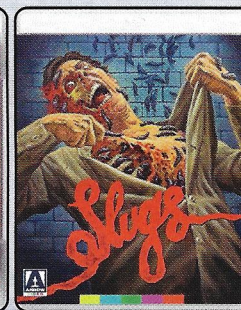
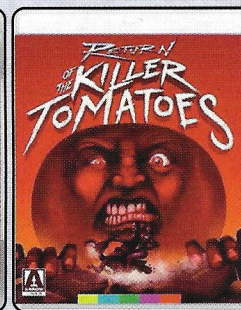
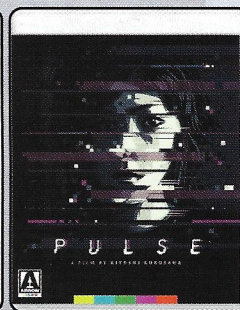
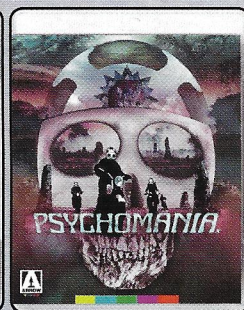
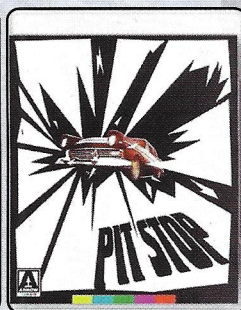
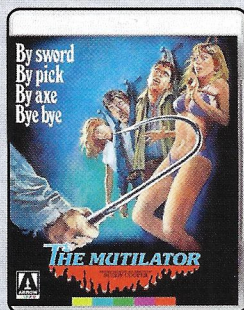
FS: Much like the situation described above with Kino and Scorpion and others, the UK is

experiencing a resurgence in this kind of cinema and catalog home entertainment in general; lots of newer labels have popped up in recent years, like 88 Films, Final Cut, and Indicator, along with more established names like Second Sight, Studio Canal, and Eureka. This has caused the industry to bounce back a bit from the doom-and-gloom the press reports about, i.e., the decline of physical media (though the industry as a whole is down, I think the catalog business is more robust). I think a more competitive marketplace is better overall for driving interest in the medium. What sets us apart is the

approach we take, whilst some might do new restorations and artwork and special packaging and booklets, there are very few that do it all and do it the way we do. I certainly think there are few distributors out there that would do what we did for the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis!

HH: Interestingly, the initial launch into the U.S. for Arrow was powered via Indiegogo, a slightly alternative route, considering the scale of the task.

FS: There were a number of reasons for



The Arrow Artists:

Original artwork created for Arrow is key in contributing to their continued success, allowing the company to stand out in the marketplace amidst other horror titles. *HorrorHound* was keen to catch up with some of the talent involved in creating the art that graces the covers for us to collect. We were graciously given time from two of Arrow's most popular artists, Gary Pullin and Graham Humphreys, to discuss the importance of their art medium's impact on the video marketplace.

Gary Pullin is a renowned artist who has worked in the publishing and home-video industry for the past decade, having worked for *Rue Morgue Magazine*, and produced artwork for *HorrorHound*, as well as companies such as Shout! Factory, MGM, Fox, Waxwork, and Mondo. He has produced many pieces of art for Arrow for both their Euro-distributed titles, as well as U.S.-based productions.

Graham Humphreys is a legendary horror illustrator and graphic designer with an extensive resume dating into the golden era of horror releases (aka the '80s), having worked on designing and illustrating original UK movie

campaigns for such titles as *Evil Dead*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Basket Case*.

HorrorHound: How did you originally come to produce work for Arrow?

Graham Humphreys: I was contacted by Francesco at Arrow about the possibility of working on a new illustration for *Slaughter High* – an older title from the early 1980s. Francesco thought that, as an artist whose work (for some) is synonymous with the period, I might be well suited for the project – in effect, recreating the feel of the era.

Gary Pullin: I first met Arrow while I was working at *Rue Morgue* as art director. It was 2011, and they emailed me and asked if I'd be interested in creating cover art for Wes Craven's *Deadly Blessings*. I was pretty excited that they found me because I had known of their releases and really liked the retro-styled cover artwork. I was also well aware of the caliber of artists they were commissioning. I consider guys like Graham Humphreys and Tom Hodge legends in the film industry, and I felt like I needed to really make artwork that could stand up on the shelf beside them.

