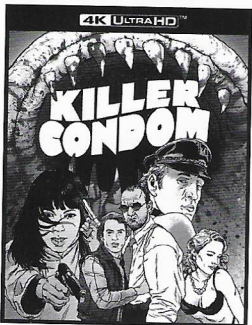


DVDementia

Initially released in the US by Troma in 1997, director Martin Walz's outrageous Swiss-German black comedy **KILLER CONDOM** [*Kondom des Grauens*] has resurfaced for Vinegar Syndrome's new 3-disc 4K/Blu-ray set containing both the film's original theatrical version and an extended uncut print. Based on a comic by Ralf König (who also co-wrote the screenplay with Walz) and set in a gloriously seedy Manhattan

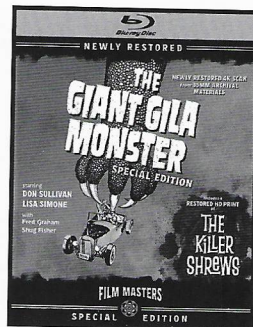


(though all of its characters speak German with English subtitles), it's a stylish mix of hard-boiled police investigation, monsters on the loose and a celebration of sexuality in all of its forms... Udo Samel stars as Luigi Mackeroni, a gruff, trench-coated NYPD detective who's also homo-

sexual. When several patrons of Times Square's appropriately-named Hotel Quickie are hospitalized with missing penises, Luigi checks out this queer hotspot (while making time for his own hook-up with a handsome hustler). Although our cop nearly becomes a cock-munching prophylactic's latest victim, no one on the force believes his wild claims. Nevertheless, Mackeroni is determined to track down the villain behind these razor-toothed "pecker-biters," as he also deals with a homophobic partner going undercover (a la *CRUISING*) into the city's S&M scene, a transvestite ex-cop, a promiscuous presidential candidate, and a sociopathic religious kook with a secret, mad scientist-style lair (which doesn't seem that improbable nowadays, considering all of the anti-LGBTQ wackos out there)... The production spent a little over a week in NYC, filming footage of Times Square, subways and parks, which was then cleverly integrated with German interiors. The ingenious special effects are courtesy of NEKROMANTIK's Jörg Buttgerit, with his disgusting little title creatures adorably wriggling about, baring their teeth and leaping at bare crotches. Samel impressively maintains a deadpan demeanor even during the story's most outrageous moments, and Walz brings humor and empathy to the story without succumbing to cheap campiness. It's also a potent AIDS metaphor (government officials ignore this crisis when it's only happening to "queers and hookers," but fly into action the moment 'normal' folks become victims), with an ultimate message of love and tolerance, whatever your sexual preference or personal beliefs... This set includes recent interviews with Walz, Buttgerit, actress Adriana Altaras, and actor Peter Lohmeyer; a new commentary by Walz and Buttgerit on the 119-minute version and an archival track with the pair on the 107-minute original cut; a making-of featurette; behind-the-scenes footage; and lots more.

Dedicated to the wonderful realm of drive-in cinema, **Film Masters** kicks off their catalog with 1959's Late Show staple **THE GIANT GILA MONSTER** and a newly restored 4K scan from 35mm archival materials. This independently-produced, shot-in-Texas horror cheapie — littered with small town teenagers, hot rods, flaccid

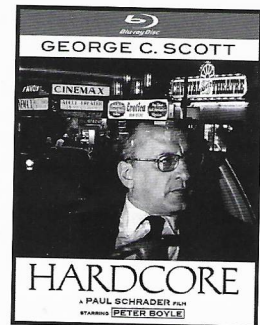
rock 'n' roll tunes, and an oversized creature on the prowl — was the directorial debut of Ray Kellogg (who'd spent the previous ten years working on special photographic effects for Hollywood studio pics). After witnessing a car attacked and tossed into a ravine by some huge, pissed-off monstrosity during a pre-credits sequence, we're introduced to our leads: hunky young mechanic and wannabe musician Chase Winstead (Don Sullivan), and his French girlfriend Lisa (Lisa Simone), who's in the US on a sponsorship and fearful of being sent back home by her wealthy, disapproving host. As more locals mysteriously vanish, their wrecked cars provide the only clues, since this beast enjoys running puny automobiles off country roads and eventually causes a full-blown train wreck. The story culminates at a teen dance hosted by disc jockey Steamroller Smith, with Chase crooning for the adoring crowd, the overgrown gila monster busting up this "platter party" and Chase's supply of nitroglycerine (kept back at his garage in quart mason jars and transported in speeding jalopies over bumpy rural roads) coming in handy against the creature. The script doesn't even bother to concoct a half-assed reason for this mutation — it's simply an evolutionary fluke! — and the effects are amusingly crude, with the title "giant" played by a Mexican Bearded Lizard lethargically meandering about miniature sets and model cars. The Blu-ray includes a 2009 audio interview with Don Sullivan (who passed away in 2018) and a commentary by The Monster Party Podcast... In order to properly replicate the old-time drive-in experience, Film Masters includes a bonus disc containing Ray Kellogg's sophomore feature (and a personal favorite from my Monster Kid childhood), 1959's **THE KILLER SHREWS**.



