

Writer-director James Glickenhaus is best known for low-IQ'd, early-'80s action like *THE EXTERMINATOR* and *THE SOLDIER*, then continued in the same vein with 1991's spectacularly braindead **McBAIN (Synopsis)**, featuring Christopher Walken and a slew of familiar supporting faces... In its Vietnam War prologue, a chopper full of American soldiers (including Michael Ironside and *THANK GOD IT'S FRIDAY*'s Chick Vennera) rescue a handful of US prisoners, just as captured Bobby McBain (Walken) has been forced into a bamboo-cage death-match against a musclebound North Vietnamese opponent. Eighteen years later in South America, Vennera's Santos has become a righteous guerrilla fighter, working with his plucky sister Christina (Maria Conchita Alonso) to liberate impoverished Colombians from evil President Bojorquez (Victor Argo). When Santos is publicly executed, Christina treks to New York City and convinces McBain to avenge her brother's murder. Quickly reuniting Santos' old squad — cop Thomas G. Waites, bodyguard Steve James, surgeon Jay Patterson, cranky millionaire Ironside — they get enough cash for



the mission by (1) robbing a crackhouse run by Luis Guzman and (2) dangling a mobster from a Midtown skyscraper, then flying to Colombia to help Christina's ragtag rebels lay siege to the Presidential palace... The plot lurches along with a flagrant disregard for logic and any emotional moments are clunky, but at least it was a good excuse to blow up a bunch of shit. Of course, Walken is always amusing, even when he's stotically wandering through this type of paycheck-driven gig. The only other standout is Argo, who seems to relish playing a sadistic dictator — whether he's smirking as women and children are being terrorized, or beating one of his own trussed-up officers with a baseball bat. Meanwhile, Glickenhaus makes the most of his NYC locations, with Walken working atop the Brooklyn Bridge, crabbing on the Hudson near the Statue of Liberty, and raiding an East Village crack den across the street from the old Life Cafe. Alas, instead of being content to make a simple, effective B-movie, he dilutes the fun with impassioned speeches, horrendous soundtrack tunes, chickenshit US politicians, and suprisingly tedious action sequences. *McBAIN* is a limp, noisy dud. The Blu-ray includes a commentary with Glickenhaus and *Temple of Schlock*'s Chris Poggiali.

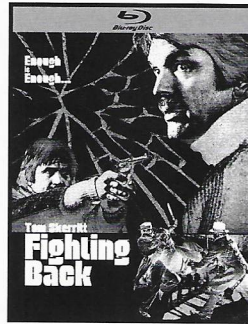
The 1980s were a golden age for movie vigilantes, as everyday men (and the occasional women) took the law into their own hands. Directed by Lewis Teague, who'd earned a reputation for solid B-movie work on *ALLIGATOR*, 1982's **FIGHTING BACK (Arrow)** benefits from a skilled cast and brisk pace, yet is too cheesy and compromised to leave much of an impression... Tom Skerritt is Philadelphia deli owner John D'Angelo, whose once clean and safe neighborhood has turned to shit. After his pregnant wife Lisa (Patti LuPone, only ten months after leaving her Tony-winning stint as Broadway's *EVITA*) jumps out of the family station wagon to intervene on a pimp beating one of his whores, his elderly mother is maimed during a drugstore robbery, and the police (including Michael Sarrazin as John's longtime friend) turn out to be useless, D'Angelo creates the Peoples Neighborhood

Patrol — recruiting several equally fed-up locals (Frank Sivero, Joseph Ragno, and Jim Moody as the token black member, proving that they definitely aren't racist), resulting in wannabe-cops busting up undesirables with baseball bats. When D'Angelo's home is destroyed by vandals, Lisa tearfully begs her husband to move out of this crappy area, but self-righteous John refuses to back down. Skerritt's *ALIEN* co-star Yaphet Kotto also turns up as a community leader who provides impulsive D'Angelo with some racial perspective about his agenda; David Rasche is an enterprising journalist; Josh Mostel deals smack to kids; Peter Brocco plays a mob boss who admires John's work; and Tony-winner Ted Ross is the police commissioner. Meanwhile, its schizophrenic script neuters any potentially intriguing notions about the dangers of vigilantism or how local politicians and press try to co-op John's growing fame, in favor of empty thrills and stock villains (e.g., a bald black pimp straight out of an old blaxploitation flick), while always staying safely within a barely-R rating. In the end, this urban revenge tale feels more like a watered-down made-for-TV movie, complete with a naive, uplifting message about the community rallying to clean up their city. The Blu-ray includes a 29-minute conversation with Teague and an interview with camera operator Daniele Nannuzzi.