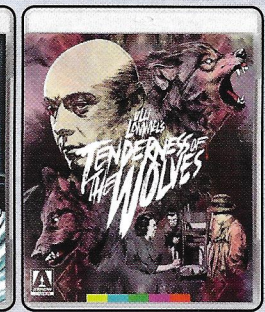
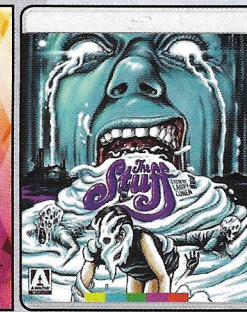
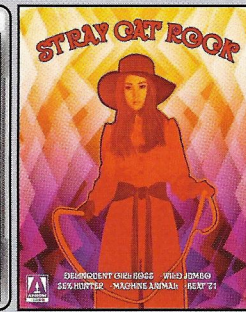
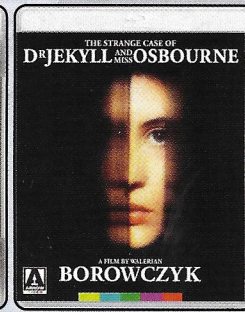
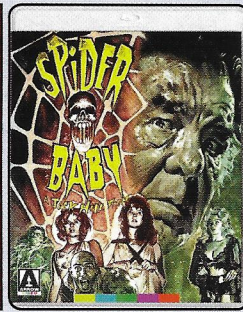
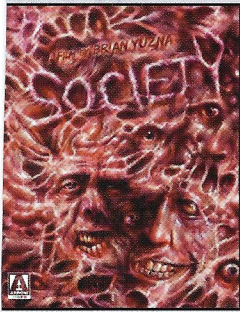
HH: As artists who are celebrated for your works within the horror industry, would you mind giving us just a few of your favorite creations for Arrow over the years?

GH: *Inferno* (it's Argento's finest moment, for me), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (it's Vincent Price!), *Lisa and the Devil*, *Frankenhooker*, *Blood and Black Lace* (it's Bava!), *City of the Dead* (as of writing, not yet released), *Super Bitch* (great retro fun), *Nightmare City*, *Night Child*, *Count Yorga* ... I could go on but it's a long list of great films I am honored to have worked on.

GP: I'm pretty happy with how *Night of the Comet*, *The Incredible Melting Man*, *The Stuff*, and *Lifeforce* turned out. Those seem to get the biggest responses from collectors.

HH: Does Arrow give you a set of guidelines to work from, or do you get free rein on the designs?

GH: Each job is different. Sometimes Arrow is clear in their requirement – in terms of portraiture or specific elements, sometimes I get free



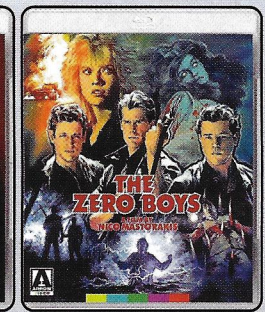
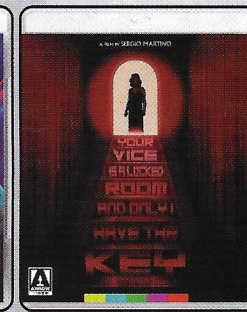
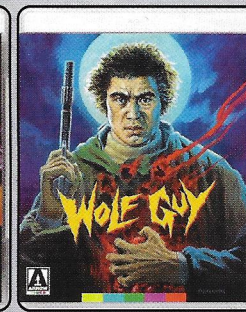
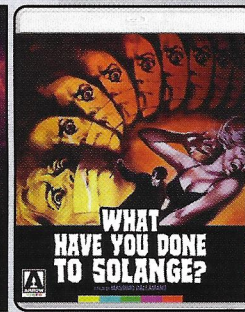
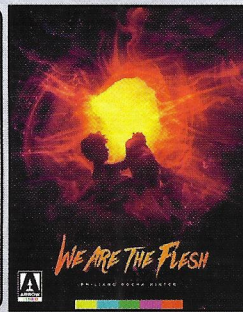
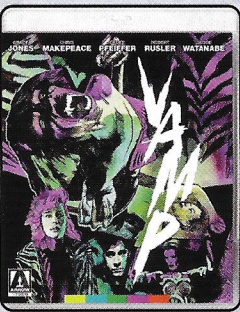
announcing our launch via Indiegogo; the first was being able to have a longer lead on our announcement, as we took time to set everything up whilst allowing people to preorder releases at a discounted rate. This would have been harder to do with lots of retailers with long dates. The second was to be able to engage with the fan community through the platform, which was difficult to do through a simple Web site [we were in the process of overhauling our UK Web site and wanted to wait for that before progressing to a U.S. site, so we needed a hub by which we could communicate]. The platform also allowed us to

engage with U.S. fans and to try and gauge enthusiasm for our kinds of releases, a big surge at the platform would have given us the confidence to release more titles per month or start more slowly, so it was great to get that feedback to help us plan for the future.

HH: Arrow has certainly provided 25 years of innovation and splendor where the artwork is involved. Having broke into the U.S., one wonders where Arrow is headed next.

FS: We have just announced that Arrow Video's sister label Arrow Academy will

launch in the U.S. and Canada in March 2017, so that's very exciting. This label focuses on art and classic cinema, and we have some exciting releases coming up! For Arrow Video, we're very excited for our forthcoming slate, which will focus on a lot of similar areas we've already covered with more Italian and Japanese exploitation and genre films, U.S. slashers, finalizing *American Horror Project Volume 2*, films by Frank Henenlotter, Brian Yuzna, Dario Argento, George Romero, and more!



rein ... although there is a matter of trust, in that I am expected to understand what is necessary to sell the film and work with empathy for any given title.

