

## THE BLACK CAT

Lucio Fulci's **THE BLACK CAT** from 1981 always gets overlooked compared to his zombie classics that sandwiched it. Yet it's always been a film I've admired...none more so than with Arrow Video's sterling new Blu-ray release.

Robert Miles (Patrick Magee) likes to record the voices of the dead and listen to them in his house...why he does this we never know. His pet cat however is causing people to die horrible deaths including the character of Lilian (Dagmar Lassander) who is burned beyond recognition and crashes through a window...landing in a pile of gore that Fulci films in loving detail. An American photographer (the film is set in England) played by Mimsy Farmer becomes embroiled in the case where she tries putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Along for the ride (literally) is David Warbeck playing an inspector who gets clawed up (and hit by a car) for his trouble.

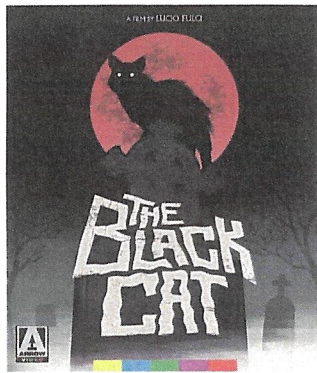
The film spins an odd yarn on Edgar Allen Poe's immortal classic but the script (credited to Biagio Proietti) is full of holes and head scratchers so it's best to take things with a grain of salt. Fulci was still able to inject enough of his spirit into the proceedings (including a ridiculous amount of close-ups and zooms of characters eyes) to whet fans appetite. Thankfully we have Patrick Magee taking center stage (if he weren't available I can see the role being tailor made for Brother Theodore!). With his intense and brooding presence he makes the most of his screen time. Mimsy Farmer emotes rather well at times but her character is underdeveloped. She remains a personal favorite who appeared in a number of classic films over the years. I should also mention another character of a police man played by Al Cliver. Listening to the English dub track it's immediately apparent he was voiced by Nick Alexander (who oversaw most of Fulci's English tracks). Fans will also recall Alexander dubbed Cliver in *Zombie* (1980) which to many (including yours truly) was the first time they heard Nick's great voice.

Adding to the excitement is composer Pino Donaggio, replacing Fulci regular Fabio Frizzi. The main theme is fantastic...an immediate classic. Donaggio's textured classical strains add a different feel to Fulci's gothic romp...a little more classy for lack of a better word...not necessarily scary or creepy.

Arrow Video has gone all out for this release. Besides the nice print (viewable with English or Italian audio) we get a great overview of the film by writer Stephen Thrower who covers every conceivable angle in 25 minutes. Thrower is one of the very best in the business and his thoughts and opinions are spot on. Next up is a twenty minute interview with Dagmar Lassander covering her entire career. Interesting to note that she mentions appearing in Indianapolis at the HorrorHound weekend convention (where I met her). She seems flummoxed by it all...talking about fans asking her to sign Japanese and Vietnamese posters of her work. When I asked her about appearing in **WEREWOLF WOMAN** she had no recollections at all, so it seems fitting that they completely gloss over this film in the interview segment.

As if that wasn't enough there is a sixty-five minute (!) interview with David Warbeck conducted in his home circa 1995 (in a rough looking videotaped segment)

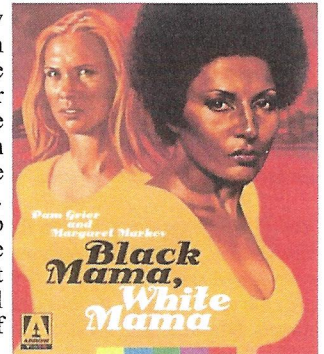
A visit to the original shooting location(s) and trailer round out the extras. I would hope that this version of **THE BLACK CAT** (which incidentally has themes that George Romero would copy years later in **MONKEY SHINES**) can find a new audience. It has enough charm and chutzpa that you never feel like you wasted 90 minutes of your time on. It is part of a box set Arrow Video has packaged together with Sergio Martino's **YOUR VICE IS A LOCKED ROOM AND ONLY I HAVE THE KEY**.



## BLACK MAMA, WHITE MAMA

Filipino mainstays Eddie Romero (director) and John Ashley (producer) delivered this entertaining women-in-prison/action flick to grindhouses/drive-ins circa 1973 courtesy of American International.

Pam Grier and Margaret Markov are two newly transplanted women in prison who make a bold escape during a terrorist attack on their jailers. Handcuffed by chains, the two ladies take turns beating each other up long enough to realize they aren't going anywhere...realizing they need each other to stay alive. Both have men 'on the outside' looking out for them...but to use the old adage...who will survive and what will be left of them?



