



QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

THE CONJURING 2 (2016)

The set up: Ghost busters Ed and Lorraine Warren (Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga) are back on the case. After retiring following Lorraine's horrific encounter and vision at the Amityville house in 1976, they are called back into action by the church a year later when supernatural occurrences at a row house in Enfield, England present grave danger to a mother and her four children residing there. They reluctantly cross the Atlantic to see if they can assist the beleaguered brood.

The breakdown: When it comes to old school supernatural horror, director/co-writer James Wan remains the modern master. He executes classic chills and thrills with such aplomb and visual panache it's as if they had never been done before. *The Conjuring 2* amps up the fear level over the first outing while summoning needed comic relief. The clear love that the Warrens have for each other also raises the stakes, allowing us to be afraid not just of the

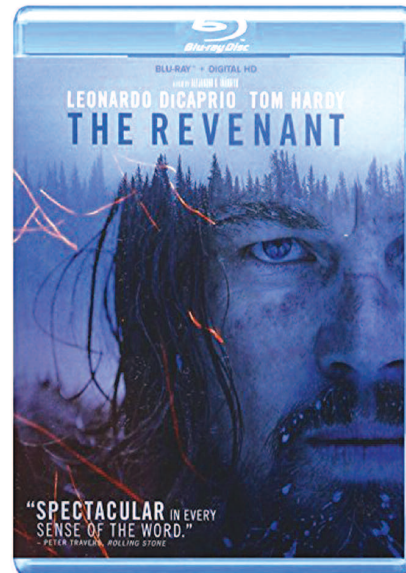


evil entity at work but of the possibility that one of them could be killed. If this is to be Wan's last horror entry for a while—he has major Hollywood commitments like *Aquaman* ahead—at least we can watch it more than once. There's also a featurette offered about the real-life event that the story is based upon. A spinoff about the film's demonic presence is reportedly in development with Wan co-producing.

ZACHARY BASS vs. HUGH GLASS

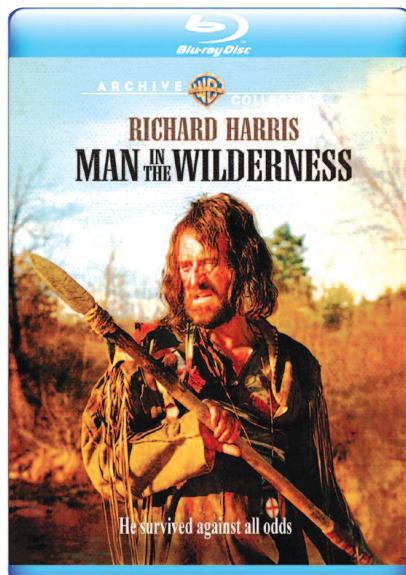
The real-life story of fur trapper Hugh Glass has provided fodder for no less than four films. It's easy to see why: his tale of surviving a bear attack but being left for dead by his trapper cohorts makes for a great legend, and it is one that won Leonardo DiCaprio an Oscar for Best Actor in *The Revenant* (2015). But an earlier telling of the tale (1971's *Man In The Wilderness*, just released on Blu-ray) has him called Zachary Bass and played by the late, great Richard Harris. In both fictional stories, Glass/Bass is traveling with a fur trapping expedition seeking to escape the wilderness in the Pacific Northwest at the onset of winter. They seek to sell their bounty for top dollar. After he is mauled by a bear, two trappers stay behind to tend to him and give him a proper burial, but leave him for dead for fear of an Indian attack. Glass/Bass survives, then regains his strength and seeks out his greedy associates to enact revenge.

There is a vast difference between the two films beyond just the plot perspective. *The Revenant* has a bigger budget to play with, a giant Indian siege scene for an action-fueled opening, and some gorgeous overhead shots that give its tale a truly epic feel. The CGI bear attack is more startling than the one in *Man In The Wilderness*, which intercuts real bear and fake bear footage to the best of its ability. Yet despite obvious budgetary advantages and the fact that it was shot in some beautiful, remote



locations—director/co-writer Alejandro G. Iñárritu is overly enamored with his visuals—*The Revenant* lacks the storytelling and character development of its counterpart (which also features some great landscapes). The Richard Harris film, directed by Richard C. Sarafian and written by Jack DeWitt, delivers flashbacks focusing on Bass' strict religious upbringing (leading to his contempt for God) and his love for his previously pregnant wife (who it is implied dies giving birth to their young son). We also witness moments of tenderness and compassion shine through despite the severity of his current situation. DiCaprio's Glass has a minimal backstory involving a deceased Pawnee mother to his young adult son Hawk, who is murdered on the expedition by one of the trappers. But we inexplicably learn little about him, then, and why we should be engaged by them in a film that runs an hour longer than its earlier counterpart. At least in Harris' version, his young son waiting for him at home is a reason to survive beyond just revenge. The conclusion is less overtly dramatic than *The Revenant*, but it offers more food for thought.

