

# MOVIEDROME

## THE GUIDE 2

BY ALEX COX AND NICK JONES





CARNIVAL OF SOULS

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second *Moviedrome* guide. You see, there really is no shortage of weird and interesting cult-type films in spite of the dismal drek that passes for entertainment in the contemporary cinema.

*Moviedrome* movies aren't the big hits in Hollywood, with either cinema-goers or the studios that provide the money. In fact if there's a typical *Moviedrome* film it was probably financed by a major studio that fired the director half-way through and then pulled out entirely, leaving the cast to pool their savings and finish the film in another country, under the directorship of a generous used-car dealer. Don't be surprised if many of the films found here were made by the likes of Joseph Losey, Terrence Malick, Richard Rush and Orson Welles, all of whom were given the old heave-ho by the conventional movie scene.

If you love big glossy Hollywood productions starring Robin Williams, Steve Martin, Robert Redford and Meryl Streep, beware: the 'Drome may damage your taste!

AT CLOSE RANGE .....	2
BADLANDS .....	2
THE BEQUELED .....	3
THE BIG COMBO .....	3
THE BIG KNIFE .....	4
BIRD .....	4
CAPE FEAR .....	6
CARNIVAL OF SOULS .....	6
CARRIE .....	7
CHINATOWN .....	7
CRY-BABY .....	8
DARK MAN .....	8
THE DAY OF THE LOCUST .....	9
DEAD RINGERS .....	9
LES DIABOLIQUES .....	10
DIANGO .....	10
THE DUELLISTS .....	11
ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ .....	11
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK .....	12
F FOR FAKE .....	12
FACE TO FACE .....	13
GOthic .....	13
GRIM PRAIRIE TALES .....	14
HELL'S ANGELS ON WHEELS .....	14
THE HILL .....	15
HOUSE OF GAMES .....	15
INSERTS .....	16
INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS .....	16
JUNIOR BONNER .....	18
KNIGHTRIDERS .....	18
LENNY .....	19
LOLITA .....	19
THE LONG RIDERS .....	20
MAD MAX II .....	21
A MAN ESCAPED .....	22
MANHUNTER .....	22
MISHIMA .....	23
THE MUSIC LOVERS .....	23
THE NAVIGATOR .....	24
PERFORMANCE .....	24
PLAY MISTY FOR ME .....	25
THE PROWLER .....	25
RABID .....	26
REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE .....	26
REQUIESCANT .....	27
ROMANCE OF A HORSE THIEF .....	27
RUN OF THE ARROW .....	28
THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW .....	28
SOLARIS .....	29
SOMETHING WILD .....	29
THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM .....	30
TO SLEEP WITH ANGER .....	30
TRACKS .....	31
200 NOVELS .....	31
VAMP .....	32
VERBOTEN! .....	32
WALKER .....	33
WEEKEND .....	33
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE? .....	34
WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS? .....	34
WISE BLOOD .....	36
WITCHFINDER GENERAL .....	36
RESOURCES: DEEP BACKGROUND .....	36

# AT CLOSE RANGE

US 1986

DIRECTOR  
James Foley

PRODUCERS  
Elliott Liewitt  
Don Guest

SCREENPLAY  
Nicholas Kazan

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Juan Ruiz-Anchia

WITH  
Sean Penn  
Christopher Walken  
Mary Stuart Masterson  
Christopher Penn

*At Close Range* is based on a true story, that of the Johnson Gang, who in the late seventies made a healthy business out of stealing tractors in Pennsylvania. It stars Sean and Christopher Penn, features an appearance by Kiefer Sutherland, and has a script written by Nicholas Kazan, who wrote the excellent courtroom drama *Reversal of Fortune* — all sons of the great and good in Hollywood, though this is of course pure coincidence. The younger Kazan actually steps in father's footsteps here, by having his hero inform on his villainous dad to the Grand Jury. Nicholas's father Elia, having busted several of his friends for being Communists, went on to make the popular *On the Waterfront*, whose proletarian hero undergoes a severe moral crisis before informing on a villainous racketeer.

The film is made in the relentless style of a rock video. It even features a specially composed title song by no less a luminary than Madonna. Mr Foley went on to direct Madonna's formidable *Who's That Girl?* He then redeemed himself by making a good film, *After Dark, My Sweet*, another film noir based on the work of the belatedly fashionable Jim Thompson.

The differences between *After Dark, My Sweet* and *At Close Range* are striking. Everything about *At Close Range* is very stylish and at the same time uninvolved. *After Dark, My Sweet* is very simply made, a matter-of-fact movie about a trio of kidnapers and would-be murderers, and it benefits from its simplicity. *At Close Range* was shot by Juan Ruiz-Anchia early in his career, when he was obsessed with putting shiny boards on tables and bouncing bright lights off them into the actors' faces — a sort of bogus naturalism akin to cinematographer Bruce Surtees's penchant for making room interiors so dark you can't see anybody.

The best thing about *At Close Range* is Christopher Walken, in what was at that time his finest performance, as the Penn boys' father. Since then he's made the very interesting *Communion*, in which he plays a science-fiction writer who gets kidnapped and experimented on by aliens, or God, or 'something'. Walken is a great *Moviedrome* actor: sometimes a complete reptilian blank, at others very passionate and engaging. You should also check him out in David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone*.

Notable among the talented cast are Millie Perkins, David Strathairn, Candy Clark and Crispin Glover, as well as the ubiquitous Tracey Walter.

Like father like son — AT CLOSE RANGE



# BADLANDS

US 1974

DIRECTOR  
Terrence Malick

PRODUCER  
Terrence Malick

SCREENPLAY  
Terrence Malick

DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Brian Probyn  
Tak Fujimoto  
Stevan Lerner

WITH  
Martin Sheen  
Sissy Spacek  
Warren Oates  
Ramon Bieri

*Badlands* is that near-impossible thing: a great American movie that was both an artistic triumph and a box-office success. It was the first starring feature role for Martin Sheen, an actor who up until then had been popular in TV movies but had little success in feature films.

Based on the Starkweather Fugate killing spree in the fifties, it is the story of Kit Carruthers, an aimless young garbage man in South Dakota, and his romance with Holly, played by Sissy Spacek, who has the misfortune to be the daughter of a disgruntled signpainter, brilliantly played by Warren Oates. The film is beautifully photographed — no less than three cinematographers are credited, including Tak Fujimoto, who is currently Jonathan Demme's cameraman of choice. It anticipates *Taxi Driver*, being the tale of a psycho killer whose exploits capture the imagination and admiration of the nation — or South Dakota, at least.

It greatly influenced the directorial debut of Martin Sheen's son, Emilio Estevez, whose first film as a director, *Wisdom*, was a remake of *Badlands*, and whose second, *Men at Work*, was a film about dustmen.

*Badlands* also features a fine eclectic soundtrack including works by James Taylor, Erik Satie, and Nat 'King' Cole.

One of the great unanswered questions about *Badlands* is 'What ever happened to the director?' Terrence Malick, who wrote, produced and directed it, was a philosophy professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who directed only two features: *Badlands* and — five years later — *Days of Heaven*. Since then Malick has disappeared, leading to unkind gossip that he has drifted into a maelstrom of drugs or alcohol — or worse, gone back to teaching philosophy. I don't think any of these stories is true. The fact is that the film business attracts the worst sort of people, particularly at the money end, and some individuals are just too sensitive, or sensible, to put up with the sort of sociopaths you have to associate with if you want to direct films.

My suspicion is that Malick is neither a freebaser nor a lunatic, but rather a decent sort of chap who decided that making movies was just a big headache he didn't need. Good for him. Too bad for the rest of us. He still makes a few bob writing screenplays under pseudonyms. Apparently he did a rewrite on *Great Balls of Fire*, which unfortunately wasn't used.

If you want to know what Malick looks like, keep an eye open when Sheen and Spacek commandeer a rich man's house in the Midwest. Somebody comes to the door looking for the householder. It's Malick, in his Hitchcock-style cameo role.



Love on the run — BADLANDS

# THE BEGUILLED

US 1971

DIRECTOR

Don Siegel

PRODUCER

Don Siegel

SCREENPLAY

John B. Sherry

Grimes Grice

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Bruce Surtees

WITH

Clint Eastwood

Geraldine Page

Elizabeth Hartman

Jo Ann Harris

Clint Eastwood made three films with the Italian director Sergio Leone, and five with the American Don Siegel. He parted company with Leone in 1966 and with Siegel in the seventies, and since then has been pretty much his own director: though he leaves the actual director's seat to someone else, he hangs on to the reins, so to speak, producing all the films in which he appears. Certain movies for certain reasons he directs himself: most of these show substantial debts to Don Siegel and Sergio Leone. Leone and Siegel were top-of-the-line action directors in their respective countries. Leone collaborated with Robert Aldrich on *Sodom and Gomorrah* and directed Eastwood in three millennial spaghetti westerns. Siegel, who had begun life as an editor, graduated to top-flight B-movies such as *Riot in Cell Block 11* and *The Killers*.

Siegel and Eastwood made *Coogan's Bluff* in 1968 – an effective film about an Arizona sheriff who comes to New York to catch a bad man. It was Eastwood's first film without a horse or a mule. In 1970 they made *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, a dismal spaghetti western co-starring Shirley MacLaine. Eastwood appeared in several imitation Italian westerns – including Ted Post's lively *Hang 'em High* and *Joe Kidd*, a wretched rip-off of *The Big Silence* previously seen on *Moviedrome*. In 1971 Eastwood and Siegel made the extremely successful *Dirty Harry*, and in 1979 they did *Escape from Alcatraz* (see page 11). In between the terrible *Two Mules for Sister Sara* and the divine *Dirty Harry*, they found time to make *The Beguiled*, another western, set in the Civil War. It's very uncharacteristic of them.

*The Beguiled* is unlike anything else that Siegel did. For a start it's mostly about women: Eastwood is the only male character. Nor is it a conventional cowboy film. There are no cowboys. Instead of his usual heroic self, Eastwood plays a deserter from the Union Army, wounded but game for whatever's going on in a weird Gothic house full of obsessive Confederate spinsters and schoolgirls who decide to ... keep him.

It's a cross between Jacobean tragedy and Ambrose Bierce – which are, in fact, not very far apart at all. Bierce was a Civil War scout who later became a cynical journalist and vanished in Mexico looking for Pancho Villa. He wrote about a dozen short stories set during the Civil War, which are just extraordinary: really vivid and

grim and beautifully written, and much more real than anything that comes out of the Press pool nowadays. The most celebrated of his stories is *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. He also wrote *The Devil's Dictionary*, which is similarly worth looking out for.

Bierce's Victorians, or pre-Victorians, are very modern in their evil banality. So are the villains of Jacobean tragedies, although a tad more flamboyant. And the characters in *The Beguiled*? Well, they're sort of sixties-ish. In fact, *The Beguiled* comes from that happy time when it was possible to experiment with cinema, to play with film language, with multi-exposures and dream sequences: the era of *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Last Movie*. Today, when the American film industry makes a film about the Civil War, they fill it with lies about honour and nobility and the privilege of being gunned down carrying the flag, and call it *Glory*. Wilfred Owen would not approve. Bierce would be amused.

The body in question – THE BEGUILLED



# THE BIG COMBO

US 1955

DIRECTOR

Joseph H. Lewis

PRODUCER

Sidney Harmon

SCREENPLAY

Philip Yordan

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

John Alton

WITH

Cornel Wilde

Richard Conte

Jean Wallace

Brian Donlevy

*The Big Combo*, as you will be immediately aware from its low angles, its high contrast, its impenetrable expressionist shadows, is a film noir, and a particularly good one.

The script, which somewhat resembles *Kiss Me Deadly*, made several years later, is by Philip Yordan – a prolific screenwriter who also wrote *Johnny Guitar* (see **Guide 1**), *The Man from Laramie*, *Day of the Triffids*, *Battle of the Bulge* and *55 Days at Peking*. It's the exciting story of an obsessed, shoe-fetishist detective, played by Cornel Wilde, who is determined to destroy the crime syndicate run by Richard Conte and Brian Donlevy, both of them terrific heavies, especially

Donlevy – a bad guy from many great American movies, including several about Alaska, as I recall. Also highly notable in the cast is a young and handsome Lee Van Cleef, as one half of the roommate hitmen team of Fanti and Mingo.

The *Monthly Film Bulletin* called this: 'a gangster thriller of an unusually violent and ugly kind', which certainly makes it sound exciting. Note the obsession with high tech creeping in around the edges – as it does in *White Heat*, and *Kiss Me Deadly* – the electric razors, dictation machines, lie detector tests, the sensory torture techniques. Mafia heads operate corporations, cops exchange influence with Army Intelligence spooks – it's all heady, postmodern stuff.

The director was Joseph Lewis, who also made the original *Gun Crazy*, a number of westerns with titles like *Blazin' Sixshooters* and *The Boss of Hangtown Mesa*, and who directed the musical numbers in *The Jolson Story*. He directs very well, keeping the film in the noir tradition of stylized visuals in real locations, utilizing real detail. We find out how much cops earn, for instance: \$96.50 a week. The film is very aware of the class system, too – and of sexual politics, as all the male characters, good and bad alike, fall grovelling before the aristocratic dames ...



Man with a mission  
– THE BIG COMBO

# THE BIG KNIFE

US 1955

DIRECTOR  
Robert Aldrich

PRODUCER  
Robert Aldrich

SCREENPLAY  
James Poe

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Ernest Laszlo

WITH  
Jack Palance  
Ida Lupino  
Rod Steiger  
Shelley Winters

Robert Aldrich is an old favourite: he has had more films on *Moviedrome* than any other director. On this occasion we don't see so many of his stock company since the cast is quite small and there is only one setting – the mansion of a narcissistic Hollywood movie star. As you might deduce from the above, *The Big Knife* is based on a stage play – fortunately a good one. It takes us deeper and deeper into the twisted history of its protagonist and the studio's increasingly vicious machinations. Its author was Clifford Odets, who also wrote *None but the Lonely and Sweet Smell of Success* (see *Guide 1*).

There are some great supporting performances, particularly from Rod Steiger and Shelley Winters. Also noteworthy is the presence of Ida Lupino, who in addition to a career as an actress was one of Old Hollywood's very few woman directors. She directed *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951) and *The Bigamist* (1953). Ms Lupino also appears in *Junior Bonner* (see page 18), where she plays the mother of Steve McQueen.

*The Big Knife* fits into Aldrich's roster of cynical, ill-at-ease films. It's an interesting companion piece to *Sunset Boulevard* (see *Guide 1*). Billy Wilder's witty dissection of the foibles and delusions of practitioners of what the French call the 'seventh art'. The very best element of *The Big Knife* is the performance of the central character, the weak-willed actor Charles Castle, played by Jack Palance. Palance, who won his first Oscar in 1992 for *City Slickers*, has had a long and successful career playing villains. He was the monochrome killer who gunned

Elisha Cook down in the mud in *Shane*; he was the only actor of note in *Batman*. He's been so villainous so many times, in fact, that one tends to forget Palance is also a straight actor of considerable talent. Many actors, especially movie actors, seem incapable of playing more than one role. Palance, on the other hand, has played Fidel Castro in *Che*, a cowboy in *Monte Walsh* and the reclusive artist Rudy Cox in *Bagdad Cafe*.

In *The Big Knife* he very effectively deconstructs his more familiar 'tough guy' image. Starting out an idealised Bel Air celebrity, Palance strips away successive layers of pretence to reveal a man plagued by demons of guilt, prone to the most awful fears, the most sincere pangs of remorse. It's an unforgettable performance. Palance really does answer the oft-asked question: 'How can someone so rich be so cowardly?'