Scripted by Jay Simms (also responsible for *GILA MONSTER*), a simple premise is stretched to its most entertainingly absurd limits. Handsome Captain Thorne Sherman (James Best, 20 years before playing *THE DUKES OF HAZZARD*'s Sheriff Rosco) is delivering a boatload of supplies to an isolated island facility where Dr. Craigis (Baruch Lumet), his assistants (including a pre-*GUNSMOKE* Ken Curtis, who also produced both cut-rate features) and pretty blonde daughter Ann (Miss Sweden 1956, Ingrid Goude) have spent the last nine months experimenting on tiny ravenous, mole-like shrews. The unforeseen result? Several hundred mutated, starving, highly-poisonous, enormous shrews (unconvincing played hyperactive dogs covered in shaggy carpeting, except for close-ups, which swap in mangy, snaggle-toothed puppets) are loose on the island — first devouring the team's livestock, then targeting the humans' walled compound. As these creatures begin to gnaw their way in, tensions grow amongst the trapped stock characters, but there's also time for flirtations between Thorne and Ann. The last 20 minutes of this tight 68-minute schlock-fest delivers plenty of fun,

frights and freaky imagery (such as the chattering shrews peering through knotholes in the walls), as the brighter humans concoct a make-shift escape plan and '50s audiences get everything they could possibly want in suspenseful, sci-fi/horror cheap thrills. Extras on this disc include a featurette on Ray Kellogg's career, vintage radio spots, plus a commentary by film professor Jason Ney. Both films are viewable in theatrical (1.85:1) or television (1.33:1) formats.

Paul Schrader took his second stab at directing with 1979's intriguing yet severely flawed **HARDCORE** (*Kino Lorber Studio Classics*). In comparison to his remarkable debut with *BLUE COLLAR* — not to mention, earlier screenplays for *TAXI DRIVER*, *THE YAKUZA* and *ROLLING THUNDER* — it's difficult not to be mildly disappointed. Its star, George C. Scott, is excessively hammy, Schrader's script is contrived and heavyhanded, but the film is also awash in amusingly sleazy ambiance... Exceedingly devout Michigan businessman Jake VanDorn (Scott) is so freaked out after his teenage daughter Kristin goes missing during a church convention in California that he



hires shady private detective Andy Mast (Peter Boyle) to locate her. Weeks later, Mast unearths a 8mm hardcore loop featuring VanDorn's runaway daughter, but with zero info about the people responsible. Heading to Los Angeles, VanDorn is determined to retrieve his kid, but also utterly clueless about the world of adult entertainment (e.g., Kristin's film was the *first* porno he'd ever seen!), as this uptight Midwesterner wanders through random massage parlors and dirty book stores, and later ludicrously poses as a novice porn financier. He also hires struggling adult actress Niki (Season Hubley) to help him gain access into the more sordid niches of the business, which eventually leads to underground snuff films and VanDorn literally busting through porn set walls in order to get to the truth... All of this is fairly entertaining, but it's also an extremely mixed bag. The film boasts exquisitely seedy locations, vibrantly captured by cinematographer Michael Chapman, and is pocked with genuine moments from its supporting roster (particularly Hubley — a standout as an older, savvy variation of *TAXI DRIVER*'s Iris). But it also suffers from hackneyed storytelling, unintentionally ridiculous sequences and a corny finale. The worst offender is Scott, whose unchecked, unapologetic overacting makes VanDorn's transition from sheltered, mild-mannered churchgoer to rage-filled, avenging action-hero never remotely plausible. The cast includes Tracey Walter as a porno shop clerk; Reb Brown is a bouncer; Gary Graham plays a creep with info about Kristin; plus Ed Begley, Jr. and Hal Williams are 'adult' actors (with recurring *SANFORD AND SON* cast member Williams hilarious as "Big Dick Blaque"). The Blu-ray includes two commentaries — one with Schrader, the other with film historians Lee Pfeiffer, Paul Scrabo and Eddy Friedfeld.