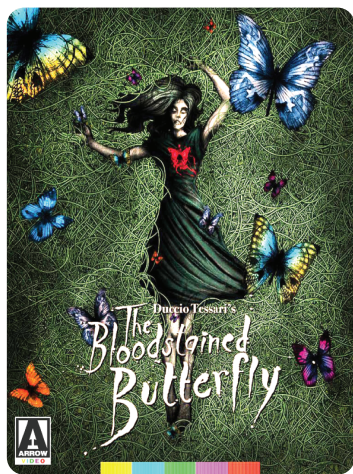
In the end, *Man In The Wilderness* is a more compelling movie. Harris truly seems like the kind of man who could endure crossing a harsh landscape with life threatening wounds, and the story feels more genuine. An added bonus: a boat hauled on wagons by 22 mules as the trappers head for the Missouri River. It's a great set piece, no CGI assistance required. I wish there had been some visual documentation of the film discovered for inclusion, but I suppose one can research how it all went down.



THE BLOODSTAINED BUTTERFLY (1971)

The set up: After he is seen fleeing the locale of a murder, sports TV personality Allesandro Marchi (Giancarlo Sbragia) is incarcerated for homicide. But when another killing occurs after he is jailed, the police are embarrassed and must hunt down the real culprit responsible.

The breakdown: *The Bloodstained Butterfly* is an unusual entry in the giallo genre as it features less arterial spray than many of its '70s peers, focusing on its courtroom drama, snaking plot twists, and sleazy underbelly. Duccio Tessari's film also suffers from the same malady as similar Italian thrillers wherein the characters are not developed enough for us to feel as invested in them as we should. The film does serve up some striking imagery from cinematographer Carlo Carlini, and despite a meandering narrative, the



finale's unusual twist and emotionally charged confrontation offer a satisfyingly off-kilter conclusion. This is definitely a movie for giallo completists, who should find some enjoyment within its dark drama. Arrow delivers a bevy of bonus material for diehard fans.

THE NICE GUYS (2016)

The set up: After initially butting heads over the pursuit of a mysterious young woman who may be connected to the death of a porn star, a P.I. (Ryan Gosling) and hired muscle (Russell Crowe) set about locating her when they realize that her life is endangered. Their winding quest becomes treacherous as they ascertain who to trust, try to avoid getting killed, and ultimately decide if their hunt is worth risking their lives for.

The breakdown: Director/co-writer Shane Black (*Iron Man 3*) takes a page from his 2005 film *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* as he mixes up noir style with a character driven story and an ultimately sinister plot. Much of the focus of the film is the interplay between Gosling and Crowe, who have a good chemistry despite working with a slightly convoluted narrative. (*White Collar*'s Matt Bomer is on point



as vicious hit man John Boy.) Not nearly as accolade worthy as its Rotten Tomatoes rating would suggest, *The Nice Guys* does get the sleazy '70s Hollywood tone right even though it unnecessarily pushes hard boiled dramedy into *Die Hard* territory during its explosive apex.

DEATHGASM (2015)

A suburban New Zealand death metal band that includes a cool rocker, two nerds, and a bullied metal outcast named Brodie perform a metal dirge called "The Black Hymn" and unintentionally invoke the coming of a demon named Aeloth. Most of the town becomes possessed by evil forces, which leads to our heroes battling them in a gore-on-steroids splatter blitz that proudly invokes *Evil Dead 2*. That's brutal as fuck, as they'd say. Despite the low budget feel, writer-director Jason Lei Howden makes the most of what he's got, displaying his reverence for both blood drenched horror and raging metal while lovingly satirizing both. Any film that can reference King Diamond, Judas Priest, and Manowar, include music from Emperor frontman Ihsahn, and pull off a romantic ice cream scene with a black metal boy and his sweet girl gets props in my book.

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