When Jerry Lewis played the narcissistic TV personality in *King of Comedy*, some critics – perhaps uncharitably – remarked that Lewis was simply playing himself. In *The Big Knife* I don't think Palance is playing himself at all. He's doing something far more clever – creating a character who is both despicable and sympathetic.

Palance has remarked in interviews that he was generally cast as villains because he has 'the face of a puglist' – characteristic modesty from one of Hollywood's better and more interesting actors.



Hollywood Babylon  
- THE BIG KNIFE

# BIRD

US 1988

DIRECTOR  
Clint Eastwood

PRODUCER  
Clint Eastwood

SCREENPLAY  
Joel Olsansky

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Jack N. Green

WITH  
Forest Whitaker  
Diane Venora  
Michael Zelniker  
Samuel E. Wright

A few years ago, a guy who worked as an administrator in one of the major studios went to jail for doing business with the Mafia. It was really the studio that was doing the business, but naturally the studio couldn't go to prison, so somebody had to take the fall. This guy got out of jail after a couple of years, and right away the studio hired him as a director. Since then, in a short time, he's directed four or five features. The 'Iran/Contra' principle applied to Hollywood – except, of course, those criminals all got pardons.

The reason I'm sharing this scurrilous story with you is that it demonstrates one of the two ways left to become a film director to the English-speaking peoples. If you live in Burkina Faso, there's still a chance for you. You might be able to do a rock video, and Roger Corman is still shooting low-budget exploitation pictures in Peru – but if you want to work in Hollywood there are seemingly only two ways left: you're either a patsy, like the Horatio Alger character in our tale, or you're an actor.

I'm serious. Don't go to film school or produce TV commercials: become an actor, or better yet, a movie star. The way it works is this: in the old days, as long as you were British, or Irish, or Dutch, or sounded like you were, you could go into any studio in Hollywood and they'd throw a couple of pictures at you to direct, straight off, no problem. It was a *The Day of the Locust* situation, and remember what disasters befell the production in that movie ...

The problem was, this great generation of artisans, former directors of those fabulous Hovis commercials of our childhood, colluded with the studios in the monumental lie that making a movie costs \$30, \$40 or \$50 million! What rubbish. And you're not seeing \$50 million on the screen, either, even though you're paying for it, because the leading hunk is taking \$10 million, the director \$2.5 million, the producer \$3.5 million, and the studio is squeezing another \$10 million in 'overheads'.

The studios like to spend a lot of money on a product, because if you can convince people to push up their prices, films become more expensive and fewer films get made. And if the studios control the market – and in some cases they own the cinemas – it's in their interest to have less product on the market: they make the same money for fewer units moved!

And who, ultimately, moves those units anyway? Is it the director?

No. And there's the rub. Because it's actors who ultimately sell the product. It's an actor who is selling you this product – perhaps the bestselling actor of them all, Clint Eastwood.

The studios want to keep film-making to a minimum; at the same time they wish to monopolize the talents of certain desirable actors. How do Warner Brothers make sure Clint Eastwood stays with Warner Brothers, acting in cowboy and Dirty Harry films? 'Find out if Clint wants to direct something.' (Thinks: 'That'll keep him busy till we're ready with *Magnum Force* in 1999!') 'He wants to act in his own movie? Sure, kid! Why dontcha!' (Thinks: 'Straight to video.')

What else could explain the proliferation of these actor-director sob-stories and vanity trips? 'Hey man, you see the new masterpiece directed by Kevin Costner/Jodie Foster/Sean Penn/Emilio Estevez/John Turturro/Keenan Wyan/Alan Alda/Leonard Nimoy/William Shatner/Kenneth Branagh/Lassie ...?' It really is appalling.

All of which said, *Moviedrome* did show a great film directed by a great actor, Marlon Brando's *One-Eyed Jacks* (see *Guide 1*); and Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* ain't bad either. Anyway ...

Clint Eastwood doesn't star in this movie, which is the biography of the jazz musician Charlie Parker. Forest Whitaker plays Parker, aka 'Bird', and gives an impressive performance. Especially at the beginning, Eastwood comes up with some good *mise-en-scène* and images – but generally he falls into the trap of thinking he's making a great movie (read: long movie). The film suffers from 'bio-pic-itis': because these are important events it has to take a long time over them. It's a syndrome visible in *Ghandi*, *Malcolm X*, *Lawrence of Arabia* – in any film that lasts over three hours.

*Bird* lasts two hours and 40 minutes, and it's generally viewed as Eastwood's finest directorial work – at least, until the *brouhaha* over *Unforgiven*. For my money, *Bird* is the better film.

RIGHT: All that jazz – BIRD

# CAPE FEAR

US 1962

**DIRECTOR**  
J. Lee Thompson

**PRODUCER**  
Sy Bartlett

**SCREENPLAY**  
James R. Webb

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Sam Leavitt

**WITH**  
Gregory Peck  
Robert Mitchum  
Polly Bergen  
Martin Balsam

*Cape Fear* is a film of some notoriety.

When it came to Britain in 1962 the censor was aghast. He demanded six minutes of cuts before granting the film an 'X' certificate. The problem wasn't with anything that happened on the screen so much as with the character played by Robert Mitchum, Max Cady. Cady is a sex offender who turns up in a small Florida town and proceeds to terrorize the local barrister (played by Gregory Peck), his wife (Polly Bergen), and their twelve-year-old daughter, who wears a push-up bra.

*Cape Fear* has a very obvious screenplay, which spells out the plot every chance it gets. It's very modern in that respect - modern in its banality and inability to leave anything to the imagination. J. Lee Thompson, who was born in Bristol but made most of his films in the United States, is a straightforward bread-and-margarine director best known for *The Guns of Navarone* and Charles Bronson and Chuck Norris epics.

What's best about *Cape Fear* is its performances: the supporting cast, particularly Telly Savalas (with hair) and Martin Balsam, are very good, and Peck and Mitchum are just great. Peck never fails to deliver the goods, always communicating a sense of decency, bewilderment, anger and deep frustration. Recently he played the writer Ambrose Bierce in the dreadful *Old Gringo*; he was the only good thing in the film. Max Cady may be Mitchum's best performance: he plays it cool, sexy, smart and really Evil. It's the sincerity of Peck's and Mitchum's performances that make *Cape Fear* a good film.

*Cape Fear* made a sizeable impact on the minds of certain film directors. Nicholas Roeg filled his picture *Track 29* with references to it, even beginning with a shot of the 'Cape Fear' bridge. Martin Scorsese remade it in 1991 in the Florida everglades, with de Niro in the Mitchum role, Nick Nolte as Gregory Peck and Jessica Lange as Polly Bergen. Mitchum, Balsam and Savalas all make cameo appearances in the remake, Scorsese's first foray into Cinemascope. Even the music in the Scorsese version is the original score by Bernard Herrmann.

In the end, *Cape Fear* doesn't entirely work. Florida

is one of the most brutal police states in the US. If a man like Max Cady were really to show up and start threatening the public prosecutor, he wouldn't be around for long. But the American cinema likes the fiction that all a crook has to do is hire himself a lawyer and the copper's hands are tied. It's a great dramatic contrivance, used in all the Dirty Harry films. Here Martin Balsam tells us: 'You can't arrest a man for something that might be in his mind. That is dictatorship.' Tell that to the Los Angeles Police Department, or to Leonard Peltier or Geronimo Pratt. You might even try it on the US Supreme Court, which recently decided that coerced confessions are constitutional. Where was Amnesty International that day?

Boy meets girl - CAPE FEAR



# CARNIVAL OF SOULS

US 1962

**DIRECTOR**  
Herk Harvey

**PRODUCER**  
Herk Harvey

**SCREENPLAY**  
Herk Harvey

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Maurice Prather

**WITH**  
Candace Hilligoss  
Herk Harvey  
Frances Feist  
Sidney Berger

*Carnival of Souls* is about a cynical church organist who ... I can't tell you any more about the story. You have to see it for yourself. It's really strange.

It was directed by Herk Harvey in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1962, featuring himself and a number of his neighbours and friends. (Mr H. plays the head zombie.) The only professional performer is Candace Hilligoss, who plays the organist. It was Mr Harvey's only venture into the exciting career of film director, unfortunately. Not only did he direct the film and act in it, he also paid for it. I think he ran a Chevy dealership. All the cars in the film appear to be Chevies, anyway. Lawrence, Kansas, is also the home of William Burroughs, author and adventurer.

The *Monthly Film Bulletin* called *Carnival of Souls* 'one of the most influential films of the sixties'. It certainly had a tremendous effect on George Romero, whose *Night of the Living Dead* resembles it in tone and zombie physiognomy. It has the strange matter-of-fact quality of *Honeymoon Killers* (see *Guide 1*). There is a touch of Ambrose Bierce's *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* about it, but in tone it's not particularly Gothic or Lovecraftian. Overt weird stuff is kept to a minimum and an extremely strange sort of horror film emerges: one where you're never quite sure whether the sound is missing by accident or

for some chilling reason; whether certain characters are 'off' because they're amateurs or because they're demons; whether the man across the hall is really just a sleazy, obnoxious oaf or ... you don't even know what. You can't predict what twists and turns *Carnival of Souls* is going to take. That's what's so good about it.

Although the sets are pretty standard and the music is, shall we say, emphatic, the photography is sometimes quite impressive, particularly when we drive out past the edge of town, to visit the old abandoned

arcade ... Maurice Prather, the cinematographer, was lucky to be working in the days when films like this had to be made in black and white because it was cheaper than colour. *Carnival of Souls* may sometimes look like it has shots missing (even the 'restored' version has charmingly ragged edges). But minute for minute it is better entertainment, and has better direction and more inspired performances, than films costing tens of millions more.

SHE WAS A STRANGER AMONG THE LIVING.



Party animals - CARNIVAL OF SOULS

# CARRIE

US 1976

DIRECTOR

Brian de Palma

PRODUCER

Paul Monash

SCREENPLAY

Lawrence D. Cohen

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Mario Tosi

WITH

Sissy Spacek

Piper Laurie

Amy Irving

John Travolta

The slow-motion, 'nekked' schoolgirl shower-room fantasy in this movie is one of the distinctive hallmarks of the cinema of Brian de Palma, director of *Wotan's Wake*, *Get to Know Your Rabbit*, *Phantom of the Paradise*, *Scarface* and *The Untouchables*. De Palma is often described by film critics as the heir to Hitchcock, but though he may share certain misogynistic traits with the Master, the films that are mostly described as 'Hitchcockian' – *Body Double*, *Dressed to Kill*, *Blow Out* – seem to be ripped off not so much from Hitchcock as from Dario Argento.

Dario Argento, as you may recall, is the Italian director of such films as *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, *Suspria*, *Opera* and the recent *Trauma*. Most of his films are so extremely horrible that they shouldn't be shown on television. I'm serious here – I honestly don't think that Argento's films should be seen by the accidental push of a remote-control button. You have to want to see them – which many people do, just as many people want to watch John Waters's *Pink Flamingos* (See *Cry Baby*, page 8) or go to Peter Greenaway marathons. *En passant*, it does seem odd to me that the British Board of Film Censors allows Dario Argento films to be shown but still won't give a certificate to Monte Hellman's *Cockfighter* – one of the best American movies of the seventies. By what standard are we not allowed to witness cockfights staged legally in the United States, yet are permitted to watch the violent disembowelling of women in Argento's films or de Palma's *Body Double*?

I suppose the answer would be that one is offensive to animal lovers, and the other is entertainment? And Argento and de Palma are good film-makers, no doubt about it. The one Argento film we might conceivably show is his first, *Bird with Crystal Plumage* – it's a good thriller with a great soundtrack by Ennio Morricone. Check out the

soundtracks of *Crystal Plumage* and *Body Double*. They are at some points very similar. De Palma actually began to use Morricone as his composer on his more recent films.

Anyway, about *Carrie*: this was de Palma's first big hit. He made it in 1976, a couple of years after his cult successes *Sisters* and *Phantom of the Paradise*. His films are marked by much black humour, and are sometimes framed as nightmares or dreams. There are often paroxysms of violence – in *The Fury*, John Cassavetes explodes repeatedly from different camera angles – which de Palma states is his incorporation of Eisenstein's theory of montage as conflict. 'Film is violence,' he has been quoted as saying.

*Carrie* was the first film in which the name of Steven King appeared. It is based on his novel. Today, of course, it is impossible to see a horror film which doesn't bear the moniker of Steven King, except for *Lawman*, whose producers King sued to force them to take his highly valuable name off the poster. Not sure why. Speculation is that the film wasn't up to the artistic standard of yer regular Steven King film.

There actually have been some good Steven King films, among them *Cujo* and the multi-part *Creepshow*. For my money, *Carrie*

is the best of them all. The script is good, it has great performances from Sissy Spacek and Piper Laurie, de Palma directs with great abandon, and it provides an early example of the trick ending, staple of all horror films thereafter, often used to set up the endless round of sequels as with *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the Thirteenth*. Do not reveal the ending to your friends.



Growing pains – CARRIE

# CHINATOWN

US 1974

DIRECTOR

Roman Polanski

PRODUCER

Robert Evans

SCREENPLAY

Robert Towne

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

John A. Alonso

WITH

Jack Nicholson

Faye Dunaway

John Huston

Perry Lopez

*Chinatown* is one of the great films of Roman Polanski, and perhaps the very finest latter-day film noir. It is such a celebrated and successful film, that I'll be relatively brief and merely draw your attention to a few anecdotes.

For example, did you know that J. J. Gittes, the character Jack Nicholson plays, was named after Harry Gittes, a Los Angeles producer and at the time a close confidant of Jack's, who constantly suffered from the mispronunciation of his name as 'Gits'?

Or that Hollis Mulwray, the evil magnate portrayed by John Huston, is to some extent based on the super-powerful LA billionaire Mulholland, who created the water system that supplied much of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley, and after whom one of Los

Angeles's most scenic boulevards, Mulholland Drive, was named?

Or that screenwriter Robert Towne wanted to give the film a happy ending, and had to be overruled by the director? Good thing films have directors, isn't it? (Even though, apparently, Polanski did shoot Towne's original ending as well.)

Or that *Chinatown* has a sequel, the truly irrelevant *The Two Jakes*?

Or that Jack Nicholson was reputedly the director of *The Two Jakes* and, equally reputedly, emerged from his trailer every morning with the words: 'Another day, another half a million dollars!'

Or that Roman Polanski has an acting role in *Chinatown*, as the villainous character called 'Man With Knife' in the credits.

Or that the brilliant production designer, Richard Sylbert, used to be a film producer before deciding he would rather design pictures?

Sylbert's other credits include *Dick Tracy*, one of the few non-naturalistic American films of recent years.

(That's enough anecdotes. Ed.)



Nosy parker – CHINATOWN

# CRY-BABY

US 1989

DIRECTOR  
John Waters

PRODUCER  
Rachel Talalay

SCREENPLAY  
John Waters

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
David Insley

WITH  
Johnny Depp  
Amy Locane  
Susan Tyrrell  
Polly Bergen

*Cry-Baby* is the eighth film of John Waters, the cult director from Baltimore. Waters once said, according to the *Virgin International Encyclopaedia of Film* that having someone vomit while watching one of his movies was like getting a standing ovation.

