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Editorial 2

Legendary Curse of Lemora 3

Salo, 120 Days of Sodom 6

Milligan's 'Bloodthirsty' Films 9

Mini-Reviews 12

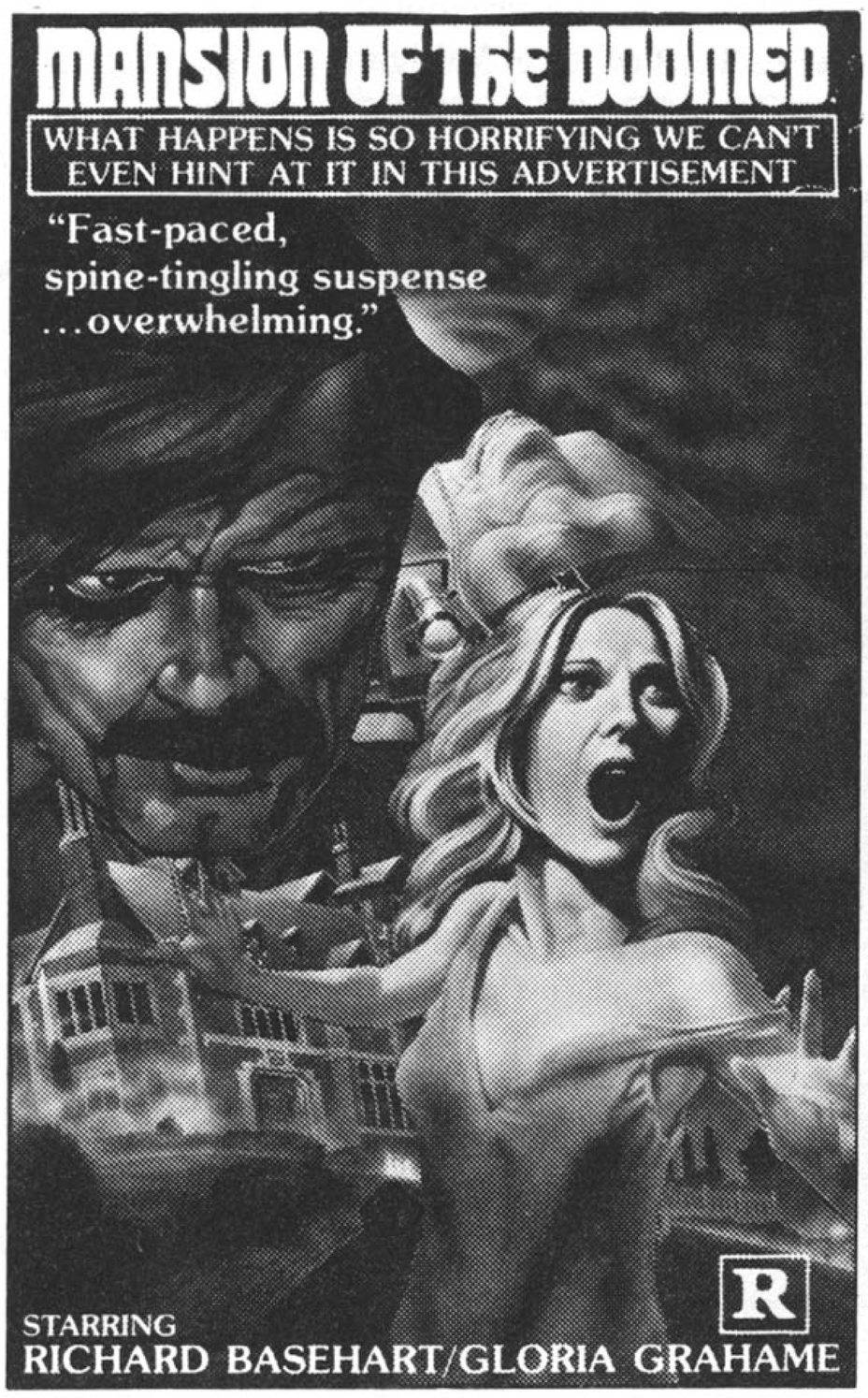
Dracula's Great Love 22

Tigon Studios and Blood on Satan's Claw 25

Italian Exorcists 28

Obscure Horror Magazines 31

Video Update 32



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The Legendary Curse of Lemora

Religion and Repression in the 1920s

By Barry Kaufman

There are times when creativity and a strong personal vision can overcome externally imposed restrictions, whether they be financial, social or religious. In the case of this specific film, the added contextual restriction must be considered, as in most corners the horror film is looked upon as clearly laudable. Yet it is also clear that in his bizarre *Legendary Curse of Lemora,* writer/producer/director Bob Blackburn had something significant to say, and he did so with style, wit and originality.

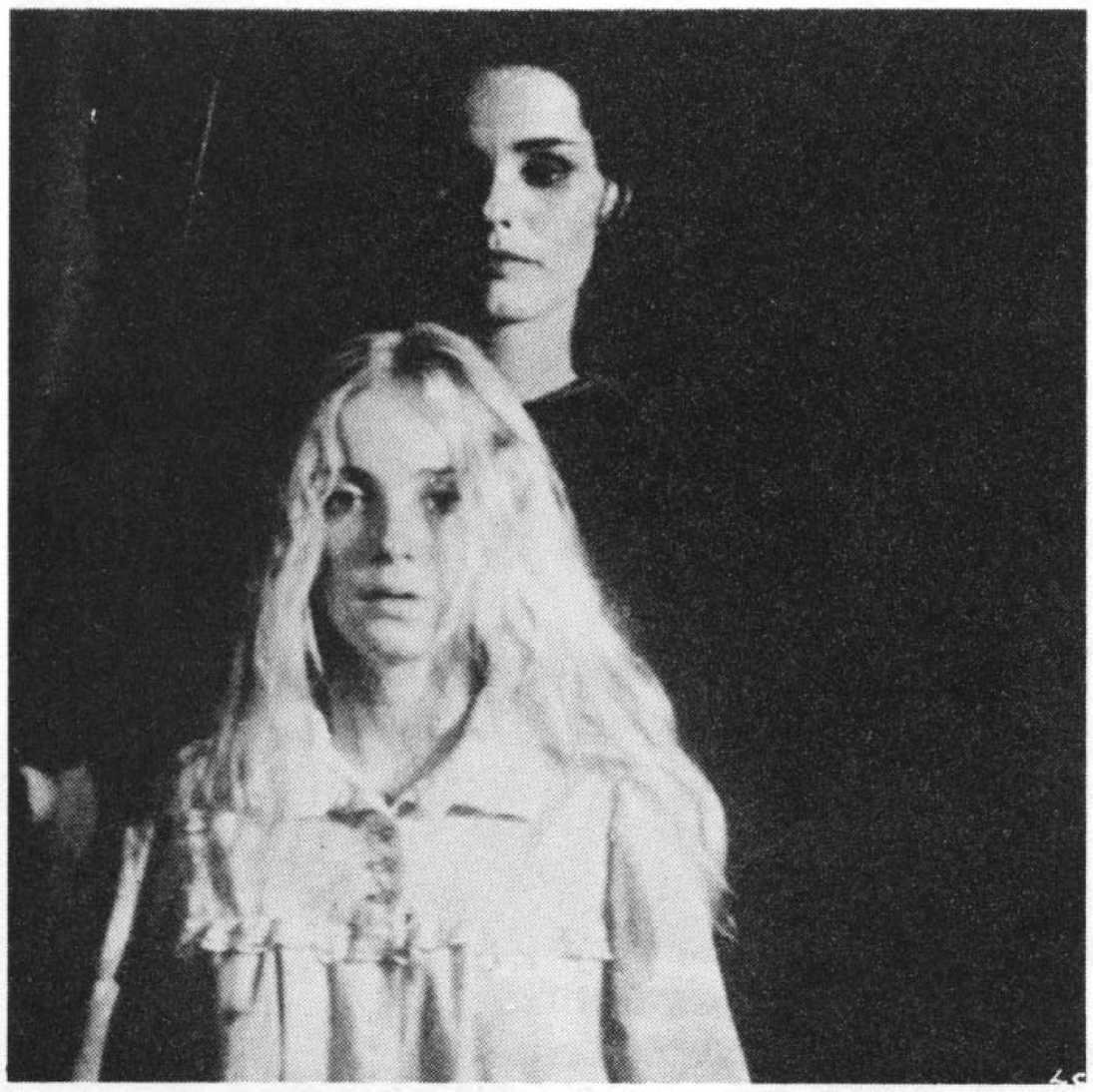
Criticism can be an ineffective tool, commonly causing an interpretation that was never intended. What *is* effective is what the creator has to say; from this can be derived conclusions of symbolic intention that are as close to genuine as possible. Therefore, herein comments from Blackburn himself will be interspersed with personal reactions and examples from *Lemora* to show how complex and artistic this obscure picture is.

Those who have heard of *Lemora* have usually been subjected to it as a "lesbian vampire" film. This is simply the picture's commercial aspect. What *Lemora* is actually about is fear and repression: fear of religion, darkness and taboos, and sexual repression. In fact, upon its release the Catholic Film Board slapped *Lemora* with a rating of condemned, which had much more significance in 1974 than it did now.

The entire plot of the film reeks of anti-Catholicism and the evils of the inhibition it causes, which is one reason why Blackburn's vision is not a terribly popular one. It's a rare example of a film in which evil wins over good, or, in Blackburn's view, sin is victorious over imprisonment. As Blackburn puts it, "The South in the '20s was separate from the rest of the world. They had their own ideology concerning marriage, sex, alcohol and religion – amazingly enough some of this sentiment remains today."

Lemora deals with a 13-year-old church singer, Lilah Lee, who is the daughter of the notorious gangland figure Alvin Lee. Alvin murders his unfaithful lover and the man he finds her with. He flees into the countryside and is stopped by several deformed creatures and their leader, Lemora. Lilah loves her father despite of his "evil ways," and tells the reverend (played by Blackburn himself) that she wants to find him. The reverend says she musn't worry about her father and tells her to continue singing at the church. That evening Lilah receives a letter informing her that her father is alive and well, but that he must see her soon to survive. The letter is signed "Your fellow Christian, Lemora."

Lilah sneaks a ride to the bus station in town by hiding in the back seat of a young man's car. While taking his date to the show in town, the man leers, "My

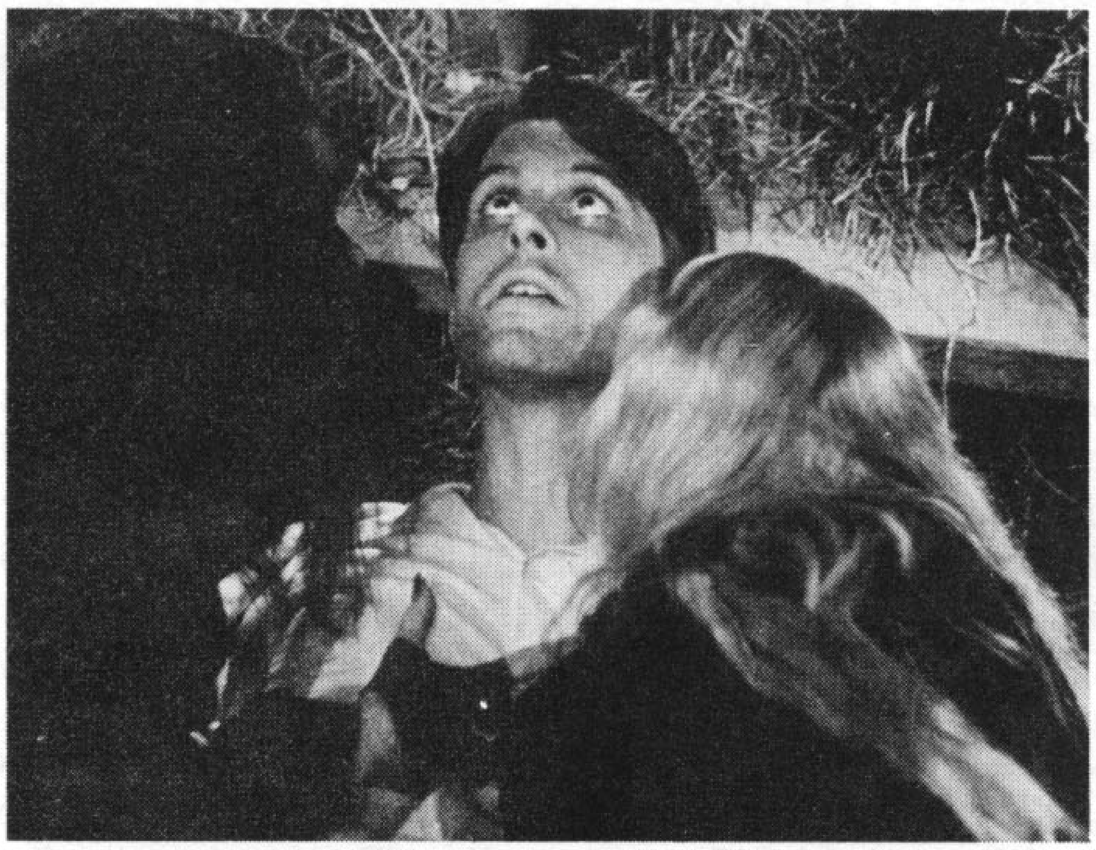


Lemora (top) and Lilah Lee in* Legendary Curse of Lemora *(1973)

gosh, that was Lilah Lee who asked me fer a ride into town! You know she's shacked up with the revernen'? I'll bet he has a hard time keepin' his mind on the books. . .she's ripe an' ready to go."

Lilah recalls a time when she kissed the reverend and he snapped, "I'll have none of these unseemly displays of emotion! Now go to your room and study . . ." Immediately following there is a shot of Lilah undressing in which she looks up and gasps.

After the car stops, Lilah runs through the woods and into town. It's during this sequence that Blackburn's



***Evil seduces religion in a scene excised from the final cut of* Legendary Curse of Lemora**

***Bus driver catches the "sickness"— one of many excellent makeups in* Lemora.**

***Lilah is imprisoned and is soon to meet the old woman of skin and bone in* Lemora.**

unusual style becomes most evident. The entire town is a sexual nightmare, each individual event appearing as a surrealistic portrait of seaminess. Our view is further exaggerated by the fact that Blackburn shows all of this through Lilah's eyes. First we come to a small, sleazy whorehouse bathed in flashing red light. Lilah looks into the window and sees her reflection blending into the hideously made-up face of a tired prostitute. As soon as she walks away from this she hears a man screaming, "You filthy whore, you're always runnin' around . . ." She looks up and sees an ugly, fat man slapping a tastelessly dressed woman. He notices Lilah, turns and leers at her and smiles, "You want somethin' girlie?"

Finally, she arrives at the decrepit bus station and asks the man at the window when the bus for North Park leaves. "Oh," he slurs, "That one goes only when someone wants it to. We don't get much call for that one no more." the man is mild-mannered but frightening, thin with dark circles around his eyes. "Now what's a pretty little girl like you doin' out this time of night?" Eventually he convinces her to take a piece of candy. As he lifts the box, we see only his wide eyes, the brim of his hat and the candy prominent in the foreground. He asks Lilah, "Now which do you like better; soft centers . . .or hard?"

There is abundant suggestive dialogue like the latter, all of which revolves around Lilah's fear of pleasure. This becomes more obvious later when Lemora offers Lilah some wine. Lilah insists it is a sin to indulge in the spirits, to which Lemora replies, "Is it a sin to enjoy yourself?" Lilah drinks some wine and faints.

In what is undoubtedly *Lemora's* most erotic scene, Lemora gives Lilah a bath before which she asks why Lilah considers the human body to be shameful. "The body is a beautiful thing. It is a gift of God," Lemora smiles, "To be seen, not hidden." As Blackburn did not want to resort to typical exploitation tactics, this scene contains minimal nudity; we see only brief glimpses of Lilah hidden tactfully by towels, plants, and Lemora herself. Two unusual things happen during this scene; first, Lemora crushes some leaves and sprinkles them into Lilah's bath. Second, although Lemora is not revolted by the cross around Lilah's neck, she symbolically tries to remove it, thus shedding Lilah of her Catholic inhibitions. After the bath, Lemora starts to dance with Lilah, all the time Lilah repeating that it is a sin to dance so freely. But as she enjoys it more and more, they circle faster and faster until Blackburn is whirling the camera around at dizzying speed.

Blackburn states, "I remember sitting in on one of the first showings in Georgia. During this scene most of the audience had to either close their eyes or lower their heads. . .some even had the leave the theatre, which is just the effects I wanted." Blackburn externalizes Lilah's confusion and exhilaration perfectly with his disorienting camera manipulation.

But all this might make *Lemora* seem like a purely artistic and inaccessible work, which is definitely not the case. Not only does the film thrive on Blackburn's bizarre mise-en-scene, but also on his outlandish characters. It is evidence of Blackburn's brilliance that even these most incredible characters remain consistent with his theme.

The most grotesque is the bus driver who takes Lilah to North Park. During the trip he tells Lilah of the "sickness' that has caused mutated, flesh-eating humans to inhabit the forests. He is grimy, sweaty and perverse, mumbling his words so enthusiastically that rarely can he be understood. But ultimately he is sympathetic, telling of how he could have been someone different had he not been so afraid of the forest. "Never go out in the dark," he shudders, "Don't go out in the dark."

Endearing and hilarious are the only words that can describe Lemora's assistant, an old woman named Solange. Solange spends much of her time chopping up cat meat for Lilah who is briefly imprisoned in a cement house by Lemora. In true Blackburn style, upon her first meeting with Lilah, Solange croaks a ridiculous tune entitled "There Was An Old Woman of Skin and Bone," at the end of which she screams "Boo!" and scares Lilah half to death.

Unfortunately, Solange is killed by Lilah's father who had run away from his imprisonment by Lemora and become stricken by "the sickness." In a sadistic scene, Alvin returns looking like a werewolf and tears the old woman's wrinkled neck open. Lilah is injured and runs to Lemora. As the two discuss what has just occurred, Solange lies suffering in the forest, rolling on the floor moaning and groaning.

Blackburn didn't infuse *Lemora* with much graphic violence but instead manages to maintain a horrific atmosphere with a series of bizarre creatures and make-ups. In one fantastic scene, all of the forest creatures attack the house and have a vicious battle to get Lilah. All during this onslaught, Lilah envisions the beasts pointing at her and shouting, "It's you who wants to be seduced! You pretend to be innocent but it's *you* who encourages them!"

