



# QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

## THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962)

**The setup:** After an American platoon returns from service in Korea in 1952, Staff Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), the stepson of a prominent U.S. Senator, is awarded the Congressional Medal Of Honor for his valorous deeds. But the recurring nightmares of Captain Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra) and another officer indicate that the platoon may have been brainwashed by Communists, with Shaw being set up to commit a terrible act. Marco will stop at nothing to prove that he

is not crazy and destroy whatever nefarious plot is underway.

**The breakdown:** Director John Frankenheimer and screenwriter George Axelrod's riveting adaptation of Richard Condon's book features intense performances from Harvey, Sinatra, and Angela Lansbury, who plays Shaw's conniving mother. While it could easily be viewed as an anti-Communist manifesto especially given when it came out (a year before JFK's assassination), the film is more of a damning examination of



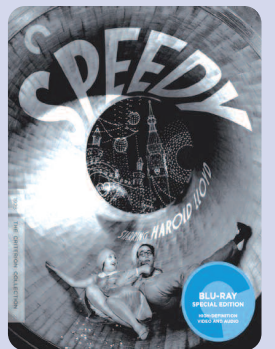
those who hide behind American patriotism to further agendas that are anything but democratic. The wonderfully designed foldout booklet features an essay by author Howard Hampton, and vintage and current interviews from cast and crew further delve into the story of the production.

## SPEEDY (1928)

**The set up:** Harold Lloyd's last silent film is a tour de force in which he plays the titular ne'er do well, a New Yorker who is obsessed with baseball and can't keep a job, but somehow he continues to charm his long suffering sweetheart Jane Dillon. After landing a gig as a taxi driver, he learns of a major businessman's subversive plot to remove his girlfriend's grandfather Pop Dillon from his horse-drawn street car to make way for a bigger rail system. He must do something before Pop

loses his livelihood.

**The breakdown:** For those who think younger people might not dig silent black and white films, *Speedy* offers a strong rebuff. Animated performances, a Babe Ruth cameo, a wild Coney Island shoot (the *real* Coney Island too), and crazy Manhattan car chases make for an impressive spectacle. A great half-hour documentary hosted by Bruce Goldstein humorously shows how much of the film was shot in L.A. (and a couple of the Coney boardwalk scenes too) and maps



out the various Manhattan shooting locations, but the revelations further illuminate the magic that Lloyd and his cast and crew created.

## THE STUFF (1985)

**The set up:** A popular and mysterious brand of yogurt called The Stuff has America addicted, and one young boy (Scott Bloom) is suspicious when he sees it move in the fridge. Escaping from his seemingly possessed family, he teams up with an industrial saboteur (*Law & Order's* Michael Moriarty) working for the now battered ice cream industry, and later a loony militia (lead by Paul Sorvino), to warn the world about this deadly dessert.

**The breakdown:** Larry Cohen's horror farce cheekily sends up '80s American consumerism (and, to a lesser extent, the failed War On Drugs). It features some great practical effects with the evil white ooze—the optical effects, not to so much—and it strikes a good tone between scary and silly. In some ways, it's ripe for a remake given how health conscious our society has become, and it could be done with better effects today. Arrow



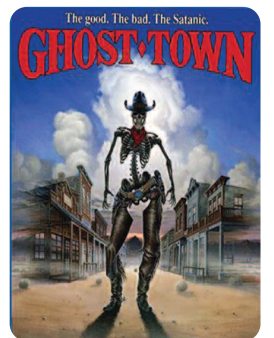
Video's transfer is well done, and the package includes a collectible booklet with an essay by Joel Harley.

## GHOST TOWN (1988)

**The set up:** Upon investigating the disappearance of a young woman named Kate (Catherine Hickland) in the Arizona desert, a sheriff's deputy named Langley (Frank Luc) finds himself sucked into in a ghostly Western town overrun with ageless undead spirits trapped by the presence of an evil gunslinger. To help them escape, Langley must bring the nefarious outlaw down...if he can.

