



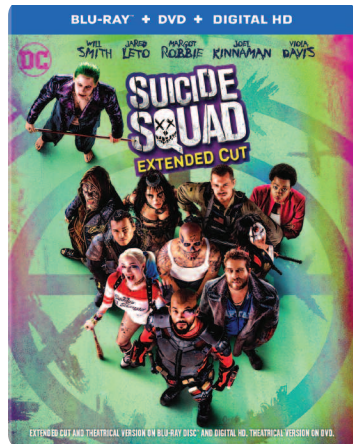
# QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

## SUICIDE SQUAD Extended Cut (2016)

**The set-up:** With Superman dead, the U.S. government authorizes a task force of bad guys to take down dangerous threats from fellow meta-humans. Manipulated due to explosives implanted in their bodies, Deadshot, Harley Quinn, and their once incarcerated criminal comrades find themselves “enlisted” to take on the Enchantress and her supernatural army before they can take over the world. Piece of cake, right?

**The breakdown:** Two major failings of the DC Cinematic Universe have been struggling with the right tone (too much dark, too little light) and chaotic character rosters without enough backstory or development. Those issues are front and center in David Ayer’s take on this antihero assembly, which has its moments but struggles to rise above a convoluted script. Flaunting Harley Quinn’s sexuality is a mere

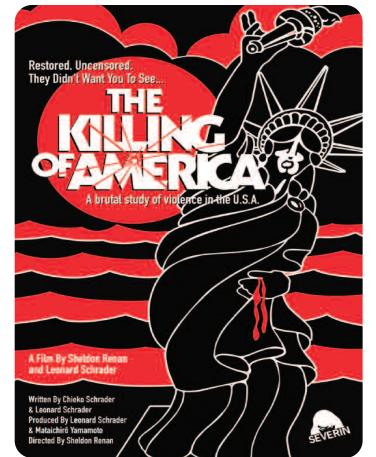


distraction, and Jared Leto’s Joker is weird yet underwhelming. The Extended Cut fleshes out the individual stories more—the bar scene before the storm is the type of scene the film needed more of—but we still cannot justify Harley’s deranged love for the Joker, which is an integral part of the story. Will Smith gets to shine as Deadshot; too bad his castmates were not given equal care.

## THE KILLING OF AMERICA (1982)

**The set-up:** In this little seen Japanese/American documentary co-production, an encapsulated history of American gun violence (and violence in general), from the assassination of JFK through to the murder of John Lennon, is explored as the filmmakers show explore America’s homicidal impulses have become increasingly more unfiltered and public. Action movie gunplay is one thing; witnessing it in the flesh and feeling the real-life effects of such attacks is another. News stories, morgue footage, filmed violence, fresh interviews, and an ominous narration keep *The Killing Of America* compelling 35 years later.

**The breakdown:** Co-produced by the late Leonard Schrader (brother of director Paul Schrader), *The Killing Of America* did not receive a U.S. release due to its controversial nature and graphic imagery. It’s a shame because the film was so prophetic it is disturbing. Some of the situations today might seem tame given the weekly mass killings we have become sadly accustomed to, but the raw, lower res nature of

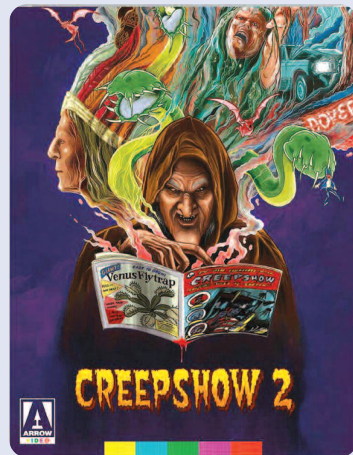


the footage will make an indelible impression. The bonus features include interviews with the director and editor, and the behind-the-scenes stories they have really illuminate the state of denial that America was in back then (and unfortunately continues to be). One really creepy moment actually happened off camera—director Sheldon Renan was interviewing serial killer Ed Kemper, who told him during a break in filming that he had killed Renan in his mind. Welcome to the psychological underbelly of America.

## CREEPSHOW 2 (1987)

**The set-up:** Three live action terror tales and an animated wraparound segment delve into spooky scenarios—a wooden Indian seeks revenge against criminals, an oil-like ooze consumes people on a lake, a woman is stalked by the corpse of the hitchhiker she plowed down, and a boy seeks revenge against his bullying peers.

