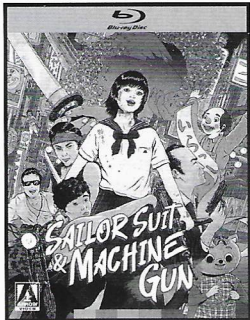


DVDementia

Fusing '70s Japanese gangster cinema trappings onto a schoolgirl coming-of-age drama, director Shinji Sômai's delightfully offbeat 1981 feature **SAILOR SUIT AND MACHINE GUN** [Sêrafuku to Kikanjû] makes its long overdue US Blu-ray debut via **Arrow Video**... When her father dies, teenaged Izumi Hoshi (future pop idol Hiroko Yakushimaru) — an outwardly ordinary student, followed around by several fawning grade-school boys — is surprised to learn she's now next in line to be the boss of a small, highly loyal, yet somewhat incompetent Yakuza clan. Reluctantly accepting this absurd honor, sailor-suited Izumi quickly experiences the highs and lows of her new position. Sure, she redecorates the gang's headquarters, stays out late drinking and partying with her four-man crew and grabs a lift from a passing biker gang, but when one of her gang minions is murdered and unceremoniously dumped onto their doorstep, this spunky "little girl" realizes just how dangerous the criminal world can get — and pushes back! Meanwhile, its somewhat convoluted story evolves into a tangle of multiple Yakuza factions, the search for a missing cache of heroin, a brutal police detective, a boss' wayward daughter, as well as Izumi kidnapped by a sadistic rival. Based on a novel by Jirô Akagawa, Sômai nimbly juggles the unexpected twists and



abrupt shifts in tone — from lighthearted and silly, to deadly serious — while Yakushimaru brings charm to the proceedings, as Izumi faces each obstacle with her unique mix of youthful moxie and clueless innocence (even when finally brandishing her titular machine gun), with ingratiating support from her diverse assortment of faithful soldiers-turned-family... The Blu-ray contains both the 111-minute theatrical version, as well as a 130-minute director's cut (adding Izumi's dinner with another Yakuza chairman, where she's almost raped, and getting served monkey brains by a psychotic boss); a new 50-minute featurette about the film and its director; and a booklet which includes an interview between Yakushimaru and **SAILOR SUIT**'s assistant director Kiyoshi Kurosawa.

I grew up during the rise of the made-for-TV movie, so it was a blast to relive that era with **PRIMETIME PANIC (Fun City Editions)**, a trio of early-'80s telefilms. First up is the overripe 1982 melodrama **DREAMS DON'T DIE**, which premiered on ABC-TV. Directed by Roger Young, it's a grab bag of eighties clichés centered around two struggling Brooklyn teenagers, but also provides loads of potent nostalgia for anyone who fondly recalls New York City's Ed Koch era. Ike Eisenmann (**ESCAPE TO WITCH MOUNTAIN**) stars as 17-year-old graffiti artist Danny Baker, who expresses himself by vandalizing subway cars with his "King 65" tag. Trini Alvarado plays his girlfriend Teresa, a foster kid so desperate to ditch her life that she accepts a limo ride from Kirk (Israel Juarbe), a puce-suited teenage drug dealer who offers to make Teresa rich if she helps him sell dope. How ludicrously out of touch is this story?

