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Sexploitation Explosion

04/24/2009

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This week, Madison takes a look at a huge stack of grindhouse, drive-in and even current films now hitting DVD shelves. The common factor? T&A!

I may be the world's easiest-to-please cineophile. Even the worst film out there can be redeemed by one of two things in my mind: Monsters and boobs. Both in the same film is a masterpiece. Just not boobs on the monster – that's just weird. Last time around on **Going Mad** I took a look at the recent spate of "creature features" seeing their lives extended via DVD release and this time, I'll focus on my other great cinema love/lust: The sexploitation film.

The sexploitation film is a widely-encompassing genre that began its roots in the more general exploitation movement. Early producers found that throwing some cleavage and short shorts into a film helped it sell. Once that became passe, they went further into toplessness, then fully nude and finally the "porno chic" era allowed explicit content. The sexploitation genre is splintered into many subgenres; the late 70s/early 80s teen sex comedy, women in prison films, Asian "pink" movies...hell, there are dozens – if not hundreds – of nunsploitation films. It's a genre just about all of us have been exposed to, a lot of us having been introduced to it by whatever was playing at 2 a.m. on Cinemax when we were twelve.

The DVD market has been virtually bursting of late with releases both vintage and recent of films dabbling in the sexploitation genre. Most of these are not generally considered "good films" but that's all in the eye of the beholder. Again, I'm not the most discerning viewer, so you can have a mediocre or even laughably bad movie, but throw a hot woman's bare chest in it for a few moments and it can make all the difference. Good or bad, there's plenty to find out there these days and for fans of them, it's a great time to own a DVD player.

One of the most prolific companies these days releasing both older and newer sexploitation films is Redemption, aka Salvation. Having made themselves known in the market early on with a line of (mostly) Jean Rollin films, Redemption has really made a niche with not only Rollin's films, but other European "sexy horror" films and more recent efforts that usually focus on the gothic aspects of sexuality. Three of Rollin's films are being released by the company as we speak - **Requiem For a Vampire** (actually an improved re-release), **Demoniacs**, and **The Escapees**. Rollin was famous for using soft-focus erotica interspersed into his horror films, and the selections here are no different. Of the three, **Requiem** is by far the most famous, with its bizarre tale of two female virgin clowns (!!!) who find themselves trapped in an old castle with a vampire coven. **Demoniacs** has two young womens' ghosts haunting their pirate rapists/killers, while **Escapees** has two (notice a pattern here?) asylum escapees falling in with a troupe of exotic dancers, with murderous results. On top of that, the latter features the ever-stunning Brigitte Lahaie, possibly the most beautiful woman ever to come out of France. The prints look great and while there may be some cuts (the internet is a very confused and tangled web regarding the actual original lengths of these films), it doesn't detract from their dreamy, hazy erotic horror. The special features on the three range from stills galleries and deleted scenes to new interviews with Rollin and **Requiem** actress Louise Dhour. Redemption hasn't been slacking in the new material department either. At the same time, they're releasing two films from this decade. A 2006 Finnish effort, **Succubus: The Demon** tries its best to retain the flavor of the earlier Eurotrash movement, but doesn't quite nail it. It's still an interesting little film, just not on par with its ancestors. One of the odder releases in the Redemption library is 2007's **Saint Francis**, which is touted as the feature film debut of former Marilyn Manson muse Dita Von Teese. With a cast that includes not only Ms. Von Teese, but Zalman King and porn queens Stephanie Swift and Sydnee Steele, it's also worth a watch, but be warned: Von Teese is not a great actress, hot though she undeniably is. Both discs have a crapload of special features that the purveyor (perv-eyor?) will find interesting for sure.

Anyone who's followed my reviews on this site (all, what, two of you?) know I adore the films of Tinto Brass. For decades, the man has created some of the most fun erotica around (*Caligula* doesn't count, that was an abomination on all counts), and with Cult Epics' release of his early (1968) murder-mystery effort **Deadly Sweet**,