Waters's films include *Mondo Trasho*, which he directed, wrote, produced, photographed and edited; and *Pink Flamingos*, a similar *tour de force*. Since it is unlikely that we will be seeing *Pink Flamingos* any time soon on British television, permit me to quote at length from the aforementioned *Encyclopaedia*, in case you're not aware of what you're missing:

'Made for \$10,000, *Pink Flamingos* was Waters's first film to receive national distribution. Divine played "the filthiest person alive"; she finds her title challenged by the Marbles, who kidnap women, have their servant rape them and then sell the babies to lesbian couples. The film assaults the viewer with a barrage of repellent images, such as the hefty Edith Massey played out in a play pen wearing a bra and girdle and



Here's Johnny - CRY BABY

covered with the half-eaten eggs that are her passion. The notorious finale, in which Divine eats dog excrement, remains one of the most sickening sights captured on film. None the less, Waters plays everything on a broadly comic scale. Dialogue is ridiculously melodramatic, and performances are overblown. The sets, designed by Waters's regular art director Vincent Peranio, are the essence of kitsch. As bad taste is elevated to a new aesthetic, the audience must laugh to keep from gagging. The act of attending and professing to enjoy one of Waters's midnight movies became a safe way to thumb one's nose at the establishment during the "Me Decade".

Needless to say, when Waters 'went Hollywood', some changes had to be made. Not that he actually went to Hollywood: Waters remains fiercely loyal to his native Baltimore, shooting all his movies there. But the more grotesque sort of elements just described were absent from his first studio-financed effort, *Polyester*. Nor are they to be encountered in Waters's subsequent features, *Hairspray*, or indeed in *Cry-Baby*. The kitsch, the melodrama and the larger-than-life quality are all retained.

We are in 1954. The young people of Baltimore are divided into two cliques, the straights and the delinquents. Prince of the delinquents is Wade 'Cry-Baby' Walker, played by Johnny Depp. Pop culture heroes appear in profusion: among them Iggy Pop, Troy Donahue, Joe Dallesandro, Tracy Lords and Mink Stole. Susan Tyrrell and Willem Dafoe are among the actors. The principal surprise of the movie, *pour moi*, was that J. Depp is a really good actor.

Anne Bilson in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* observed that Waters lacks the killer instinct, and it is true that when his films are deprived of true obnoxiousness there is not much left. Nevertheless, check out the scene where Johnny Depp reveals exactly why he is called 'Cry-Baby', and tears open his shirt to reveal ... something tattooed on his chest ...

# DARKMAN

US 1990

DIRECTOR  
Sam Raimi

PRODUCER  
Robert Tapert

SCREENPLAY  
Chuck Pfarrer  
Sam Raimi  
Ivan Raimi  
Daniel Goldin  
Joshua Goldin

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bill Pope

WITH  
Liam Neeson  
Frances McDormand  
Colin Friels  
Larry Drake

Sam Raimi was also the director of *The Evil Dead* - you probably recall the controversy surrounding that low-budget 1980 horror picture. In the cold light of day it's hard to see what all the posturing was about - *Evil Dead* was a good, competent, cabin-in-the-woods horror flick, certainly not a *cause célèbre* worthy of all the anguish and outrage that surrounded its release on video. Raimi's bigger-budget *Crimescene* (1985), was considerably less successful, but *Evil Dead 2* (1987) was a tremendous film, full of all sorts of manic originality. Manic originality is less in evidence in Sam Raimi's first studio picture, *Darkman*.

*Darkman* was obviously intended to be a sequel-procreator along the lines of *Batman*. It didn't work out that way. It lacks the well-developed comic-book roots of *Batman* or *Dick Tracy*, and spends rather too much time referring to *The Phantom of the Opera* or indulging in familiar grotesquerie: definitely a case of too many writers, with no less than five names credited with the screenplay. Nevertheless, blessed with a massive budget, Raimi does come up with some impressive action scenes, though apparently the picture was taken away from him by the beneficent studio during editing. Directors-for-hire John Landis and William Dear have tiny acting roles, as do several hack producers from the studio. What, they couldn't find enough actors in Los Angeles?

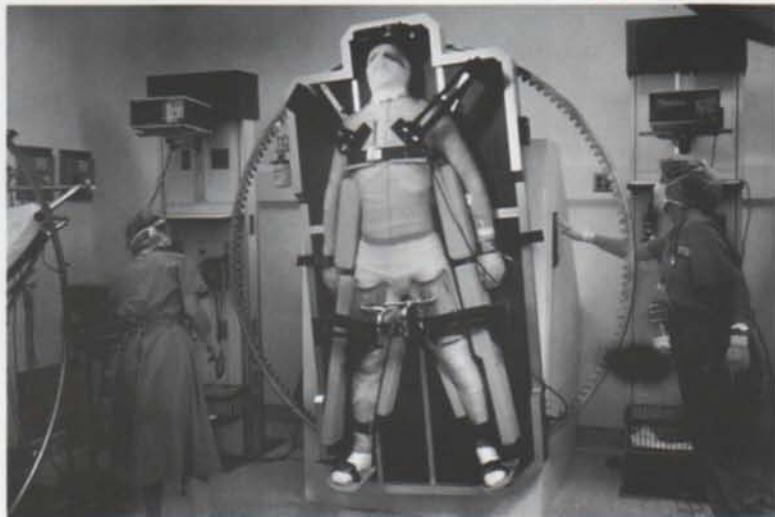
Raimi's most recent film is *Amy of Darkness*, a sort-of sequel to *Evil Dead 2*, which takes place where the previous film dumped its protagonist - the Dark Ages.

One rather distasteful thing about this film is its use of the American movie cliché, the Disposable Black Man. I had a girlfriend who worked for one of the major studios in Burbank, California. She and the other secretaries were allowed to see the new studio product every week and they used to take bets among themselves as to what reel the black character would die in. No kidding. This was a few years ago, but nothing has changed, to judge from Clint Eastwood's unsavoury use of Morgan Freeman in *Unforgiven*.

For a while it seemed like every action movie coming out of Hollywood had a white hero with a black best friend who died somewhere between reels two and eight in order to supply the hero with a convenient revenge motive. I don't go to see Hollywood pictures much, but a couple of years ago I made the mistake of seeing *Darkman* and David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* in a single weekend. At the start of *Wild at Heart*, the white hero beats a black guy till his brains run from his head. In *Darkman*, Raimi establishes the villain's villainy by having him cut a black man's fingers off with a cigar cutter.

Coincidence or something else? I don't know. I expect thudding mindless racism from thudding mindless blockbuster directors. But Lynch and Raimi? Come on boys, do better.

Changing faces - DARKMAN





# THE DAY OF THE LOCUST

US 1974

DIRECTOR

John Schlesinger

PRODUCER

Sidney Harmon

SCREENPLAY

Waldo Salt

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Conrad Hall

WITH

Donald Sutherland

William Atherton

Karen Black

Burgess Meredith

For an industry as self-congratulatory as Hollywood, you would expect there to be a plethora of movies showing the film business in a glowing light. Strangely enough, this doesn't seem to be the case. Of all the movies made about the film industry, the only one I can think of that treats the business well is *Day for Night*, in which the romantically-inclined French director François Truffaut did his best to convince us that making a film is a process full of sweetness and light.

The Americans, on the other hand, appear to have been resolutely cynical in their treatment of the Factory of Dreams. From Robert Aldrich's *The Big Knife* (see page 4) through Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (see Guide 1), Tony Richardson's *The Loved One* (see Guide 1), John Byrum's *Inserts* (see page 16), Richard Rush's *The Stunt Man*, the Coen brothers' *Barton Fink* and Robert Altman's *The Player*, the American cinema has managed to be quite brutal, i.e. truthful, about itself and the way films are financed and made.

*The Day of the Locust* is no exception. It is the story of a hapless art director and other movie peripherals in the year of our Lord 1938. It was directed by John Schlesinger, but we should resist the temptation to say that only Europeans tell the awful truth about Hollywood: Wilder and Richardson were foreigners but Aldrich and Rush are 100 per cent American. *The Day of the Locust* is far and away the most apocalyptic of these films. It features two highly impressive disasters and the constant threat of a city-levelling earthquake. Of course, the earthquake has a major symbolic presence here, and the film does waver slightly too far in a 'meaningful' direction.

The script is by Waldo Salt, one of the blacklisted writers, and it's based on the book of the same name by Nathanael West. West was a screenwriter, mainly for Republic Pictures. He was also the brother-in-law of S. J. Perelman, and unlike Perelman, had a relatively good time in Hollywood, never taking too seriously the inane material he was required to turn out. *The Day of the Locust* was one of those books like Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* that many film-makers longed to make. Schlesinger shot it on the heels of two successes, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *Midnight Cowboy*. He used

many of the same crew members as on the latter film.

Whereas *Midnight Cowboy* is a genuine masterpiece, *The Day of the Locust* doesn't make it to those lofty heights. The characters are interesting but lack the real dimensions of Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo. The film has a tremendous look, though (it was shot by Conrad Hall) and a fine art department: the production designer was Richard MacDonald, of *The Servant*, *Marathon Man* and *The Rose* fame. The most interesting character is probably Harry Greener, the Miracle Polish salesman, played by Burgess Meredith. Meredith is a fine actor who generally plays character roles. He was Lon Chaney Jr's partner in *Of Mice and Men*, and played The Penguin in the TV series of *Batman*. He was also Sylvester Stallone's trainer in *Rocky*, for his sins.

California dreamin' - THE DAY OF THE LOCUST



# DEAD RINGERS

CANADA 1988

DIRECTOR

David Cronenberg

PRODUCERS

David Cronenberg,

Marc Boyman

SCREENPLAY

David Cronenberg,

Norman Snider

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Peter Suschitsky

WITH

Jeremy Irons

Genevieve Bujold

Heidi von Palleska

Barbara Gordon

A Canadian biochemistry student who switched to English language and literature, David Cronenberg can legitimately be described as the most original director currently working on the North American continent. His films, which are always shot in Canada - Canadian cities doubling for New York or Marrakesh - fall generally within the horror genre. They deal with secret scientific experiments that go wrong, cannibalism, sexual mutation and epidemic disease. Depending on your point of view, Cronenberg is either a maker of sick exploitation movies or an ascetic prophet of the modern age.

*Shivers*, made in 1975, was his first feature. It dealt with a hotel suddenly ravaged by a sexual virus which drove all the guests insane. *Scanners* deals in exploding heads and mind control. *Rabid* (see page 26) is the story of a woman who mutates into an erotomaniac cannibal. *The Dead Zone* deals with a man whose precognitive gifts lead him into madness and political assassination. *The Fly* is about a man who turns into ... a giant fly.

Compared to the maestro's other films, *Dead Ringers* is remarkably unbloodthirsty. It is the tale of Beverly and Elliot Mantle, twin gynaecologists from Toronto, whose perverse relationship with their patients and each other leads them into nightmarish territory. It's based on a book called *Twins* by Bari Wood and Jack Geasland, and is, apparently, a true story. Not that it matters. I doubt that the original story of the Mantles was any more like *Dead Ringers* than Cronenberg's *The Naked Lunch* was like the William Burroughs book. Cronenberg films are always, first and foremost, Cronenberg films. The only compromise to which *Dead Ringers* had to submit was a title change, the word 'twins' having been appropriated by an Arnold Schwarzenegger film.

In some ways *Dead Ringers* is unique, however. It is the first Cronenberg film that features really good acting. I know there are those who will insist James Woods was good in

*Videodrome*, or Christopher Walken excellent in *The Dead Zone*. But to my taste, the acting in the great man's films has always been deliriously wooden. *Dead Ringers*, on the other hand, has a genuinely fine performance by Jeremy Irons, who plays the twin gynaecological brothers. It's photographically remarkable too, laid down on film via a process called Motion Control, whereby the camera's moves can be duplicated via computer automation, thus enabling Mr Irons to play one brother, then get changed, go back and play the other while the camera tracks ahead of them, round corners and through doors. In the old days of films about twins, you may recall, the camera had to remain in one position and there was always a blue line running down the middle of the screen. The excellent director of photography was Peter Suschitsky.

Jeremy Irons is reported to have said that the way he differentiated between his two roles was by always playing one brother on the balls of his feet, the other on his heels. Can it be true? Or was there more to his extraordinary performance?

Double trouble - DEAD RINGERS



# LES DIABOLIQUES

FRANCE 1954

DIRECTOR

Henri-Georges Clouzot

PRODUCER

Henri-Georges Clouzot

SCREENPLAY

Henri-Georges Clouzot

G. Geronimi

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Armand Thirard

WITH

Simone Signoret

Vera Clouzot

Charles Vanel

Paul Meurisse

*Les Diaboliques* is a horror film, and yes, it's in French, with subtitles, but please don't be put off! You will not be disappointed. This film is at least 15 times more frightening than *Friday the Twelfth Part Fourteen* or any of the other inane sequels you can rent down at the newsagents. This is a real film, directed by a real film director. And it is really frightening. If you watch *Les Diaboliques* all the way to the end, you will be scared. Guaranteed.

It is very unfortunate, my having to throw myself at your feet like this to try and make you watch this film, but there really does seem to be a lot of resistance to foreign-language films, not only in this country, but all over Europe. France and Britain are relatively civilized in showing foreign films in their original language, assuming they get shown at all. Germany, Italy and Spain, on the other hand, will generally only screen dubbed foreign movies. And all across the EC

the most popular films are the American ones, with local products coming a distant second and other nations' movies hardly registering at all.

Imagine a triple bill of Roman Polanski's *Repulsion*, *Les Diaboliques* and Paul Verhoeven's *The Fourth Man*. Three fantastic, sexy, Euro horror films. Pit them against the contemporary Hollywood product – say *Pet Semetary*, *Freddy's Dead* and William Friedkin's *The Guardian*. Why would anybody want to watch films like these, if they could watch films like those?

I can't really tell you what *Les Diaboliques* is about since the plot is fraught with too many strange twists and surprises. Let me instead briefly talk about the director. Henri-Georges Clouzot's second feature, *Le Corbeau*, was made in 1942 and produced by the German-owned Continentale Films. The film's negative and depressing view of provincial French life was seen as German propaganda and as a result

Clouzot didn't direct again until 1947 when he made *Quai des Orfèvres*, which won the Golden Lion at Venice. Clouzot evolved into a cynical, highly pessimistic film-maker – and also a very brilliant one. His most celebrated film is the adventure drama, *Le Salaire de la Peur* (*Wages of Fear*), which was remade – not badly – by the aforementioned William Friedkin in 1977, before his fall from high estate. *Wages of Fear*, the story of four men paid to truck high explosives through jungles and across mountains in Honduras, is one of the greatest films of all time – it was made entirely in the South of France.

*Les Diaboliques* has much of the same intensity and mad invention, though it's about women, not men. It features an implacable Simone Signoret and the fabulously beautiful Vera Clouzot, wife of the director. She was also the glamorously cringing love interest in *Wages of Fear*.



Evil spirits – LES DIABOLIQUES

# DJANGO

ITALY 1966

DIRECTOR

Sergio Corbucci

PRODUCERS

Manolo Bolognini

Sergio Corbucci

SCREENPLAY

Sergio Corbucci

Bruno Corbucci

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Enzo Barboni

WITH

Franco Nero

Loredana Nusciak

Jose Badalo

Angel Alvarez

*Django* is a great treat, a long-unseen spaghetti western. Sergio Corbucci also directed *The Big Silence*, another 'missing' film premiered on *Moviedrome* (see **Guide 1**). This was the first western I ever saw where the bad guys win absolutely. It was so troubling that the producers actually had Corbucci shoot a happy ending too, which played in certain territories where the sad one was perceived as being too much. *Django* isn't quite as doom-laden, but it comes close. It also benefits from an even madder plot and some extraordinary sets and costumes by Giancarlo Simi, who designed all of Sergio Leone's films. *The Big Silence* took place in the snow; *Django* is set entirely in a sea of mud.