**The breakdown:** While this low budget follow-up to one of the ‘80s greatest horror movies is neither as good as the original nor essential viewing, it’s not bad either. Original director George Romero returns to pen the screenplay based on Stephen King short stories, and while they do not serve up the gruesome glee of the first flick they are decent. “The Raft” is actually the standout with a grimly intense ending, and the latex outfit for the wooden Indian come to life remains striking three decades later. It’s too

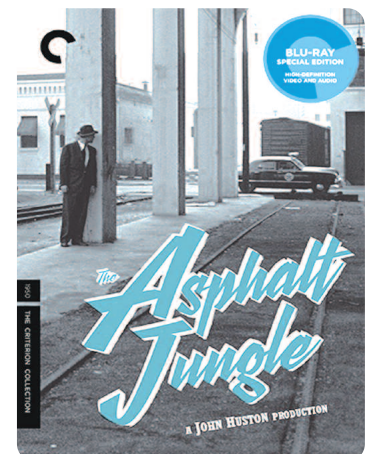


bad budget and script limitations kept the filmmakers from doing more, but the special features delve into the making of this sequel and show how much of a challenge director Michael Gornick and the FX team had.

## THE ASPHALT JUNGLE (1950)

**The set-up:** In co-writer/director John Huston’s noir crime caper, adapted from the W.R. Burnett novel of the same name, a freshly paroled career criminal (Sam Jaffe) approaches a crooked lawyer (Louis Calhern) about plans for a major jewel heist. While the initial set-up seems promising, unforeseen circumstances and underhandedness lead to a power struggle between key players as well as an intense police manhunt. Sterling Hayden’s washed up con helps us connect to this den of thieves by offering a character that is not as hard as he initially appears, with a backstory that underlines the tragedy of many such lives.

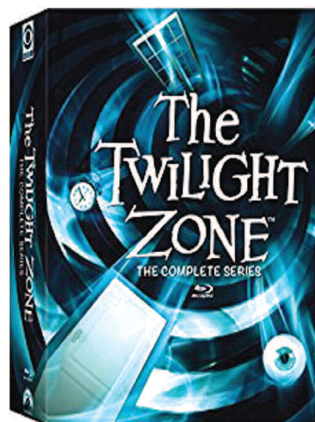
**The breakdown:** Huston assembled a superlative cast for this crime drama, including Hayden, Jaffe, Calhern, and a young Marilyn Monroe in her breakout role. What helps this dark drama stand out is Huston’s well choreographed scenes which rely on as few camera angles and little editing as possible, even during moments of violence, lending greater grittiness to the narrative.



*The Asphalt Jungle* is enlivened by sharp dialogue and smart performances. In a vintage clip, Huston discusses how each character lives for their vice and adds, “You may not admire these people, but I think they’ll fascinate you.” Film noir historian Eddie Muller views this as “the quintessential crime film” as it shows how normal society and the underworld are similar in many ways. Hardened criminals, they’re just like us!

## THE TWILIGHT ZONE: The Complete Series on Blu-ray (1959-1964)

All five seasons of Rod Serling’s famed anthology show took on a variety of topics and characters that often epitomized the old adage “be careful what you wish for”. Beautifully filmed in black and white and meticulously preserved over the years, the 156 episodes featured major Hollywood stars like Robert Redford, Jack Klugman, Dennis Hopper, Bill Bixby, Leonard Nimoy, Burt Reynolds, Martin Landau, Telly Savalas, and William Shatner in their younger days. Sterling writers like Serling, Richard Matheson, and Ray Bradbury cleverly crafted tales both original and adapted about a wide range of topics (like prejudice, paranoia, greed, and narcissism) and concepts (such as time travel, aliens, and misuse of advanced technology) in fantasy, sci-fi, horror, and psychological thriller settings. They still bear a gold standard that few shows have matched.



This is not the first time the series has come out on Blu-ray, but this collection includes all the special features found on the separate season sets, including commentaries, isolated scores, vintage interviews, radio plays, and the original, rarely aired pilot “Time Element”. The downside to this set is the hard shell package holding all 25 discs on a flimsy plastic spine. Handle with care. But as far as value for the money (\$79.99), it can’t be beat.

## BLACK MIRROR

Charlie Brooker’s brilliant anthology series about technology gone awry, picked up for a third season by Netflix following two on British television, presents us with cautionary tales about what could happen if we let the darkest parts of our psyche merge with the machines we love so dearly. No matter how outrageous some of the scenarios get—and the show tackles everything from Virtual Reality mayhem to Artificial Intelligence manipulation—they still make you think about the moral implications within each tale. There is little hope to be found in these well written and emotionally incendiary stories; perhaps that’s the point. You might be tempted to unplug a lot more from online immersion and simply enjoy life in analog, the way it was originally intended.

Netflix Fix:

