



CURRENT REVIEWS

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**Dead Before Dawn** (2011/Vivendi DVD)/**The Last House On The Left: Uncut** (1972/Atlas/Umbrella Import Region B Blu-ray)/**My Boo** (2013/MVD Visual DVD)/**Slither** (2006/Universal/Umbrella Import Region B Blu-ray)/**Stag** (2012/Vertical DVD)

Picture: C+/B-/C/B-/C Sound: C+/C+/C/B-/C Extras: C/C+/D/C-/C- Films: C/C+/C-/C-/C

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Region B Import Blu-rays of **Last House On The Left** and **Slither** are only available from Umbrella Entertainment, will only play on machines capable of that version of the format and can be ordered from the link below.

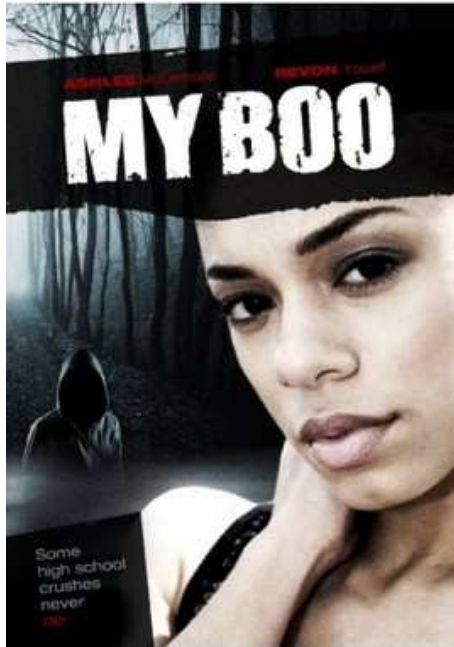
Now for some new and classic genre releases in time for Halloween 2013, et al...

Though not a great success, April Mullen's **Dead Before Dawn** (2011) is a high school horror comedy that actually grasps the concept of... comedy! Here, they have combined currently popular zombies with demons, resulting in Zemons! Funny and they almost make it work, plus some scenes on their own stand out a bit, but the problem is that despite there energy and the obvious fun all are having here, it never becomes a whole narrative the coheres into the world of the horror genre. **Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things** (reviewed elsewhere on this site) comes to mind as a version of this set-up that works.

In this one, there is a cursed skull in a pawn shop and its owner (Christopher Lloyd playing his nervous guy persona, not here enough either) warns them about. Of course, things go quickly wrong and it is a patchy 89 minutes. Mullen actually plays in the cast and with more thought and effort, this could have been the most popular horror comedy since **Shawn Of The Dead**, but it does not work out that way. At least it is close and fans might like it more than myself.

Extras include a Behind The Scenes featurette and Original Theatrical Trailer.

Wes Craven's **The Last House On The Left** (1972) continues its Blu-ray



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(2012/Magnolia/MagNet Blu-  
ray)  
> Dancing Ninja  
(2010/Inception Media Group  
DVD)  
> Kung Fu Panda: Legends  
Of Awesomeness - The  
Scorpion Sting  
(DreamWorks/Fox DVD)

THE CRAYONS THE LAST HOUSE ON THE BLOCK (2012) continues its Blu-ray arrivals in different countries and after a U.S. Release recently from MGM, Umbrella has come up with it in Australia and it is basically the same transfer material on both editions. We reviewed their import PAL DVD which at the time was better than any U.S. copy, but this new version is as definitive as it is going to get picture-wise unless someone gets crazy and spends a few million dollars to further save it.

Since my DVD review, a hideously offensive, cynical, horrid remake happened that thankfully no one liked and most would like to forget, further highlighting what does work here. However, I still find the film overrated and am still not Craven's biggest fan despite his talents. Sadly, 41+ years later, the tale of two gals lost in the woods, then abducted, tortured (pre-Torture Porn, so things have become worse cinematically as this is still more cinematic than anything in that cycle) and worse still has some cynicism and contempt to it no matter the "realism" intended.

Some of the shots and suspense to work, but a hatred for the counterculture (not to mention feminism) that always comes out of nowhere and is overdone still shocks people (I always get "what is that film's problem") and as compared to Pasolini's **Salò** (1975, reviewed on Criterion Blu-ray elsewhere on this site) has all kinds of short comings. It is remarkable that it was a success over so many similar films (the ad campaign at the time really helped out this one) being more convincing with the now long played-out "based on a true story" schtick. This now seems like an everyday event on the national news. Sad, but it has its fans and some scenes do work, so it is required viewing for anyone serious about the genre. I think the trailer is better than the film.

