

### Good for the soul

A viable double bill with Alfred Hitchcock's 1953 **I Confess**, the 1939 RKO Pictures production directed by the always dependable John Farrow, **Full Confession**, released by Warner Home Video as an *Archive Collection* title (UPC#888574535333, \$22), is about a priest, played by Joseph Calleia, who hears a confession to a murder, but can take no action when another member of his congregation is charged with the killing and sent to Death Row. Victor McLaughlin is the killer, and Barry Fitzgerald is the innocent man who has been accused of the crime. Made in another era and without Hitchcock's subversive attitude, the 73-minute film is simpler in its resolution, but the emotions it explores are still quite powerful, Farrow provides an effective pace for the narrative and the movie's psychological depth is compelling.

The full screen black-and-white picture is a bit grainy and worn, but workable, and the monophonic sound is adequate. There is no captioning

### Unraveling cop

The conclusion of the Arrow Video Blu-ray release, **The Ghoul** (UPC#760137043782, \$30), is fairly clever, and encourages you to return immediately to the beginning of the film, where you will definitely see and hear things you didn't appreciate the first time through. Unfortunately, most of the 85-minute film is barely worth suffering through, and the ending is not so clever that you can't anticipate it well in advance. To give a literal report on how the narrative unfolds, Tom Meeten is a cop who finds a connection between the suspect in a horrible crime and a therapist, going undercover as a patient to investigate further. His therapy, however, puts him in touch with his own demons, and his investigation becomes more and more convoluted as he begins to psychologically unravel. Produced in 2016, the film, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, looks slick and glossy on the Blu-ray, and the DTS sound has an excellent surround mix, with many enveloping and involving directional effects. None of that really helps, however, and the drama feels more pretentious, and becomes less and less interesting, as it proceeds.

There are optional English subtitles and a trailer. The director, Gareth Tunley, Meeten and producer Jack Guffmann supply a fairly good commentary. This was their first feature film and they do their best to share what they weren't expecting to learn, from budgetary challenges to lighting problems. "We decided to make this film, and then we sort of found out how to do it as we went, in a way, and we couldn't have done without lots of advice from people, as well. We didn't really know that much." A 36-minute featurette contains interviews with a number of members from the cast and crew, many of whom came from the same comedy group, which they tend to talk about as much as they talk about the film.

Finally, there is a very witty 2013 short film, running 9 minutes, entitled *The Baron*, about a man who tries to make his wicked daydreams come true and fails rather miserably. Tunley and Meeten supply a commentary for it, as well, talking about how it was made and what they hoped it would accomplish.

### Another round with Dead

Tsunamis of blood and guts fly every which way in the marvelously gross and amusing TV series available from Lionsgate, **Ash vs Evil Dead Season 2** (UPC#031398268062, \$35). We reviewed the first season in Feb 17, and our one concern approaching **Season 2** was whether the show's creators could keep it fresh and funny for another round. Well, they certainly have. To be sure, the show's outrageousness is less impactful as it moves forward, but there are plenty of other witty twists and turns to compensate. Near the end of **Season 2**, for example, the heroes return to the Eighties, and so there are all sorts of funny time travel gags mixed in with everything else. Bruce Campbell stars as the egocentric hero, who is saving the earth from demons and other evil forces that he himself accidentally released. And he continues to release them as often as he bottles them up. Dana DeLorenzo, Ray Santiago and Lucy Lawless co-star. Each episode runs about a half hour, and is pretty much loaded from beginning to end with horrors upon horrors. The show has a nightmarish setting, although everything is then exaggerated so much that it is riotously funny rather than scary. And guts are everywhere. Think of the grossest thing you can possibly imagine, and they've not only done it at some point, they've made it grosser. Spread on two platters through ten episodes, the season, originally broadcast in 2016, has the heroes trying to retrieve the book that holds all of the spells to control the evil forces, and then battling a demonic villain when he finally tricks them into giving it to him. There are digressions with other evil creatures (including a bit with a possessed car that shows you how **Christine** should have been done), and Lee Majors appears as the father of Campbell's character, which is amusing even before they start insulting one another. There is also an impressive and clever two-episode arc that presents the possibility the whole thing may only be in the hero's head.