If it sounds like Blackburn is promoting an anti-female sentiment, recognize the fact that Lemora is the most rational figure in the picture. Whether or not she is outstandingly portrayed by Lesley Gilb is another question, but in the character of Lemora, Blackburn presents the savior in his context. She saves Lilah from a life she was unhappy with; Lilah still sings at the church, but it's implied that she lives with the priest under more unrestrained conditions. She no longer considers men "unclean and filthy-minded," and is shown smiling in the film only after she meets Lemora.

The transition is a sudden one. At the film's end, Lilah is trying to escape the grasp of a bunch of hungry vampires. She stumbles into a dark room that contains only a mirror. Suddenly a torch appears and Lemora tells Lilah that she must relax if she wants to survive. As Lemora is about to put the bite on her, we are transported to a barn where the reverend is sleeping as he continues his search for Lilah. She appears, the reverend hugs her, and Lilah seduces him with little resistance. The camera tilts up and we see Lemora smiling down on them. Abruptly, Lemora's red cape turns into the red curtain of the church and Lilah bolts through it. The film ends just as it began, with Lilah singing "Rock of Ages" and the camera moving away from her.

***A beautiful, black-caped Lilah seduces the reverend (Blackburn) in* Lemora.**

Blackburn states, "I wanted to show that Lilah changed internally, but that she didn't have to completely alter her lifestyle. In other words, I wasn't making a statement against the church itself – merely its strict principles."

Regardless of its anti-religious overtones, *Lemora* evidences a great amount of effort behind the scenes. Every shot is obviously meticulously lit and composed which is most unusual for a low-budget film. It is nice to see a cheap film that is so carefully constructed, but it's even nicer to see one that is so creative and spirited – one that doesn't resort to gory neck slashings and nudity to sustain viewer interest.

Although it was condemned by the Catholic Film Board, *Lemora* received a 'PG' from the Motion Picture Association of America. Blackburn's eroticism originates from the situation, not from exposed skin; his horror stems from exaggeration, inversion and illusion, not from high body counts. Gore is fine, but not when it constitutes a film's substance in lieu of characterization and originality. Lemora's substance consists of both of the latter, and for this reason will prove exciting to a select number of viewers who are able to tolerate poor acting and appreciate quality filmmaking.

Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom:

Pasolini's Sadistic Work of Art

By Donald Farmer

The circumstances accompanying the 1977 American release of *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* were almost as unusual as those depicted in this, the final film of Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. Advance word in *Film Comment, Film Quarterly* and particularly *The Village Voice* indicated that *Salo* features extremes of sadism, violence and scatology then unheard of in a major picture, and the publicity mills were scarcely hampered by the fact that Pasolini himself had been brutally murdered on November 2, 1975 – nearly six months after his film's completion.

When the critical verdict returned from the picture's fall 1977 showing at the New York Film Festival, however, it was clear that the usually softened reception given a posthumous work had been abandoned for an overwhelmingly negative, often vicious backlash.

Attacked as both nauseating for its frankness and depressing for its bleak ideology, *Salo* has since garnered a reputation as one of the screen's darkest works. At least in terms of shock value, the intervening years have seen its violence outdone by the current wave of explicit gore films, but even in 1977 the gore scenes were hardly as disturbing as one in which 16 captives are forced to eat their own excrement.

Anyone familiar with the Marquis De Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* knows that the exhaustive catalog of tortures and sexual perversities found therein would seem doubtful material for a major film production, much less one by a director who had previously won praise from as unlikely an admirer as Billy Graham for *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew.* But just as De Sade's work was intended more as literary rebellion than exploitation, so Pasolini's approach to this material took a similar intent – with a special emphasis on political allegory.

The worst possible frame of reference for a viewer to approach *Salo* would be with comparisons to films where sadism is the main attraction. To quote Pasolini from an interview conducted during the filming by Gideon Bachmann, "My film is planned as a sexual metaphor, which symbolizes, in a visionary way, the relationship between exploiter and exploited. In sadism and in power politics human beings become objects."

Pasolini conceded that he was not indifferent to whatever salacious appeal the finished film would have and said, "I am surely not planning to create an aesthetically political, puritanical film. Obviously, I am fascinated by these sadistic orgies in themselves. So there you have two basic dimensions: the political and the sexual."

Both the film and De Sade's novel have a particular numerical emphasis, an aspect which Pasolini amplified with some revisions. For example, the book features four symbols of French authority: a bishop, a president, a banker and their leader, the Duc de Blangis, of whom De Sade writes, "He may be regarded as the repository of every vice and every crime. He has killed his mother, his sister, and three of his wives."

Pasolini transformed this group into four equally sadistic Italian fascists who abduct 18 teenage boys

and girls for a four-month succession of orgies and torture. DeSade's book saw the four principals assisted by four old storytellers, their four wives, and four female servants. The book is also divided into four parts titled "The Simple Passions," "The Complex Passions," "The Criminal Passions," and "The Murderous Passions," – the section where all the captives, the servants, and all but one of their wives are excruciatingly tortured and killed.

While retaining this basic structure, Pasolini let his introductory scenes (titled "The Ante Inferno") count as the film's first quarter in order that the actual 120 days could be divided into a trio of "circles" to parallel Dante's circular descent in "The Inferno." Dropping De Sade's titles, he renamed these sections "Circle of Manias," "Circle of Excrement," and "Circle of Blood" in which the teens are subjected to graphic tortures which the four masters alternately observe, assist in, and perform. Pasolini added this touch so that each would have the "philosophical pleasure of contemplation, the particularly abject pleasure of complicity, and the supreme pleasure of action."

To carry the Dante comparison a step further, Pasolini had apparently conceived *Salo* as the first in a trio of films corresponding to the poet's *Inferno, Purgatory,* and *Paradise.* His murder so soon after the film's completion, however, has left us with only the first picture in what promised to be Pasolini's second trilogy.

Salo opens at a lakeside villa where the four fascists are signing a pact in preparation for the 120 days. The first line of dialogue, heard after the last name is marked down, gives a clue to the film's general direction for the next two hours – "Everything is good at the extreme."

We're next shown a succession of Italian teenagers being kidnapped for the initial "screening" where the imperfect youngsters will be weeded out to provide 18 perfect boys and girls for tortures. This number soon descends to 16, matching the book's figure, when a boy is shot trying to escape and a girl's throat is slit after she is found praying.

The standards used to select the teens are almost ridiculously extreme. One otherwise attractive girl is rejected because she has a tooth growing too high from the gums. The candidate the masters seem most pleased with is a girl who witnessed her mother's murder as she was kidnapped, and Pasolini emphasizes the fascists' delight in finding an innocent already exposed to such horror. This girl becomes a repeated target of cruelty throughout *Salo* as she is forced to eat the Duke's excrement and is last seen during the "Circle of Blood" with a candle held to her breasts.

With all the teenagers selected, they are driven to the masters' huge villa and lined up under the balcony where the Duke reads the rules they now must live under. The most conspicuous include one which punishes normal sexual activity with the loss of a limb and another prescribing instant death for any religious act.

The "Circle of Manias" begins at this point, concentrating mainly on sexual degradations. Aside from several erotic reminiscences provided by the first of the storytellers – all aging prostitutes – the main episodes here involve a "wedding" staged with two of the teenagers and a sequence where all the youths are stripped and forced to crawl around like dogs. Highlighting the effect, all of them wear collars and leashes and are encouraged to bark for strips of meat which the masters toss at them. One of the four calls a girl over and tells her to eat a ball of cheese he holds out. She obediently bites into it, unaware that he'd hidden several nails in the cheese. The fascist seems especially pleased when the girl grimaces and blood pours from her mouth.

This scene and the subsequent "eating" scenes tend to hammer home the Freudian concept of an oral assault. Despite the (inexplicable) success of a film like *Pink Flamingos,* Pasolini must have realized that he risked alienating much of his audience by showing characters eating human feces. In his own words, he included the footage to point out the "manufacturers force the consumers to eat excrement. All these industrial foods are worthless refuse." The substance used was not, of course, the real thing – Pasolini's recipe called for Swiss chocolate mixed with biscuit crumblings, marmalade and olive oil.

Moving into the "Circle of Blood," the 16 captives

have become progressively desparate and several of them attempt to save themselves by implicating their fellow prisoners. A chain reaction of this effort begins when a boy tells one of the fascists that a certain girl has broken one of the rules by concealing a photograph under her pillow. That master goes to her bed and finds a picture of a boyfriend, but the girl begs for mercy and leads him to a couple making love in exchange for her own protection. To save themselves, in turn, the couple tells him about one of the guards who visits a serving girl at night. Gathering the other fascists, they find the two in his room and immediately draw their pistols. As a last act of rebellion, the guard gives a Communist salute before being shot. This chain reaction tattling proves to have been useless as none of the teenagers are spared.

The entire group moves into the main hall for a final story about a maniac who enjoyed torturing 15 young girls simultaneously. One girl is tied to a razor-studded wheel and skinned alive while a live rat is sewn up in another's vagina.

The fascists are finally ready to conclude the 120 days, and they take the boys and girls to the villa's courtyard where their arms and legs are tied to stakes in the ground. As the tortures begin. Pasolini heightens their realism by only showing the action from the point-of-view of whichever master is watching them through the binoculars, creating a documentary effect. The absence here of live or dubbed sounds from the courtyard (we hear instead a beautiful instrumental/ choral piece) also adds an unsettling atmosphere to this sequence.

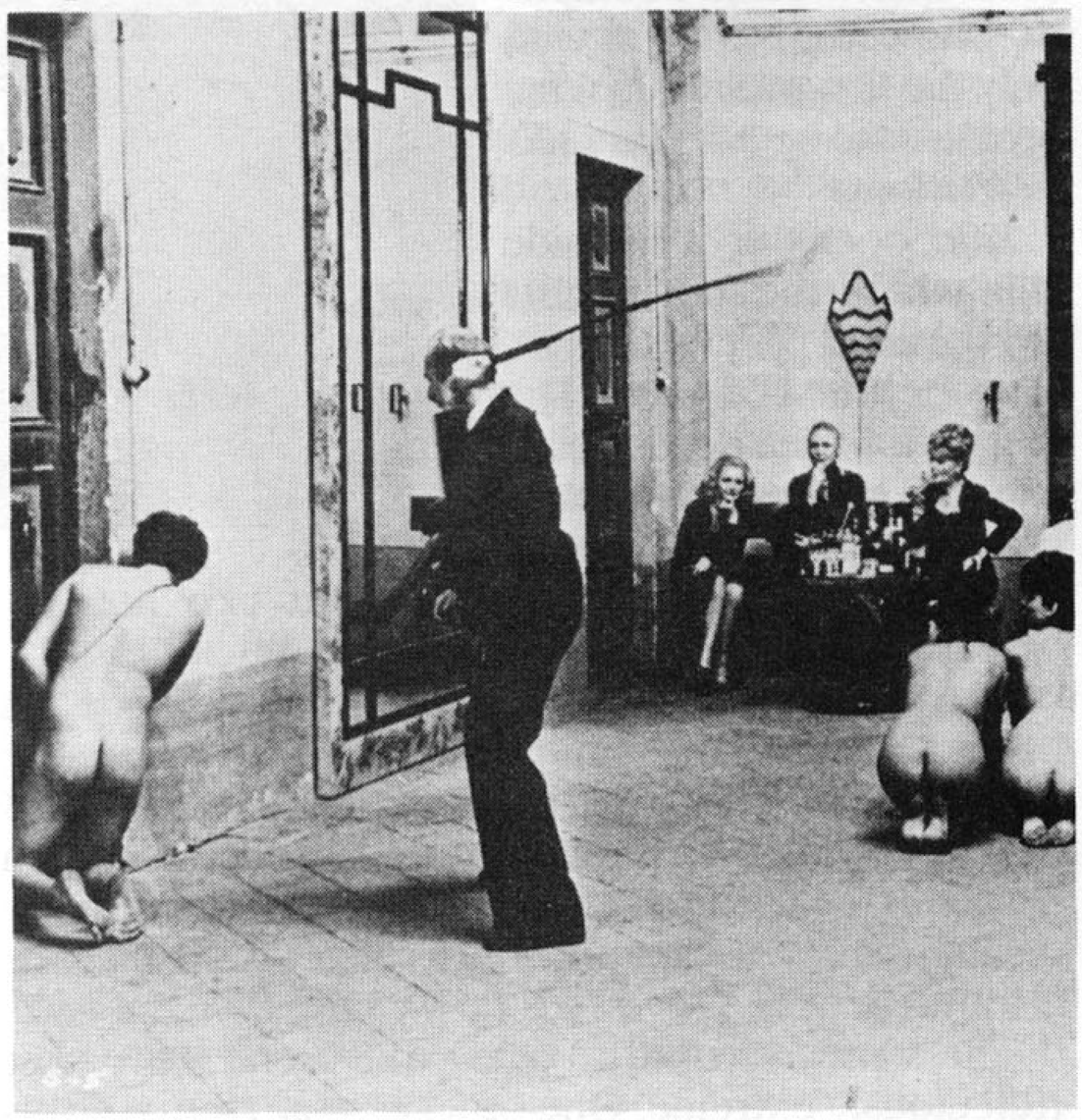
Fire and steel are the favorite torture devices in *Salo,* as one fascist holds a lit candle to a boy's genitals and a girl's breasts – this is followed by another master using a knife to cut out one boy's tongue and another's left eye. We also see a graphic scalping and watch as a boy is repeatedly branded on the chest. Intercut with these shots are scenes of one fascist joking with a guard while another performs an impromptu dance in the courtyard.

The original design for *Salo* included some material not in the final version, but the theft of part of the negtaive after production prevented Pasolini from using this material. Pasolini wasn't the only Italian director during this time who had to alter his film because of a negative theft – Fellini had the same problem while making *Casanova* – but this loss unfortunately managed to eliminate any hint of retribution and leaves us with the bleakest ending imaginable.

To downplay this somewhat, Pasolini said he tried to avoid presenting the victims sympathetically while directing the film. "I have in no way tried to arouse sympathy, and in fact the film would lose its sting if I had. I have not shown victims whose side viewers could be on. Pity would have been horrible as an element in this film; nobody would have stood for it. People who cry and tear their hair out would have made everybody leave the cinema after five minutes. In any case, I don't believe in pity."

Despite these remarks, one may not be able to distance himself from the film's victims as easily as Pasolini suggested, but then a major crux of *Salo* is its ability to be both repellent and fascinating; sometimes difficult to watch but just as difficult to turn away from.

For a film so equipped to provoke violently different reactions in audiences, further discussion and a variety of fresh viewpoints would seem to be in order. Hopefully, the enthusiastic reception *Salo* received at last August's Fifth World Film Festival in Montreal will inspire additional bookings through 1983.



Milligan's 'Bloodthirsty' Butchery

By Donald Relizzo

In horror cinema, the auteur theory, or belief that the director is primarily responsible for the onscreen result of a film, is one of considerable significance. We speak of films as those by Mario Bava, H.G. Lewis, Jess Franco, John Carpenter, David Cronenberg and innumerable others. Occasionally the relative obscurity of a director's work causes a reputation to be formulated from one of three elements: word of mouth among audience members, advertisements and/or stills, and inaccurate literature based on the assumption of one single picture in a group of directorial works. For example, it is only recently that the films of H.G. Lewis have reached a mass audience, and as a result facts about the man and his work can be stated in a concrete fashion.

Due to misinformation and assumptions derived from contemptible horror capsule-review books, British horror director Andy Milligan has frequently been compared with H.G. Lewis. Actually, the two are as similar as Andy Williams and Johnny Rotten. The sole manner in which the two are comparable is that neither has much directorial skill, but their attitudes and treatment of material are radically different. But a comparison of the two isn't the purpose here; it is instead to eliminate the misconceptions involved in the definition of an "Andy Milligan" film. Because few, if any, of his pictures have been seen by fans and/or "authorities," a variety of false rumors exist that need to be corrected to remedy incurable curiosities.

First and foremost is the general misconstruction that Andy Milligan makes explicitly violent pictures. Certainly the subject matter of his films is horrific, ranging from classical horror like Count Dracula in *Body Beneath* to Todd Slaughter-style theatrical perversity like the butchers cooking human entrails into meat pies in *Bloodthirsty Butchers.* But just because the subject is inherently violent and the titles are exploitative does not mean the films themselves are excessively gory. For example, bloodletting in *Body Beneath* consists merely of a hand cut on broken glass, a quick shot of empty eye sockets, and a minimally bloody vampire bit. Amusingly, John Stanley in his popular *Creature Features Movie Guide* describes *Body Beneath* as "Andy Milligan sexploitation" when actually the picture is devoid of nudity. The closest the film comes to sexual reference is an orgiastic eating binge by the disciples of Dracula: *Body Beneath* must be the most sexless piece of sexploitation ever made. In fact, Milligan's films frequently *avoid* sex and violence, particularly *Body Beneath, Man With Two Heads* and even *Blood.* In these films, Milligan often

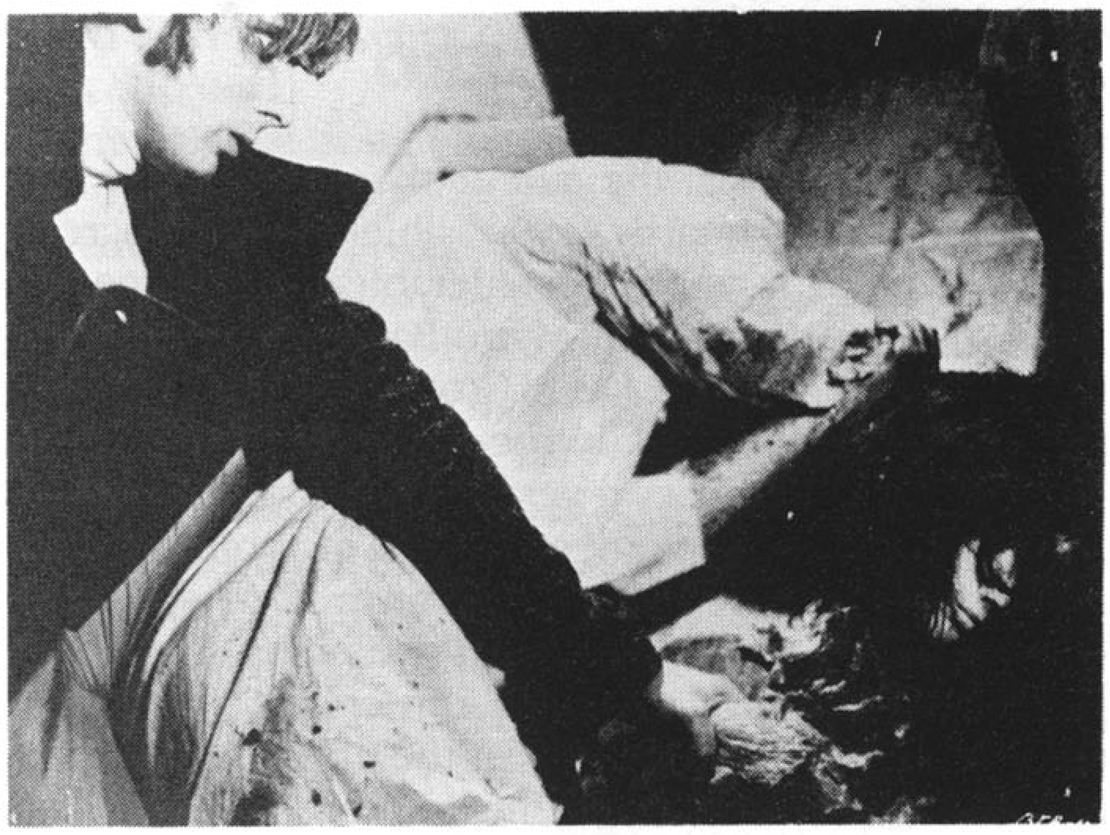
The butcher's henchmen decides to have leg of lady for supper in* Bloodthirsty Butchers *(1969).

chooses to fade out just as the questionable acts are about to occur.