Romero keeps the action flowing, with back and forth editing between the girls and the 'men' seeking them out. With supporting turns afforded to Sid Haig and Vic Diaz, you know things will heat up! As with practically most Filipino productions from the '70s, there is no shortage of exploitation elements...nudity; violence and a dog that wears women's panties all make an appearance! I shouldn't have to tell you that this comes highly recommended?

Arrow Video once again delivers the goods with a stellar print that showcases bold and vivid colors. The rich palette completely destroys all previous versions...the foliage of the Philippines has never looked so good! Also on tap are some terrific interviews including a new (2015) one with Margaret Markov (still looking great). She expounds on her Filipino livelihood with no qualms what-so-ever except maybe the working conditions (bugs and heat). She also talks about meeting her future husband Mark Damon and subsequently retiring from the film business altogether (it would be great to see them on the convention circuit).

Sid Haig also talks about his life in the Philippines in a new interview where he discusses his instant bond with Pam Grier. He was such a staple in that film industry that just when he thought he could go back to America more roles popped up! Finally an older interview with director Eddie Romero is included where he talks about his relationship with John Ashley and more. It was originally conducted for an Australian release and is entitled *Mad Director of Blood Island!*

All in all another wonderful package from Arrow who continues to hit home runs with each release. Fans of classic Filipino trash won't want to miss it!

## BLOOD RAGE

Proving that there will *never* be any shortage of quality horror films to see from years past, **BLOOD RAGE** is yet another slasher film that had passed me by. Not anymore!

The prologue opens at a drive-in, circa 1974. When two young brothers sneak out of their car (as mom is too busy making out with her boyfriend) they realize why it's dubbed 'the passion pit.' For no reason at all, one of the brothers (Terry) decides to axe a fornicating dude right in the face. He then passes the blame onto his horrified brother Todd. Todd is subsequently locked up and promptly escapes ten years later...on Thanksgiving no less.

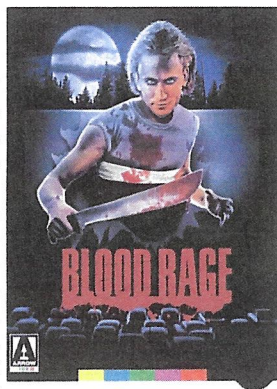
The problem is Terry still harbors murderous intentions and they come out when his mom (Louise Lasser) announces her engagement to their apartment manager. With some college buddies loitering around (fearful of the escaped lunatic), it's all the ammo Terry needs to stage another killing spree. Who will survive...and more importantly which





brother will come out on top?

This entertaining romp is never boring. With whip smart performances (especially the dual role essayed by Mark Soper as the two brothers) and lots of gore this is a winner through and through. Add to the mix some sleazy situations, Old Style beer, pot and hard liquor and you have all the key ingredients for a good time. The various axe attacks, body slicing, throat slashings, stabblings, hand lopping and decapitations are rendered in loving detail by Ed French (who also essays a weird and odd looking rich guy). It should be noted that this is one of the bloodiest and goriest slasher films you'll ever see.



Yet if you happened to see the version titled **NIGHTMARE AT SHADOW WOODS** then you didn't see much of the gore since it was edited out. Thankfully Arrow Video has come to the rescue to unleash no less than *three* different cuts of the film. The aforementioned Nightmare...version is the weakest of the bunch. In fact aside from a lengthy pool side encounter (that establishes some situations and character motivations) there isn't a lot of extra footage save for extra seconds of sexual situations. The composite cut puts everything together for the longest version. However the theatrical version...under the **BLOOD RAGE** title...is the way to go. Arrow realized this and restored it for maximum effect. The print is clean and colorful, and the pounding electronic score (along with some orchestral moments) by Richard Einhorn come through loud and clear.

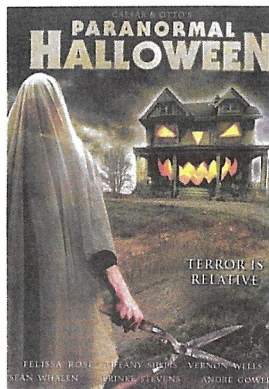
There are scads of extras scattered about this set. Mark Soper is interviewed about his participation in the project. He talks about how the film has taken on a life of its own even when initially it seemed to fall through the cracks. Louise Lasser spends some minutes talking about her career (including her breakout show **MARY HARTMAN MARY HARTMAN**) before discussing the 'oddsness' surrounding her character in **BLOOD RAGE**.