The season runs 267 minutes, and each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is crisply detailed, and the action is clear during the many scenes set in quasi darkness. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a basic but enjoyable separation mix. There are alternate French and Spanish tracks in standard stereo, optional English and Spanish subtitles, and 43 minutes of passable production featurettes, most of which run less than two minutes, with no 'Play All' option.

With no real help from the menu screen, six episodes have commentary tracks. To find them, you have to select the individual episodes on the 'Episodes' option, and then, either the episode will start, or another screen will come up to ask if you wish to activate the commentary. To save you the trouble however, we have done all of the grunt work for you. The first three episodes on the first platter have commentaries, and the first and last two episodes on the second platter have them. All of them feature various combinations of the cast and the production crew, with DeLorenzo and Lawless on every one. While they may joke around a lot, they somehow manage to slip in decent information about their experiences on the set, the show's strategies and the other players. On Majors: "Thankfully Lee, and you guys all know Lee now, you know, this is not his bag. Lee is like, you know, he does movies for the Disney channel and he makes, you know, home movies for good entertainment people. He doesn't really do this horror stuff. So we offered him the role and he said, 'Well, let me see it.' So he watched the whole first season and he said he he binged it, and laughed his [butt] off, so he said, 'Yeah, let's do this.'"

### Crisis of faith

Paolo Sorrentino is a god. His most recent two films, **The Great Beauty** and **Youth**, were not only pinnacles of modern cinematic expression, they were enormously entertaining, cerebrally and viscerally. So it is with great sadness, wrapped in a crisis of faith, that we must report his ten-episode 2017 HBO series released by HBO Video, **The Young Pope** (UPC# 883929587575, \$50), is a complete stinker. Sorrentino's sense of style is unfettered. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is fantastic, with many directional effects, rapturous dimensionality and marvelous swings in volume levels. Visually, the show is also dazzling, with upside-down camera angles and everything else. Its replications of and substitutions for the Vatican are incredible (the production design and cinematography deserved their Emmy nominations). But the show never feels true (at one point, the pope goes to visit the newborn baby of a staff member, and never even thinks about blessing the child). It is either a humorless comedy, an oblique satire, or a flaccid and direction-less drama that never gains momentum, even as it builds to its final episode and characters start to die.

Jude Law portrays a forty-something cardinal who has just been selected as pope when the series begins. He is snotty, dogmatically conservative, and attempts to instill a mystique in his office by hiding his image from the public. He gradually restructures his administrative team—everything in the show is gradual—and confronts different problems that he eventually resolves on his own terms. Silvio Orlando is fairly enjoyable as his devious and somewhat unsupportive chief assistant, and James Cromwell portrays his elderly mentor, who had hoped to become pope himself. There are also flashbacks to his strange childhood as an orphan, with Diane Keaton—who has never, ever given more than a journeyman performance in a drama, at best—playing the elderly version of the nun who raised him and has now been appointed as his personal aide.

The story goes nowhere, and if it is meant to be satirical, its satire will only be appreciated by those steeped in the ways of the church. And yet, it plays as if it is entirely unknowledgeable of how the church functions. While presenting a completely believable and fascinating presentation of what the Pope's living quarters are probably like, it utterly fails to present, in any way, shape or form, a believable depiction of how the Pope acts when he is within those quarters. So what is the point? After ten episodes and a resolute conclusion, you are as unsure as you are after the end of the first episode. There are simplified discussions of faith and atheism, counterpointed by what are—although too scattered to accumulate with any significance—the show's best moments, when genuine miracles occur, but the program hardly seems to be about belief at all, much less Catholicism. And in the center of everything is Law, who is a problematic movie star even when you do sort of like him in a part, and is utterly grating here. His character isn't likeable—he also smokes, which is irritating even if you can't smell it, but that is the level of the show's satire—and to spend all of those hours with him is trying. It's not *Golgotha*, but it feels like it anyway.

The show is spread across three platters running a total of 569 minutes, and each platter has a 'Play All' option. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Like the sound, the image looks super, and is one of the show's few genuine selling points. There is an alternate Spanish track in standard stereo, optional English and Spanish subtitles, and 29 minutes of promotional featurettes with snippets of behind-the-scenes footage.