There can be no denying that, like any prolific exploitation filmmaker, Milligan has included some gruesome effects in several of his pictures. But these effects are both infrequent and incredibly tame when compared with the carnage in *Blood Feast, Wizard of Gore,* and today's dime-a-dozen "prosthetic effects" films. In *Torture Dungeon,* one of Milligan's most effects-filled works, violent acts range from pitchfork impalement to tortures with silver skewers and rattlesnakes. The pitchfork sequence is bloodless, obviously executed by embedding the pitchfork in a piece of wood and harnessing the wood to the actor. And the effectiveness of the torture sequences is attributable more to Milligan's skill as an editor (he edited most of his films under the name Alan Manson) and less to complex prosthestics. Unfortunately, his excellence as an editor materializes only during violent scenes; in general, his expository scenes are almost as inept as H.G. Lewis's. Some of the character makeups in *Torture Dungeon* are amazingly intricate, particularly the abundant rotting corpses and an old hag who claims to be a witch.

Milligan's other film of 1969 and his true "piece de

A strangling in* Bloodthirsty Butchers *and . . .



. . . a less subtle disembowelment from the same.

de resistance" is *Bloodthirsty Butchers,* and it's no coincidence that this film has received the most exposure through distribution to theatres and drive-ins. *Butchers* is Milligan's most explicit gore film, though scenes of carnage tend to be isolated (four in the entire film). Still, the sight of a meat cleaver embedded in a skull, or the butcher's assistant picking up the innards of a female victim, tend to be of reduced impact due to accompaniment by anachronistic squeaky violin music straight out of *Plan 9 From Outer Space.* In the film's favor is the fact that it has a texture unlike any other Milligan picture; the intricate art direction and elaborate costumes lend a certain beauty found usually in more expensive films. Performances vary from broad theatrical gestures to lifeless line delivery by the heroine, played by Dorene Bebtree. Milligan used Bebtree in many of his pictures – hopefully she was more fun off-screen that she is on. Though most of *Bloodthirsty Butchers* is unusual, the screenplay by Milligan tends to dampen things a bit.

Here we come to a major fault in most of his films in that, unfortunately, atmosphere and execution is not all. Not one of Milligan's pictures has a story that could be called even slightly original, and each can be traced directly back to another movie with the identical plot elements. Much of *Body Beneath* is straight out of Universal's film adaptation of *Dracula* starring Bela Lugosi; the three brides in flowing gowns, Dracula shipping dirt to Carfax Abbey, and a Jonathan Harker type of character who becomes Dracula's henchman. Ironically, the best scene in *Body Beneath* is the most original; a meeting between Count Dracula and his twenty disciples concerning the destiny of the vampiric clan. Milligan uses unusual lens filters, long tracking shots, and rapid editing to make the gluttony of the dinner and the ugliness of the disciples that much more revolting. It almost seems as if the scene was directed by someone other than Milligan (which is indeed possible).

His *Man With Two Heads,* the story of a man growing a bigger head on his shoulders, had many scenes and concepts done before in the Japanese film *The Manster* of 1961. Milligan himself called this particular film "The most shocking I'll ever make." He obviously considered nudity and rape shocking, as that is what most of *Man With Two Heads* deals with. *This* 1971 Milligan film is a true example of his inept sexploitation. It is difficult to tell if the equally perverse *Incredible Two-Headed Transplant* was inspiration for this "shocking" film or vice-versa. In any case, Milligan treats us to the eye blinking on the shoulder routine (done more convincingly in the Japanese film), ladies' blouses being torn off, and the new head exclaiming "Fun! Fun!." The new head also has an unpleasant habit of drooling blood and chunks of meat every few minutes.

Why Milligan regressed as a filmmaker after *Bloodthirsty Butchers* is unclear, but his later films show a marked reduction in either interest or effort. His *Blood* is simply buckets of blood poured over people in the sewer systems. It is similar to Cronenberg's *Rabid* (purely in terms of subject) in that "Rabid Rats Run Rampant" and infect innocent townsfolk, who in turn need human flesh and blood to survive. Effects are limited to several rat bites, but mostly people run around drooling gallons of dark red blood. Due to its excesses, *Blood* received domestic bookings as *Werewolves Are Coming, The Rats Are Here.* The werewolves of the title were rabid individuals afflicted to the point of growing additional hair, fangs, skin ulcerations and other pleasantries.

Criticism of Milligan's films is all relative; most of his

Some admirable makeup in* Torture Dungeon*; note the knife piercing the corpse's neck in the upper right hand corner.

***A traitor gets bitten by a snake and skewered in the neck in* Torture Dungeon.**

***More interesting makeup (applied by Milligan himself) in* Torture Dungeon.**

works are considerably better than the current crop of horror films, yet few are as well-done as his own *Bloodthirsty Butchers.* Even *Man With Two Heads,* as poor as it is, manages to maintain a certain level of interest throughout. And none of his movies approach the poor craftsmanship found in the works of H.G. Lewis, as even Milligan's 16mm, $40,000 *Body Beneath* looks better than anything Lewis has ever done. And, of course, never has Lewis attempted a period piece, nor has he done any genuine effects.

Milligan has made other films not in the horror genre per se. For example, his rarely seen *Fever* dealt with a flu epidemic that caused heightened sexual aggressiveness. Made in 1973, this was another example of Milligan's curious apathy towards the aesthetics of a medium he started very promisingly in. *Fever* is no longer sexploitation – it is unadulterated pornography. One can only guess that Milligan abandoned horror films for the more lucrative X-rated market, and simultaneously decided to cease any attempts at artistic quality. *Fever* is even below-average in comparison to other porno films at the time, with obvious lighting and minimal camera setups. There are allusions in the film to Milligan's horrific origins; one sexually insane husband tries to murder his wife with his disposable razor, and another constantly watches Hammer horror films on television. But this and Milligan's other non-genre works obviate the fact that these pictures were simply ground out by the dozen for financial recompense.

And it is here that Milligan differs from other horror-exploitation filmmakers, for he seems to have a desire to make films of that type. Unlike Herschell Gordon Lewis, he is not doing it solely because "no one had ever done it before and it was a good way to make money at the time." The fact that Milligan started with Count Dracula as the main character in his first picture and kept the violence to a minimum shows that his intent was not to exploit the genre. The only horror film he made that could possibly be termed sexploitation is *Man With Two Heads,* but even here he exhibited some concern for period setting and atmosphere.

Thus, Milligan is not the villain he has been made out to be. His horror films, with the possible exception of *Body Beneath,* are *not* incredibly dull and offensive, as they have been called. All of them are decently crafted, pleasant to look at, and amusing. Only his genuine porno films, which were made after 1973, are dull and unexceptional. But Milligan should not be overlooked as a major talent in horror film history, adept at making minor mountains out of molehills.

Demonique Mini-Reviews

Flavia, Priestess of Violence

(1975) Starring Florinda Bolkan, Anthony Corlan; Produced and Directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi; Rated R; 95 Minutes.

Extremely gruesome Italian import would have been moreso had Worldwide Entertainment not been forced to censor it in order to receive an R rating. Balkan plays the title character, a nun banished to the convent by her father Don Diego. When the Moslems invade Italy, Flavia sees a chance for escape and joins Prince Achmed and his Moslems. Together with Achmed she takes vengeance on Italy, torturing the citizens who caused her to suffer in the convent for most of her life. Eventually Achmed realized that Flavia is using him for his power, and he leaves her to face hordes of angry Italians who skin her alive with razors. A handsomely mounted piece, *Flavia* contrasts lush countrysides with sadistic gore for maximum effect. Anyone who can take the sight of a girl having her nipples cut off or a man getting speared in the crotch has a stronger stomach than I do. The skinning of Flavia is absolutely revolting, although much of it was excised by American censors. Enough nudity to make a lengthy softcore porno reel; for tolerant fans.

– Barry Kaufman

American ad mat not run in most U.S. cities.

Lady Frankenstein

(1972) Starring Joseph Cotten, Sarah Bay; Directed by Mel Wells; Rated R; 85 Minutes.

An atmospheric New World pickup that offers two Frankenstein monsters, Sara *(Devil's Wedding Night)* Bay in another strip-tease stab at horror, and the sight of Joseph Cotten in a bearhug with a creature that eschewed Universal's flat-top look for a head modeled after a swollen eggshell. Making the most of Cotten's participation in this effort, the press kit announced that his performance as Dr. Frankenstein, "adds another dimension to his great career which began with Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane.*" A comparison like that probably did more the film's PR effort than Cotten's reputation, but *Lady Frankenstein* is actually one of the early

Increased gore distinguishes* Scars of Dracula *('71)

'70's more entertaining Frankenstein sagas and several times better than Cotten's latest horror (in a literal sense) *Screamers* or even Hammer's *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* – an example of England's gothic giant running on near empty. Cast as Cotten's daughter, Bay is back from medical school at the opening to help the doctor in his typically evisceral experiments. When the resulting creature crushes him and runs amok, she combines the body of a local stud and the brain of a deformed genius to make creature number two; all the better to dismember the first monster while satisfying her "strange desires" on the side. With several New World titles now on videotape, here's hoping they arrange a release for this hard-to-catch film in the near future.

– Donald Farmer

Scars of Dracula

(1971) Starring Christopher Lee; Directed by Roy Ward Baker; Rated R; 89 Minutes.

Largely ignored for its increased gore content. Much has been written about the scene in which Lee (Dracula) stabs one of his lady vampires; i.e., Dracula should not have to stab anyone, why didn't he bite her, etc. The fact is that the stabbing is painfully unconvincing, with Lee flailing a rubbery knife that visibly bends as it makes contact with her body. Other effects, like the priest having his face bitten off by vampire bats and Lee's third-degree burn makeup at the finale are much better. By this time in the series the story – searching for brothers and friends at Castle Dracula amidst gasps from the villagers – had become minimal and was dependent upon minor subplots to generate interest. Fiery finale, though effective, fails to sufficiently wrap things up. Overdone.

– Donald Relizzo

Grave of the Vampire

The Visitor *(German ad)*

Carradine dies once again in Silent Night. . .

Grave of the Vampire

(1973) Starring William Smith, Michael Pataki; Directed by J.P. Hayes; Rated PG; 95 Minutes

Poor distribution, a lousy ad campaign, and a negative review in *Castle of Frankenstein* fatally wounded this film's chance to succeed at the box office. Based on David Chase's novel *The Still Life, Grave* begins with sex offender Caleb Croft being accidentally electrocuted while running away from the cops. He later returns from the dead as a vampire and rapes a young girl who gives birth to his illegitimate offspring. The child is a sickly grey color, incapable of laughter, and prefers blood to milk. Upon reaching maturity, the offspring James sets out to find his vampire father and destroy him. He finds him teaching night courses in the occult at a university and falls in love with one of his father's students. When Croft eventually becomes aware of who James is, he traps and kills his son's pals and then goes after the girl. Father and son battle and it is James who emerges victorious and assured of his girlfriend's safety. . .until he himself becomes a vampire on the spot! Although plagued with obvious inanities, the idea is certainly a most welcome variation on an overworked theme. The film moves along at a brisk pace with plenty of violence, though Pyramid trimmed some scenes to achieve a PG rating. Casting is nothing short of inspired, Smith being most appealing as the troubled James and Pataki coming off as an ideal choice for the outwardly normal, calculating Croft. But, perhaps above all else, the film is marked by Chase's flippant, cyncial dialogue, the same mark he would bring to those episodes of *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* he personally wrote or co-authored.

– David K. Farley

Silent Night, Bloody Night

(1973) Starring Patrick O'Neal, John Carradine; Directed by Theodore Gursha; Rated R; 83 Minutes.

An extremely bloody tale of an unusual family and their house in which incest and insanity prevail. Patrick O'Neal appears briefly as a lawyer for Jeffrey Butler, who wants to either sell his grandfather's house for $50,000 or destroy it because of past strange occurances. After O'Neal goes to the house to meet Butler, he and his mistress get axed up while making love. If this seems tacky, how about the scene in which a helpless old man (John Carradine) running down a street with his hands cut off gets hit by a car? *Bloody Night* has a variety of interesting effects: closeups of axes and hammers penetrating flesh, subjective shots of a crazed lunatic escaping from an asylum hitting people in the head with a large plumber's wrench, and frequent slow-motion shots of knives being thrust into animal and human skin. The source for all this bloodletting is that grandpa's house was once used as an institution for the mentally ill, and one day he found that the asylum was being used by his doctor's friends for bizarre parties. To get even, he released all the lunatics who rebelled against the doctors in a nightmarish scene. *Bloody Night* isn't a complete bloodbath, but is artistically done, with numerous flashbacks used to help clarify incidents, and the killing of each official illustrated in slow-motion. The characters are well-cast, the sets are realistic, and the script is tight. Offensive but nicely done. *– Marc N. Tompulis*

Visitor, The

(1979) Starring Joanne Nail, Glenn Ford, Mel Ferrer.

Mel Ferrer dressed in a Hare-Krishna robe visits earth to warn of the second coming of the devil himself. Suddenly, Kathy (Joanne Nail) finds her child Barbara acting rather unusual, and one begins to wonder if Ovidio Assonitis didn't get it all out of him with *Beyond the Door*. But this time an extra-terrestrial force seems to be causing all the trouble, and it's up to Ferrer sitting atop a building in downtown Atlanta to counter the invasion with vicious doves. Director Paradise uses

Atlanta to its fullest advantage, particularly in a spectacular scene set in the Omni Center's skating rink. Assonitis's story is pretentious but at least manages to blend horror and science-fiction with minimal difficulty. *Visitor* appears high budget, with superb makeup and effects, and amusing cameos by Sam Peckinpah and John Huston. The main problem is that the film falls between the never-never land of classy horror and bizarre, cultish science-fiction. Scenes featuring birds biting into necks and blood spurting are juxtaposed with drug-culture, good-natured aliens spewing curses at the evildoers. The ideas mesh well but the styles don't, with the cliched "the world is saved" conclusion adding insult to injury. *The Visitor* overstays its welcome after the first hour. – *Barry Kaufman*

'GP' rated violence of 1971 in* Blood and Lace *(American International Pictures)

Blood and Lace

(1971) Starring Gloria Grahame, Milton Selzer; Directed by Philip Gilbert; Rated GP; 87 Minutes.

Crazy early '70s exploitation is as sleazy as it sounds despite a curious GP rating. Grahame looks withered as the owner of a girls school where the nubile young students are kept from leaving in a variety of ways. The entire picture is pretty much typified by the opening scene in which a prostitute and her customer are caught in the act and bludgeoned with a hammer. The great screenwriter Gil Lasky was obviously at a loss for plot structure, as in the end our heroine is found to be a murderer. Our hero promises to keep her guilt a secret if she'll marry him, but not before several others are hatcheted, meatcleavered, and bludgeoned. Love makes for strange bedfellows. – *Ralph Darren*

Eaten Alive

(1976) Starring Neville Brand, Mel Ferrer; Directed by Tobe Hooper; Rated R; 90 Minutes

Also known as *Starlight Slaughter* and *Death Trap,* Tobe Hooper's first film after *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* apparently didn't turn out to his satisfaction according to a recent interview. Still, *Eaten Alive* stands well above last year's *The Funhouse* thanks to several memorably eccentric characters, a great electronic/country soundtrack, and the kind of Texas-slime atmosphere Hooper is so fond of. It's hard to believe Neville Brand is quoting lines from a script when he carries on muttered monologues after each semi-explicit murder, but I can't think of a role he's had more fun with (or eaten so much scenery in). He gets particularly excited in monologues concerning his more vividly dispatched victims. A real shame his part wasn't bigger since we're treated to (among other things) the sight of Finley groveling before his wife Marilyn Burns – begging her

More blood and a shot to the head in Tobe Hooper's* Eaten Alive *(1976) (Virgo Int.)

to grind a lit cigarette into his eyes. Ms. Burns has a few minutes less screaming to do here than in *Chainsaw,* but it's nice to see her providing some continuity between Hooper's two earliest and most enjoyable horror films. Despite the more liberal use of blood, *Eaten Alive* doesn't match the tension of *Chainsaw,* but it remains a highly worthwhile example of the type of drive-in horror that low-budgets serve best.

– *Donald Farmer*

Night of the Witches

(1970) Starring Keith Erik Burt, Kathryn Loder; Directed by Keith Erik Burt; Rated M; 78 Minutes

Could only be made in the early '70s. A bogus preacher (atrociously portrayed by Burt) travels by mule and goes around blessing pretty young things. Soon he steals a car and winds up traveling to a desolate island inhabited by a murderous coven of California witches. A real estate company has been sending

representatives to the island in hopes of buying the witches' castle for a tourist spot. Less than pleased with the idea, the witches poison the prospective buyers and use their bodies for sacrifice. The preacher is smarter and takes full advantage of the situation, but soon realizes he should have remained home "blessing" the native females. Entertaining piece of horror sexploitation.

– Andrew MacDougall

Demon Rage

(a.k.a. *Satan's Mistress*)
Starring Britt Ekland, John Carradine; Directed by James Polakof; Rated R; 86 Minutes.