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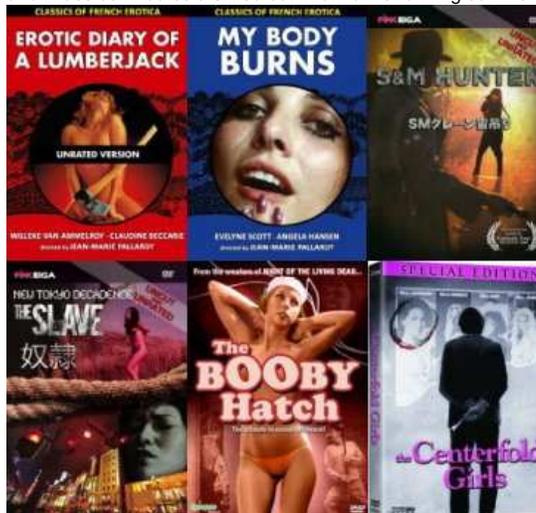
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it's interesting to see where he started from. Nowhere near as explicit as his later films, it actually has a real plot (convoluted though it may be), but it does feature the sweetly beautiful Swedish actress Ewa Aulin (looking like a better-fed Goldie Hawn) in the buff a few times. The plot gets a bit comic-bookish but the visually stunning print used is excellent (no joke, it's one of the cleanest prints I've ever seen for this type of film from that era) and Brass contributes a stilted but informative running commentary.



Switching back over to France for a second, we have a new vintage player on the field. A director I'm unfamiliar with – Jean-Marie Pallardy – is seeing a trio of his 1970s efforts hitting the States for the first time. I'm always eager to discover a new smut-maker, so these are a revelation of sorts. With titles like *Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack* and *My Body Burns*, you know there's probably something worth finding here and there are. Released on DVD by a company called MVD (not that you'd ever know it by looking at the cover jackets, there's nary a mention of a DVD company on them), these may suffer from full-frame releases.

Pallardy runs the gamut here between the two, with *Lumberjack* being a goofy T&A comedy about a Nobel-level professor who heads out to a country brothel for some fun while *My Body* takes a more serious approach, dealing with the true story of a village official who has to get married in order to get rid of rumors of his perverted ways, but his new wife's lesbian lover

doesn't really like the idea at all. Now, while the prints are full-screen, they look quite splendid, showing almost none of their true age. Both discs contain hundreds of photos from Pallardy's personal collection, trailers for the films in the series, and (unfortunately redundant) both have the same hour-long documentary about Pallardy. *Lumberjack* includes a section of deleted scenes that are a bit more explicit than found in the running cut. Both are fine little films in their own ways, and I look forward to discovering more Pallardy goodness in the future.

We've hit the French and Italian sides of the genre, so let's delve into the Japanese side with two new releases from a company I'm fairly unfamiliar with: PinkEiga. "Pink films" are basically the Japanese sexploitation subgenre, and for reasons I still haven't fully discerned, they seem to like their boobs and butts to be intertwined with a healthy (?) heaping of bondage and S&M thrown in. So it goes with *S&M Hunter* and *New Tokyo Decadence: The Slave*. Both films focus a lot on women bound up by rope and being psychologically tortured by their captors. To be honest, neither are really anything groundbreaking in the subgenre, but *S&M Hunter* gets points of some sort for making the titular character a superhero who saves the world by tying up women to get them off. I think. It didn't make a whole lot of sense to me, but again, who cares about plot? The prints look fine, but I wish the two, or either, had more substantial special features. Oh well.

With a finish to our international venture, we return to the good ol' USA to see how the yanks, uhm, handle their tits-and-ass films. And what better way to start than with a film actually called *The Booby Hatch*? Co-directed by *Night of the Living Dead*'s John Russo, this release from Synapse Films starts off with a bang, with a mock commercial for dildos. It's a set-up for the plot, in which a product tester for a line of adult novelty toys (how the hell do you sign up for that gig?) realizes he's starting to lose his passion for his job and thus, not able to keep things, uhm, up for said testing. It has its moments, but the comedy can be a bit lame at times and the film print used is slightly scratchy and grainy. The Synapse DVD includes an alternate version of the film (*The Liberation of Cherry Jankowski*) and a running commentary by Russo and his co-director as well as his co-producer. *The Booby Hatch* is okay, but it's weird knowing the guy who gave us gut-munching zombies turned to softcore porn less than a decade later.

On a more serious track is the newest offering from Dark Sky Films, *The Centerfold Girls*. Like many erotic thrillers after it, it deals with a psychopath targeting beautiful women; here, the murderer focuses on a group of girls who once posed for a particular mens' magazine. There's plenty of nudity and plenty of blood, but I've always been one of those people who try to keep the two separated, unless it's the dreamlike state that directors such as Rollin manage to combine them in. Here it's just gritty and unappealing. The film looks pretty good with only minimal grain, though and Dark Sky has included a few decent extras to the disc, such as a retrospective and even some isolated music cues. Fans of the sex-and-violence bent may be very pleased with the release.