**The breakdown:** This low budget Charles Band production, inspired by a story from *Puppet Master*

director David Schmoeller, is actually an intriguing tale that puts a nice spin on Western horror (it's more of a ghostly Western) and features gorgeous cinematography from Mac Ahlberg (*Beverly Hills Cop III*). The acting, character development, and overall plot leave a lot to be desired, but the film has a great vibe and offers a scenery chewing performance by Jimmie F. Skaggs as the villainous Devlin. Like *The Stuff*, it could be remade and improved,



but it is still fun to watch. It is too bad there are no special features on the Blu-ray as it would fun to learn about the making of the film.

## BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR (1990)

**The setup:** Many months after the horrific events of *Re-Animator*, Doctors Herbert West (Jeffrey Combs) and Dan Cain (Bruce Abbott) are still experimenting with life and death, first as medics in a Peruvian civil war, then back at Arkham, Massachusetts to further work on their depraved experiments, this time cobbling together a Frankenstein-like woman from body parts they steal from the hospital that employs them. We all know this is going to turn out badly, especially when the head of

West's old nemesis Dr. Carl Hill is re-animated.

**The breakdown:** The second in a trilogy of films, *Bride...* is an unnecessary yet gruesomely fun Lovecraft adaptation that draws inspiration from the last part of the original short story. Combs is as inspiredly nutty as ever as Herbert West, and while some of the plot logistics are ridiculous, the movie effectively riffs on the *Frankenstein* mythos and offers a perhaps unintended commentary on the objectification of women. The limited edition



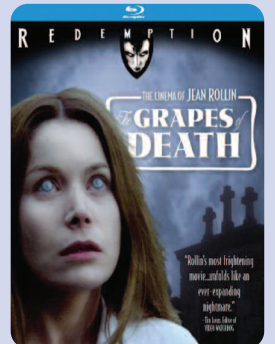
three-disc edition, which is selling out fast, includes both the original and unrated director's cut versions, numerous bonus features, and great packaging with a collectible booklet.

## KINO COLLECTIBLES

It's hard to keep up with all the great Kino reissues on Blu-ray, but two genre pictures worth noting are *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) and *The Grapes Of Death* (1978). *The Quatermass Xperiment* could be viewed as an *Alien* predecessor in its tale of an experimental rocket that returns to Earth and crash lands in the English countryside. Two of the three astronauts are dead, and the surviving member is infected with some strange virus that slowly causes him to mutate into something sinister. When he gets loose in the London

streets, the authorities race against time before the deadly infection spreads. Fast paced and intense for its time, this sci-fi classic still holds up today.

One of director Jean Rollin's best films, *The Grapes Of Death* is a zombie movie set in French wine country. While thin on plot, the film has some great imagery, even though it is hampered by some soft focus shots and low grade effects in parts. There is a suitably grim atmosphere that pervades the film, and fans of both Rollin and cult movies will enjoy its surreal narrative. It's



also a nice break from his large catalog of lesbian vampire flicks. Like *The Stuff* and *Ghost Town*, this movie could be updated for a modern audience, especially given increased wine consumption among Millennials.

## THE FOREST (2016)

After her twin sister goes missing in a Japanese forest where many people are known to have committed suicide, Sara Price (*The Hunger Games'* Natalie Dormer) sets out to find her with the aid of a local guide and a hunky American journalist. But the spirits in the woods are not at rest and reach out for the

souls of the living, leading Sara into treacherous terrain where her own life may be at risk. *The Forest* performed well upon its January release—it's a taut and at times understated ghost tale inspired by a real-life location. Some of the shock tactics are familiar, but the psychological twists keep it compelling.



## SUSPICION (1941)

**The set up:** After a naive heiress (Joan Fontaine) falls for a smug lothario (Cary Grant) who has seemingly been smitten by her, they enter into a romantic yet tumultuous marriage. His lack of income and debts soon became apparent, and his secretive behavior leads her to believe that he may have more sinister intentions than she ever realized, a notion that challenges her undying devotion to him.

**The breakdown:** This 1941 film from Alfred Hitchcock is not as well known as his other works, but it still sustains a good level of suspense and features many trademarks of the director, including dramatic camera angles and solid narrative twists. Fontaine won an Oscar for her role as Lina McLaidlaw, and she was well matched with Grant as bon vivant Johnnie Aysgarth. The ending is both unexpected and realistic. This



Warner Archive Collection release also includes a 21-minute documentary about the making of *Suspicion*.

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