Weakly scripted grindhouse favorite features Lana Wood as a sexually frustrated housewife who is visited in the wee hours of the night by a black-caped visitor. Soon Lana's family goes through hell as they try to reach their mom, who by now is satisfied with secluding herself in her bedroom and painting wild portraits of the mysterious visitor. As it turns out, the mystery man is none other than Satan himself, and it isn't long before heads are being lopped off on a guillotine that just happens to be in the basement. Abundant nudity and sufficient gore have kept this one on the lower half of double-bills for years, its title being altered for every subsequent re-release (it also turned up in 1977 as *Bride of Satan*). Polakof's direction is fine, but the script contains too many incongruities that considerably reduce the film's impact. For example, what is a guillotine doing in the basement? Why is the family so stupid that when they hear mom gasping and panting in the bedroom, they can't figure out what's going on? Where do all the disciples of Satan come from at the film's conclusion? Why does Britt Ekland receive top billing when she's in the picture for 5 minutes? Potentially excellent horror movie ruined by incomprehensible conclusion; definitely worth a look.

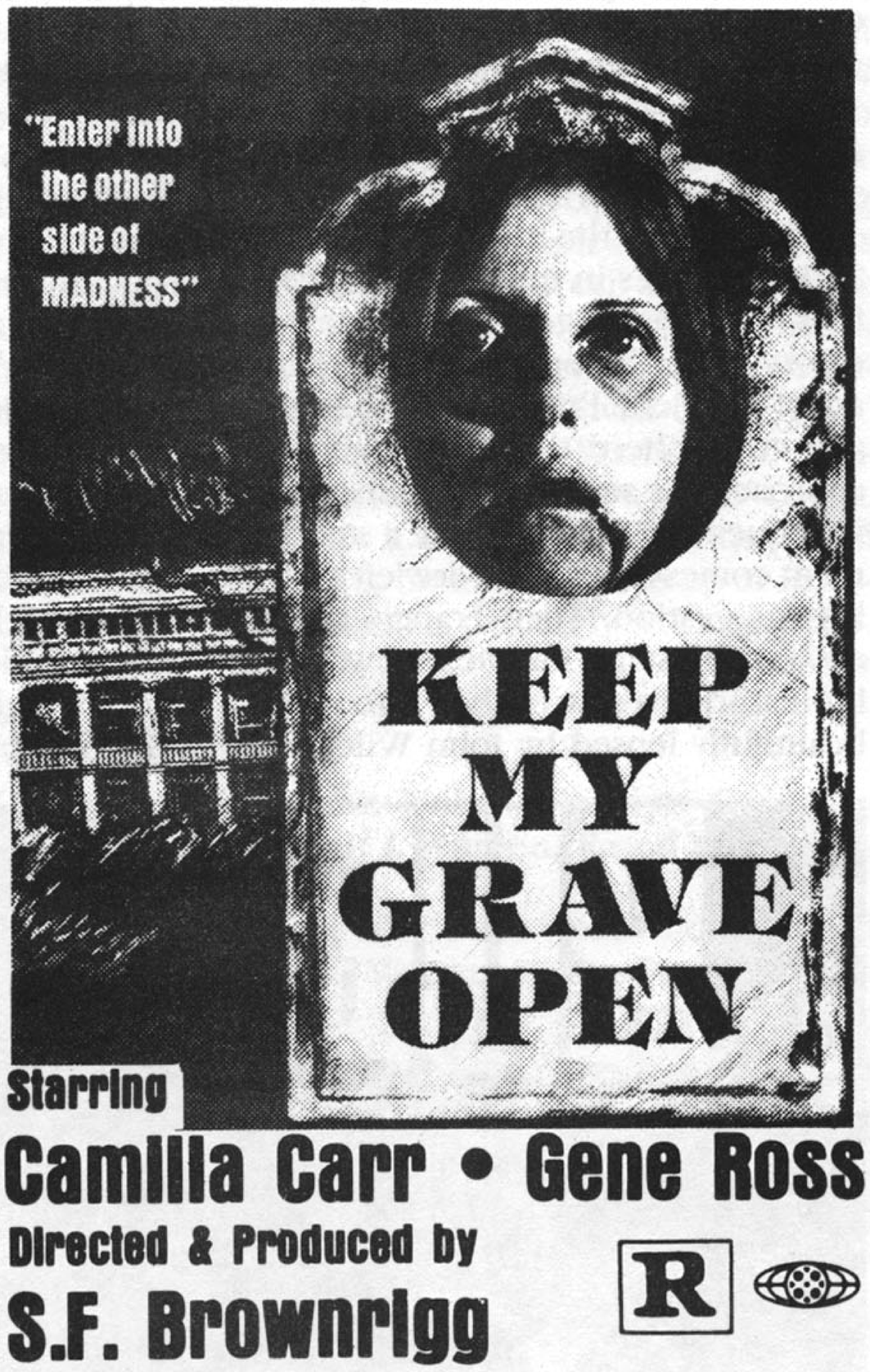
– Ralph Darren

Keep My Grave Open

(1973) Starring Camilla Carr, Gene Ross; Directed by S.F. Brownrigg; Rated R; 95 Minutes.

This apparently is S.F. Brownrigg's apology to horror fans for his putrid *Don't Look In The Basement,* and though he hasn't improved much in his craft there is at least an original story to sustain interest. Carr plays a wealthy mansion owner who leaves meals for her beloved husband Kevin. Problem is when folks stop by they usually end up with a sword in the stomach, neck or face. After she makes love to Kevin things are okay for a while, until we find that she is the killer when she seduces and slashes a young neighbor. Now totally insane, she swallows an entire bottle of pills and chews on the broken glass (pictured in the ad for the film). At her funeral, a tall, handsome figure is the last to leave her grave. He walks into the house, looks upstairs and says, "Honey, I'm back." Brownrigg handles the story well, complicating matters through scenes like the one in which Kevin makes love to his wife. We assume him to be so real because the entire sequence is photographed from Kevin's point of view; the fact is that nobody is actually on top of Carr. But Brownrigg seems to lose focus as the film wears on, uncertain as to whether he is making a violent exploitation piece or a psychological drama. The several murders in the film are treated inconsistently, with one showing nothing and another wallowing in blood. Neither angle is well-developed and the final result is a bizarre, intriguing but ultimately disappointing curiosity. A must see for the obscure horror completist.

– Barry Kaufman



Ruby

(1976) Starring Piper Laurie, Stuart Whitman; Directed by Curtis Harrington; Rated R; 88 Minutes.

Promising supernatural oddity has sunk into obscurity just as the last thirty minutes sinks into absurdity. Piper Laurie is Ruby, whose underworld husband was shot many years back by the men she now employs at her drive-in. Several creepy scenes ensue as her

husband returns to hang, impale and twist the men who double-crossed him. Then suddenly Ruby's daughter becomes possessed by his spirit and she starts acting an awful lot like Linda Blair three years earlier. It's all downhill from there. Intriguing but dissatisfying conclusion has Laurie fall into the same lake her hubby fell several years back, only to be entangled in his rotting skeleton. Worth seeing once or twice.

– Barry Kaufman

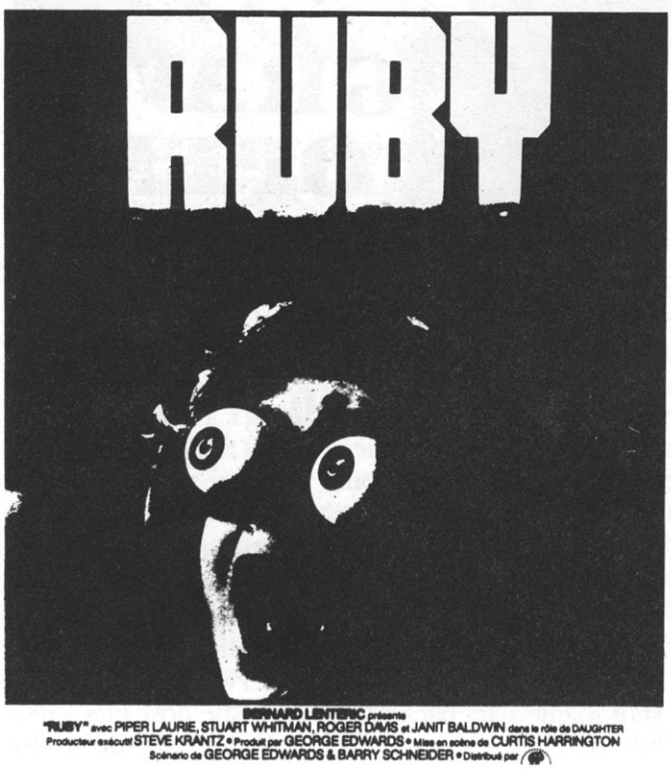
The Ghoul

(1975) Starring Peter Cushing, Veronica Carlson; Directed by Freddie Francis; Rated R; 93 Minutes.

Stylish Tyburn horror delivers too little too late. John Elder's spirited screenplay tells the story of Cushing's desperate attempts to cure his deformed son whom he keeps locked in the attic. A group of frolicking 1920s upper-class snobs have a car competition during a dense fog and several get lost. Cushing does a lot of sobbing and praying, his maid broods and chops up dead snobs for the boy upstairs, and everyone tries to find out what's in the attic. The man who does at the film's conclusion gets a ribbon saw in the head in *The Ghoul*'s only bloody scene. Herein lies the picture's major problem: Francis tries so hard to develop mood and atmosphere that he abandons a contemporary approach for most of the film. As a result, when an infrequent bit of action like a stabbing or dismemberment comes around, we are left with absolutely bloodless suggestion. Then Francis reverses his approach and in the last five minutes shows an extremely graphic bit featuring a saw pushed into a man's head. Though beautifully lensed by John Wilcox and well-acted by Cushing, it is easy to see why this anachronistic melodrama has remained so ignored. Ending is anticlimactic to say the least.

– Barry Kaufman

The only violence in* The Ghoul *(1975)



The Virgin Witch

(1972) Starring Ann Michelle, Patricia Haines; Directed by Ray Austin; Rate R; 80 Minutes.

Cheesy but fun, this British production is mainly a sexploiter with sufficient rituals and spell-casting to satisfy the supernatural angle. Real-life sisters Anne and Vicki Michelle become involved with several affluent cult members, which leads to Anne gaining a few occult powers of her own. Softcore sexual activities result. Vicki's male interest is Keith Buckley, better remembered as the scorpion victim in *Dr. Phibes Rises Again,* and though her sister appears throughout the film as a slightly less-than-virgin witch, this picture appears responsible for launching Ann's mini-horror career in *House of Whipcord* and *The Haunted.*

– Donald Farmer

Schizo

(1977) Starring Lynne Frederick, Stephanie Beacham; Directed by Pete Walker; Rated R; 109 Minutes.

Pete Walker strikes again with a slick, exploitative horror/mystery. Frederick is a famous ice skater who is getting married to the owner of a weaving corporation. She is followed by a tall, tough man who keeps having flashbacks of a sadomasochistic sexual experience followed by a brutal knifing. Frederick becomes more worried when her friends are found with knitting

Lynne Frederick tries to look innocent as the old lady gets a knitting needle in* Schizo *(1977)

needles pushed through their heads and their faces pounded in by sledgehammers. Scripter David McGillivray throws in an unncessary supernatural angle involving a seance scene, and finally wraps things up with one tremendous, well-calculated twist. By this time Walker had become an artistic, more restrained director and presented material in a more entertaining manner. Examples of his clever transition devices include a closeup of a pen circling a picture dissolving into a twirling ice skate, or a chugging locomotive abruptly becoming a pounding weaving machine. But of course, Walker's mise-en-scene lies firmly attached to grotesque attractions, be it a knitting needle emerging from an eyeball or a knife slicing into bloodied skin. *Schizo* rivals Walker's 1974 film *Frightmare* in its disgusting setpieces, while being as dramatically excellent as 1973's *The Comeback* – a film that featured a bravura performance by singer Jack Jones. As Hollywood churns out slasher cheapies by the dozen, it is refreshing to look back on Walker's stylized treatment of fairly standard material.

– Donald Relizzo

Murder Clinic

(1969) Starring Rico Daneli; Directed by Dara Tenar; Not Rated; 85 Minutes.

Interesting, well-plotted Italian film revolves around a respectable doctor who heads a clinic in which many unexplainable deaths have been occurring. The doctor is accused of murdering his wife's sister and forced out of practice. He decides to start a clinic for the mentally ill, rationalizing that after time passes he might be able to revive his old practice. Although his wife and the citizens are convinced he is the murderer, the doctor sets out to prove them wrong. *Murder Clinic* presents a well-developed story during which the audience is supplied with significant bits of information to help expose the true murderer. The violence is typical of the late '60s Italian horror film: razor slashings that show us the razor striking and the messy aftermath, but few elaborate effects. In the context of an above-average story this subtlety is infinitely preferable to distractingly complex Savini throat slashings and disembowelments.

– Marc Tompulis

Simon, King Of The Witches

(1974) Starring Andrew Prine, Brenda Scott; Directed by Bruce Kessler; Rated R; 92 Minutes.

Witchcraft meets the '70s drug culture in this surprisingly good production by the long extinct Fanfare Corporation. Held together by a vivid, likeable characterization in the title role by Andrew Prine, it makes one wonder where he went wrong down the road appearing in junk like *Grizzly* and *Town That Dreaded Sundown.* Much of the credit for *Simon* should go to Robert Phippeny's very original script which lands the fantasy premise into a setting where politics and drug dealing play respective hands. A couple of hippie dealers who say, "Hey man!" as often as Cheech and Chong are after Simon to curse a pesky narc. Meanwhile, Simon is busy romancing the District Attorney's daughter (Brenda Scott) and working on his "effluvial condensor," and there's even a scene featuring Warhol star Ultra-Violet as the head of a neighborhood witches' coven. Originally released on a double bill with the tepid *Werewolves On Wheels, Simon* still pops up at drive-ins from time to time and is definitely worth the trip.

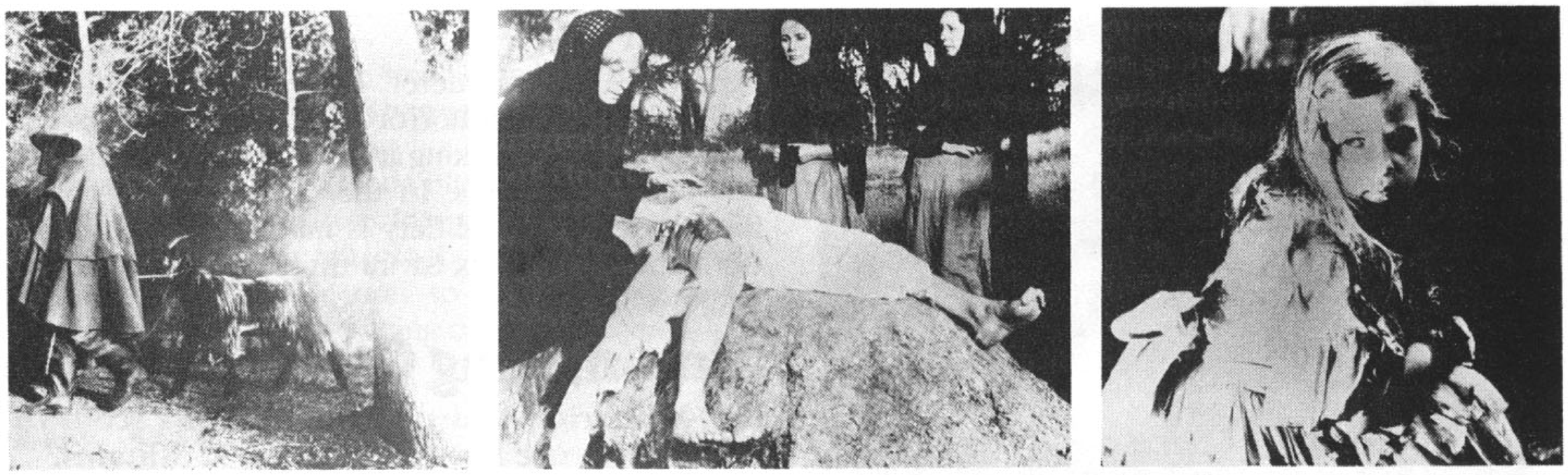
– Donald Farmer

Terror

(1979) Starring John Nolan, Carolyn Courage; Directed by Norman J. Warren; Rated R; 86 Minutes.