Extras still do not include that classic trailer, but we get expanded goodies including two feature length audio commentary tracks (one by Craven and Producer Sean S. Cunningham, the other by co-stars David Hess, Marc Sheffler & Fred Lincoln), two Behind The Scenes featurettes in *Celluloid Crime Of The Century* and *Scoring Last House*, Original U.S. & German Theatrical Trailers, Deleted Scene: Mari dying in lake, 14 minutes of Outtakes & Dailies, a 7 minutes-long Image Gallery and 8 minutes of *Forbidden Footage*.

Erica Hayes' **My Boo** (2013) is an African American thriller with the best horror title of late, but the cover (pictured above) is misleading. A good looking woman is on the cover with what looks like the ghost of her (implied-to-be-dead) lover unseen, looking like a ghost. Does he get killed and she assaulted, then he comes back as a disembodied hoodie for revenge, possibly with Trayvon Martin intertextual references? Is he a dead ghost? That title would work for such a story, but the cover is highly misleading.

Instead, there is a hooded figure going around killing people who is not the living dead and some crazy story is behind it including the killer is watching people on surveillance equipment. What we get is the Philip Noyce thriller **Sliver** (finally just issued on Blu-ray, if not uncut) on a very low budget with no suspense or point. If only they made a motion picture to go with the cover, then we might have had a breakthrough work.

There are no extras.

James Gunn's **Slither** (2006) has yet to be issued by Universal on Blu-ray in the U.S., but it somehow apparently is popular enough in Australia that Umbrella has issued it on Blu-ray. The lame tale of slimy creatures coming to kill everyone in their nice neighborhood stars Michael Rooker and Brenda James, but it is now a curio because Elizabeth Banks and Nathan Fillon have become bigger names in 7+ years. Too bad this is as silly and weak as ever. Is it an improvement over the U.S. HD-DVD?

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More on that below, but it does have the same extras including a Gunn/Fillon feature length audio commentary track, 7-part Behind The Scenes piece, 11 minutes of thankfully Deleted Scenes, 11 minutes of Extended Scenes and a 8-minutes Gag Reel.

That leaves us with the outright Brett Heard comedy **Stag** (2012) in which Donald Faison is pulling pranks at everyone else's stag parties, but he is going to get married and they intend to turn the tables on him for fun. Too bad the script does not grasp quite how to make this work, despite some good comic actors and energy, a problem **Dead Before Dawn** also has, but that was at least a bit more consistent and ambitious.

A mixed time killer at best, I kept hoping it would get better during its long 84 minutes, but the more it was predictable, the more any chance of picking up slowly died.

Extras include a Trailer.

The 1080p 1.85 X 1 digital High Definition image transfer on **Last House** is superior to the previously reviewed import PAL DVD and any previous US DVD we have seen, but it has some softness and the print can show its age, yet it is on par with the 1080i 1.85 X 1 digital High Definition image transfer on **Slither** which never looked good, has aged poorly and is no improvement over the long out-of-print U.S. HD-DVD. Still not available in the U.S. on Blu-ray, we can see why.

The anamorphically enhanced 1.85 X 1 image on **Dead** has some detail issues and other problems, but they are typical of the genre in this format, leaving the other two DVDs softer, less defined and with more motion blur than they should have.

The Dolby TrueHD 5.1 on **Slither** is the only lossless presentation here and is no major improvement over the lossy, obsolete Dolby Digital Plus 5.1 (remember that pumped up version of the old codec?) on the old HD-DVD. **Last House** retains the same lossy Dolby Digital 2.0 Mono the DVDs have had and it is the one aspect of the film that needs more attention. The owners need to get some money, go back to the original sound sources, clean them up and upgrade them with a new transfer. By default, it would improve the sound. The lossy Dolby Digital 5.1 on **Dead** is too much towards the front channels and cannot get ahead of **Last House** sonically, but the same kind of 5.1 mix on **Stag** is much more compressed, loud and worse overall, making it harder to watch. That leaves lossy Dolby Digital 2.0 sound on **Boo** barely stereo, on the weak side with some issues of its own and even having location audio issues, tying **Stag** for worst audio on the list.

To order either **Last House On The Left** and **Slither** on Umbrella import Region B Blu-ray, go to this link:

<http://www.umbrellaent.com.au/>

- Nicholas Sheffo

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