The sole good guy is a caring NYPD patrolman (Paul Winfield) who urges Danny to stop being a "punk with a spray can," buys the kid a ticket to the Guggenheim and even gets him an interview with a posh Manhattan publisher. But when inevitable tragedy strikes, Danny concocts an asinine scheme to take down Kirk and his boss (James Broderick). Never the most nuanced actor, Eisenmann has to do most of the heavy lifting, while talented Alvarado (**TIMES SQUARE**) is stuck with the thankless role of a rather stupid, short-sighted 15-year-old. At its best, the production makes brilliant use of the NYC Transit System, as Danny sneaks about subway platforms and train yards after dark, working on his latest burners. But despite occasional moments of harsh, streetwise reality, the script's ultimate, uplifting-fairy-tale agenda has it veering awfully close to Afterschool Special territory. Extras include a commentary with FCE's Jonathan Hertzberg and graffiti historian Dino Proserpio... Next we have 1983's amusingly tawdry **DEATH RIDE TO OSAKA**, in which a gullible young woman gets a taste of white slavery and prostitution in Japan. Directed by Jonathan Kaplan, it was first telecast on NBC as **GIRLS OF THE WHITE ORCHID**, but unlike the original TV version, this print adds a little gratuitous nudity for foreign markets. Carol Heath (21-year-old Jennifer Jason Leigh) moved from Omaha to LA in hopes of breaking into the music biz, only to end up as a waitress. After answering a dubious classified ad, she's promptly offered a two-month performing gig and one-way plane ticket to the "mysterious Orient." But instead of fame and glamour, naive Carol finds herself working at a garish Tokyo nightclub called The White Orchid, warbling off-key disco renditions of "Heat Wave" and ordered to be 'courteous' if any inebriated male customer requests some 'one-on-one' time in the club's back room. Our reluctant newcomer refuses to put out, but the last girl who objected was transferred to "Osaka" and never heard from again. Ann Jillian co-stars as lead dancer Marilyn, who guides Carol through her workplace responsibilities whenever she isn't cheesily strutting her stuff on stage. Thomas Byrd (who was currently starring on NBC's short-lived country-music drama **BOONE**) is Carol's hometown boyfriend, a flavorless meat-head desperate to locate his missing sweetie. At its core, this is standard exploitation packed with horrendous Japanese stereotypes (horny salarymen, corrupt police, plus Mako as the nightclub's abusive owner), but Leigh manages to make Carol vulnerable, sympathetic and genuine — right down to her seriously mediocre singing — while bringing the only credibility to this sordid project. Extras include a commentary by Lars Nilsen and an interview with Kaplan about the chaotic production... Saving the very best for last, director Joseph Sargent's thoughtful, 1981 coming-of-age drama **FREEDOM**, telecast on ABC-TV, features a touching performance by 21-year-old Mare Winningham (who'd won a Supporting Actress Emmy a year



earlier for the Sargent-directed **AMBER WAVES**) as a troubled but talented teenager. 15-year-old Lucy Bellow (Winningham) is a habitual runaway who has dreams of being a singer/songwriter and instinctively rebels against anyone who tries to control her life. After becoming a legally emancipated minor, she gets her own place, goes to school and everything seems fairly normal. That is, until Lucy stumbles upon a traveling carnival, befriends its rowdy makeshift family (including Peter Horton, Taylor Negron and J. Pat O'Malley as the carnies) and joins them on the road. Adopting their transient lifestyle — sleeping in the concession booths, partying during off-hours, breaking down the attractions and moving to a new town, and avoiding any long-term ties — she deals with a little heartbreak, learns about the real world and eventually discovers her own path. With all of her impromptu bad decisions, Lucy could've easily been painted as just another entitled screw-up, but the script by Barbara Turner (loosely based on the experiences of her own daughter, Carrie Ann Morrow, older sister of Jennifer Jason Leigh) is refreshingly nonjudgmental, even when it comes to adults like Lucy's divorced dad (Roy Thinnes), mom's boyfriend (Tony Bill), or the wayward teen's contentious relationship with her mother (Jennifer Warren). They're all just flawed individuals struggling to do their best. Winningham's wonderfully naturalistic performance makes Lucy introspective beyond her years, while also showing off her exceptional vocal skills by singing six original songs contributed by Janis Ian. The Blu-ray includes a commentary by Amanda Reyes and an interview with Andrea Adams, Turner's granddaughter.

Elvis Presley had a horrendously spotty track record when it came to his feature film gigs, but his G-rated, 1969 inner city melodrama **CHANGE OF HABIT (Kino Lorber Studio Classics)** is, without question, the easiest to ridicule. Although it boasted slightly grittier surface trappings and superficially tackled modern-day problems, the overall film was still squeaky-clean at its core. The times might've been a-changin' across America, but "The King" was still content to warble insipid pop tunes like "Have a Happy" while riding on a carousel. No surprise, this stupendously wrong-headed project was 34-year-old Presley's final dramatic acting role... Elvis plays Dr. John Carpenter, a hip physician who runs a free clinic in the middle of Los Angeles' crime-ridden (obviously backlot) ghetto. During his off-hours, he entertains neighbors by crooning "Rubberneckin'." Mary Tyler Moore, continuing her string of post-DICK VAN DYKE SHOW big-screen duds, is comely young nun Sister Michelle, who — accompanied by Sisters Irene (Barbara McNair) and Barbara (Jane Elliot) — strip off their habits and slip into street clothes in order to experience real life by working undercover as nurses for Carpenter's clinic. Meanwhile, our clueless, porkchop-sideburned Doc wonders why all three of these foxy chicks are so weird and, later, why Michelle doesn't respond to

