



Debbie Rochon surveys the *Uncle John* set.

We fought against the daylight restrictions and freezing temps, but there were other battles to be addressed. The co-director and DP Robert Lucas worked hard at trying to bring some of the "classic" John Russo imagery and sensibilities updated and to the table. And once in a while it worked. I have to give Robert a lot of credit because working with a 77-year-old director who is very clear and set in what he likes and wants is a challenging task from the start. Gone are the days when a camera would mostly sit still and actors would enter and exit via frame with small amounts of camera movement. Bill Hinzman, may he rest in piece, had been John's DP for almost all of his movies; now Robert had that duty and his cinema tastes were far removed from what John's are and Bill's had been. Another challenge was to get our beloved movie sheriff George Kosana while he was still in good health. He has been battling some serious heart issues, which have left him on the brink. When the call came in that we should "shoot him today," I understood that meant we had to drop whatever was on the schedule and get him shot while he was having a good day. They sat him behind a table for his scene. He even brought his original **NOTLD** shotgun, which made pretty much every fanboy and fangirl on set cream his or her long johns—understandably. George's scene was cut down so he would be able to get through it okay, and he was shot out as soon as possible. He was even able to take a few photos with cast and zombie extras. Bless his heart.

John Russo has a big heart and he is without a doubt one of the good guys in this biz. He has always been fair and a man of his word and even more rare, loyal. I know the shoot was tough on him, but he got through it like a trouper. Whether money comes through for his other projects soon and he does make another movie, I don't know. But I am happy I got to visit some older alumni while I had the chance. ♪

## Rob Freese's THAT'S BLAXPLOITATION: PAM POWER!

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#### **BLACK MAMA, WHITE MAMA** (1973)

D: Eddie Romero. Pam Grier, Margaret Markov, Sid Haig, Lynn Borden, Zaldy Zshornack, Vic Diaz. 87 mins.

Our story follows femme convicts Karen Brent (Markov), a revolutionist, and Lee Daniels (Grier), a prostitute, on the run after escaping from a brutal Filipino women's prison. Shackled together a la Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis in **The Defiant Ones**, the gals try to stay one step ahead of crazed bounty hunter Ruben (Haig) and greasy pimp Vic Cheng (the always reliable Filipino powerhouse Diaz). The girls take time to wrestle during the quiet moments in their flight to freedom, eventually building a mutual respect for each other. Based on a story by Joe Viola and Jonathan Demme, this is a serviceable action flick that hits all the right spots as it powers toward its shocking, shoot-'em-up finale. Romero keeps the film moving at a fast clip with just enough sleaze to be entertaining without becoming mean-spirited. Produced by the great John Ashley, who also owned drive-in movie theaters that no doubt played his films all summer long, it was released through AIP. Extras include new interviews with Markov and Haig, an archival interview with Romero, theatrical trailer, still gallery, and running commentary with filmmaker and Filipino film historian Andrew Leavold. Dumb fun that's worth a look for both Grierheads and fans of Filipino exploitation action flicks.

#### **SHEBA, BABY** (1975) ♪♪

D: William Girdler. Pam Grier, Austin Stoker, D'Urville Martin, Rudy Challenger, Christopher Joy, Dick Merrifield. 90 mins.

Businessman Andy Shayne (Challenger) is beaten by thugs attempting to take over his loan company. His right-hand man Brick Williams (Stoker) calls Shayne's daughter Sheba (Grier), a private detective, who leaves Chicago for her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky to help kick some slimeballs into the gutter. Sheba jacks some jaws and puts the hurt on lowlife scum Pilot (Martin), who in turn leads her to Shark (Merrifield), the white crime lord in charge of the Louisville underground of gangsters and dirty dealings. This is an enjoyable but light actioner with more of a focus on characters than bloody mayhem. It doesn't pack the punch of **Foxy Brown** or **Coffy** (VS #21) but still works well on its own merits. Grier seems to be having fun, going undercover to infiltrate Shark's crime syn-



dicate while managing another fabulous costume change from one scene to the next. (Seriously, in what amounts to one day in the film, she seems to change clothes three or four times!) The always dependable Martin owns his scenes, especially when he's berating his dimwitted thugs. (He comes across as the Morris Day of Blaxploitation.) Costar Stoker is instantly likeable, although he isn't given much to do once Grier makes the scene. (He is most famous for his lead in John Carpenter's **Assault on Precinct 13**, easily his best role.) Director Girdler hailed from Louisville, KY and filmed a number of his movies there. He was a very popular exploitation director, hitting his stride with the **Jaws** rip-off **Grizzly** (VS #59) and delivering solid flicks like **Day of the Animals** (VS #60), **Zebra Killer** and **The Manitou** (VS #63), among others. Sadly, he died in a helicopter accident at age 30 while scouting locations for his next film. It was a blow to exploitation cinema to lose him so young: Just imagining the films he would have made throughout the '80s and '90s boggles the mind. Extras include an interview with screenwriter David Sheldon, a look at Pam Grier's years with AIP courtesy of Chris Poggiali, trailer, still gallery and multiple audio commentaries. Don't let the PG rating fool you—this is PG from 40+ years ago, which is much edgier and violent than today's lily-livered, smiles-and-sunshine-friendly PG. Fans of Grier, Girdler, Stoker and Martin should not hesitate to scope it out. ♪