It's basically a rip-off of *A Fistful of Dollars*, which was of course a rip-off of *Yojimbo* (see **Guide 1**), the classic Kurosawa movie about a paid assassin who brings destruction on a town controlled by two groups of bandits. Rumour has it that *Yojimbo* is currently being remade by Abel Ferrara, director of *Bad Lieutenant*.

To my mind, *Django* is the very best of the *Yojimbo* imitations: it really goes for it, far more than *A Fistful of Dollars*. It's more violent, more insane, more exotic, with a much higher body-count and far more ingenious cruelty: check out the scene where the unpalatable curate has his ear cut off and is then made to eat it. Such scenes were favourites of Corbucci, who was forever cutting off scalps, tongues and hands in his Jacobean spaghetti westerns. He died a couple of years ago, having made approximately 30 comedies, Roman sword-and-scandal epics and demented westerns such as *Django*.

*Django* was a very influential movie. In Italy it was far more popular than the Clint Eastwood films. It made Franco Nero an international star, and spawned at least 25 sequels. The last one, *Django's Great Return*, also starred Franco Nero and was released in 1990.

For a long time there was a rumour that *Django* had been banned by the British Board of Film Censors: I'm not entirely sure if this was true, but certainly the film never received a cinema release in Britain: in *Moviedrome* it had its first public screening on these shores. The reason given for its censorship problems was its violence, but by contemporary standards – say those of the average Arnold Schwarzenegger movie – the film is really pretty mild. The violence is exorbitant, improbable, and highly stylized. You may recall the great Jamaican movie *The Harder They Come*, in which Jimmy Cliff goes to see *Django*

at the Rialto cinema: the montage of falling bodies and massacred Ku Klux Klansmen impresses him so much that he imagines he is Django in the shoot-out at the end. Joe Strummer wrote a reggae song called 'Don't Tango With Django' in honour of these two influential films.

To the best of my knowledge this is the only spaghetti western that wasn't made in the wide-screen Techniscope format. They've dubbed Franco Nero with a Clint-Eastwood-type voice, but clad in the Union colours, dragging his saddle and his favourite coffin into a Confederate-dominated, utterly decrepit border town, he's a much more interesting character than Eastwood's Man With No Name. (The film was shot at Elios Film Studios outside Rome – it's the same set as they used for *The Big Silence*, minus the fake snow.) The cameraman was Enzo Barboni, who went on to direct the Terence Hill/Bud Spencer 'Trinity' films, under the pseudonym of 'E. B. Clutcher'.

As to where the name Django comes from, it appears to be a sick joke on the part of Corbucci and his screenwriter brother Bruno. Django Reinhart was a jazz guitar player who achieved legendary status despite lacking several fingers on one hand. How does that tie in with our Django? Well, you'll have to see the film.



Way out West – DJANGO

# THE DUELLISTS

GREAT BRITAIN  
1977

DIRECTOR  
Ridley Scott

PRODUCER  
David Puttnam

SCREENPLAY  
Gerald Vaughan-  
Hughes

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Frank Tidy

WITH  
Keith Carradine  
Harvey Keitel,  
Albert Finney  
Edward Fox

*The Duellists* is the story of two French Hussars who engage in a series of affairs of honour at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was produced by David Puttnam, the man the *Reader's Digest* called the father of British cinema, so naturally it stars two Americans, Keith Carradine and Harvey Keitel, in the principal roles. It's great to look at, as you might expect, because Scott – here directing his first feature film – was one of the so-called 'Renaissance' directors, a group of British TV commercial chaps who moved to Hollywood in the late seventies to make feature films. Other members of this august clan include Adrian Lyne, Alan Parker, Hugh Hudson and Ridley Scott's equally talented brother, Tony.

It's a little unfair to poke fun at the Renaissance gang. They didn't ask to be called that, and compared to the generation of British directors that came after them (the ones who earned their stripes directing pop videos) their qualifications are almost impeccable. Plus, let's face it: audiences like films like *Flashdance* and *Mississippi Burning*, which look just like Hovis commercials or Billy Joel promos. Audiences, by which I don't mean the mad coterie of cult movie enthusiasts but the vast throngs who turn out for *Rambo* and *Days of Thunder*, like their films to be as much like watching TV as possible. Try sticking a reel of *Stranger Than Paradise* into the middle of *Top Gun*. The punters will notice. And they won't approve. The general tendency of what we dignify with the name 'culture' is homogeneity, and if that goes against original and personal film-making, so be it.

*The Duellists* is based on a story by Joseph Conrad, *The Point of Honour*. Conrad is an author who fascinates and bedevils film

directors. Orson Welles came to Hollywood determined to make a film version of Conrad's *Notorius* but was frustrated by delays and ended up doing *Citizen Kane* instead. Francis Coppola based *Apocalypse Now* on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. David Lean tried for many years before his death to get *Notorius* going in Almeria, Spain.

The least effective parts of *Apocalypse Now* are those that try to cram the Vietnam War into a Conradian world-view, but the story of *The Duellists* works pretty well. The script is by Gerald Vaughan-Hughes. The production design by Peter J. Hampton and the sound re-recording by Hugh Strain are both very good. But in the end it's an unengaging film, made according to a reliable formula: get a couple of American movie actors for your leads, mix 'em up with a bunch of English character actors, boil and serve. At least the serving is attractive and they're not your average Hollywood hunks. If you sort of squint you can imagine you're watching the out-takes from *Barry Lyndon*.

Men of honour – THE DUELLISTS



# ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

US 1979

DIRECTOR  
Don Siegel

PRODUCER  
Don Siegel

SCREENPLAY  
Richard Tuggle

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bruce Surtees

WITH  
Clint Eastwood  
Patrick McGouhan  
Roberts Blossom  
Jack Thibau

Since we've already exhausted the standard reference works and databases, to say nothing of your gentle ears, with information about Siegel and Eastwood, I propose instead to talk about the second featured player of this almost all-male cast, Patrick McGouhan.

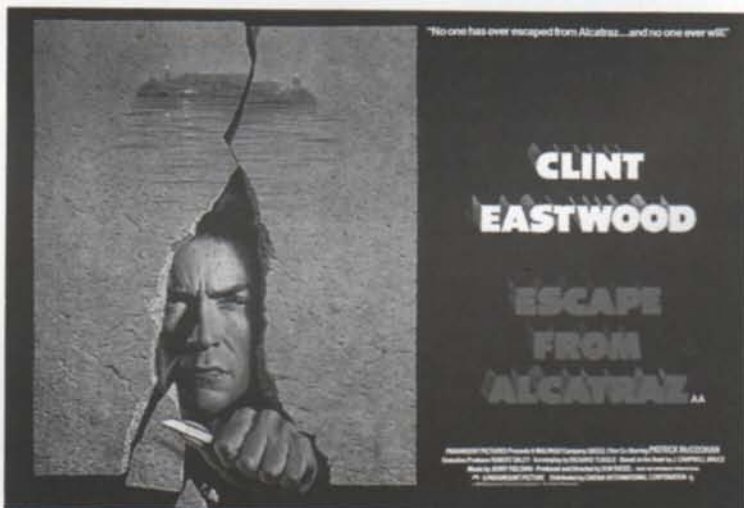
McGoohan was the star of a very popular TV series in the early sixties – *Danger Man*, apparently called *Secret Agent* in the States. McGouhan followed this with a remarkable series of his own devising, *The Prisoner*. There are some, myself included, who believe that it was the greatest TV series of all time. You've probably seen an episode or two on one of the commercial channels. Actually, you probably know exactly what I'm talking about.

*The Prisoner* was a bizarre, apocalyptic, Cold War Kafka nightmare

in which McGouhan awoke in a bizarre prison colony (Portmeirion in North Wales) to face endless interrogations from a series of semi-absolute leaders all named Number Two. McGouhan's character's name, of course, was Number Six. Number Six denied he was a number and insisted he was a free man. But every week when he tried to escape he'd be betrayed or sprayed with hallucinogenic drugs or smothered by a gigantic floating beach-ball and brought back to the holiday camp. McGouhan directed several episodes, including I believe its incomprehensible but brilliant two-part finale, which apparently had to be improvised when the second series was terminated at short notice. It was a brilliant piece of television, which as yet has not been made into a film. How about it, Patrick?

*The Prisoner* is now a cult of the first order. You can buy books about it, even attend 'Prisoner' conventions. McGouhan went on to direct a feature musical based on Othello, titled *Catch My Soul*. Rather like one of the weirder episodes of *The Prisoner* called 'Living in Harmony', *Catch My Soul* was set in a desert commune. *Variety* called McGouhan's direction 'taut', but the *Monthly Film Bulletin* said the film was 'arguably even less watchable than the unspeakable *Godspell*'.

After that, McGouhan appeared in various movies, including a weirdly compelling spaghetti western produced by Sergio Leone called *Un Genio Due Compari e Un Pollo*, and *Baby*, the film about the baby dinosaur. In *Escape from Alcatraz*, ten years or more after he played Number Six, he plays another character without a name – the warden of the impregnable high-security jail on Alcatraz Island. Interesting: Number Six has become Number Two. Clint Eastwood is Number Six ...



The big break – ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

# ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

This is one of the more disappointing John Carpenter films. Carpenter is the director of a series of horror and science fiction films, the most famous and commercially successful of which was *Halloween*.

His first film, in some ways still his best, was a science-fiction comedy called *Dark Star*, about surfers in space. *Dark Star* was written by one Dan O'Bannon, who later wrote *Alien*, which, in spite of a much larger budget and the inimitable chocolate-box photography of Ridley Scott, is essentially the same story (mad alien aboard space ship, picking off the crew) minus the very funny humour of Carpenter's original, super-low-budget film.

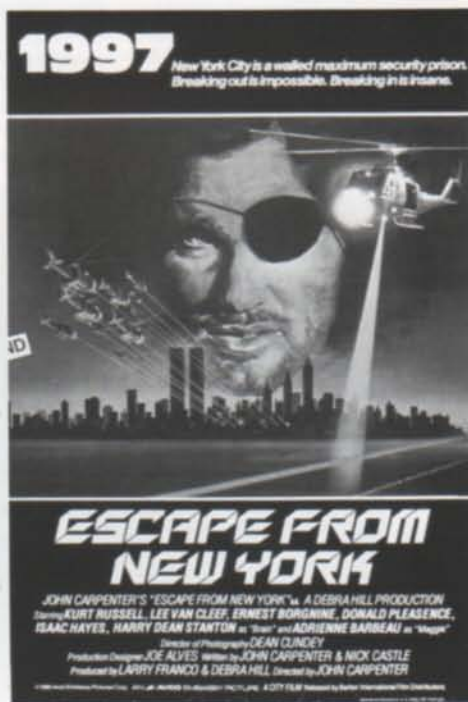
Carpenter is a variable director. Sometimes he really pulls it off, as with *Assault on Precinct 13* (see **Guide 1**), his remake of *The Thing*, or the highly underrated *They Live!* *They Live!* is one of the few recent American films to feature a homeless person as the hero, and for the first hour it's a mesmeric revelation of how yuppies and the Soho video and advertising crowd are really aliens who, having taken over the planet, are busy throwing the rest of us out of work. *They Live!* falls down at the end, stumbling as do many modern science-fiction films into a dull welter of chases down corridors and high-tech gunfire – similar malaises afflict *Total Recall* and *Terminator 2*.

*Escape from New York* really should have been a brilliant film. Its premise is that five years from now all order has broken down and New

York has been turned into a vast maximum-security prison encircled by a giant wall. Budgeted in 1981 at \$7 million, it was Carpenter's most expensive film. It features some splendid actors, including Lee Van Cleef, Harry Dean Stanton, John Diehl, and Kurt Russell doing a very funny Eastwood imitation. With a great premise, decent money, and a good cast, why does *Escape from New York* go wrong?

I think it's partially because of the inadequate special effects, which were done at Roger Corman's cheapo studio in a Los Angeles lumber yard. If you study the credits closely, you'll see the name of one Jim Cameron listed as effects photographer and matte artist. Could this be the renowned James Cameron, of *Terminator* and *Abbyss* fame? Maybe it could, if you recall how bad the model work and mattes were in *Terminator 1* (see **Guide 1**). More to the point, though, is that the film obviously doesn't take place in New York. For budgetary convenience it was shot in St Louis and Century City, Los Angeles, neither of which resemble Manhattan at all. And there's a certain laziness and sprawling quality to the script, which really never gets going, beyond the level of in-jokes such as subsidiary characters named Romero and Cronenberg.

It is a minor offering from the sometimes extraordinary stable of John Carpenter. It features, as usual, music composed and performed by the director.



Urban decay - ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

# F FOR FAKE

*F for Fake* is Orson Welles's quasi-documentary about various forgers and fakers, made in 1973. It was the last Welles film to be released. He actually completed two other movies, *The Deep* and *The Other Side of the Wind*, which for obscure financial or legal reasons have never been distributed.

*F for Fake* is a witty, bon-vivant type of film in which Welles, clad in his trademark black hat and cloak, dines in various restaurants, attends parties, and introduces us to Clifford Irving, the man who forged Howard Hughes's diaries, and Elmyr de Hory, a painter who claims to have created fakes that hang in all the great art galleries of the world. It's amusing and occasionally very impressive, as in Welles's long meditation on Howard Hughes, in which he claims that he originally intended to make *Citizen Kane* not the story of a newspaper mogul, but rather the tale of a dashing millionaire aviator film director – Citizen Hughes.

Yet, inherent in *F for Fake* is something very unfair and very sad: the notion that Welles himself was not an authentic artist, but rather a faker too, like Irving and Elmyr – a charlatan who managed to trick the movie business into believing he was a genius. Nothing could be further from the truth. No great film-maker had a harder time attempting to make movies than Welles did. Luis Buñuel spent fourteen years without making a single film after his former friends denounced him as a Communist, but in 1947 he resurfaced in Mexico and made 28 more features. In the fifties and sixties Buñuel made at least a dozen brilliant films. Welles fared worse. After *Citizen Kane*, his career declined precipitously. He was fired from the editing of *The Magnificent Ambersons* while making a propaganda documentary for the US government. He then found he had been blacklisted by all the studios, supposedly because he was a Communist, but more likely because he was the author of a popular left-wing column in the *New York Post*. Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Welles to stand for Senator of Wisconsin, against Joe McCarthy. Welles declined, but still found it no easier to work as a director. He struggled from one B-movie acting job to another, often partially financing his own low-budget films. He made a version of *Macbeth* on a studio sound stage in 21 days, yet could never shake off an utterly unjustified reputation for profligacy. Charlton Heston got him a directing gig at Universal but the studio

fired him from the editing as soon as *Touch of Evil* was in the can.

All the while, American film critics re-evaluated Welles – always downward. It was an easy, iconoclastic thing to do, and in so doing, the bold hacks pleased the studios and the Hearst press. Pauline Kael went so far as to publish a book in which she claimed Welles had no involvement in the screenplay of *Citizen Kane*, as if in some way her brilliant thesis made the film – and Welles – less great. In the end, the critics and the studios got what they deserved: a mediocre national cinema whose greatest talent was perennially excluded. Yet Welles continued to make films – always ambitiously, always for too little money and in too short a time, always funded by the strangest sources: *F For Fake* is a French/Iranian/German co-production.