Producer/actor Marianne Kanter reflects back on being a woman producer on a low budget horror flick. She is proud of her work and was thankful her character was killed off early! FX technician/actor Ed French looks back at his early days as a goremeister with fondness. He reasons if it wasn't for his work in horror, his career never would have taken off. Finally 3 minutes with Ted Raimi is just that. Ted talks about how close he was to quitting acting when no offers came in. Yet at the last minute (before packing it all in and working for his father) the audition for **BLOOD RAGE** came up and the rest is history. I do wish he would've talked about why his character (condom salesman!) was dressed like Walt Gorney from **FRIDAY THE 13<sup>th</sup>**. Not to be outdone is an audio commentary track with director John Grissmer. Fans can get the scoop on the film from nearly every key player with these fascinating extras.

This amazing set is a must have for hardcore horror fan. It was a treat seeing this in all its gory glory. Easily one of the best films from that time period (shot in '83, copyrighted '84 but not released theatrically until '87) that will only get better with age. Remember that it's *not* cranberry sauce!

## CEASAR AND OTTO'S PARANORMAL HALLOWEEN

Unlikely brothers (one fat and grey the other well-built and young) Ceasar and Otto accept an offer from a governor (who has no hands) to stay in his house...the only problem is the place is haunted. Through the course of the film they encounter all kinds of strange things...swiped from various horror films. This is a pastiche of '80s and current terror tropes from the opening which echoes Carpenter's **HALLOWEEN** (replete with a funny jab at Dr. Phil) to a mock-up from **THE CONJURING** (featuring Felissa Rose).



this effort corrals all of the vulgar stuff and aims for something grounded. While a lot of the jokes and situations aren't that funny, they aren't stupid either. Several bits are quite amusing including a great moment poking fun at **THE SHINING** with Brinke Stevens doing the honors. Another jab at the **PARANORMAL ACTIVITY** series was probably the funniest bit in my eyes... great stuff guys!

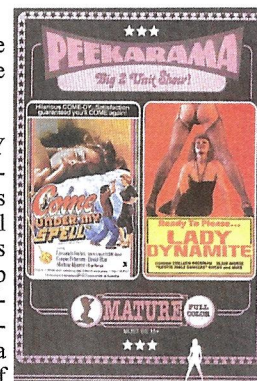
Director and writer Dave Campfield belies his low budget with inventive camera work, various swipes and split screens, colorfully lit scenes and plenty of energy. While horror and humor rarely work (at least in my eyes) there is enough here to pass the time. With horror vets such as Beverly Randolph, Sean Whalen, Vernon Wells, Tiffany Shepis and Debbie Rochon along for the ride makes it easier to sit through.

The DVD from Wild Eye Releasing includes director, cast and crew commentary, blooper reel, a Robert Z'Dar tribute, bonus shorts and videos plus trailers. A nice package all the way 'round.

## COME UNDER MY SPELL/ LADY DYNAMITE

In this splendid Vinegar Syndrome "Peekarama-Big 2 Unit Show" we have more Carolos Tobalina nuttiness.

First up is **COME UNDER MY SPELL**. David (Blair Harris) and Fernando (Fernando Fortes) are buddies with different sex lives. David pulls all the pussy while Fernando only fucks animals and his hand! David tries to help him out by purchasing a book on hypnosis. It works all too well. Soon Fernando is going from shooting loads into a Fanta can (!) to squirting on the back of every girl he can wave his magic wand at! David too gets in the act (even overzealously shooting some cum on Fernando's back!). Things really heat up when Fernando hypnotizes an entire wedding party with a camera. He intones "Fuck and suck without restraint!" His bride soon arrives from Mexico, but Fernando is laid up in a San Francisco hospital from too much screwing. David falls in love with his bride leaving Fernando despondent. He tells the nurse "fuck and suck me until I die." However even the grave can't hold him and the shock **CARRIE** ending will no doubt have viewers picking their jaws up off the floor!



In **LADY DYNAMITE** the effervescent Colleen Brennan stars as a frustrated housewife (married to the same guy...Shone Taylor...for ten years) who finds out her hubby infected her with gonorrhea. Since that proves he is cheating she goes off on a wild spree looking for love wherever she can get it. After some wonderful adventures (including an all-girl party infested with male strippers) she comes back to her man who promises her things will be different. Yet her final words to him are *not* what he wanted to hear.

Both films are enjoyable romps filled with hot sex. **COME UNDER MY SPELL** has the better plot, with plenty of fun moments from Fernando which livens things up quite a bit. Yet **LADY DYNAMITE** gets my vote for best sex scenes simply because Colleen Brennan is one of the top stars from that time period (1979). Her mere presence, let alone sexual prowess, gives any production an added boost.

Another outstanding presentation from Vinegar Syndrome, both films look and sound utterly amazing. I had a Colleen Brennan compilation DVD that included scenes from **LADY DYNAMITE** and I can assure you the new print (scanned in 2K from a 35mm camera negative) wipes out any and all previous versions.



Unlike the Wayans brothers crude and outlandish spoofs in the Scary Movie sweepstakes, at least