GP: I try and come up with a compelling image that really gets the film in one [picture], or I'll play with concepts that fans of the film hopefully can resonate with.

HH: Gary – you are largely known for working with bright colors in your creations. Do you have a preferred method you work to, and have you always enjoyed working with bright colors for horror?

GP: I think I get that from my first encounter with the vivid monster portraits on the covers of *Famous Monsters of Filmland Magazine* by Basil Gogos. I was looking for back issues of *Mad Magazine* when I was a kid, and I'll never forget the impact that those painted covers had on me. I loved how Gogos took monsters that were filmed in black and white and gave them life with multiple light sources and vivid colors to convey atmosphere and to

highlight certain areas.

When I'm designing a poster, I sometimes take inspiration from that and also even the way a particular film is lit. If it's made in the 1980s, for example, I'll use neon blue or green to convey the era. I love the way films were lit in the '70s and '80s ... Dario Argento, Mario Bava, and Stuart Gordon all used bright lighting to create atmosphere, George Romero used comic-book aesthetic for *Creepshow*, and in *The Thing*, John Carpenter used a lot of dramatic lighting for atmosphere. I don't think a poster or a piece of artwork needs to be black, "dark," or bloody to be scary. The original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* poster is on a white background, but it's a terrifying image.

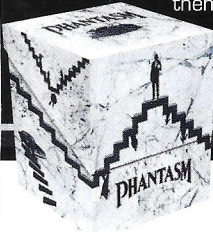
HH: Graham, you have a notable style that stands out. Can you tell us a little about your favored process for creating your artwork? Do you stick to a set method, or try and use different processes?

GH: Again, each job is approached differently. There is a technique that I have developed to create maximum effect as swiftly as the budget demands. Each job begins with the image

traced in pencil onto watercolor paper, and then a color wash is applied to create a base texture and color theme. The medium is Designers Gouache paint, in essence a watercolor with an opaque base. It dries quickly allowing me to play with textures as the paint dries on the brush, also taking advantage of the surface texture of the paper. Wherever I don't paint, the underlying wash provides the fill.

The main detail will always be in the portraiture, so the likenesses are the first thing I complete, and then in a hierarchy of focus and detail, I can finish the most important parts first, in case I start running out of time ... beyond a certain point, I am paying for my own work! Every job has to be delivered according to the budget, a professional necessity of earning an income and staying in business.

Within each job, there is always room for experimentation – it's an ongoing learning process that allows me to develop and [hopefully] improve. I research all titles, looking at previous campaigns in order to deliver something different to what has gone before. Where reference from the actual film is lacking, I'll often take photographs of poses and especially



Arrow Video: Arrow announced that a complete *Phantasm* film collection box set will be released on April 24th in the UK only. This box set will include a replica of the killer sphere.

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hands (always an important, expressive detail). For instance, for *Blood and Black Lace*, the killer is a photo of me (taken with a 10-second timer) in the nearest clobber I could find among my own clothes! It took about 30 shots before I was happy!

Most color themes have already been formulated whilst watching any film; these are suggested by existing colors and lighting or simply the suggestion of an atmosphere (particularly if it's a black-and-white film).

HH: Graham, having seen the industry change from VHS to DVD to Blu-ray and now downloads, do you think the need for physical artwork is still as strong as it was with the new

digital age and movie downloads/streaming?

GH: I think it's telling that I am busier now than I've ever been, certainly more so than in the early '80s (the so-called golden age of illustrated covers in home entertainment). Clearly, original art elicits a response that a photo-comp often doesn't. I believe that people appreciate craftsmanship, knowing that passion and labor have been part of the product, something beyond a binary confection. [As with] the films, people can spot a fraud! There are elements of nostalgia, reappraisal, discovery, and the all-important "collector's market." Tangible items are real world; we are still flesh, after all!

HH: Is there a particular title you would like to

see Arrow pick up in the future, perhaps one that you would like to work on?

GH: Yes! *The Keep* and *Shock Waves*, plus all the Hammer Horrors!

GP: I'd love to see Arrow release Peter Medak's *The Changeling* on Blu-ray with all the trimmings. I think it's a movie people are still discovering and it's highly influential; directors like Ti West and Mick Garris have always sung its praises. If there was another film on the wish list, then I'd have to say, I'd love to see the Arrow treatment given to the original *My Bloody Valentine*. How great would a tour of the mine locations with the cast and crew in Sydney, Nova Scotia, be? 🍷





... some of Rick Melton's best Arrow art (many seen above) incorporate a sexier art style that works better in the UK marketplace. Notable works include *Cardplayer*, *Inferno*, *House by the Cemetery*, *Funhouse*, *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night*, *Sleepless*.