This brings us to my favorite of the batch - *The Stewardesses*. The plot? A group of airline attendants have sex. Lots of sex. That's about it. With a dash of comedy, a touch of drama and lots of nubile women running around starkers, it's a perfect example of the genre and one of the go-to's for any collection (take that however you will). The two-disc edition from Shout Factory includes no less than three different versions of the film: The 3-D version, the 2-D version and even a black-and-white 3-D version! One of my favorite scenes doesn't actually include any sex or nudity: it's the prolonged scene in which two of the characters visit a local carnival. While at the time, it was mostly just used as a way to pad out the film by an extra 10 minutes or so, it does well to capture the flavor of the times (late Sixties) and really makes me wish I was there now. The 2-D print, while full-frame, isn't half bad at all (the 3-D is...well, I'll let others judge that, I've never been a big fan of these). There's a ton of extras on here (even the DVD jacket acknowledges this, simply listing them as "Tons of DVD extras" instead of listing



them separately. We get a history of 3-D filmmaking, a retrospective on the film, a trailer, deleted scenes and even an SCTV skit spoofing this and similar films.

Moving on from my favorite of the batch, we head to the absolute weirdest film on the list: **The Sinful Dwarf**. A cult classic in the realm of EuroTrash, it concerns a perverted dwarf and his mother keeping a harem of women captive as part of a white slave trade market. Sick and twisted, it's definitely the most f'ed up film reviewed so far on this list. Pretty girls though, but some seriously disturbing imagery abounds. Released on DVD by Severin Films, the disc includes the trailer, a couple of radio spots and a really funny bit where Severin's head John Severin goes to search out a cult film fan who wrote to Severin of his negative reaction to the news they'd be releasing the film. It's definitely a different angle to the special feature.

So that's a wrap-up of the "classic" exploitation films hitting shelves at this time. So where does that leave the here and now? Well, as evidenced by Redemption's two current efforts mentioned earlier, there's still a market for new sexploitation films and there's a plethora of companies out there looking to fill the niche. **Gone the Way of Flesh** is your typical no-budget slasher film – about a rock band's teen girl fans turning up dead - but it knows where its bread is buttered, so it doesn't shy away from throwing some bare breasts in when it can to keep the rest of us entertained. The acting isn't great, the DIY digital cinematography is on par with what you'd shoot for your summer vacation, and the gore isn't anything to write home about, but so long as it keeps a stripper or two in the background, it can't be all bad. Extras on this independent DVD release (by Cut 'N' Run Productions) include a making of doc, concert footage of the band that film follows and some trailers and radio interviews. For a no-budget slasher film, it's bearable and shows a lot of promise.

On the other hand, no-budget filmmaker Keith J. Crocker has gone another route and tried to recreate the exploitation genre in his loving tributes to them in such films as **The Bloody Ape** (shot in 1997) and **Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69** (shot last year). Crocker does his best to make his films actually look like the grainy sleazefests from the 1960s and '70s, and while not always successful, the results are entertaining. **The Bloody Ape** is his version of "Murders in the Rue Morgue" but with tits thrown in, while **Blitzkrieg** is his homage to the *Ilsa* films and their kin. While they have a very amateur feel to them, they're quite entertaining in a trashy sort of way. Released on DVD by Wild Eye, the two are loaded with extras, ranging from Crocker's running commentaries to making of featurettes. Short films, trailers, convention Q&A sessions...there's a lot packed in these two to give the DIY fan some fun.

Finally, and in a way, tying the two eras together, we have the documentary **American Swing**. A new documentary about the sexual revolution of the 1970s, in which swinging and partner-swapping became a national pastime for ever so brief a moment, the film It's a fairly serious but engaging look into the subculture and shows another side of the sexuality that was becoming predominant in the decade. Released by Magnolia Pictures, the doc is at once fascinating and sleazy, tasteful and eye-opening. Focusing on Plato's Retreat, a very well-known swingers club, it parallels the film *54* in a lot of ways, chronicling the excess, rise and fall of a short-lived phenomenon. Special features are mostly relegated to extended outtakes from interviews involving some of the attendees at Plato's.

Now, you'll probably notice that I didn't get too graphic in describing the films. That's partially because I'm trying my damndest to keep this at a PG-13 level (ironic, huh?) and also because half the fun of these films is discovering them for one's self. Whether you're watching it all the way through for the plot, or just fast forwarding to the fapping material, these films bring an often-tacky but well-needed remedy to the oh-so-serious and oh-so-politically-correct level of mainstream films. While not truly cinematic masterpieces, they have their fans – myself included – and deserve their current revival on DVD. Hopefully, this lengthy piece has shed some light on what's currently out there for cult fans to get a good starting point.

Next time around, this column will be taking a look in the exact opposite direction of today's subject, as I delve into a ton of animation releases new to DVD, both classic and new. Thank you for reading, have a wonderful day and remember: Boobies make any film better.

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