British gorefest in which the word "f-ck" is used more often than "the." Warren imitates Pete Walker in

***Carolyn Courage pinned to the fireplace in* Terror.**



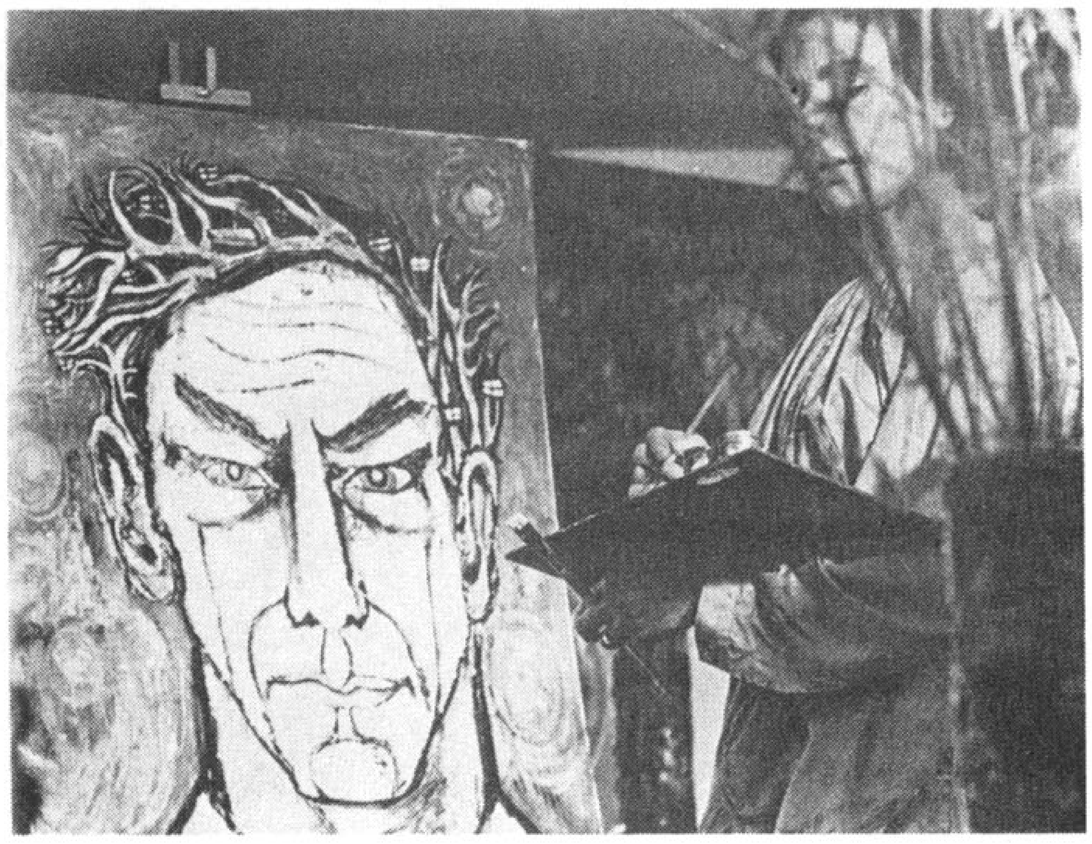
Three atmospheric shots from* Witches' Mountain *(1974); Left— One of the disciples takes a goat to the sacrifice; Center— Gory impromptu sacrifice; Right— A naughty little witch girl.

his polished treatment of David McGillivray's antiquated family curse screenplay. Jim, the owner of a movie studio that has started to specialize in teasy porno films, gets slashed with a sword by his sister at a post-Hollywood party one evening. It's not long before acquaintances are getting decapitated, impaled, dismembered and slashed, presumably by Jim's loving sister. Worse yet, Jim's glassware and china are mysteriously exploding. When mom returns from the 1800s and finds all the dishes broken, Jim ends up with an axe in his chest and sister is stapled to the fireplace. Rarely dull, *Terror* gets bogged down by silly (albeit impressive) supernatural scare devices like a car suspended in midair and multitudes of flying objects. McGillivray has not lost his sense of sleaze since his association with Walker as he managed to put into his screenplay a nude nightclub dancer entertaining herself with phallic devices. Just goes to show the British can sometimes exceed domestic tastelessness. *– Barry Kaufman*

Ghastly Ones

(1969) Starring Don Williams, Veronic Radburn; Directed by Andy Milligan; Not Rated; 81 Minutes.

Pretty ghastly Milligan film benefits only from brief bits of gore and attempted period detail. The age-old "relatives gather for a reading of the will" story is brought back with predictably hokey results. A hooded beastie resembling a monster from the old Republic serials dices and slices most of the family members with knives, sickles . . . anything handy. The late 1800s setting is a nice try but the cast members' "in-crowd" hairstyles give it away. Poor lighting and grainy photography are sure to include eye-strain headaches: not as graphic as one would expect. "Actors" give Connie Mason strong competition. *– Ralph Darren*



Sharon Gurney paints a remembrance of her dear, departed husband in* Crucible of Horror *(1970)

Crucible Of Horror

(1970) Starring Michael Gough, Sharon Gurney; Directed by Viktoris R.; Rated GP: 86 Minutes.

Rarely seen British horror is an exceptionally artistic and clever revenge drama. Relentlessly sadistic father (Gough) finally breaks mother's last straw when he brutally whips their 18-year-old daughter, and mom and daughter decide to kill pop. But instead of focusing on the murder, most of *Crucible Of Horror* concentrates on mom and the kid's difficulty at concealing the crime. The thriller takes on Hitchcockian overtones as neighbors and friends stop in with the most annoying regularity. Shocking conclusion finds Gough still alive and things returning to exactly the same as they were in the beginning. Some wild nightmare sequences and smatterings of nudity and violence help move things along. *– Barry Kaufman*

Witches Mountain

(1974) Starring Patty Shepard, John Caffari; Directed by Juan Cortez Alvarez; Rated R (TV Print PG); 100 Minutes (TV Print 90 Minutes).

Confusing Spanish supernatural absurdity is even more disjointed in its edited television form. Mario, a news photographer dumps sexy Monica Randall for an assignment to do a photo essay on "Witches Mountain." On the way, he picks up the equally attractive Patty Shepard (the vampire woman in *Werewolf Vs. Vampire Woman*) who accompanies him. After staying in the castle under the hospitality of female hosts, Mario finds

***The retarded boy is hung by a vengeful Camille Keaton in the despicable* I Spit On Your Grave**

that they are witches and plan to sacrifice his new lover. She is chased by the witches and prefers jumping off a cliff and cracking her skull open on the rocky shore to being sacrificed. Mario returns to his apartment to find the witches (whom he thought he had destroyed), with Monica Randall leading them, preparing to bring him back to the mountain. There are several nice touches, like a little girl mysteriously appearing in Mario's negatives, or the innovative soundtrack, but as is common with many foreign horror films, the plot is minimally developed and nonsensical. For instance, we are never told *how* the witches survived Mario's attack – we are simply left to assume because they are witches they can't be killed. Photography by Ramon Sempere obviously tries to be arty but seems rather pretentious in this context. TV prints contain considerable violence but have been cleansed of frequent eroticism present in the original version. Exaggerated horror film benefits from its own weirdness.

– Donald Relizzo

I Spit On Your Grave

(1980) Starring Camille Keaton; Directed by Meir Zarchi; Rated R; 96 Minutes.

People frequently debate the merits of *Friday the 13th, Maniac,* and other storyless gore pictures; anyone who defends *I Spit On Your Grave* must be hopelessly perverted and/or very limited in their exposure to film in general. Technically, *I Spit On Your Grave* is one of the most inept in recent years, with torturously dull editing and basic nonmotile porno-style camerawork. In fact, the scope of the screenplay would've fit nicely into a 20-minute Mitchell Bros. peep-show reel. A young, not very pretty female writer (Camille Keaton) travels to her summer cabin for solitude but instead gets raped and beaten by three rednecks and their reluctant retarded "buddy." She returns and predictably castrates, hangs and axes her tormentors. Writer, producer and director Meir Zarchi is so unconcerned with art that *I Spit On Your Grave* contains no music, with dull background noises usually predominant. Absolutely the lowest common denominator in "horror" filmmaking.

– Ralph Darren

I Dismember Mama

(1974) Starring Zooey Hall, Geri Reischl; Directed by Paul Leder; Rated R; 88 Minutes.

Cheap American sickie that played on a double bill with *Blood-Spattered Bride* and sported an ad campaign that encouraged patrons to pick up an "upchuck cup" at the box office. Hall plays a sexually deprived young man who considers his mother a whore because she remarried. As could be expected he considers all other females to be like mom, so he rapes a nurse at the mental institution, his maid, or any other pretty thing that happens to be around. After he escapes he goes after mother, whom he eventually does dismember. Nasty film starts with heavy doses of skin and moves onto heavy doses of blood pouring out of knife wounds. Some interesting lighting and hilarious overacting (Zooey Hall seems particularly fond of screaming, "My mother's a whore!" at the top of his voice) make up the film's only redeeming qualities. Purulent sleaze might be entertaining to those who aren't easily offended.

– James Masters

Fury Of The Wolfman

(1970) Starring Paul Naschy, Perla Cristal; Directed by Jose Maria Zabalza; Not Rated; Spanish Version 95 Minutes (TV Version 90 Minutes).

Third and possibly worst in Naschy's Waldemar Daninski wolfman saga has him killing his unfaithful wife only to be placed under the power of a mad female scientist. . .and his former lover. Seems she isn't terribly original and is once again trying to return the dead to life for her diabolical purposes. Naschy's

Family portrait, publicity shot from* Fury of the Wolfman *(Avco Embassy, 1972)

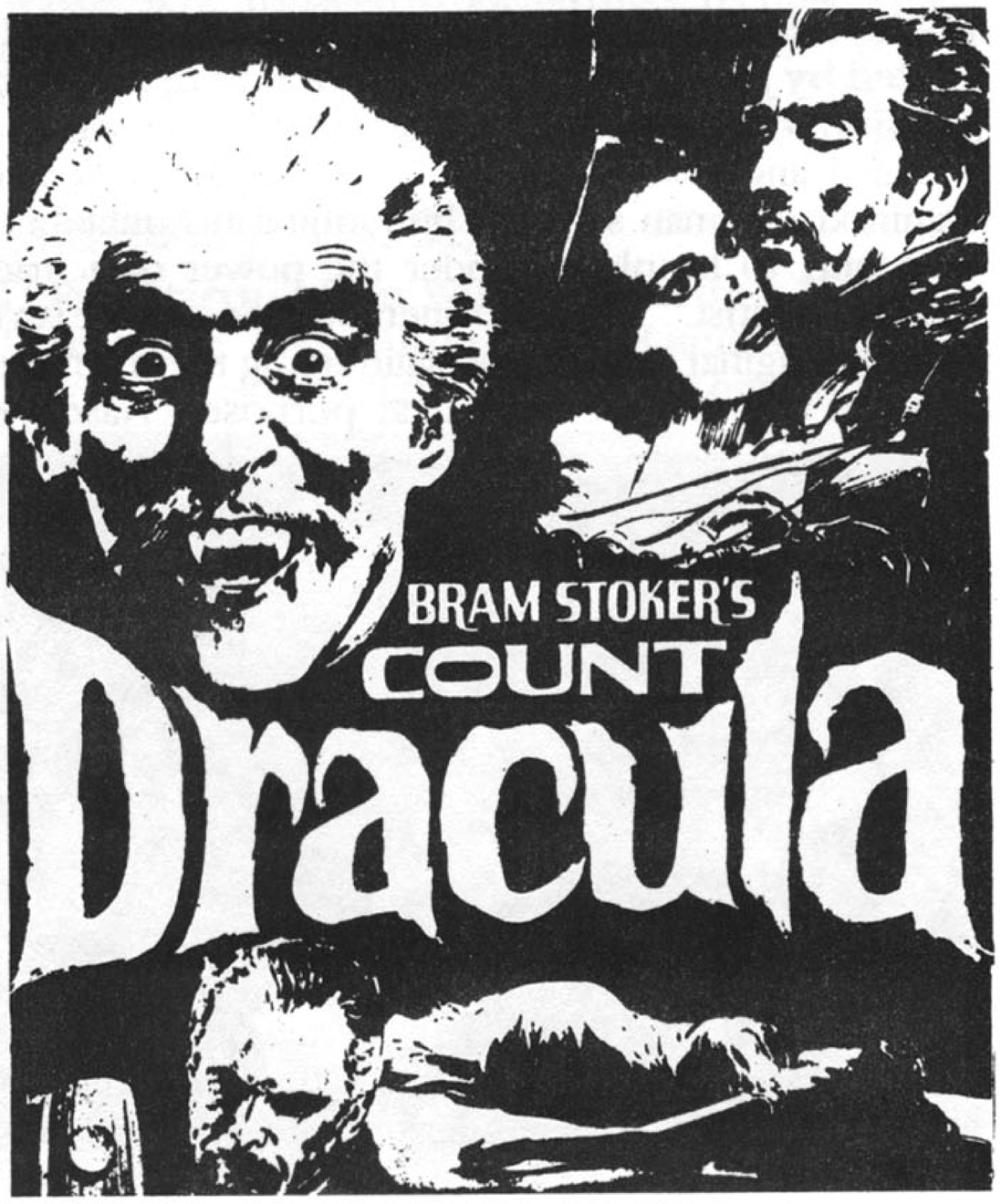
screenplay throws too many conventions of the Universal horror series in, which results in a pot-luck product. In addition, the film is unable to overcome an atmosphere of budgetary deficiency, with a murder scene from the first of the Daninski series *(La Marca Del Hombre Lobo* or *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror)* incongruously edited in. Particularly annoying is the fact that the wolfman makeup in *Fury Of The Wolfman* is totally different from that used in *La Marca Del Hombre Lobo.* Naschy himself stated that *La Furia Del Hombre Lobo,* "didn't work well for a variety of reasons. The primary one is director Jose Maria Zabalza, and second concerns problems of mediation with the censors who removed twenty minutes from the final version." This could also be a reason why the scene from *Marca Dela Hombre Lobo* was edited in. In any case, *Fury Of The Wolfman* contains several worthwhile sequences, especially the finale in which Naschy as wolfman battles a newly discovered girlfriend who has been transformed by the jealous scientist into a wolfwoman. Poorly done, but not boring.

– Barry Kaufman

Count Dracula

(1970) Starring Christopher Lee, Herbert Lom; Directed by Jess Franco; Rated R; 98 Minutes (TV Print 91 Minutes).

Failure of this Italian/German/Spanish co-production is frequently attributed to Jess Franco's direction, but upon further scrutiny seems more due to the fact that Stoker's literary work is too slow to adapt directly to



***Exciting art for Franco's dull* Count Dracula.**

Eyeless victims in* Mansion of the Doomed *(1975)

film. The atmosphere and locations are on target, as are the performances, but the talky first half almost ruins the show. Some of Franco's heavy duty violence is cut by the censors, including an effective beheading with a shovel. Klaus Kinski makes an incredible Renfield, and his cell scenes are actually disgusting due to Franco's dim, grainy documentary style photography. Effective musical score helps, but the overall impact is diminished by excessive zooms (Franco's greatest weakness) and an occasional cheap set or two. Possibly Lee's best portrayal of Dracula, though he'll never stop insisting how dreadful the rest of the picture is.

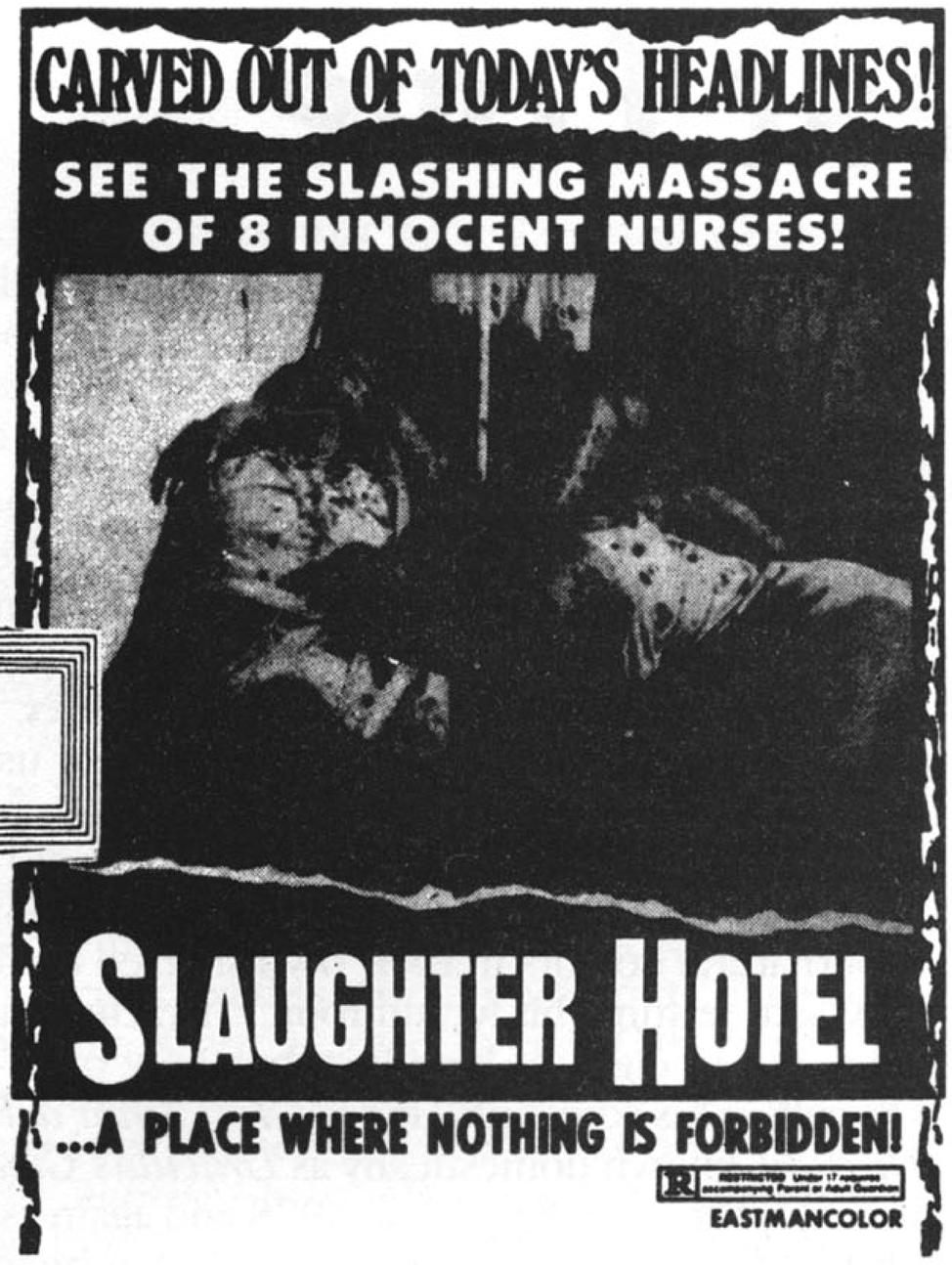
– Barry Kaufman

Mansion Of The Doomed

(1975) Starring Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame; Directed by Michael Pataki; 93 Minutes.

Unpleasant grand guignol cheapie directed by the same Pataki of *Grave of the Vampire* and *Dracula's Dog* fame. Basehart is Dr. Chaney, a loving father who was driving when his daughter was blinded in an auto accident. Chaney reads too many medical journals and sees too many bad horror movies as he decides to transplant the eyes of his daughter's fiance to restore her vision. Things only get worse as the doctor is forced to confine the unhappy fiance to a cell in the basement until he can restore *his* sight as well. Meanwhile, Chaney's daughter continues to lose her vision at the most inopportune moments, so the doc must go out and find more unwilling eye donors. If you don't know what happens at the end with scores of perturbed blind people locked up in the basement, then you'd better see this film. Pataki's direction isn't bad at all, but it all seems terribly contrived and even more low-budget. Grahame walks on and off the screen in true fallen movie star style. Gory, but there's only so many times an eye extraction can be exciting. Conclusion supports the old saying "an eye for an eye," but *Mansion of the Doomed* gets a "nay."

– Donald Relizzo



House Out Frontiers, The

(1976) Starring Geraldine Chaplin, Tony Isbert; Directed by Allan Pecudio; 99 Minutes; Not Released in the U.S.