Don't buy the notion of Welles as a faker and a fraud though. He was The Great American Film-maker, even if, as he told a BBC documentary crew: 'I have wasted the better part of my life looking for money. I have spent too much energy on things that have nothing to do with making a movie.'

Sleight of hand - F FOR FAKE



## US 1981

### DIRECTOR

John Carpenter

### PRODUCERS

Larry Franco

Debra Hill

### SCREENPLAY

John Carpenter

Nick Castle

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Jim Lucas

### WITH

Kurt Russell

Lee Van Cleef

Ernest Borgnine

Donald Pleasance

## FRANCE, IRAN, WEST GERMANY 1973

### DIRECTOR

Orson Welles

### PRODUCERS

Dominique Antoine

François Reichenbach

### SCREENPLAY

Orson Welles

Oja Palinkas

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Gary Graver

### WITH

Orson Welles

# FACE TO FACE

## ITALY 1967

### DIRECTOR

Sergio Sollima

### PRODUCER

Albert Grimaldi

### SCREENPLAY

Sergio Sollima

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Raphael Pacheco

### WITH

Gian Maria Volonte  
Tomas Milian  
William Berger  
Jolanda Modio

*Face to Face* is one of three 'political westerns' by the Italian director Sergio Sollima, who sometimes operates under the pseudonym 'Sterling Simon'. The other two were *The Big Gundown*, an excellent bounty-hunter movie starring Lee Van Cleef and Tomas Milian, and *Rim, Man, Run*, a rather worse-than-mediocre sequel involving the further adventures of Milian. They were 'political' in much the same way as all the spaghetti westerns, setting up a rural/urban conflict in which the city dwellers are always insidious degenerates or usurious bankers, and the rural characters innocent exploités, often championed by a glamorous social bandit. It's a straightforward, simple-minded view that you can find even in supposedly sophisticated Italian films, the most lumbering example perhaps being *1900*.

*Face to Face* has been described as a parable of the rise of European fascism. Well, maybe. It certainly has the political schematic outlined above, but to me it seems more of a Borgesian tale of fate and doppelgangers. You can take your pick. It also has, and this is where it gets good, some of the most improbable character names, and some of the most outlandish haircuts ever seen in a western.

Gian Maria Volonte plays professor Brad Fletcher, a consumptive Boston University professor who heads west for his health. Volonte is, of course, one of the great spaghetti western actors – he was the bandit chief in *A Fistful of Dollars* and *For a Few Dollars More*; he was the unwilling revolutionary in *A Bullet for the General* (see **Guide 1**). Volonte was a serious actor who had been blacklisted for being a Communist – Leone was the first director to break ranks and give him a job. Later he went on to appear in more 'serious' political films, including *Sacco and Vanzetti*, and Francesco Rosi's *Lucky Luciano*. He's always good, and this is one of his better western roles.

In *Face to Face*, Brad Fletcher becomes involved with a Mexican bandit with the unlikely moniker of Solomon 'Beauregard' Bennet, leader of a hippie-esque outlaw gang called Bennet's Raiders. Beauregard is played by Tomas Milian – the Cuban actor who

appeared in Sollima's other political westerns, and in many other spaghetti westerns including the truly extraordinary *Django Kill*. Milian, like Volonte, is a 'proper' actor – he played the priest in Dennis Hopper's Peruvian epic *The Last Movie*, and recently was seen as one of the anti-Castro hitmen in Oliver Stone's *JFK*.

The chemistry between Volonte and Milian is really interesting, and it keeps the film alive when it might otherwise expire – as, for instance, in the incongruous hippie commune scenes. There are also those haircuts to contend with. But *Face to Face* is really quite an entertaining and intriguing film. Watch out for several spaghetti western regulars, including William Berger as the mysterious Charlie Siringo, Aldo Sambrel as the treacherous polecat Zachary Shot, and Angel del Pozo in the role of the gentleman gunfighter, Maximilian de Winton.

## Spaghetti showdown – FACE TO FACE



# GOthic

## GREAT BRITAIN 1986

### DIRECTOR

Ken Russell

### PRODUCERS

Al Clark  
Robert Devereux

### SCREENPLAY

Steven Volk

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Mike Southon

### WITH

Gabriel Byrne  
Julian Sands  
Natasha Richardson  
Myriam Cyr

Ken Russell is a highly talented and off-maligned director who, as the *Virgin International Encyclopaedia of Film* observed, 'refuses to make movies in the genteel British tradition.' As such his *oeuvre* rarely finds favour with the critics, but is often highly popular with the unwashed mob of real people who intermittently attend the cinema. For a while, things got difficult for this original and therefore feared director. It looked as if he was going to get stuck in the United States, waiting years to direct not-good studio potboilers like *Altered States* and *Crimes of Passion*. But no! Russell came sailing back to these shores on the wave of video money which erupted in the mid eighties, when new companies – in this instance Lord Branson's Virgin Vision plc – financed features on the basis of anticipated video and TV sales. This is how many films in the eighties were made, among them *Company of Wolves*, *Empire State*, *Sid & Nancy* and a whole string of madcap low-budget high-energy Ken Russell films.

*Salome's Last Dance*, *The Lair of the White Worm*, *The Rainbow*, *Whore*: films to conjure with. All of them highly suitable for *Moviedrome*. *Gothic*, made in 1986, is a portentous tale about the origins of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. It has outstanding costumes by Victoria Russell and is wittily designed by Christopher Hobbs. Steven Volk's script has all the stops pulled out, but Thomas



## Stomach trouble – GOTHIC

Dolby's soundtrack is a disappointment – it's overdone, like a TV movie score. But maybe this is what Our Ken wanted.

An odd thing about *Frankenstein*: films about the Great Doctor and his Noble If Demented Creation tend to get made in clumps. Right now there are at least three *Frankenstein* movies in production. And in the same year as *Gothic*, another film about Mary Shelley, her husband Percy and naughty Lord Byron got made: a Spanish film called *Ramamiento contra el Viento*, or *Rousing against the Wind*. It's a more 'classy' version of the same story, though not in a bad way; it still has totally surreal moments involving the monster, and Lord Byron's pet giraffe. I recommend it also. *Gothic*, Ken Russell's *Mr and Mrs Frankenstein*, as the *Virgin Encyclopaedia* noted, is definitely not *Howard's End*.

# GRIM PRAIRIE TALES

US 1990

DIRECTOR  
Wayne Coe

PRODUCER  
Richard Hahn

SCREENPLAY  
Wayne Coe

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Janusz Minski

WITH  
James Earl Jones  
Brad Dourif  
Lisa Eichhorn  
William Atherton

*Grim Prairie Tales* was made on a shoestring budget in the Mojave Desert in 1990. The writer/director, Wayne Coe, was an illustrator who designed the American campaigns for *Out of Africa*, *Brazil* and *Back to the Future* before deciding that he wanted to get involved behind the lens. He gives us an excellent example of why writer/directors shouldn't be allowed to talk about their aspirations or their films. To wit:

'If I look back on my brief life at the age of 29, I've learned I don't want to be a star, nor be the richest guy on the block. I want to have fun with the process of making films, and hopefully entertain and provoke people through them. If I get applause when the curtain falls, so much the better.'

Oh dear.

But wait! Pay no attention to these saccharine burlblings. *Grim Prairie Tales* is actually good... thanks mainly to the presence of good camerawork and some fine actors, especially Brad Dourif and James Earl Jones.

Brad Dourif, as we have observed before, is a really strong actor who seems doomed to a career in weirdo cultist *Moviedrome*-type films.

James Earl Jones, here looking like a refugee from *The Big Silence* (see **Guide 1**), is of course one of the best living American actors. He usually gets cast as 'The Voice of God'.

Here they play two drifters who meet on a lonely prairie and proceed to tell weird tales around the camp fire. It's a portmanteau film, like *Dead of Night* (see **Guide 1**), but in this instance the storytellers are so good that as *Variety* observed, you almost regret the interruption that their weird tales provide.

Almost, but not quite. For these are good, weird stories too. It's almost a new genre in fact - the Gothic western, rather like Richard Brautigan's unsatisfying novel *The Hawkline Monster* or Cormac McCarthy's epic tome *Blood Meridian*.

Coe's background as an illustrator serves him well when at one point *Grim Prairie Tales* turns from live action into a horror cartoon.

Hair raising - GRIM PRAIRIE TALES



# HELL'S ANGELS ON WHEELS

US 1967

DIRECTOR  
Richard Rush

PRODUCER  
Joe Solomon

SCREENPLAY  
R. Wright Campbell

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Leslie Kovacs

WITH  
Jack Nicholson  
Sabrina Scharf  
Jana Taylor  
Mimi Machu

The production manager and the director of photography of this biker movie, Paul Lewis and Laszlo (under the Anglicized pseudonym 'Leslie') Kovacs, went on with Jack Nicholson to make *Easy Rider* the following year. *Easy Rider* was directed by Dennis Hopper. It was the film that broke the conventional biker-movie mould - a mould set by Marlon Brando's *The Wild One* in 1954.

*Hell's Angels on Wheels* is a fairly traditional piece. Though former Hell's Angels president Sonny Barger is credited as technical consultant, and though both Angels and Nomads appear in the ridin' sequences, like most biker movies the film is squeaky clean. There is very little violence, and what there is at the level of a John Ford bar-room brawl. What it does have is a lot of humour and a great deal of sexual tension.

It also has a lot of motorbikes. In that sense it actually sets the pace for *Easy Rider*: there are several bike ridin' scenes set to pop tunes, which serve as transitions. One of them, a telephoto lens sequence accompanied by a song called 'Goin' Nowhere', is spectacularly good: better than any of the ridin' sequences in *Easy Rider*. The bike sequences start off somewhat familiar and staid, but as the movie progresses, the bikers get more into it and start doing stunts and falling off. There's even a wonderful sequence which should be familiar to all bikers, in which our heroes get stuck behind a lorry on a winding road.

*Hell's Angels on Wheels* was made at the tail end of the period when the American cinema glorified rebels instead of cops. Hence the police in the film are generally unsympathetic, as are the military characters, who pull knives when challenged to a fair fight. No Hell's Angel would ever do that. *Variety* was rather dismissive when the film came out. They said that Jack Nicholson's contribution was made up mostly of variations on a grin. The director, Richard Rush, went right on doing biker movies none the less, including the somewhat more destructive *Savage Seven*. He also directed *Psych-out*, *Getting Straight* and *The Stunt Man* - a great movie about the movie business, during which he suffered a heart attack.

Since then he has been scheduled to direct *Millennium*, *Air America* and *Total Recall* - all of which he sadly disappeared from before they

were committed to film. Recent projects include a script called *Fat Lady*, about the plane in which American terrorist Eugene Hasenfus was shot down over Nicaragua.

Paul Lewis and Laszlo Kovacs have been more productive: Lewis has produced all Dennis Hopper's movies, including *Colors* and *The Hot Spot*; he also produced the odd cult serial murder film *The Hitcher*. Kovacs became a noted 'serious' photographer. In addition to *Easy Rider* and *The Last Movie*, he shot *Five Easy Pieces* (see **Guide 1**), *Paper Moon*, *Shampoo* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Highway to heaven - HELL'S ANGELS ON WHEELS



# THE HILL

GREAT BRITAIN  
1965

DIRECTOR

Sidney Lumet

PRODUCER

Kenneth Hyman

SCREENPLAY

Roy Rigby

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Oswald Morris

WITH

Sean Connery

Harry Andrews

Michael Redgrave

Ian Bannen

*The Hill* is a rarely seen drama set during World War II. Sidney Lumet is an American director, most famous for his urban dramas like *Network* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. It was made in 1964, the year after Lumet's tense nuclear war drama *Failsafe*, the year before he made the sensational *Panther*.

*The Hill* is the story of a British camp for army prisoners in North Africa. Among the prisoners are Sean Connery, Ossie Davis and Roy Kinnear. It's an outstanding cast. The officers are played by Ian Bannen and Michael Redgrave, and Harry Andrews is Regimental Sergeant-Major Wilson, who has designed a Mayan-death-cult-style pyramid in the centre of the prison compound, which the men are forced endlessly to run up and down.

This hill is a metaphor for all sorts of things, of course: the army,

war, obedience, and society with all its vile institutions and demented sexual sadism. The film is so brilliantly photographed, though, that none of this symbolic stuff intrudes until the end, when its origins as a stage play do unfortunately become apparent. The camera work was by Oswald 'Ossie' Morris. (How come nobody's called Ossie any more?) He also photographed *Moby Dick*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *Sleuth*. The opening shot is one of those long takes you read about in film textbooks. It's certainly on a par with the famous opening shot of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil*. The film uses wide-angle lenses and long takes very effectively: particularly in the scene where the men are introduced, and in the interiors; they even manage to make a jail cell interesting.

As the warden says in *Escape from Alcatraz* (see page 11), this isn't a film about reforming malefactors: there's no possibility of making good people here, only good prisoners – or in this case, soldiers. As Connery observes, in Andrews's prison 'even the screws are doing time.'

Given how much of *The Hill* is excellent, it's strange it isn't more celebrated. Certainly it's equal to Lumet's other work, which sadly has degenerated lately into formulaic studio films.

Perhaps *The Hill* is largely unknown because it's so odd: a British war film with an American director and a relentlessly pessimistic take on everything. No one gets let off the hook here, there is no room for sentimentality; the script remains cruel and strong and plausible until almost the very end ...



Soldiers of misfortune - THE HILL

# HOUSE OF GAMES

US 1987

DIRECTOR

David Mamet

PRODUCER

Michael Hausman

SCREENPLAY

David Mamet

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Juan Ruiz-Anchia

WITH

Joe Mantegna

Lindsay Crouse

Mike Nussbaum

Lilia Skala

*House of Games* is a tale of confidence tricksters. It's the first feature directed by David Mamet, the noted playwright and screenwriter who wrote *Duck Variations* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, and penned the screenplay for de Palma's *The Untouchables*.

It's a complex story, involving a series of consecutive and concurrent scams which I will not ruin by relating to you here. Certain parts of the plot, if you think about them, don't entirely convince – but why think? It's a movie that's cleverly constructed and very well acted. Joe Mantegna is outstanding as the principal conman. The dialogue is great and the tension winds down only in the slightly stogy action scenes.

Since *House of Games* is very good and basically indescribable, let's talk about the titles instead. They are composed of white letters on a black screen. There is nothing showy about the lettering. It's a typeface that conveys its information soberly and with dignity. Indeed, these are dignified titles, bearing the message that this is a quality film.

Well, quality it may be, but in my opinion this convention is getting grievously overused. Nine out of ten movies have these white-on-black titles now, often with nice classical music playing, or even more portentously, no music at all, just this hissing sound. Enough is enough! You want to know the real reason so many films have 'quality' titles of this type? It's because they're cheap. It costs a lot more to have good titles superimposed over the action, even more if you have animation or special effects involved. And even though they've blown \$100 million on the movie, by the end of post-production the studio is starting to complain about the money, and before you know it ...

Make no mistake. Good titles are expensive, and time-consuming. Few indeed are the films today that enjoy a really first-class title sequence like Saul Bass's famous catwalk credits in *Walk on the Wild Side* (see **Guide 1**), or *Bullitt*, whose

titles were so cool as to be unreadable, or the famous animated titles of *The Pink Panther*. Great must have been Spike Lee's temptation to start *Malcolm X* with 'classy' titles. To his credit, he did not. Nor did Charles Burnett, in his very fine *To Sleep with Anger* (see page 30).

There actually are people who do nothing but titles. Well, they do other things, of course, but they make their living designing titles. One of the best currently working is an American, Bob Dawson, who did the titles for *Salvador*, *Patriot Games* and *Ironweed*.