Hidden identities, double crosses, manipulation, and murder are only a few of the ingredients in **A DANDY IN ASPIC (Kino Lorber Studio Classics)**, a 1968 Cold War drama based on a best-selling novel by Derek Marlowe (who also penned the screenplay). Despite decent reviews, the film was quickly forgotten in the tsunami of '60s secret agent outings, but boasts an amusingly elaborate plot with a deeply cynical edge. It's also a bit of a disheveled mess — undoubtedly due to the fact that director-producer Anthony Mann died of a heart attack in his Berlin hotel room midway through production, with the film's star, Laurence Harvey, taking over the directorial duties... Our title "Dandy" is dapper British Intelligence agent Alexander Eberlin (Harvey), whose job primarily consists of dull desk work. Most



importantly, none of his colleagues suspect that he's actually a longtime undercover Soviet assassin named Krasnevin. When Eberlin lands a surprising new assignment — which could get him closer to finally returning to his Russian homeland — he's partnered with prickly, by-the-book field operative Gatiss (Tom Courtenay) and heads to West Germany, in order to track down a notorious spy. Once in Berlin, things get even trickier for Eberlin, as his escape plan is thwarted, he worries that Gatiss' investigation will expose his true identity, plus free-spirited photographer Caroline (Mia Farrow) ends up in his bed... Conspicuously lacking the wit or excitement of mainstream spy game films from that era, its



characters are uniformly uncharismatic, with the only light touch provided by Peter Cook as glib, lecherous UK agent Prentiss. Sturdy support is provided by Harry Andrews as Eberlin's British boss, Lionel Stander is a Russian agent, and Per Oscarsson plays a London junkie who's also Eberlin's Soviet contact. Unfortunately, 22-year-old Farrow, in her feature debut — after quitting TV's *PEYTON PLACE* and marrying 50-year-old Frank Sinatra — is horribly miscast, with her grating character constantly underfoot and utterly forgettable. Not everything works, but *ASPIC* is an admirable curiosity peppered with clever subtleties about the dangers and confusion of '60s-era espionage. The Blu-ray includes two 2019 featurettes containing recollections from crew members (including title designer Michael Graham Smith, second assistant editor Richard Dobson, camera assistant Nigel Cousins, and more); plus an appreciation of Anthony Mann's career.

The first feature from director-writer Bret McCormick (credited as Max Raven and Bando Glutz, respectively) is 1986's wonderfully warped **THE ABOMINATION (Visual Vengeance)**, a homemade Super 8mm monsterama/gorefest primarily shot in rural Poolville, Texas. Despite a hit-and-miss opening hour and some excruciatingly amateur acting, once the film finally shifts into high gear it's a DIY trash delight... Cody Lee

(Scott Davis) suffers from grotesque, violent nightmares (which gives McCormick a novel way to open the film, with a three-minute highlight reel of all of the carnage we're going to witness later on), and blames his current condition on a ravenous creature from hell which he calls The Abomination. You see, Cody's troubles began when his sickly mother (Jude Johnson) fell prey to a phony, TV-evangelist con man named Brother Fogg, only for her to suddenly hack up a bloody, throbbing tumor, which then crawled into her son's mouth as he slept! Possessed Cody eventually slaughters most of the supporting cast, feeding their corpses to the quickly-growing Abomination and its equally repugnant offspring (most amusingly, he also leaves an unexpected surprise in Brother Fogg's private toilet). McCormick finds some ingeniously lame ways to pad out the film's running time to a hour-and-a-half, from interminable footage of pick-up trucks driving about the county to continually recycling earlier scenes, including the film's *entire* five-minute opening of Cody chasing down a young woman and slitting her throat. Like a 5th-rate Herschell Gordon Lewis, he lovingly lingers on the fun but hokey gore effects, only to go impressively bonkers in the finale. And his toothy, tendrilled title monstrosity is pretty damned impressive — particularly once it takes over Cody's house, hiding in kitchen cabinets and the washing machine, and transforming the place into a blood-drenched, body-part-strewn abattoir for the film's outrageously deranged climax... The Blu-ray includes a commentary with McCormick, joined by Visual Vengeance's Rob Hauschild and Matt Desiderio; a second track with *Wang Chop Magazine*'s Tony Strauss; plus individual interviews with McCormick (74 minutes!), actresses Blue Thompson and Victoria Chaney, plus the film's original VHS distributor; outtakes; raw footage; and McCormick's early Super 8 efforts.