Complex, intense Spanish horror thriller features superb performances and an intricate plot. A 23-year-old man named Daniel (Isbert) moves to the big city to make something of himself. A kind old man offers assistance and introduces him to a group of senior citizens who assign him the task of finding a young lady named Laura Campos. As more unusual events occur Daniel tries to decline his assignment, but is subtly told "that would not be a wise decision." As the plot thickens, Daniel falls in love with Laura, who tells him that the folks at the House Out Frontiers delight in torturing specified individuals for large monetary rewards. In the end, all is futile as Laura and Daniel end up bleeding to death with hundreds of needles stuck into their bodies. Profound film uses extreme bloodiness sparingly for maximum effect. *– James Masters*

Slaughter Hotel

(1974) Starring Klaus Kinski, Rosalba Neri; Directed by Fernando Di Leo; Rated R; 100 Minutes.

Hallmark import released by American International is possibly the sleaziest "horror" film in history. Weak plot revolves around a hospital which houses perverts convicted of sexually violent crimes. Between seducing some of the more voluptuous nurses, Rosalba Neri "assists" the frustrated patients with their needs which pleases them for a while. But nobody is happy when the nurses start getting explicitly disemboweled. To make certain the audience receives the most extreme oversaturation of bloodletting possible, De Leo has patients shot in the head at the slightest sign that they might be the murderer. Their brains and bits of skull splatter vividly onto the white hospital walls. Fortunately, they don't kill the cleaning lady. Director of photography Franco Villa tries hard to make things look less impoverished but doesn't succeed. Still, his attractive lensing does no harm. Truly exceptional musical score by Sylviano Spadaccino helps make the nauseating goings-on more palatable, but it doesn't help enough. Yet another film Kinski would prefer to forget that he ever made; not a bad film to forget. *– Barry Kaufman*

Witchmaker, The

(1969) Starring Anthony Eisley, Alvy Moore; Written, Produced and Directed by William O. Brown; Rated M; 109 Minutes.

Overlong film has something for everybody. Eisley plays a deranged witch's assistant who fetches young lovelies for his demanding master. She's a wicked old witch who needs blood to help her return to her deceiving, youthful form. As with many 'M' rated films of the late '60s and early '70s, there is plenty of teasy nudity and syrupy blood, though Brown seems to censor himself on occasion. Most of the shots avoid showing breasts, with the top of the frame either above or below the exposed portion. But there is some rather risque action involving two very close girlfriends, as well as some nifty gore as Eisley hangs his victims from tree branches, slits their throats, and collects the blood in a bucket. Technicolor photography of the Louisiana bayou lends more atmosphere to *The Witchmaker* than it deserves. Performances by all except Eisley are barely passable, and interminable speculating between dull male leads might induce drowsiness. Contains an unusual slow-motion shot (that lasts over a minute) of a nude woman fleeing from Eisley holding her boobs between her elbows. She eventually knocks herself out.

– Ralph Darren

Horror Hospital

(1973) Starring Michael Gough, Robin Askwith; Written and Directed by Anthony Balch; Rated R; 86 Minutes.

Another Hallmark import, this time from Britain and more intelligent than their usual product. Askwith is a young punk on his way to a vacation at "Dr. Storm's Hairy Holidays." Dr. Storm (Michael Gough) isn't fond of teenagers and uses them in his brain control experiments. As Askwith is about to get onto what's happening, Storm orders his death. Dennis Price appears briefly as a cheery real estate tax collector until he is decapitated by Gough's lethal car. Lots of gory decapitations and even an icky monster at the conclusion make this a fast-paced, macabre piece. Better direction would've been an immense help. *– Ralph Darren*

Dracula's Great Love

Comments from Paul Naschy
Critical Analysis by Barry Kaufman

***A pre-title eye-catcher in* Dracula's Great Love**

As has been stated in earlier issues of *Demonique,* foreign films, and foreign horror films in particular, present various problems for American audiences. Usually due to poor dubbing, movie buffs/critics reject foreign horror as non-cinema that caters to the lowest common denominator of exploitation audiences. Many horror fans even dismiss overseas horror as low-budget worthlessness, preferring the more pasteurized mainstream domestic horror product. The fact is that, in retrospect, Europeans might be responsible for the best horror product of the seventies.

***Vic Winner (center) and friends up to no good in* Dracula's Great Love**

Their pictures frequently rejected the popular slash-and-stalk approach to horror, featuring atmosphere and style in lieu of the stroke of the knife. Admittedly foreign horrors frequently contain more gore and nudity than their American counterparts; however, it is a question of treatment that defines its proper use. This is particularly true of traditionalists like Mario Bava, Leon Klimovsky, Amando De Ossorio and Jacinto Molina (Paul Naschy) who usually dealt with classical or supernatural horrors in their own stylized fashion.

Naschy featured his lycanthropic character Waldemar Daninsky in eight of his films, but only once played Dracula in his screenplay for *El Gran Amor del Conde Dracula,* known domestically as *Dracula's Great Love* in 1974, *Vampire Playgirls* in 1978 and again as *Count Dracula's Great Love* in 1980. The film has been called "slow and sentimental" by *Cinefantastique,* "like watching paint dry."

It's amusing how closed-minded we Americans can be due to our television mentalities. The *Cinefantastique* critic could find no depth to the film and sloughed it off as trash, while as Naschy comments, "The critics have said it is a story between Stendhal and Rocambol." In fact, the majority of foreign critics were very favorable towards Naschy's first deviation from his Waldemar Daninski character.

And if there's one thing *El Gran Amor del Conde Dracula* is not, it is slow moving with no less than ten violent acts in its 96-minute running time. There are only one or two talky stretches in the film, and minimal padding footage of individuals walking apprehensively through the castle corridors. By the time the credits roll by, one gravedigger has had his neck torn out and another has received a hatchet in the forehead. Five minutes later a stagecoach driver has his face mutilated by a horse's kick. There follows impalements, more bitings, slashings with a sickle, stakings, graphic whippings, lesbianism. . .it is definitely not slow.

Sentimental, yes. But what is wrong with a variation on a theme? It was bold of Nashcy to have Dracula commit suicide at the film's conclusion because the girl he loved, Karen, would not join him in the world of the undead. *Dracula's Great Love* is both a love story and a gothic horror picture, both coming together nicely, if abruptly, at the end. Naschy's Dracula is totally different from any ever portrayed; as Naschy himself says, "He is a pathetic character. . .tormented. . .and while conserving elements of the classic vampire has little to do with the common screen vampire. He is a very distinct vampire, very human, and it is that quality which I pursued."

Other distinctions that make *Dracula's Great Love* more than just another vampire film are its atmosphere and photography. The Hammer Dracula films are heavy in gothic atmosphere and slick photography, but they remain distractingly artificial, set in plastic, obviously studio surroundings. *Dracula's Great Love* achieves a genuinely gothic atmosphere due to Naschy's insistence of location shooting. Full advantage is taken of the ambience exuded by the elaborate Spanish moors and lush gardens, a mood reinforced by natural fog. Especially stunning are the transitional shots of sunlight beaming through the trees in the morning mist as the camera slowly dollies across the forest floor.

An additional criticism leveled against *Dracula's Great Love* is that Naschy is too stout to play Count Dracula. Regarding this Naschy points out, "Essentially, my physique is not adapted to him (Dracula). I am broad-shouldered, and I am not tall. My eyes yes, they functioned well in the role. I would have been a Dracula along the lines of Christopher Lee. Naturally, I had to flee from this." To better distinguish this version, Naschy had his Dracula be a doctor, which further developed the humanistic dimension of his character.

Like his Waldemar Daninski, Naschy's Dracula is ambiguous and therefore difficult for domestic audiences to swallow. He is not the cut-and-dried, good versus evil figure that Americans have come to expect, but a Dracula who is violent and romantic at the same time. He is a friendly fellow who can laugh at himself; he is also a vicious killer who murders nonchalantly to satiate his thirst for blood. We are used to packaged entertainment films that don't contain such wild paradoxes.

Though many of Naschy's screenplays derive elements from the universal horror films of the 1930s, his script for *Dracula's Great Love* does not. Instead Naschy invents traditions of his own: Count Dracula is a doctor and a hunter, the castle is plaqued by vampiric tramps, Dracula can ignore Satanic requests in favor of his own emotional desires, ad infinitum. Of course, it is difficult to distinguish between dialogue in Naschy's original screenplay and dialogue that the picture's American and British distributor, International Amusement Corp., haphazardly dubbed in. In the American version much of Dracula's dialogue is told in the form of voice over narration similar to that of Amen-Ho-Tep's in *Mummy's Revenge* (1973). Again distributors used a kindergarten-style vocal interpretation, with a supercilious echo-chamber to enhance the "menacing" effect.

The film's temporal and structural qualities were additionally destroyed by release to television in 1976. Its 96 minutes were rearranged to anywhere from 68 to 70 minutes, depending on the independent station the sale was being made to. About these widely distributed prints Naschy comments, "They have cut out 36 portions of *Dracula's Great Love* in censorship. I wanted to rebuild the puzzle in order to make it comprehensible. Consequently, I wanted to roll a second part, but I had problems and the movie wasn't made."

To go through a sequence shot-by-shot would help exemplify the incredible alterations caused by censorship. During the sacrifice of an innocent woman, we see a closeup of Dracula striking here in the back with a heavy leather whip. Suddenly, a lady vampire is beside her and rips open the victim's dress. The long shot of the scene is cut. Naschy hits her again with the whip and once more the shot of her back is removed. We see a closeup of a lady vampire with whipping noises in the background. Then a shot from behind Dracula showing his handiwork is removed. All three vampire ladies walk towards the dying victims and

***A scene totally cut from the TV version of* Dracula's Great Love**

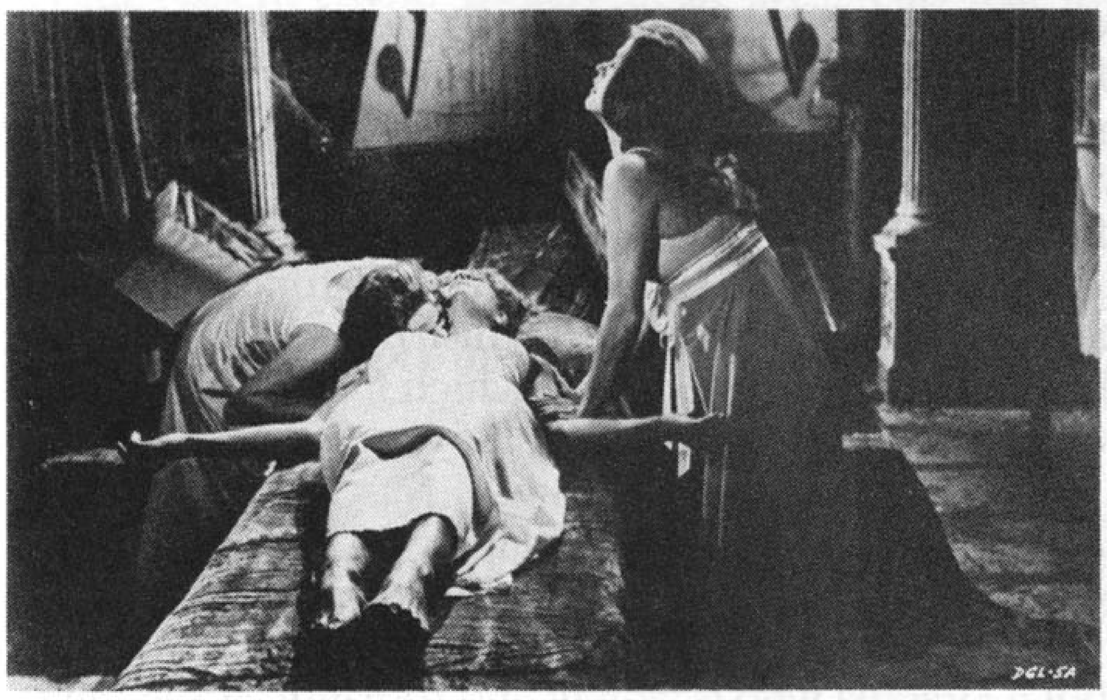
. . . suddenly she is hanging upside down. Missing is a key moment in which, while the female vampires suck the blood out of the victim's wounds, Dracula has a brief expression of disgust on his face. So by deleting violence unsuitable for television, the censors also eliminate portions that are mandatory for character development. As could be expected, this scene concludes when a female vampire brings a knife to the victim's neck.

Dracula's Great Love is not a film for television. Not only is it extremely gory, it is highly erotic as well. Even scenes without nudity had to be cut for TV due to their sexual overtones. In addition, there is lovemaking between Naschy and two of the girls, and between many of the ladies themselves. Loud, echoing sighs are dubbed over many of the lesbian scenes, adding an eerie, otherworldly dimension.

But let us not stray from reality; in the final analysis, as profound as it might be, *Dracula's Great Love* is essentially fancy exploitation, the same way the current *Not A Love Story* is essentially fancy pornography. It must be considered as such, and not grouped with Fellini or at the same time with Jess Franco (though certainly Franco's best work rivals *Dracula's Great Love* in visual attractiveness and atmosphere).

In the realm of the horror film, Dracula's Great Love is significant indeed. Naschy states it perfectly when he says, "It is unusual that the title is not going to be remembered as *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* or *Dracula, Prince of Darkness.* It has many good moments and is a very important title in my filmography."

Vic Winner meets a gory end in Naschy's story.



***Heavy-duty eroticism in this slow-motion sequence from* Dracula's Great Love**

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Tigon Studios and

Blood on Satan's Claw

A victim of sea pollutants in* Doomwatch *(1972)

A studio of decidely minimal output, Tigon is behind some superb '70s horror films. Their worst they weren't directly responsible for; Tigon imported *Cauldron of Black* back in 1967, a decent but slow mad wife tale with an ailing Boris Karloff as a blind sculptor. Their best, *Beast in the Cellar, Doomwatch,* and *Blood On Satan's Claw,* represent some of the finest British horror in recent years.

In addition, Tigon had in their favor directors such as Michael Reeves, Peter Sasdy, Vernon Sewell, Freddie Francis and Piers Haggard. Some of these men had already proven themselves as directors; others like Michael Reeves and Piers Haggard got their first genuine support from Tigon. Under their banner Reeves made *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Sorcerors* (1967). *Witchfinder's* a vicious, moody tale starring Vincent Price thta unfortunately was chopped down to a 'PG' rating by American International's censors and dimwittedly released as *The Conqueror Worm.* Only British prints of this film are complete. *The Sorcerors* is the occult tale of an old couple who receive visceral thrills through a young man they psychologically control. This was Reeves' second feature film, and contained the most well-defined personages of any of his works. Violence and nudity are minimal – it is later that Tigon became interested in the more explicit opportunities the horror film offered.

Less exceptional, though still talented, is Vernon Sewell, who made *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968) and *Blood Beast Terror* (1967). As a director, Sewell is efficient, basic and straightforward. Curiously enough his films contained little evidence of style, and it can't be said by just watching these two films that they are obviously directed by Vernon Sewell. Neither of the screenplays are exceptional, but *Crimson Altar* boasts Boris Karloff , Barbara Steele, Christopher Lee and Michael Gough in the cast, and *Blood Beast Terror* stars Peter Cushing. *Crimson Altar* contains several excellent scenes, including a rousing fiery finale, but is poorly paced and is filled with dull stretches. *Blood Beast Terror* has a more powerful screenplay but is terribly mild, desperately in need of action or violence or both to give it some life.

More forgettable is Michael Armstrong's pedestrian treatment of an even worse script entitled *Horror House.* Frankie Avalon is out of place, spending the night in a haunted house with his buddies and having to attempt a real performance after leaving Annette Funicello. Several gory scenes, including a neck slashing, were again trimmed (though not totally eliminated) by American censors, causing *Horror House* to be less watchable than it was in the first place.

Peter Sasdy's *Doomwatch* (1972), although it wasn't commercially successful in the United States, is a significant ecological thriller. Ian Bannen stars as a visitor to an island that houses a small fishing village. Nobody on the island wants to accommodate Bannen. He finally finds lodging at a small inn but hears strange noises in the night. Eventually he finds that industrial pollutants in the sea water have caused incredible deformities in the villagers' bodies. In the end it comes down to a battle between the townspeople who want to be left along, and Bannen who wants to help them.

Doomwatch is what I consider the first of the Tigon trilogy; a group of three films that are recognizably similar in quality, approach, atmosphere and musical accompaniment. The characters in all three are oppressed by some force. In *Doomwatch* it is pollution, in *Blood on Satan's Claw* it is the devil, and in *Beast in the Cellar* it is a crazed war veterans'

***Americans censored the more violent portions of this sacrifice in* Blood on Satan's Claw.**

dominance over his two aging sisters. More importantly, all three are beautifully photographed – in fact, though they are in the horror genre, all three are exquisitely appealing works.

Beast In The Cellar suffers mainly from lackluster direction by James Kelly, who was either very fascinated by veteran actresses Flora Robson and Beryl Reid or exceedingly lazy. In several scenes he lets the camera sit at a medium long shot while the two spinsters babble away. His treatment of action (which mostly consists of the demented brother mutilating innocent soldiers) is strangely stylized, unlike that of any other horror director's. A typical attack in *Beast In The Cellar* consists of quickly edited, variably focused views of tearing and shredding, followed by a fall towards the screen during which a piece of loose skin might fall off, letting loose a stream of blood.

Reid and Robson are marvelous, managing to be simultaneously sinister and pathetic. They portray spinster sisters who keep their brother locked in the basement so he will not murder the townspeople. When he starts finding ways to escape and goes on killing sprees, the frightened sisters try to cover for him so he won't be taken away. Their plight is complicated by a well-meaning soldier (sensitively played by John Hamill) who constantly drops by to make certain the old ladies are not afraid. The conclusion is tragic and brings a downbeat tone to the whole affair, but it's an ambiguous ending that leaves us hopeful for Reid and Robson yet saddened at their loss.