Truth or dare? - HOUSE OF GAMES

# INSERTS

## GREAT BRITAIN 1975

### DIRECTOR

John Byrum

### PRODUCER

Harry Benn

### SCREENPLAY

John Byrum

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Denys Coop

### WITH

Richard Dreyfuss

Jessica Harper

Veronica Cartwright

Bob Hoskins

John Byrum's *Inserts* is another of *Moviedrome's* perennial excursions into the doomed periphery of Hollywood.

*Inserts* tells the sad tale of a talented, young film director, played by Richard Dreyfuss, whose artistic temperament and love of booze have dragged him to the nadir of his career, shooting pornos in his apartment. This bold exposé of talent reduced to the dregs is of course an example of what it purports to criticize – or, at best, the same process in reverse, soft-core exploitation wearing the agonized mask of art. It is an entertaining and cynical film. The script contains many felicities and if it seems like a staged play, it's not. Perhaps *Inserts* is confined to one four-walled set for aesthetic reasons. Perhaps the budget didn't permit anything else.

Although its observations are not all that new – we've learned worse things about the Industry in *Sunset Boulevard* (see **Guide 1**) and *The Big Knife* (see page 4), to say nothing of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* books – *Inserts* has a nice atmosphere of melancholy. None of the characters have real names either – they're called Harlene and the Boy Wonder, Rex the Wonder Dog and Miss Cake. Watch out for Bob Hoskins in his first feature role as Big Mac, film producer extraordinaire, singing the praises of the coming homogeneity of the Americas – a continent united by tens of thousands of burger joints and petrol stations all exactly alike. You can tell this thing was done by British people, can't you? And the joke's on us.

Richard Dreyfuss, who can be an exaggerated actor with a tendency to mug, is here surprisingly

subdued, even 'sympathetic' as they say in Hollywood. A little young perhaps. He says he's 'been in the bizniz a long time' but he doesn't look as if he has. Makes you wonder, what if they asked Jack Palance...?

Top acting honours from this armchair critic go to Veronica Cartwright, as the tragic-yet-cheerful Harlene, and Stephen Davies as Rex the Wonder Dog, a Valentino clone. Both are excellent. They really manage to convey in two quite different ways the type of self-deluded, naïvely depraved go-getters who against all odds distribute favours wisely and become the most glorious of beings, movie stars ...

Something borrowed, something blue - INSERTS



# INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

## US 1978

### DIRECTOR

Philip Kaufman

### PRODUCER

Robert H. Solo

### SCREENPLAY

W. D. Richter

### DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Chapman

### WITH

Donald Sutherland

Brooke Adams

Leonard Nimoy

Veronica Cartwright

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is that rare thing, a remake that is as good as the original. There have been countless lousy and incompetent remakes – *Stagecoach*, for instance, or *Father of the Bride*.

Sometimes they are so bad they have to be concealed under a different title: the remake of *Out of the Past* was called *Against All Odds*. Off hand, I can think of only one other genuinely good remake, and that was William Friedkin's *Soylent Green*, a truly inspired retelling of the French classic *Wages of Fear*. *Soylent Green* was a great film based on a great film; it was also a monumental failure at the box office. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a good film based on a good film.

Needless to say it made lots of money, and made its director Philip Kaufman something as rare as a good remake: an independent American filmmaker whom the studios considered 'bankable'. From humble and intelligent beginnings like *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* he went on to achieve grandiloquence, in the form of *The Right Stuff* and *The Unbeatable Lightness of Daniel Day-Lewis*.

The original version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has been shown in *Moviedrome* (see **Guide 1**), as the gentle reader will no doubt recall. Made in 1955, it was a dark and moody science-fiction thriller, a bit intellectual, and a tad more subtle than the radioactive-cloud-that-turns-men-into-giant-ants fifties norm. Directed by Don Siegel, it was a parable of the encroachment of a dangerous, alien conformity upon a small California town. At the time, the great manufactured paranoia was Communism, and the film could be viewed as a warning against

said political doctrine, or as criticism of those who would suppress it at all costs.

Communism remained the great American fear through six presidencies, justifying the enormous military expenditure of the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford years. By 1978 Carter was president and the Red Menace didn't seem such a menace any more: in fact, for a brief while it began to appear that the menace might actually be domestic rather than foreign – hence the rather different 'take' of Philip Kaufman's film. Instead of a small town in northern California, we're in San Francisco; a city already filled with threatening people and job descriptions. Long before the aliens show up in force it's obvious that something is wrong: the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate fear of big, unseen power-politics lurks at the edges of the film.

One of the symbols of insidious corporate encroachment in this version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is an odd-looking skyscraper, a little like a stretched-out version of the Masonic pyramid on the dollar bill. It appears several times and always manages to aggravate our sense of unease. Ironically, or maybe not, that building is called the Transamerica Tower: Transamerica being a massive corporation that owns, among other assets, United Artists, the producer of this film.

Watch out for Don Siegel playing a small role as a taxi driver, and Kevin McCarthy, star of the previous *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, reprising one of the scenes from the original. Also, be on the lookout for a five-second appearance from Robert Duvall, whose part is so small he doesn't receive a credit, and Leonard Nimoy in a non-pointy-eared role.

Grateful Dead fans should enjoy Jerry Garcia on the banjo.



of the *Body Snatchers*, reprising one of the scenes from the original. Also, be on the lookout for a five-second appearance from Robert Duvall, whose part is so small he doesn't receive a credit, and Leonard Nimoy in a non-pointy-eared role.

Grateful Dead fans should enjoy Jerry Garcia on the banjo.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Waking nightmare - INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS



# JUNIOR BONNER

US 1972

DIRECTOR

Sam Peckinpah

PRODUCER

Joe Wizan

SCREENPLAY

Jeb Rosebrook

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Lucien Ballard

WITH

Steve McQueen

Ida Lupino

Robert Preston

Joe Don Baker

Sam Peckinpah is an American director who came out of television in the fifties. He directed some memorable episodes of *The Rifleman* before embarking on a series of features which included some of the best westerns of all time: *Guns in the Afternoon*, *Major Dundee* and *The Wild Bunch*. There have been so many bloodthirsty adventure films made in the last 20 years that one tends to forget what a shock wave *The Wild Bunch* made when it came out in 1969. It was both condemned as violent pornography and lauded and at least one journalist – Alexander Cockburn – was so incensed that he got into a fist-fight in the cinema. In retrospect, *The Wild Bunch* – with its random cruelty, its senseless massacres, high-tech killing and gangsters dressed as US soldiers taking hostages and murdering old ladies – seems to be an early feature about Vietnam.

Peckinpah is the kind of director that guys like. You don't find that many women interested in his meandering stories of embittered gunslings brooding about betrayal and revenge. Yet he was a man of contradictions, too, and made one of the few westerns with a female protagonist – *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. He hated studios: he took insane delight in torturing producers and was regularly fired during the editing of his films. Yet at the same time he was repeatedly drawn to Tinseltown, and ended his days not like his mentor, John Huston, on a beach in Mexico, but in a broken-down trailer park in west LA.

Rumour has it that at the very end the great director brooded that his last completed work was a Julian Lennon video. A

fitting fate, perhaps, for the great chronicler of Men Betrayed. Yet Peckinpah left behind more than a couple of pop promos. In addition to his westerns, Peckinpah's legacy includes *Snaw Dogs*, a very odd film about holidaymakers in Cornwall, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, the story of a severed head worth a million dollars, and *Junior Bonner*.

*Junior Bonner* is a very atypical Peckinpah film in that it isn't violent. It's the story of a modern-day rodeo cowboy, played by Steve McQueen. It's firmly cast in the Peckinpah mould, though – with much musing on the passing of the mythic West and the impossibility of honour in the contemporary world. Some critics – including Tom Milne, the BFI's expert on westerns – regard *Junior Bonner* as Peckinpah's best film.

Watch out, as always, for a tremendous supporting cast. Like John Ford, Peckinpah relied on a stock company of fine character actors – here represented by Ben Johnson (from *Major Dundee*, *The Wild Bunch* and *The Getaway*) and Dub Taylor, who played the temperance preacher in *The Wild Bunch* and was, of course, the traitor in *Bonnie and Clyde*. Also present here, and quite outstanding, is Ida Lupino – noted actress and director – as *Junior Bonner*'s mother Elvira. Ms Lupino also appears in the *Morlock* offering *The Big Knife* (see page 4).

*Junior Bonner* was shot by Lucien Ballard, frequently Peckinpah's cameraman of choice, in Prescott, Arizona.



Saddle tramps  
– JUNIOR BONNER

# KNIGHTRIDERS

US 1981

DIRECTOR

George Romero

PRODUCER

Richard P. Rubinstein

SCREENPLAY

George Romero

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Garnick

WITH

Ed Harris

Christine Forrest

Steven King

Tom Savini

George Romero is, of course, the director of *The Night of the Living Dead* and its numerous sequels. This was his first non-horror film.

*Knightriders* centres around a peculiarly horrible American phenomenon, that of the 'renaissance fayre'. This is an opportunity for American anglophiles, of whom there are unfortunately many, to dress up in quasi-Elizabethan costumes, eat hamburgers, watch jousting, buy leather belts and engage in other supposedly medieval pursuits. In this case the jousting tournament takes place on Japanese motorcycles. Why not? Americans, coming from a very young country, seem extremely anxious to establish their place in history. Hence their interminable rambling about genealogy, and their tendency to purchase spurious family trees and to build Tudor-style mansions in the Arizona desert and in Beverly Hills.

Unlike Romero's other films, *Knightriders* isn't very violent. Perhaps that's why it wasn't very successful at the box office. The plot doesn't make a lot of sense; the characters are confused stereotypes; the women tend to sigh and simper; the men are stalwart dopes. What makes it worth watching is its leading character, the King Arthur, played aboard a six-cylinder Honda by Ed Harris.

Ed Harris may well be the best actor in the United States today. Like all great actors, he seems completely crazy, fearless and totally into whatever the script demands of him. In the case of *Knightriders* it demands a lot. He plays the ultimate renaissance fayre enthusiast, a man of high moral principles (he won't give autographs), prone to furious ranting and to birching himself in ice-cold streams. Prior to *Knightriders*, Harris appeared in a very interesting student film made out of the University of California at Los Angeles called *The Dream Players*, and was a villain in a

Charles Bronson movie. *Knightriders* was his first starring role. No matter how implausible the picture gets, Ed Harris never fails to keep it afloat. Which is quite an achievement, given the film's tendency to engage in endless metaphysical speculation about nothing much.

It's always a pleasure to see a Romero movie, though. He's a genuine author/director who makes films about what interests him, although it's generally buckets o' blood. He also made the pretty good portmanteau film *Creepshow*, written by Steven King. See if you can spot the famous author here, in a delightful cameo role.



Renaissance men – KNIGHTRIDERS

# LENNY

US 1974

DIRECTOR  
Bob Fosse

PRODUCER  
Marvin Worth

SCREENPLAY  
Julian Barry

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bruce Surtees

WITH  
Dustin Hoffman  
Valerie Perrine  
Jan Miner  
Stanley Beck

*Lenny* is the story of the comedian Lenny Bruce. The director, Bob Fosse, was a dancer and a choreographer who began his directorial career with the 1969 musical *Sweet Charity*. Thereafter he directed *Cabaret*, which made his reputation; *Lenny*; *All that Jazz*, a quasi-autobiography which prefigured his own death; and *Star 80*, the story of the murdered Playboy bunny Dorothy Stratten. No other short career, except perhaps for Terence Mallick's, has produced so many outstanding films.

Fosse understood movement, he understood acting, and he understood films. Had he made more movies he might have become one of what the French call 'pantheon directors': you know, that weird Romanesque frieze where John Ford and Stanley Kubrick rub shoulders with Jerry Lewis and W. D. Griffith, holding up the Edifice of Film. As it is, he left behind a short but memorable array of pictures,

all of them technically outstanding and with great performances.

Dustin Hoffman plays Lenny. Valerie Perrine plays his wife, Honey Bruce. The film was photographed by Bruce Surtees in black and white. Structurally, it follows the old 'what was he really like?' ritual of biographical movies from *Citizen Kane* to *Reds*. Honey, Lenny's mother and his agent are respectively interviewed, which leads to a classical storyline but also a somewhat distant film. This was Fosse's tendency, anyway. Even when he was making a film about himself, *All that Jazz*, he used jarring editing strategies and camerawork to distance the viewer from the subject - a collapsing choreographer portrayed with Fosse-esque goatee by Roy Scheider.

In a sense all of Fosse's films - apart from *Sweet Charity* - are about death, or people on the verge of death: the nightclub entertainers in the Weimar Republic, the doomed comedian banned by law from telling jokes, the speed-freak choreographer with a heart condition, the blissful bunny girl with the homicidal husband/manager. It's a pretty heavy subject for a feel-good culture, and perhaps that's why Fosse was never elevated to the ranks of Coppola and Scorsese by the intellectual establishment of the English-speaking world.

Also, you get the feeling Fosse wasn't that dependent on film, that he had a life outside it, thanks to his successes as a choreographer and stage director. Whatever the reason, he made only a handful of films, but technically and aesthetically he was way ahead of the game.



Laughter in the dark - LENNY

# LOLITA

US 1962

DIRECTOR  
Stanley Kubrick

PRODUCER  
James B. Harris

SCREENPLAY  
Vladimir Nabokov

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Oswald Morris

WITH  
James Mason  
Shelley Winters  
Sue Lyon  
Peter Sellers

*Lolita* is the story of a lecturer in French literature and his *amour fou* for a pre-teenage nymphet. The film, of course, is based on Vladimir Nabokov's book, which was generally considered unfilmable until a young American director called Stanley Kubrick took it up. The script is by Nabokov, and it's very good - although, surprisingly, not overtly literary. Nabokov was born in Russia: English was his second, or maybe even his third or fourth language, and perhaps not surprisingly he became a master of the idiom what we speak. If you ever yearn for literary indulgence, I would urge you to check out his book *Pale Fire*, a brilliant parody of epic poetry with an insane sub-plot running through the footnotes.

Not surprisingly, given the extremely literary quality of Nabokov's writing, and the near impossibility of depicting *Lolita* on screen, the film is a great success. It might almost be called the first big Kubrick film - made after he was fired from *One-Eyed Jacks* (see **Guide 1**) and took over *Spartacus* from another sacked director, Anthony Mann. *Lolita* is one of the high points in Kubrick's career, packed with fine, larger-than-life performances and imbued with a tremendous, cynical sense of humour. Shelley Winters is outstanding as *Lolita*'s mother, and Sue Lyon is perfect as the demon nymphet herself. James Mason plays the increasingly desperate Professor Humbert Humbert with a finely judged sense of understatement; but the mad acting laurels must go to Peter Sellers in a strange triple or quintuple role which prefigures his work in Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*, made the following year.

Kubrick has today become the Untouchable Director. He makes one movie, in great secrecy, every seven years. Apparently he is an anglophile: at least, he refuses to work anywhere but in England, which may explain the slightly odd version of Vietnam that he hewed from London's Docklands in *Full Metal Jacket*. I like most of Kubrick's work a lot - particularly his science-fiction movies, *Dr Strangelove*, *Clockwork Orange* and *2001*; and *Lolita* is a great pleasure.

