



# QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

## DEADPOOL (2016)

**The set up:** After cancer-stricken mercenary Wade Wilson (Ryan Reynolds) seeks a cure through genetic mutation and becomes horribly disfigured in the process, he hides from the love of his life (Morena Baccarin) and seeks out Ajax (Ed Skrein), the mad scientist who botched the job, to set things right. Reborn as the masked Deadpool, Wade also gets to kick criminal ass.

**The breakdown:** One of Marvel's few R-rated movies, the monster hit *Deadpool* subverts comic book norms as it embraces them, delivering fourth wall wit with aplomb. The antihero's snarky humor belies his grim determination in tracking down Ajax, with two X-Men (including preachy Colossus) in tow. Beneath his intense violent streak and edgy sense of humor, *Deadpool*'s a wounded romantic at heart, and even in



spite of a typically over-the-top Marvel finale, the story carries emotional weight. I didn't expect it to be this good.

## KILLER DAMES box set (1971-72)

Arrow Films has nicely restored two crazy giallos by obscure Italian director Emilio P. Miraglia, both of which revolve around a mysterious figure named Evelyn (unrelated). In *The Night Evelyn Came Out Of The Grave*, a rich man tormented by the loss of his dead wife remarries to forget her, but her spirit continues haunting him. He's either right or he's nuts. In *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times*, a family curse is repeated as a dead woman returns to kill six random victims then off her living sibling. The fun part about both of these films is the costumes, modern '70s apartments with crazy wall

patterns, the cool soundtracks, two awesome castle locations, and hot babes. (A young, pre-boob job Sybil Danning appears in the latter; simply delicious.)

*The Night... is the superior of the two—its improbable narrative, which includes the playboy killing two women who remind him of his wife (not that anyone seems to care), gets even crazier with its twist upon twist finale that is both impressive and inane. It somehow works as a surreal nightmare. *The Red Queen...* isn't nearly as good and lags, but the water flooding finale in the castle is well done. Only hardcore fans of giallo lunacy will plunk down for this limited*



edition set, but it is totally packaged for them, including a 60-page book with essays and photos, oodles of bonus features (including a new 20-minute interview with Danning), and two sincere video commentaries from British author Stephen Thrower, who totally praises and jokes about the films' true strengths and funny flaws.

## STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR (1940)

**The set up:** After a reporter gives court testimony that puts away an alleged killer who might be innocent, he finds himself in a similar situation when a creepy vagrant (Peter Lorre) seems to have murdered the next door neighbor he loathes, leaving him as the prime suspect. The two killings may be linked.

**The breakdown:** One of the very first examples of film noir, this 65-minute feature offers some dynamic cinematography from Nicholas Musuraca (*Cat People*), a great nightmare sequence, and a laudably creepy performance from Lorre. The narrative is heavy-handed and obvious, making it more of a title for noir aficionados, who should enjoy it.



## WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? (1966)

**The set up:** A middling college history professor (Richard Burton) and his vulgar, alcoholic wife (Elizabeth Taylor) host a new biology professor and his naïve spouse (George Segal and Sandy Dennis) for a late night soiree after a university party. The intimate gathering soon devolves into all out psychological warfare as the older couple preys upon the younger one, which is still full of the hopes and dreams they have bitterly forsaken.

**The breakdown:** Mike Nichols' black and white cinematic rendering of Edward Albee's acclaimed play, which won five Oscars, was the first nail in the coffin of the then 36 year-old Motion Picture Production Code that forbade certain types of language and activity in American movies. The cursing and sexual innuendo was certainly shocking for the time. It's a fascinating and frustrating film to watch. The performances, particularly from Burton and Taylor, are intensely



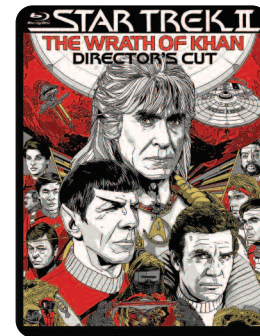
well crafted, but the toxicity of the characters may leave you wanting to smack them through the TV.

## STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN The Director's Cut (1982)

**The set up:** When scouting a seemingly lifeless planet suitable for testing the life-sprouting Genesis project, Chekov and Captain Terrell of the USS Reliant discover the compound of Khan (the fantastic Ricardo Montalban) and his race of genetically engineered supermen banished there 15 years by then Captain Kirk. Khan captures the men, commandeers their vessel, and seeks revenge against Admiral Kirk, who is doing training maneuvers aboard the Enterprise with his old crew and

a cadre of inexperienced cadets.

**The breakdown:** Possibly the best *Star Trek* movie ever made, this intergalactic battle of wills struck the right balance between strong characterizations, action sequences, and dazzling effects. It's incredibly well-written and executed. As far as the director's cut, there is a total of three new minutes of dialogue restored during various scenes that offer some nice, subtle changes. If you own a previous Blu-ray of this movie, those few moments,



new box art, and the new 30-minute documentary likely won't sway you to buy this. (Both versions of the film are included.) But if you don't own it and this is your jam, snag it.

## HERE COMES MISTER JORDAN (1941)

**The set up:** After a highly touted boxing contender (Robert Montgomery) is inadvertently brought to Heaven before his time, one of the top administrators (Claude Rains) accompanies him back to earth to find a suitable replacement body. He ends up taking over a newly murdered business mogul and falling for a young woman whose father "he" recently framed for fraud. It is up to him to make amends with the lady who has smitten him and find his true destiny.

**The breakdown:** The inspiration for the remake *Heaven Can Wait* with Warren Beatty (1979) and numerous other spin-offs (the sequel *Down To Earth* was remade as *Xanadu*), this quirky movie still charms today. It does not play everything for laughs; poignancy and darker elements ground the fantastic narrative with a sense of real human emotion through beautiful performances. A 30-minute discussion featurette featuring critic Michael Sragow and



filmmaker/distributor Michael Schlesinger offers great historical and contextual insights into this vintage Hollywood gem.

## NIGHTMARES (1983)

**The set up:** In this dark anthology, a serial killer runs amok at night in Topanga Canyon, a troubled teen (Emilio Estevez) obsessed with a battle video game finds the fight brought to him, a priest of lapsed faith (Lance Henriksen) is relentlessly pursued by a Satanic pick-up truck, and a family with an alpha male husband is terrorized by a

giant rodent hiding in their house.

**The breakdown:** Director Joseph Sargent assembled this creepy quadrilogy. While it's been criticized over the years for being subpar, *Nightmares* is actually a very underrated and enjoyable collection, even if the optical effects in the final story are weak and really dated. There are some good performances here, which



really helps in the end. It's very '80s and very fun.

## THE WITCH (2016)

**The set up:** After being banished from their Puritan community over religious differences, a family of six (father, mother, teen daughter, tween boy, and small twin brats) must fend for themselves in a heavily wooded area. Later, when their newborn baby is snatched away (allegedly by a witch) and then their crops start to wither, the family becomes paranoid and starts turning on itself, with the daughter on the verge of womanhood considered to be the main culprit. Are they losing

their minds, or is evil truly afoot?

**The breakdown:** A study in isolation and impending insanity, *The Witch* transports us to late 17th century New England, from the rugged living conditions to the superstitious beliefs that made people fear the world. First time writer-director Robert Eggers eschews modern scare tactics, wisely exploiting slowly building suspense and eerie imagery to maximum effect. Whether or not there is a witch is less important than the unsettling rage that seethes



within the family. It might seem unfathomable to imagine living in a time when such irrational actions could transpire, but look around at America today and it does not seem all that different.