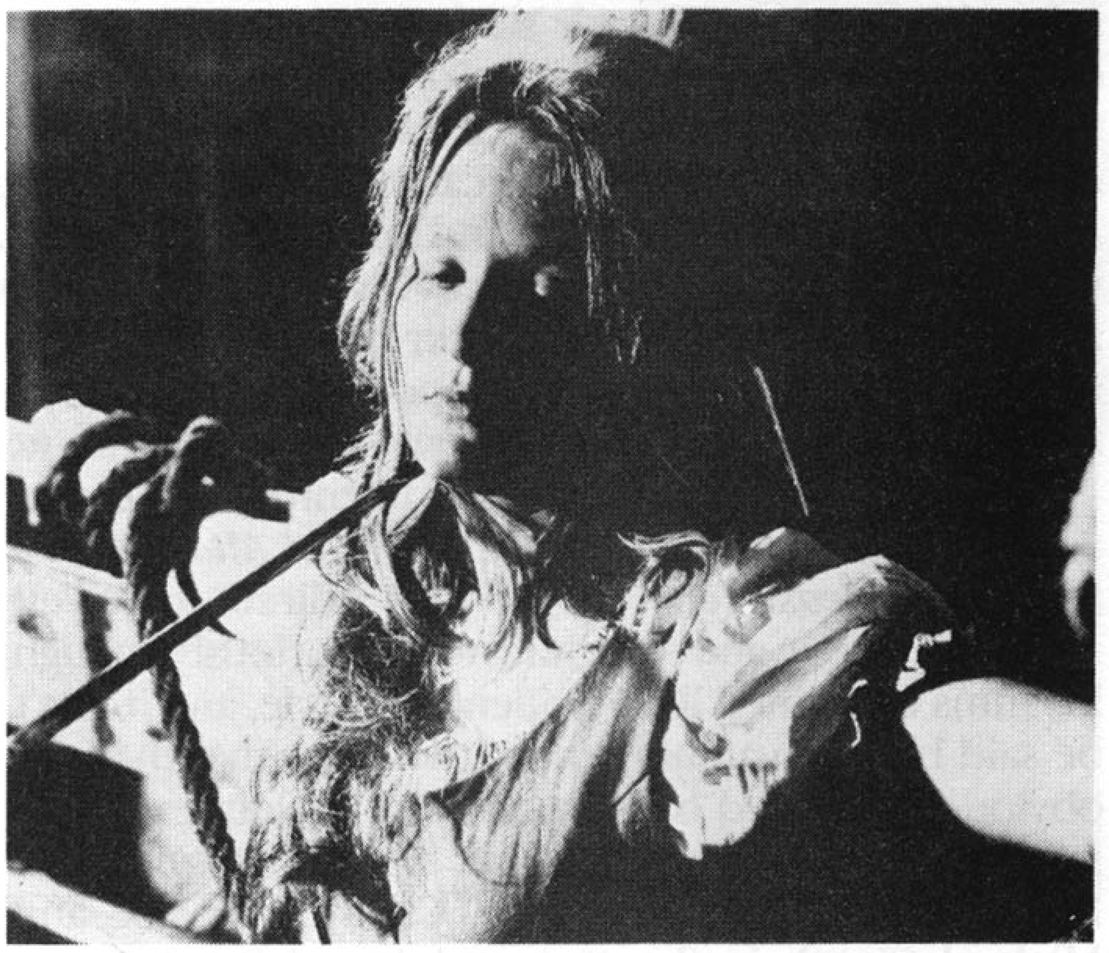
Tigon's most successful picture, artistically if not commercially, is *Blood On Satan's Claw.* Linda Hayden, horror's pretty teenage naughty girl (in *Madhouse, Taste the Blood of Dracula, House on Straw Mountain* and many others), stars as Angel Blake, leader of a Satanic cult that was formed when Satan himself was freed by a farmboy and his plow. Hayden is ideal for the role, and director Piers Haggard takes full advantage of her penetrating green eyes with ample closeups.

Blood On Satan's Claw is interesting for many reasons, primary of which is the exceptional feel for the period evidenced by all involved. Costumes and sets are impeccable, with none of Hollywood's elaborate exaggeration concerning the beauty of the time. Here we have real people in a real town; even the governor gets his hands dirty as he himself impales Satan on a pitchfork-like object at the film's end. Haggard's approach is straightforward – what happens is shown. It must again be left up to the Americans to censor a sacrifice in which a girl gets stabbed repeatedly with old-fashioned shears. There's quite a bit of violence in *Blood on Satan's Claw;* more than in any other Tigon film including *Witchfinder General.* Early on in the scenario a young man hallucinates that he is severing a hairy claw that is clutching his throat, but he actually cuts off his own hand. Later, an unwilling young girl has her Satan's skin (the film's British title) surgically

***Ralph saved the girl from drowning after she was accused of being a witch in* Blood On Satan's Claw**

removed from her leg. This same girl gets her ankle gashed in a bear trap several minutes later. Both Angel and Satan are graphically impaled on Richard Wydmark's anti-devil spear.

This violence and some fairly explicit nudity make it clear that Tigon intended *Blood On Satan's Claw* for a wider audience. Unfortunately, Cannon Releasing purchased the film in 1973 and distributed it just as widely as another film in the package, *Crucible of Horror.* Then when it was sold to television, certain scenes were darkened to make them acceptable for younger viewers. The frenzied final ritual has several nude women walking around; with the screen darkened not only can't we see them, but the rest of the action is silhouetted against a bonfire. And when Wymark impales the title creature, the beast is so dark and the



***An old-fashioned interrogation in* Blood On Satan's Claw**

contrast so indistinct that it's impossible to understand what's taking place on screen. The same goes for the scene in which the young man severs his hand.

But it isn't the gore that makes this film or *Doomwatch* or *Beast In The Cellar* effective. In all three it is human ignorance that is the villain. The most *shocking* thing in *Doomwatch* is the revolting facial deformity makeup; however, the most *frightening* thing is the villagers' refusal to be helped. In *Beast In The Cellar* all of the savage murders are physically shocking, but the real horror lies in the sisters' unwillingness to let go of their family loyalty. The contrast ot two kindly old women covering up the disgusting actions of their brother is truly chilling. In *Blood On Satan's Claw,* nobody knows how to rationally deal with the evil being spread. A slip of the tongue results in being accused of witchcraft; the townspeople believe their reverend and schoolteacher seduced Angel Blake.

An amusing exchange in *Blood on Satan's Claw* sums things up appropriately. A group of villagers are chasing a pretty girl through the woods shouting, "Kill the witch!" Finally they arrive at the edge of a river, lift the girl and hurl her into the water. The hero hears the commotion and comes running to the rescue.

"What have you done?" he asks incredulously.

"She's a witch," laughs one, "We threw her in the water."

Our hero shakes his head and continues, "How do you know she's a witch?"

"Well," replies another, "If she floats, she's a witch."

After a pause, the hero asks, "And if she sinks?"

The men look at the ground and scratch their heads as if they didn't know the consequences beforehand.

Tigon went bankrupt in 1973 after production of their florid, romantic horror tale *Monique,* which is so hopelessly obscure that this writer wasn't able to see it. I do know that it is filled with nudity and contains tasteful touches of gore, but that it received negative reviews in the West End and was pulled one week after its release. We are left with a diverse bunch of films, some of which deserve to remain obscure, and others that were poorly handled by American distributors and are most deserving of better exposure.

A Succinct Tigon Filmography

1967:

Cauldron of Blood (a.k.a. *Blind Man's Bluff*); Starring Boris Karloff, Viveca Lindfores, Jean-Pierre Aumont; Written, produced, and directed by Santos Alcocer (Edward Mann U.S. pseudonym) (Tigon distributed only)

Sorcerors, The; Starring Boris Karloff, Catherine Lacey, Ian Ogilvy, Susan George; Written and directed by Michael Reeves (Tigon's first fully financed production)

Blood Beast Terror; Starring Peter Cushing, Ian Bannen; Directed by Vernon Sewell

1968:

Curse of the Crimson Altar (a.k.a. *The Crimson Cult*); Starring Boris Karloff, Barbara Steele, Mark Eden, Christopher Lee, Michael Gough; Directed by Vernon Sewell

Witchfinder General (a.k.a. *The Conqueror Worm*); Starring Vincent Price, Hilary Dwyer, Ian Ogilvy, Patrick Wymark, Rupert Davies; Written and directed by Michael Reeves

1969:

Horror House (a.k.a. *The Haunted House of Horror*); Starring Frankie Avalon, Jill Hayworth, George Sewell, Dennis Price; Written by Ralph Dennings; Directed by Michael Armstrong

1970:

Blood On Satan's Claw; Starring Linda Hayden, Patrick Wymark, Milton Reid; Directed by Piers Haggard

Beast In The Cellar (a.k.a. *Are You Dying, Young Man*); Starring Beryl Reid, Flora Robson, Tessa Wyatt, John Hamill; Directed by James Kelly

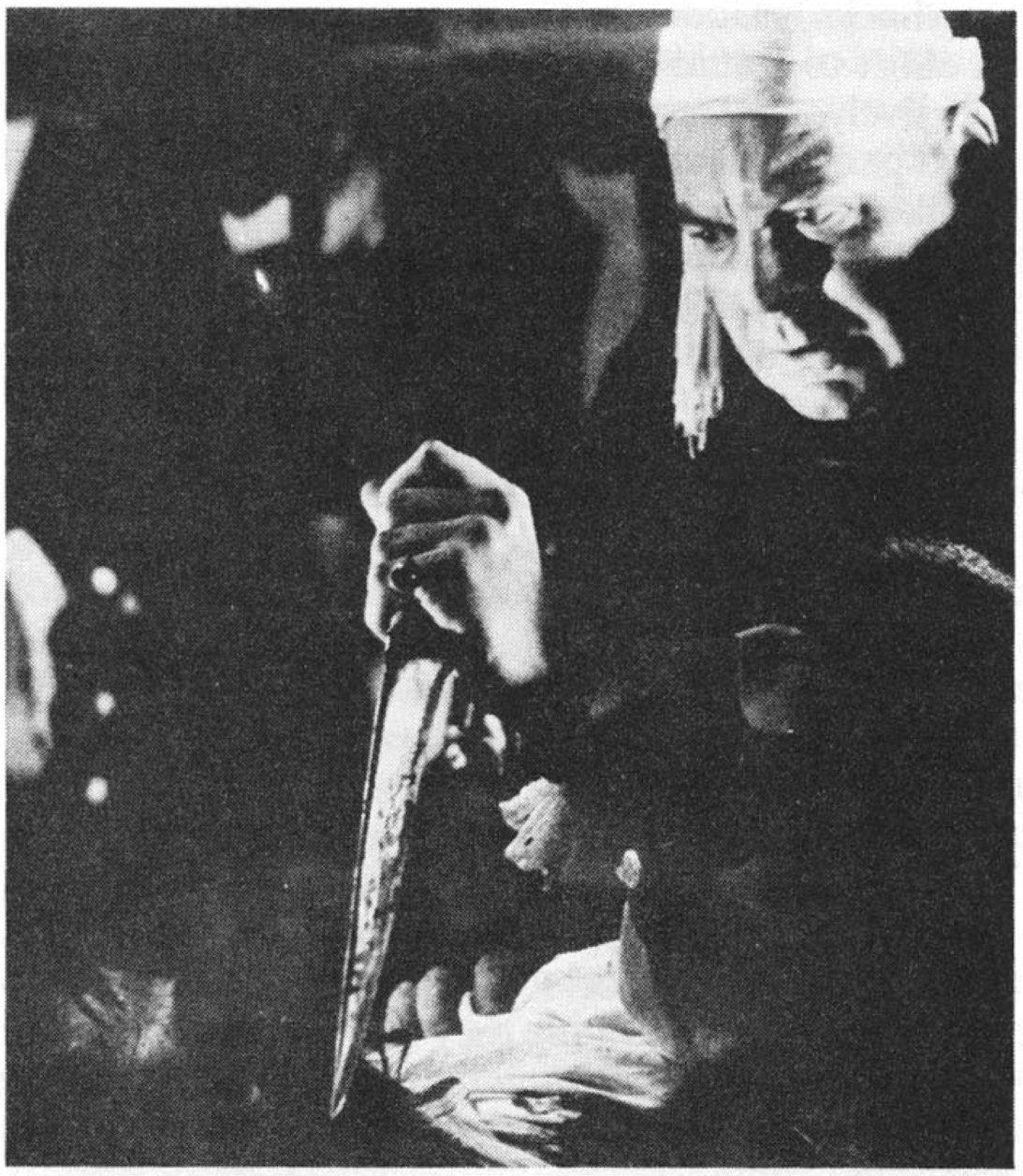
1971:

Doomwatch; Starring Ian Bannen, Theresa Wright, Dennis Price; Based on the short story "The Saddened Sea" by Amil Steward; Directed by Peter Sasdy

1972:

The Creeping Flesh; Starring Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, George Benson; Written by Peter Spencely and Jonathan Rumbold; Directed by Freddie Francis

Virgin Witch, The; Starring Anne Michelle, Patricia Haines, Neil Hallett; Screenplay by Klaus Vogel; Produced by Ralph Solomons; Directed by Ray Austin



***Patrick Wymark picks up the bloody knife with which his nephew severed his own hand in* Blood On Satan's Claw**

Exorcism in the '70s:

The Spaghetti Satans

Imitative ad for this imitative 1975 Italian film.

Of all the recent movie trends, perhaps the longest lasting (next to killing promiscuous teens with hatchets, axes, meatcleavers, etc.) and most popular is the possession film. A typical possession film is one in which a character is a breeding place for an evil spirit (usually the ever-popular demon Satan) who induces vomitng while wreaking havoc on loved ones and priests, psychiatrists, gynecologists, psychics, and physicians. William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* is usually credited (or blamed as the case might be) for starting this branch of the horror film genre.

A controversial film at the time of its release and still shocking today, *The Exorcist* is one of the few horror pictures that can be viewed in complete seriousness due to its strong basis in reality. One of the film's major drawbacks is Linda Blair in the opening sequences. In an effort to sound like an adorable child that would effectively contrast with her foul-mouthed, crusty-faced persona later in the movie, young Linda comes off like a poor man's Shirley Temple in bell-bottom jeans. Scenes in which she talks to her adoring mother (well acted by Ellen Burstyn) appear more forced than cute. But aside from this minor complaint, more of a personal grudge than direct criticism, the film has brilliant atmosphere and photography, quick pacing, some classic morbid lines ("Your mother sucks ---- in ----, Karras") and, needless to say, some of the finest prosthestic work in recent years.

But the best thing about *The Exorcist* is its plausibility. Even if the viewer isn't involved in Christianity, the film helps the viewer understand its history and context. The Christian community was so outraged they wanted the movie banned entirely. Maybe it was because Linda Blair was having more fun with Satan than the priests were. Whatever the case, the priests would get their chance, for there was a bandwagon to be jumped upon, and jump they did. With such obscure items as *The Tempter, Magadelena – Possessed by the Devil, Demon Lover, Cathy's Curse, Satan's Mistress* and *Ruby,* the possession film was well on its way.

The two films examined here are at opposite ends of the possession film scale: *Beyond The Door* (not to be confused with *Behind the Green Door*) from Ovidio Assonitis, and *Statue of the Antichrist* (literal translation) from Mario Gariazzo which is currently showing domestically as *Eerie Midnight Horror Show* (?).

Beyond the Door, starring Juliet Mills (TV fans will remember her as Nanny in *Nanny and the Professor,* or most recently as a diaper enthusiast on Pampers commercials), is a rather straightforward tale of demonic hijinx. The film's main problem is its screenplay by Richard Barrett; nothing is ever actually explained and we are left with gaping plot holes. There is nothing wrong with ambiguities if there is sufficient substance to explain them. But in the case of *Beyond the Door* the ambiguities are present because Barrett either couldn't think of anything more to write or thought it would be intriguing to put something strange in the story. The film opens with Dimitri (Richard Johnson – sounds like "Deme," doesn't it?), a man who has a pact with the devil (though we're never certain why), receiving the chance to live a little longer if he'll take the child from an old lover of his and give it to the

devil. So Dimitri must make sure the child is born to fulfill his selfish desire to live. Meanwhile, Dimitri's old love, Jessica Barrett (Juliet Mills) is trying to deal with her strange new pregnancy. Her gynecologist doesn't know what to make of it, and neither does the writer, so Jessica becomes possessed. Her head spins around, she floats around the house, has a variety of voices, turns green, and drools thick, dark green steamy vomit from her mouth as she talks. Jessica swears often, but never with any wit. Jessica hurls her witless husband around the house and tries to scare us but never does. All of this original action is intercut with ominous dollies towards the door to her room straight out of *The Exorcist.* In *The Exorcist* these shots were frightening mainly because the threat was new and seemed real.

But in *Beyond the Door* the characters are cardboard cutouts who don't elicit any response from the viewer. If we aren't concerned about the characters, then the "scary" scenes are merely gross-outs. Ovidio Assonitis' direction is workmanlike with several nice touches added in the editing room. Probably the most entertaining thing about the movie is Jessica's daughter and her "hip lingo." When her younger brother is having nightmares, she spouts profundities along the lines of, "Hey man, are you having a bad trip? That's not cool, ya dig? Get some shuteye before the old man catches ya." All of this is said in dubbed monotone and is possibly the most sensitive portrayal of today's youth in recent memory. *Beyond the Door's* main fault lies in its derivative and lazy script. Like the baby born without a mouth at the film's conclusion, it really doesn't say much.

More stylish if equally lamebrained is *The Tempter,* a 1974 Spanish/Italian production originally titled *The Antichrist* starring Carla Gravina, Mel Ferrer and Arthur Kennedy. While the possession storyline is fairly typical and includes all the usual trappings, there are several

Gravini looking punk in* The Tempter *(1977)

***Specially staged ad photo makes* The Tempter *look even more like* The Exorcist**

offbeat scenes that merit attention. One is a nightmarish orgy in hell sequence in which Gravina is led through piles of twisted bodies engaged in sexual acts. By the time the sequence is over she has eaten a frog's head and licked a goat's rear end. Must be a new Satanic school. Innovative but cheaply done are the surrealistic scenes in which Gravini masturbates in bed and as she reaches orgasm her room is literally swallowed into the blue sky.

Mel Ferrer seems right at home as Gravina's jet-setting father who, of course, is never home and further develops Gravina's hostility. On the other hand, Arthur Kennedy seems quite embarassed as he is forced to lick what appears to be dog excrement that Gravina has spit out of her mouth. Though she looks a bit like a punk-rocker at times, Carla Gravina does admirably well as the possessed young lady. Unfortunately, much of the time she is given little more to do than foam at the mouth during family dinners.