Nevertheless, I would be delinquent in my iconoclastic duty if I didn't add that I think Stanley has

lately taken to pulling the odd fast one. Not that it's necessarily his fault - he's been so lionized by the movie critics of this planet that he's become uncriticizable. I think both *The Shining* and *Full Metal Jacket* are seriously inadequate films, but you wouldn't find many professional pundits who'll admit to anything like that. They're all so afraid of Kubrick, and so desperate to find out what he's up to, and to be among the first to see his next long-awaited offering, that the average review of a new Kubrick movie reads like a press release from the distributor. Is no one brave enough to opine that *Full Metal Jacket* should have been shot on location? Does not one lone dissenting voice feel that *The Shining* was a boring film?

This, though, is a film that is not boring. In fact a film that is

The generation gap - LOLITA



# THE LONG RIDERS

US 1980

DIRECTOR  
Walter Hill

PRODUCER  
Tim Zinneman

SCREENPLAY  
Bill Bryden

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Ric Waite

WITH  
Stacy and James  
Keach  
David and Keith  
Carradine  
Dennis and Randy  
Quaid  
Nicholas and  
Christopher Guest

*The Long Riders* is an American western about the famous James and Younger gang, as miserable a bunch of dry-gulching, back-shooting, terrorist assassins as ever walked the earth.

Needless to say, they are not portrayed thus. Hollywood has always been partial to outlaws, as long as they are of the fictionalized variety, sanitized by the veil of history. Thus Duke Wayne, who ended his career playing reactionary cops and crooked landowners like John Chisum, began it as a host of romantic bad-man types, most famously as The Ringo Kid in *Stagecoach*, the Duke's first stellar role.

For some reason Hollywood likes these historical bandit types all the better if they are Southern racists – pardon me, that should read 'romantic Confederates'. It's a strange phenomenon, which dates back at least as far as *The Birth of a Nation*, that appalling and boring saga of the early Ku Klux Klan. This, film students were once told, was the first great American narrative film. Thankfully, W. D. Griffith's ridiculous masterpiece seems to have been reassigned to the garbage dump of film history, but the notion that Southerners are more glamorous and worthy to be western movie heroes persisted in the American cinema until very recently – for instance in *Ran of the Arrow* (see page 28), which features as its hero a Confederate who attempts to assassinate General Grant. The Italians' 'take' on the War Between the States was of course totally different: Franco Nero's *Django* (see page 10) fought for the North and spends his Sundays machine-gunning ex-Confederates. *Requiem* (see page 27) addresses the same conflict even more exotically.

The heroic James Boys are portrayed by James and Stacy Keach; the Younger brothers by three Carradines – David, Robert and Keith. The Miller bros. are played by Dennis and Randy Quaid, and those darn cheatin' Ford brothers by Nicholas and Christopher Guest, the last of whom played the memorable Nigel Tufnel in *Spinal Tap*. A pattern obviously emerges. Picture the scene at the studios as the execs and casting people get all excited: 'They were brothers ... so we're going to get real brothers to play them!' You can see the same extraordinarily brilliant thinking at work in *Young Guns*.

*The Long Riders* is better than *Young Guns*, though. It's sort of 'Walden meets Bonny and Clyde', with lots of pastoral/mythological

stuff and long, long dancing sequences, which remind one of the equally long, long dancing sequences of Cimino and Bertolucci. Which is no doubt the idea. Unfortunately, most of the actors aren't strong enough to carry off the lengthy passages of dialogue – but fear not! There is action aplenty, as is always the case in a Walter Hill film.

Hill wrote *The Getaway* script for Sam Peckinpah. And he is stylistically perhaps the closest director to Sam Peckinpah today. (I refer here to his use of slow motion and adoption of certain over-weighty manly themes: he never achieves the sense of poetic melancholy of which Peckinpah was such a great practitioner.)

Watch out for two spectacular action sequences, one modelled on the early bunkhouse shoot-out in Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the other more than a little similar to the opening massacre of *The Wild Bunch*. There is some very interesting use of sound in the latter battle, where you don't hear gunshots but you do hear bullets flying at you – it sounds rather like the old BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

One question: where do all these long coats that you see in westerns nowadays come from? You can't go to a western that doesn't have at least ten guys wearing dusters that are so long that you spend the picture wondering how they manage not to be tripping on them all the time. Sergio Leone started it, but now they all wear 'em: Clint Eastwood, Burt Reynolds, even guys with pony-tails in rock videos. In *The Long Riders* everybody wears identical designer dusters. Where do they get them from? Do they travel with them in their luggage? Or do they buy new ones every time they get to town? How come they never get dirty, just covered with blood?

Incidentally, I believe that there's a feminist critique of action movies that says that exploding blood-hits such as those popularized by Peckinpah are a form of 'menstrual envy', the obverse of penis envy, which Freudians and other savants claim women suffer from. This is a very interesting notion, since these exploding blood-hits have become *de rigueur*. If this critique does exist, please send us a copy, c/o *Moviedrome*.

BELOW: Trigger happy – THE LONG RIDERS



# MAD MAX II

AUSTRALIA  
1981

DIRECTOR  
George Miller

PRODUCER  
Byron Kennedy

SCREENPLAY  
Terry Hayes  
George Miller

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Dean Semler

WITH  
Mel Gibson  
Bruce Spence  
Vernon Wells  
Emil Minty

*Mad Max II* is one of the last gasps of the once proud Australian cinema. *Mad Max I*, you may recall, was a low-budget, science-fiction action thriller which introduced Mel Gibson to the agog world. *Mad Max II* is that rare thing, a sequel that is actually better than the original. The only other instance I can think of is *For a Few Dollars More*, the sequel to *A Fistful of Dollars*. Interestingly in both cases the director

remained the same. Leone of course went on to make an even better sequel, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (see **Guide 1**).

The second *Mad Max* sequel, *Beyond Thunderdome*, is by all accounts not of the same calibre despite the presence of the noted actress Tina Turner and Mr Gibson yet again. But *Mad Max II*, released in the US as *The Road Warrior*, is a tremendous action film benefiting from a bigger budget than *Mad Max I* and also lacking its predecessor's desultory borrowings and pretensions. It still borrows extensively from road movies, spaghetti westerns, punk fashion and John Ford cavalry films, but in a very clever and entertaining way. For my money it's the director George Miller's best film.

But what's best for the discerning viewer isn't always what's best for our favourite planet and *Mad Max II* really should have been

forced to file an environmental impact report before beginning shooting. What with all the burning tyres, blazing diesel fuel, wasted petrol and the inevitable mounds of styrofoam cups and flattened beer cans dumped in the desert, *Mad Max II* – and all its ilk of action films – is a major menace.

As are all motion pictures, when you consider the volume of toxic chemicals produced by the processing laboratory and ultimately dumped into the groundwater and sewage system of the unhappy city where the film is edited. Films are a petrochemical process and a waste-intensive industry, and if this relatively humble offering is bad, what about a \$30 or \$40 million explosodrama such as *Die Hard 3* or *Terminator 9*. Can you imagine the amount of pollution generated by Arnold Schwarzenegger's camper or by Mel Gibson's private Lear Jet?

Ultimately, of course, this tirade means nothing. Films are big business, like napalm manufacture or the second-generation Concorde. But to reduce waste in the entertainment business: don't watch big-budget Hollywood movies, which are disproportionately idiotic in their excess; don't ever watch commercials or rock videos, for the same reason; and *stay tuned to Moviadrome*, home of lower budget, marginally ecologically sounder films! Yay!!



ABOVE: Driving ambition – MAD MAX II



# A MAN ESCAPED

(UN CONDAMNÉ À MORT S'EST ÉCHAPPE)

FRANCE 1956

**DIRECTOR**

Robert Bresson

**PRODUCER**

Robert Sussfield

**SCREENPLAY**

Robert Bresson

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

H. Bural

**WITH**

François Leterrier  
Charles LeClainche  
Maurice Beerblock  
Roland Monod



An inside job -  
A MAN ESCAPED

Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* is based on the true story of André Devigny, a French officer who was imprisoned by the Germans and the Vichy collaboration government at Montluc jail in 1943.

Bresson is a former painter and scriptwriter who was himself a prisoner of war from June 1940 to April 1941. Perhaps for that reason *A Man Escaped* is quite unlike *Escape from Alcatraz* (see page 11) or any other film in this familiar genre.

The story exists entirely in small details – the minute mechanisms of the hero's escape plan, the matter-of-fact approach to violence (which is quite horrifying though entirely unseen) the natural use of

sound, the absolutely real performances.

No actors were used in this film. This is part of Bresson's unique style as well: he believes that actors are incapable of projecting the truth – all they can do is act and Bresson isn't interested in acting. Instead he always works with real people.

Bresson's most famous work is *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, made six years later in 1962. It too has the spare visual style in which abstract details communicate much of the story. It too employs non-actors in an intensely passionate and revealing way.

Given that the French cinema has now degenerated, like our own, to the level of the rock video, it is a great pleasure to see this classic film and great adventure movie.

# MANHUNTER

US 1986

**DIRECTOR**

Michael Mann

**PRODUCER**

Michael Mann

**SCREENPLAY**

Michael Mann

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Dante Spinotti

**WITH**

William Pedersen  
Brian Cox  
Kim Greist  
Joan Allen

If you ever go out to the pictures, or even if you only watch television programmes about the pictures, you can hardly fail to have heard about a film called *Silence of the Lambs*, directed by Jonathan Demme. It's the story of a hideous but charming serial murderer named Dr Hannibal Lektor, played by Anthony Hopkins, and an FBI agent, played by Jody Foster, who uses the incarcerated Lektor's homicidal instincts to track down another serial killer currently at large.

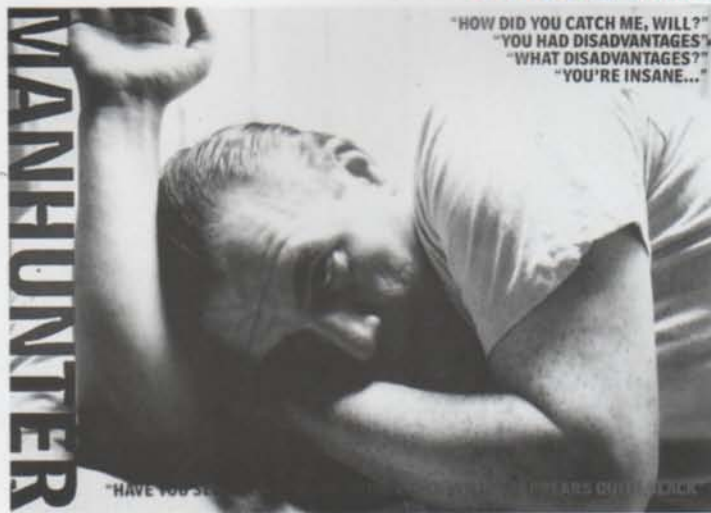
What you may not have heard is that there is another film in which the mad former psychiatrist and bon vivant Lektor appears: *Manhunter*. Comparisons being invidious, let's make some: Jonathan Demme is a very good director who keeps improving; Michael Mann is the creator of *Miami Vice* and an incorrigible faddist. Demme's film is tightly plotted; Mann's is not. Demme's film is quite traditional; Mann's is full of show-offy shots which mean nothing, and degenerates towards the end into a series of rock videos, complete with loud songs. Demme's film has a real sense of place; so does Mann's. *Manhunter* is full of LA stereotypes like the burned out big-city cop who lives in a penthouse on the beach and keeps a Lear Jet waiting on the runway – he's more like a TV producer than a cop, in fact. Mann's hero is played by William Pedersen, essentially reprising his role in *To Live and Die in LA*. Both films have their share of high technology and running, jumping, hiding, shooting cops in black SS outfits. Both are based on books by the same author, Thomas Harris. *Silence of the Lambs* ends as *Manhunter* begins: seen through a set of high-tech green-tinted Video Night Vision goggles, symbol of psycho-killers everywhere.

*Manhunter* is very similar to *Silence of the Lambs* and was made four years earlier. It features the outstanding Shakespearean actor Brian Cox, who plays Dr Lektor. Cox and Hopkins look the spitting image of each other. Isn't it interesting that when they need a literate psychopath in Hollywood movies, i.e. Dr Lektor or Claus von Bulow, they cast a heavyweight British actor?

A question: why is it that in cop-rock movies like *Manhunter*, and *To Live and Die in LA*, all the characters

stand with their heads permanently cocked to one side?

And how many more cop movies do we have to see where the hero endlessly agonizes over the 'fact' that in order to defeat his evil adversary he must become exactly like him? This lame old cliché has been the mainstay of a thousand Mel Gibson and Dirty Harry creakers. It may be fashionably Nietzschean and excuse all manner of evil deeds. The only problem is, it isn't true. It's an erroneous, corrupt modern convention which I suspect was dreamed up during the Cold War by some CIA screenwriters in order to justify the deals they were making for the rights to Hitler's home movies. But that's another story ...



Lektor at the feast - MANHUNTER

# MISHIMA

US 1985

**DIRECTOR**  
Paul Schrader

**PRODUCER**  
Francis Coppola  
George Lucas

**SCREENPLAY**  
Paul and Leonard  
Schrader

**DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY**  
John Bailey

**WITH**  
Ken Ogata  
Kanji Sawada  
Yasuko Bando  
Masayuki Shionoya

*Mishima* is in Japanese. It is not, however, a Japanese film. The distinction was made very clear at the Cannes Film Festival, where the celebrated Japanese director Oshima said: 'I was told that this was a controversial film. It is not controversial. It is merely bad.'

The movie was shot in Japan with American money and directed by Paul Schrader – creator of such tortured protagonists as Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* and Nastassja Kinski in *Cat People*. It is the story of the last day in the life of the Japanese playwright and novelist Yukio Mishima, seen in parallel from the perspective of three of his stories.

Mishima's death took place in 1970, and was hugely controversial. He was a right-wing adept of *bushido*, the rigorous *samurai* code; unlike the cowboy *samurai* of Kurosawa, he was desperately loyal to the Emperor. He spent his time writing and drilling the cadets of his own private army, called the Shield Society. He was disliked by the accommodating establishment which arose in Tokyo after the Second World War; he was also gay. On 25 November 1970 he raided the Eastern Army Headquarters in Tokyo, tied up and harangued a general of whom he disapproved and committed suicide via the traditional form of *seppuku*. Mishima is thus in many ways a touchy subject in Japan, and it's hardly surprising certain people got upset when a foreigner decided to make a film about him.

Apparently Mishima's heirs were able to exercise certain controls over the content of the film: hence its complicated structure and relative restraint around the sexual theme. *Mishima* illustrates a problem with the bio-pic: it's always a mistake when there are heirs around, worse when the character in question is still living. When Bob Fosse made *Star 80*, he wanted Harry Dean Stanton to play Hugh Hefner, the pipe-smoking, black-sock-wearing proprietor of *Playboy*. Hefner, however, had final approval of the actor who was to play him and decided that Cliff Robertson would be a more appropriate thespian. In the same way, *Mishima* suffers from a slightly reverential approach to its subject – much like the film *The Doors*, whose director apparently really believed the old bullshit story about Jim Morrison being the reincarnation of an old Indian mystic. Sure he was. And he's still alive too, working as a carpenter in San Diego, along with Mishima and Elvis.

That said, there is much to praise in *Mishima*. It has outstanding music by Philip Glass, and it's a very unusual film, about a character

unknown outside literary circles. It provides a glimpse into a culture which still regards the military arts as the highest form of study, although over the last 50 years it's managed to apply them to the world of manufacturing and international commerce, with incredible results. It's also a culture that does not regard suicide as failure, but rather an acceptable and decent culmination to a satisfactory life. Hence Kurosawa's own attempt at suicide in the seventies. Hence, also, his brother's death: his brother was a silent-film narrator; he killed himself when the talkies arrived.

