

ASIAN INVASION

ARROW VIDEO

(\$39.95 2-disc Blu-ray + DVD) 4/15
MASSACRE GUN (1967) B&W ♂♂♂♂
 D: Yasuharu Hasebe. Jo Shishido, Tatsuya
 Fuji, Jiro Okazaki, Hideaki Nitani, Takashi
 Kanda. 89 mins.

Mob boss Akazawa (Kanda) orders lieutenant Kuroda (Shishido) to kill a woman who also happens to be his lover. Kuroda carries out the hit, but his younger brother Saburo (Okazaki), who has been kept out of the gangster life until now, confronts Akazawa and refuses his support in the boxing ring. He is duly punished for this lack of respect, and in response Kuroda pulls out of the crime family. Hot-headed middle brother Eiji (Fuji) wants to take on Akazawa, and he soon gets his wish, as incidents pile up and Kuroda and his brothers are pulled into a war. Kuroda has no taste for the battle, particularly since he knows he will end up confronting his best friend Shirasaka (Nitani), the presumptive heir to Akazawa's power. Shirasaka is just as reluctant, but the machine is engaged and the plot moves inexorably to a final showdown that more than justifies the title (which, let's face it, is one of the Most Badass Titles Ever). All the expected tropes of a gangster tragedy are present and correct: the march of fate, more-than-brothers who will be forced to fight each other to the death, the law of unintended consequences enacted again and again, and so on. (Also, women treated as minor and/or disposable characters.) For all the beatings that punctuate the film, the plot feels quite stately, and there is at least one confusing moment (how Kuroda and Eiji escape from a certain death trap is never explained). But patience is rewarded by the spectacular finale—a bloody shoot-out on a deserted freeway that is as beautiful as it is violent. Arrow Video's presentation is gorgeous, perfectly capturing the ravishing black-and-white widescreen cinematography. Extras include an interview with Jo Shishido and a truly fascinating history of Nikkatsu Studios provided by film historian Tony Rayns.

—David Annandale

PATHFINDER ENTERTAINMENT

(\$24.98 DVD) 8/14

PHANTOM (2012) ♂♂

D: Jonathan Soler. Yuki Fujita, Masato
 Tsujioka. 76 mins.

A young woman in a going-nowhere job (holding up placards) and her boyfriend spend the night talking about their hopes and

fears. Will they find their place in the world? Will they find meaning in their lives? What is the meaning of identity? Is it stable or will it slip away? Will they avoid becoming living phantoms, having no effect on the world around them? Will they get better jobs? And so on. The visuals accompanying their mostly off-screen dialogues are a collage of urban life in Japan. There are some striking images, and one has the sense of director Soler's camera getting under the skin of the city, capturing daily life in all its often suffocating mundanity. There is more than an echo of *Koyaanisqatsi* in the approach. On the other hand, there is also a whiff of *Glen or Glenda?* in the accumulation of disconnected images and rather trite philosophizing. Though the film accurately reproduces the experience of overhearing alienated twenty-somethings having an all-night Deep Talk, a lot of what is said is almost as banal as the banality it condemns. There is very little here one hasn't heard, at length, before, and even at 76 minutes, the film feels long. At least, it does to my middle-aged sensibilities. Would an audience the same age as its characters find more to connect with? Possibly. In any event, the film is rigorously true to itself, and viewers will know within minutes if that works for them or not. ♂

—David Annandale

ASIAN UPDATE

Elsewhere in the Asian arena, Synapse Films releases Kurando Mitsutake's *Zatoichi* variation **Samurai Avenger: The Blind Wolf**, while Shout! Factory intros the same director's **Gun Woman** (\$24.95 each Blu-ray), starring Asami.

Well Go USA delivers the HK serial killer thriller **Cross** (\$24.98 DVD), starring Simon Yam as a murderous religious zealot, and the epic Tsui Hark adventure **The Taking of Tiger Mountain** (\$29.98), arriving in a Blu-ray featuring bonus cast and crew interviews. Pathfinder Entertainment issues the raw, gritty Yakuza psycho study **Osaka Violence** (\$24.98 DVD).

ITALIAN INVASION

By Nancy Naglin

VCI ENTERTAINMENT

(\$19.98 DVD) 4/15

WITHOUT PITY (1948) B&W ♂♂♂♂ 1/2

D: Alberto Lattuada. Carla Del Poggio, John
 Kitzmiller, Giulietta Masina, Folco Lulli, Pierre
 Claude, Lando Muzio, Daniel Jones. 90 mins.

From the opening moment of a black G.I., the armed M.P. Jerry Jackson (Kitzmiller, who made for himself a European screen career), chasing down a fleeing white suspect in heavily degraded and thoroughly corrupt postwar Italy, then, wounded in the encounter and meeting up by chance with impoverished Angela (Del Poggio), together, and provocatively alone, in a boxcar hurtling down the tracks to who knows where, you know this film, wherever it's going, is about only one thing: race. Maestro Federico Fellini, a noted screenwriter before turning to directing, could be expected to infuse this riveting gem with a seamless expose of black-market chicanery, human need, moth-eaten but still dapper dons and their gritty extortion and prostitution rings—all drenched (thanks to Aldo Tonti's cinematography) in a heady, nearly religious downbeat aura—but he also put the finger on the pulse of our ongoing prejudices. Angela, appealing in her impoverishment in a *Patch of Blue* way, is on a quest to find her missing brother but, not surprisingly, becomes dependent on, then employed by, the creepy, older pimp Pier Luigi (Claude). The clients, of course, are all American G.I.s, both white and black, finding in sex with debased white Italians an equality of sorts. Jackson locates Angela—again by accident—and both, out of place and reeling from the environment, innocently develop a friendship, then an enduring, near spiritual bond. Escape is on everyone's mind. The need for money—everything is bribes—drives the dream. A fellow prostitute, Mariella (Masina), makes it out—it costs a fortune—by boat. Meanwhile, Luigi's thugs keep bribing Americans to conveniently misplace truckloads of goods. Jackson is duped into meeting with the band, is held up, given money, and arrested for helping smugglers. If local lowlifes weren't enough, Fellini imports a fascinating, money-grubbing South American captain (Muzio) who adds spice to the club scenes. Jackson and Angela, now on the run, become ensnared in an exciting all-night chase to separate the captain from Luigi and both from the money they want for some kind of impossible future. It's Italian neo-realism with an American undertow: the trip is great but it never ends well. ♂

SEND TO A FRIEND!

Give a Gift Subscription to
The Phantom of the Movies'
VideoScope!

See page 6 for details.