At least *The Tempter* has moments that are unpredictable, instead of being totally dependent on the established conventions of Friedkin's film. Its ending that takes place in an abandoned stone monastery is very similar to that of *Statue of the Antichrist's,* a film that uses ambiguity to an advantage. There are mutiple rationalizations for what occurs in *Statue,* and it can be interpreted on many different levels. The story concerns

***Arthur Kennedy reads a hot best-seller to Carla in* The Tempter**

a young female (just try to imagine *The Exorcist* with a little boy) played by Stella Carnacia who purchases an old, wooden, religious artifact to study. It is an elaborate woodcarving of the man hanging on the right side of Jesus when he was crucified (Jesus had already been bought). She brings it to her studio and then goes to a party where she witnesses her dear mother having a sado-masochistic extramarital affair. Mother pulls out all the stops in a scene that should interest softcore fans, as mom is being whipped with thorny rose stems. Definitely a new angle in screen erotica. Anyway, her daughter witnesses this shocking (or exciting, depending on your tastes) event and runs back to her studio to paint and hopefully forget the whole affair. As she does, the man on the cross (Ivan Rassimov) comes to life, tears off her clothes, and rapes her. Evidently this is the point at which the devil penetrates into her (pun intended), as she is possessed from here on in.

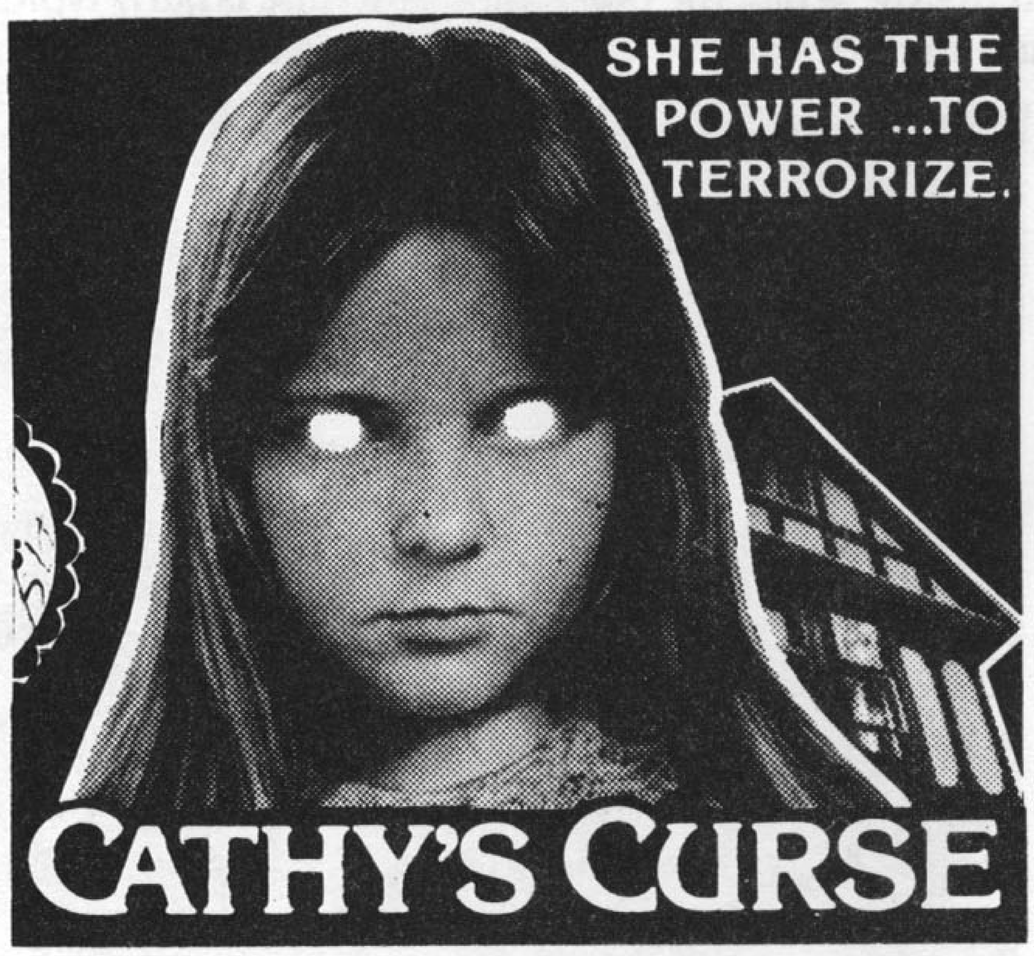
However, after it appears that she had intercourse with this living statue, the editor has her back in her chair fully clothed, implying a dream or fantasy. This is where *Statue of the Antichrist* becomes interesting. We are never certain if the possession is within the heroine's mind or due to the (imaginary?) visit by the Satanic work of art. The conflict becomes an ambiguous one, one involving form and content as well as good versus evil. Indeed, the scenes involving the priest seem old hat compared to this unusual approach. We have seen thousands of priests hold up crosses and chant in Latin. As a result, when the parents send the girl to a priest, the film loses itself and fizzles into a silly (albeit better photographed) vomit movie a la *Beyond the Door.* The most enthralling portions of the film are not those concentrating on deformities and upchucking, but rather the complex psychological paradoxes. Did the girl imagine she had intercourse with the devil's disciple? Or was it a real manifestation of evil?

Apart from the disappointing ending, *Statue of Antichrist* is way above the level of most possession tales. There is some brilliant editing by Robert Colangeli, particularly in a gruesome sequence in which Carnacia has her hands and feet graphically spiked to a cross. Mario Gariazzo's direction is adept throughout. Director of photography Carlo Carlini gives the film a washed-out generic look in the real-life sequences, then switches to a hellish red-orange tone for the "fantasy" sequences. Craftsmanship in all areas is commendable, though it's hard to tell with the acting as everyone grunts and breathes heavily in typical cheaply dubbed style. This minor distraction aside, *Statue of the Antichrist* is a well-made, unusual possession tale that is worth looking out for.

Several Satan/possession/violent-little-girl films have come from other countries. Canada came up with *Cathy's Curse,* the story of a 7-year-old girl who is possessed by the spirit of a girl who was burned in a car accident. Though it is slickly made and occasionally rousing, the film is eventually too subdued for its own good. It's still miles ahead of *Beyond the Door.* The extremely low-budget American *The Demon Lover* by Donald Jackson deals with a Satanic cult that makes sacrifices to a demonic creature. It's a throwback to the '50s and at the same time contemporary in its inclusion of massive doses of gore.

There are others, of course – the list is virtually endless. For now the possession film boom has subsided, with one or two being released every summer. Just because the film deals with possession doesn't mean it's an *Exorcist* ripoff, but trial and error have shown that the best aren't highly derivative of Friedkin's original work.

– Peter Tysver



Or* The Omen, *female style. Effective ad from this 1977 21st Century Canadian release.

Obscure Horror 'Zines

There are innumerable fan magazines dealing with the horror, fantasy and science-fiction genres. In this section I will discuss those that I have found most valuable, and those that aren't available at your corner newsstand.

CineFan

Randall D. Larson
P.O. Box 70868
Sunnydale, CA 94086

Larson's *Cinefan* is a rather incredible beast. Only two issues have been published – #1 in 1974 and #2 in 1981, but what issues they were! #1 covered everything from Godzilla to *Son of Blob* to *Land Unknown,* with thorough pieces like Howard Clegg's "Performers in the Horror/Fantasy Cinema: 1950-1960" and Greg Shoemaker's "Romantic's View of the Toho Legend." *Cinefan #2* consisted of 62 pages of teeny tiny type and equally miniature stills. Contents included an excellent analysis of the obscure Filipino horror *Superbeast,* the uncut version of *Vampire Circus,* and even a feature entitled "Horrors Come and Gone" which discussed Naschy, *Horror Hospital* and other unusual titles. Unfortunately, the latter article took a rather highbrow attitude and poked fun at the films instead of informing about them. Still, #2 is a very valuable volume, and Randall has informed me that there are a limited number of copies available at the ridiculously low price of $2.00 plus $.50 postage. Grab one if possible. The good news is that Randall is planning *Cinefan #3* for mid-1983. Contents will include interviews with Michael Lee (producer of *Clonus Horror),* Don Dohler (*Fiend* and his upcoming *Nightbeast),* and analysis of *Ugetsu, Kwaidan, Seizure, To the Devil a Daughter* and much more. Copies can be reserved for $2.50.

Midnight Marquee

Gary J. Svehla
5910 Glen Falls Avenue
Elatimore, MD 21206

Gary's magazine has received some decent distribution as of late, though only in selected comic book/movie meorabilia shops. The mood is somewhere between a sophisticated *Famous Monsters* and a horror-oriented *American Film.* Articles like "The 75 Greatest Scares" are cute but not very informative. Stuff like "Forgotten Faces of Fantastic Films" is *Midnight Marquee*'s (affectionately known as *MidMar*) bread and butter. Unfortunately, *MidMar* has put one wheel onto the beaten track, the latest issue featuring E.T. on the cover. Discouraging, to say the least. Still, *MidMar* contains intriguing gems; i.e., interviews with John Carradine, career histories of underrated genre actors like George Zucco . . . worth $3.00 to wade through the excess and get to the heart of *Midnight Marquee.*

CINEMACABRE

George Stover
P.O. Box 10005
Baltimore, MD 21204

Cinemacabre is more slick and resultantly more mainstream-oriented than the previous two 'zines, but like *MidMar* each issue contains several pleasant surprises. Usually one half of this 5" by 8" glossy mag is filled with well-written albeit predictable articles on *Empire Strikes Back, E.T.,* etc. However, there is also terrific stuff like interviews with John Agar and Nicholas Meyer, and offbeat coverage of 3-D films, fantasy and horror soundtracks, and more, If it sounds like I'm partially condemning *Cinemacabre,* it is only due to personal preference. The magazine is worthwhile, attractively presented and consistently literate. Contact George for information concerning the latest issue.

Mad Movies

Jean-Pierre Putters
248 Bd de Stalingrad 94500
Champigny/Marne France

Can't read French? No problem, for *Mad Movies* contains enough rare stills, ad mats and illustrations to keep your eyes occupied. Jean-Pierre covers the films that *Demonique* is made of. A recent issue had 15 pages devoted to the Spanish horror cinema, but you must take heed if you re the victim of a weak stomach. Jean-Pierre pulls no punches in his still selection. If you can find a friend who reads French, you can get a first-hand account of the Sitges Horror Festival, or information on superb foreign horror pictures that might never see American release. Rumor has it that Jean-Pierre has ceased publishing *Mad Movies,* which is a shame. However, back issues of many editions are still available. Make every effort to contact Jean-Pierre and obtain some.

DMQ's Video Update

As the video software market booms, more and more valuable horror obscurities are becoming available. Due to most video stores' inability to stock complete selections, many fans aren't aware of the vast array of titles now available. *Demonique* has now solved this problem with "All-Horror" Video. The walk-in store in Homewood, Illinois has over 150 horror films available, with more coming in every day. The following are some newer and/or not widely distributed titles that should prove of interest to *Demonique* readers:

Thorn/EMI is offering quite a selection of worthwhile films. The uncut version of Dario Argento's rare *Deep Red, The Hatchet Murders* is a new release, and one of the Italian filmmaker's more gory works. As time wore on and Argento tried to make his movies more marketable, they lost their rough edge that made them so effective. His popular *Suspiria* doesn't hold a candle to *Deep Red.* A more obscure offering is Earl Owensby's *Wolfman.* Owensby, the king of deep South "B" exploitation, realized a life's dream by filming this version of the famous tale. Though slow at times with unconvincing performances, the makeup is passable, the sets effective and the violence gruesome. Hammer's *Lust For A Vampire* is a must for fans, with beautiful sets and fine performances by Ralph Bates. Something for everyone here: colorful photography, abundant nudity, and frequent touches of gore. Their *Horror of Frankenstein* is not quite as good, with gore et al but a minimal plot and predictable outcome. Thorn/EMI is also offering *House of Shadows* starring Yvonne DeCarlo, on which no information is available.

A smaller company, Planet Video, offers some truly bizarre titles. One of the most offbeat is *Eerie Midnight Horror Show* (see "Italian Exorcists" article in this issue), an *Exorcist* spinoff done with style and enthusiasm. Just as stylish, if somewhat more excessive, is *Nightmare* featuring some sickening "X" rated special effects. The film itself is extremely unoriginal, but decent direction and outstanding editing lift this way above the *Friday the 13th* level. Planet's *Cathy's Curse* isn't for everyone, what with its minimal violence and nudity; however, it is actually scary at times. Two new releases are *Blood Tide* and *The Slayer. The Slayer* is the better of the two, featuring several extreme gore scenes and some neat (if economical) "slayer" makeup. *Blood Tide* is disappointing, wasting a good cast in a story with too much mumbo-jumbo and too little horror.

Embassy Home Video is now offering Paul Naschy's great *Horror Rises From the Tomb.* I've been told from Embassy Home Video's sales manager that video copies have been struck from an uncut print (not the TV version), but it's not yet available as this issue goes to press. See *Demonique #2* for a critical analysis of this wild, no-holds barred horror film. Embassy also offers 1982's *Humongous,* an above-average horror story with some decent special effects.

VCII has released 1981's little seen *The Prowler* featuring yet more explicit effects by goremeister Tom Savini. Highlights include pitchfork impalement, a knife pushed down through the top of a head and a head being blown off in slow-motion with an elephant gun.

Cult Video bring us John Ashley's Filipino exploitation *Beast of the Yellow Night* and *Curse of the Headless Horseman.* Both are low-budget and filled with sex and violence (Cult Video's specialties). Neither is terribly artistic or profound.

Unicorn Video offers three obscure films: *Keep My Grave Open* (see mini-reviews), *Demon Lover* (see "Italian Exorcists") and *Killing Kind.*

These films and over 150 more are available from:

"All-Horror" Video
18070 S. Halsted
Homewood, IL 60430

Call (312) 957-2332 or write for free price lists.

ISBN 0-938782-02-9

Altered States ★★★
(1980) Color, 103 min. Director: Ken Russell.
William Hurt, Blair Brown, Charles Haid. A young research scient
sensory deprivation experiments in an effort to uncover some ulti
and its capacity to achieve alternate states of consciousness. A f
sound and fury that has everything but a good story.
(Warner Home Video) VC

Amazing Spiderman, The ★★½
(1977) Color, 92 min. Director: E.W. Swackhelmer.
Nicholas Hammond, Lisa Eilbacher, Michael Pataki, J
turns newspaper reporter/photographer Hammond i
to crawl up large buildings and spin deadly webs fo
movie, pilot for the short-lived series, based on th
(CBS/Fox Video) VC

Amazing Transplant, The
(1970) Color, 80 min. Director: Louis Sil
A man murders his girlfriend and is relen
uncle. At the root of the whole mess is
exercise in total brainlessness.
(Electric Video) VC

Amazing World of
(?) Color, 91 min.
Narrated by Raymond Burr. A
(VidAmerica) VC

American Were
(1981) Color, 97 min.
David Naughton, Jen
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(1979) Col
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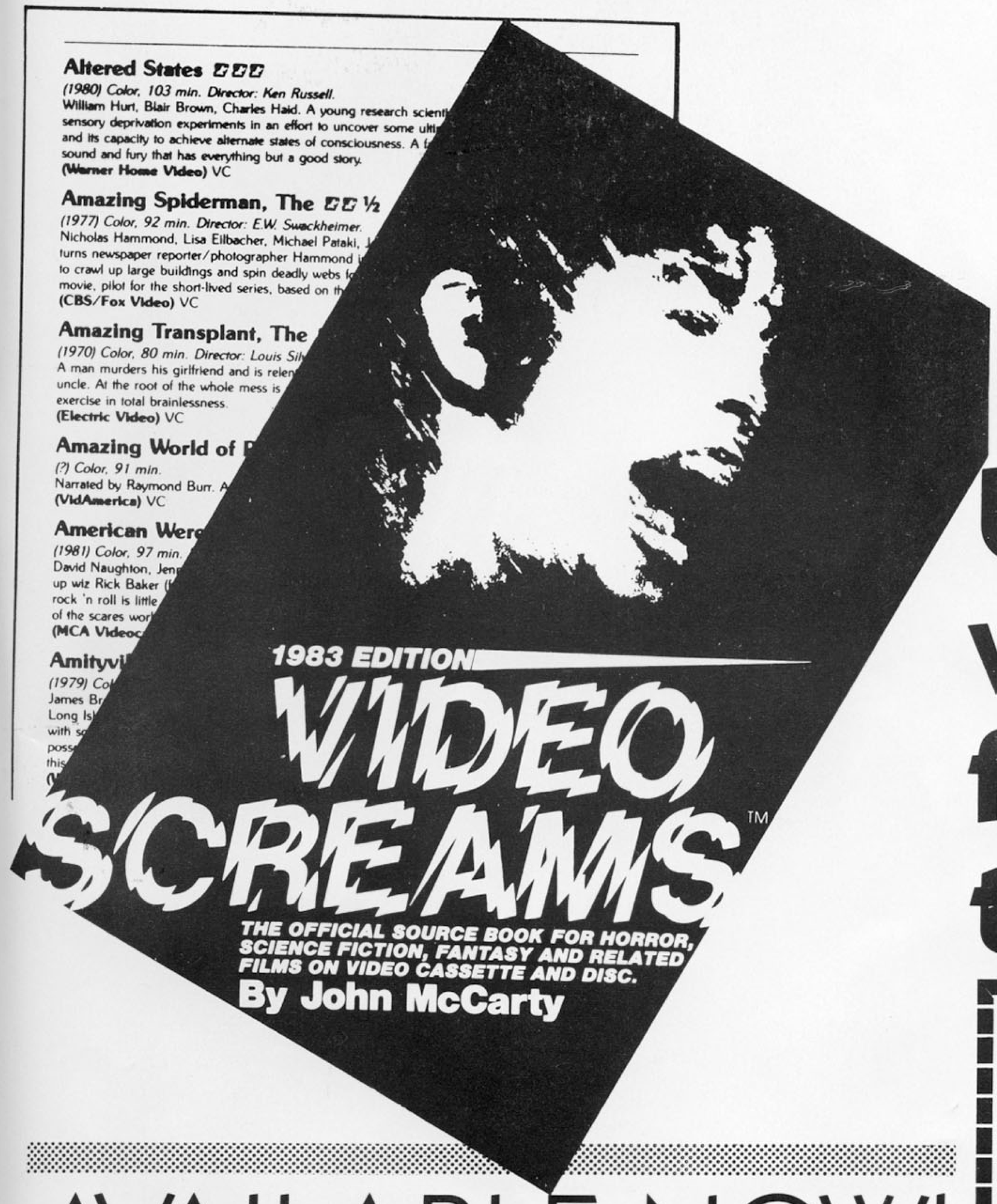

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Bloodthirsty Butchers (1969)
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