The big question for me with *Mishima* was, can the director speak Japanese or not? The answer is yes – but when they started shooting he directed in English via three interpreters, because he could speak Japanese, but not think in it.

Look back in anger – MISHIMA



# THE MUSIC LOVERS

GREAT BRITAIN  
1970

**DIRECTOR**  
Ken Russell

**PRODUCER**  
Roy Baird

**SCREENPLAY**  
Malvyn Bragg

**DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Douglas Slocombe

**WITH**  
Richard Chamberlain  
Glenda Jackson  
Christopher Gable  
Max Adrian

Ken Russell is, according to the conventional wisdom, the Baddest Boy of British Cinema. It is fashionable, among the critical and producer elite, to deride Our Ken and treat him as a finished old madman from a bygone age. This

in spite of the fact that just in the last two or three years he's made at least four feature films. And in spite of the fact that any video shop you go into is bound to be a veritable trove of Russell films. The list of his important films is really long: *The Devils*, *Tommy*, *Savage Messiah*, *Women in Love*, *The Boyfriend*, *Valentino*. Even his bad films – principally *Altered States* – have pretty interesting stuff in them. And his more recent work in *Salome's Last Dance* and *The Lair of the White Worm* show no significant dimming of Russell's unique flair.

It's not hard to see why Russell's pictures tend to goad the critics and the intelligentsia. For a start he himself is a known critic-basher, having accosted a notable critic on live TV. In addition, he is somewhat self-indulgent: no recent Russell film can be complete without a fantasy sequence featuring crucified sheep and writhing naked nuns. But his worst crime, maybe, is that no matter how elevated his subject

matter, his approach to it is always resolutely anti-intellectual. There is nothing Russell likes more than broad humour and shots of people drinking and taking off their clothes.

*The Music Lovers* is the life story of Tchaikovsky. Russell is very fond of bio-pics about composers and other artists: his early work for the BBC included dramatic biographies of Richard Strauss and Frederick Delius. Imagine how *The Music Lovers* would have been if, for example, David Puttnam had made it. Reverential credit-sequence, black screen, goes on and on, cut to a fabulous country house in the Ukraine, cut to a hundred extras toiling in the fields, cut to a butler pouring a glass of vodka, cut to a shot of sunlight streaming through parted curtains onto a man at a piano, music builds, and so on for the next three and a half hours. We're talking Oscar material.

Our Ken will have none of this. His Tchaikovsky is a gay man married to a nymphomaniac, with a bit of music on the side. A lot of music actually. It's great. It's really funny, it has a screenplay by South Bank supremo Melvyn Bragg, great performances, particularly from Glenda Jackson as Mrs Tchaikovsky, and from Richard Chamberlain, who appears to be really playing the piano in the concert scenes. I think

it's this determination not to make a 'well-made film' but rather to make an entertaining, madcap one which really catches your attention, that annoys the critics so. Your cultural elite like to believe that fellers like Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov are their property. What Russell does is to attempt to make highbrow stuff less posh and less exclusive. Sometimes he fails, as in his *Nightmare on Elm Street* version of the Byron/Shelley story, *Gothic* (see page 13). But more often he succeeds, as in *Salome's Last Dance* or *The Devils*.

If you haven't seen *The Devils*, you should try and get hold of a copy on tape. They don't make films like it any more, and it isn't going to show up on TV uncut any time in the next 5,000 years.

*The Music Lovers*, set in Russia in the 1870s, shot in England in the 1970s, a biggish-budget British film with balls.



A classical education – THE MUSIC LOVERS

# THE NAVIGATOR

**NEW ZEALAND  
1988**

**DIRECTOR**  
Vincent Ward

**PRODUCER**  
John Maynard

**SCREENPLAY**  
Vincent Ward  
Kely Lyons  
Geoff Chapple

**DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Geoffrey Simpson

**WITH**  
Bruce Lyons  
Chris Haywood  
Hamish McFarlane  
Marshall Napier

*The Navigator* is a medieval odyssey from New Zealand. Released in 1988, it was apparently four years in the making, and attracted such attention that *Moving Pictures* made a documentary about the director, Vincent Ward.

It is an ambitious tale, which I won't spoil by telling you. Suffice to say it begins in 1348, but doesn't remain there. There are some powerful images, it's influenced considerably by Bergman, and includes a couple of very nice effects shots, involving a flying skeleton and a tunnel under the world.

It's also a fine repository of what author Michael Green describes as 'Coarse Acting'. I highly recommend Mr Green's book *The Art of Coarse Acting*. If you keep it next to the remote control, you will be able to compare the illustrations of the 'All-Purpose Coarse Costumes', male and female, with the attire worn by the actors in this film. Turn on your TV at random, and witness startling examples of Coarse Acting from around the world. Kurosawa henchmen jumping and looking scared in unison, wounded soldiers struggling through swamps or trudging in Napoleon's van, old ladies knitting at the foot of the guillotine, 'sensitive' bodybuilders, subsidiary characters from *Inspector Morse* ... The only difference between many of the actors you see on screen and the Appalling Amateur Thespians of Green's survey is that the ones on screen got paid to do it!

Coarse Actors abound in this film. These are the Middle Ages, in which nobody had an occupation or did anything with their hands. None of them can walk and talk at the same time. There's a goodly amount of grunting, though, but

you sort of pine for the days of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, when at least the peasants had something to do, even if it was only grovelling in mud. In fact, *The Navigator* would have done well to go for some of *The Holy Grail's* all-stops-out craziness, instead of endlessly repeated 'dream images' in the rock video mould.

*The Navigator* keeps veering from tiresome to pretty good. There's a truly wonderful sequence, very alarming, in which the protagonists attempt to cross a road. On the basis of *The Navigator*, director Ward was hired to write and direct the intended blockbuster *Alien 3*. For some reason he was replaced early in production, though he retained screenplay credit and, we hope, got paid.

Back to the future - THE NAVIGATOR



# PERFORMANCE

**GREAT BRITAIN  
1970**

**DIRECTORS**  
Nicholas Roeg  
Donald Cammell

**PRODUCER**  
Donald Cammell

**SCREENPLAY**  
Donald Cammell

**DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Nicholas Roeg

**WITH**  
Mick Jagger  
James Fox  
Anita Pallenberg  
Michele Breton

*Performance* was made in Britain in 1968, immediately shelved by the studio that paid for it, then re-edited by seven different editors and released in 1970. It was co-directed by Donald Cammell and Nicholas Roeg. Cammell also wrote the script; Roeg photographed it. Some say this film is the product of Roeg's genius, others that it's all down to Donald Cammell—as if it was some sort of contest rather than a collaboration. For the record, Donald Cammell has also directed the computer slasher movie *Demon Seed* and the cult slasher *White of the Eye*. Roeg has made too many great films to mention.

It is, or appears to be, the story of a weird battle of wits between a London gangster and the inhabitants of a hippie pad on Powys Square in Notting Hill. There is so much to *Performance*—what it has to say about sex, violence, reality, illusion, counter culture and the culture of money, life, death, Brian Jones—that I have decided to eschew these weighty issues and concentrate instead on drugs and the nature of Kool.

*Performance* was made at a time when drugs in our society were viewed neither as an escape or a night off, nor as the demons unscrupulous cops and politicians have made them out to be. Certainly, drugs in excess are bad for you, and that includes coffee and tobacco and alcohol and contraceptive pills. Even so, far fewer people die from drugs than die from guns and bombs. And back in 1968, drugs, specifically mushrooms, mescaline, peyote and chemical analogues like acid, were being used as a shortcut to the Mystical Experience, a sort of short-circuit satori. Anything that makes you doubt the ethics

of a materialistic doomed culture isn't all bad. Anything that makes you able to see your demon, as Turner does in *Performance*, is pretty interesting. Turner's got it all figured out: he knows the ultimate drug of all is power, and power grows out of the barrel of a gun.

The other pressing question we must deal with here, although doubtless not resolve, is Who is Kooler? Turner the former rock star, played by Mick Jagger, or Chas the murderous gangster, portrayed by James Fox. When the film was made, in the late sixties, it was obvious. Chas was a vulgar wideboy who dressed like a straight and poured red paint on his head in a ludicrous effort at disguise. Turner, on the other hand, had long flowing hair, and two girlfriends, and had once been a major pop singer, and was played by Mick Jagger. In 1970, Turner was king, although things did get a little strange when Jagger launched into 'Memo from Turner' (the first rock video?) with his hair slicked back and a drape jacket like a Teddy Boy. By 1980, the opposite was true. Turner seemed like a strange artefact, a rather un-Kool and dilapidated relic of the sixties ... Chas, on the other hand, with appalling taste in suits and his bright red spiky-top, was up to the minute, the first punk movie hero since Gaston Modot.

Ten, twelve year later, pony tails are being worn again in fashionable bistros all across the land. The sixties are now in vogue again. Turner triumphant. Chas laid low. Poor Chas. He doesn't even have a mobile phone.

**Vice. And Versa.**

Mick Jagger. And Mick Jagger.

This film is about madness. And sanity. Fantasy. And reality. Death. And life. Vice. And versa.

**performance..**

James Fox/Mick Jagger/Anita Pallenberg/Michele Breton

Written by Donald Cammell/Directed by Donald Cammell & Nicholas Roeg/Produced by Sanford Lebeson in Technicolor  
A Goodtimes Enterprises Production from Warner Bros. Released by Warner Bros. Distributors Ltd.

Notting Hill carnival -  
PERFORMANCE

# PLAY MISTY FOR ME

US 1971

DIRECTOR  
Clint Eastwood

PRODUCER  
Robert Daley

SCREENPLAY  
Jo Heims, Dean Reisman

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bruce Surtees

WITH  
Clint Eastwood  
Jessica Walter  
Donna Mills  
John Larch

*Play Misty for Me* is the first feature directed by Clint Eastwood. As has been more than once observed, Eastwood's directorial style was greatly influenced by the directors of his most successful movies, Sergio Leone and Don Siegel. Leone was a manic sadist, a misogynist, and one of the great film makers. Siegel was a former editor, and a successful director of action films like *Riot in Cell Block 11* and *Dirty Harry*. Eastwood's second feature as a director, *High Plains Drifter*, has often been mistaken for a Leone film. *Play Misty for Me* bears many of the hallmarks of Don Siegel – creative editing and use of sound, mixed with routine exchanges of close-ups and familiar dramatic tension in the *Psycho* mould.

Siegel even appears in a supporting role, as Murphy the bartender. *Play Misty for Me* is a good thriller, with the usual solid, bemused performance from Eastwood and a truly inspired piece of acting on the part of Jessica Walter, who plays the villainess.

Which brings me to the focal point of this mini-lecture. Why hasn't Ms Walter had as good a part as this since 1971? And why, moreover, this peculiar fascination for homicidal predatory females in contemporary feature films? Look at the blockbuster thrillers of recent years – *Fatal Attraction*, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, and *Basic Instinct*. Or, at our more familiar cult level, consider the cinema of Dario Argento, almost all of whose highly bizarre slasher thrillers feature crazy women wielding knives or razors or sewing needles. What does it all mean?

It's one thing to depict women as victims – this is the traditional stuff of



Victorian melodrama and western films. But what is going on when some of the most popular films in modern memory depict women – sexually active women, no less – as deranged, homicidal killers; serial killers in the case of *Basic Instinct*? As far as *Moridrome* is aware, women tend not to be the principal aggressors in the domestic violence stakes, so why is Hollywood obsessed with the notion that any woman who's not married with 2.5 children has to be a hatchet-wielding dyke?

The sad truth is, I think, that only comedy needs to be based in some sort of reality or truth. It's possible to base drama on the most outrageous lies and millions of people will be entertained by it. Lies can be very entertaining. And, from the point of the gigantic multinationals that own the studios, lies can be very valuable – by reinforcing sexual and racial stereotypes, thereby marginalizing and disempowering sections of the community which might otherwise seek social change and alter the nature of the market-place ...

All right, all right. I know, you didn't buy this book to read this kind of stuff, right? You just want to read about the Eastwood movie. Communism's dead, and Hollywood won. And everything's just excellent! All right. Well, in that respect, I'm pleased to say we have more good tidings – *Play Misty for Me* was 95 minutes long when it was first released in Britain. *Moridrome* was the 102-minute, extra-auteurist, super-slasher original version.

Love hurts – PLAY MISTY FOR ME

# THE PROWLER

US 1951

DIRECTOR  
Joseph Losey

PRODUCER  
Sam Spiegel

SCREENPLAY  
Hugo Butler

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Arthur Miller

WITH  
Van Heflin  
Evelyn Keyes  
John Maxwell  
Katharine Warren

Joseph Losey was born in 1909. He abandoned medical studies to work in the theatre, becoming a stage manager at Radio City Music Hall and later a director. In 1935 he attended film classes given by Sergei Eisenstein in Moscow, and after serving his country in the Second World War he became friends with Bertolt Brecht and directed a famous stage production of Brecht's *Galileo*, starring Charles Laughton.

Brecht is a great dramatist, perhaps the greatest of the twentieth century, who was pretty much responsible for destroying the concept of the 'well-made play' and reintroducing things such as the didactic monologue and the absence of naturalistic scenery, which had been lost since the theatre of the Jacobean. Brecht was also a Communist, and proud of it: *Galileo* is a play about a great scientist forced to recant what he knows to be the truth (the earth is round, the earth revolves around the sun) under threat of torture by the church. What happened to Galileo happened to a lot of American writers and directors and actors in the 1940s and 1950s. They weren't threatened with torture exactly; rather if they didn't inform on friends and co-workers who might be Communists, then they themselves must be Communists and as such could never eat lunch in that town again.

This splendid rooting out of leftist elements, not dissimilar to the cleansing of the Labour Party in Britain in the 1980s, was carried out by the House Committee into Un-American Activities. Various Hollywood luminaries rushed to it to spill their guts: Elia Kazan, Lloyd Bridges, and Sterling Hayden among them. Brecht went to see the committee and made mincemeat out of them at length – told them nothing, and made them look like idiots. Others, such as Dalton Trumbo and Ring Lardner, refused to speak at all and were blacklisted.

Losey's case was doubly unfortunate. Having made a string of good low-budget movies – including *The Prowler* – he was offered the chance to shoot a film in Italy, called *Stranger on the Prowl*. He was in the middle of shooting when the call came to return to Hollywood, confess his wickedness and denounce his friends. Losey refused to go. He said, quite rightly: I am making a movie, it is more important than your ridiculous committee, and in any case if I leave in the middle of a shoot I will be breaking my contract. Losey was right, artistically, legally and morally. He returned to Hollywood after the film was done

to find he had been blacklisted. He never ate lunch in that town again.

Losey moved to England and started making films over here. Of course, the British producers were too cowardly to let him use his own name and so his first films here were made under pseudonyms. Nevertheless Losey persisted and it turned out that the blacklist was the best thing that ever happened to him. He made films in Europe that he never could have got on in the United States – *The Damned*, *The Servant*, *Figures in a Landscape*, *Accident*, *The Go-Between* and the outstanding *Mr Klein*, in French, with Alain Delon, one of the best films of all time.

Losey is one of the great American – or should I say European? – directors. It's interesting to compare his enforced exile with the voluntary banishment Stanley Kubrick has chosen: Kubrick has not set foot in the United States since 1968, when he made *2001*.

*The Prowler* is a tough melodrama about corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department. It is a timely film. Listen to the interesting things he does with sound. And marvel at the fact that it was made in just three weeks; thanks no doubt to the sterling efforts of the assistant director, that *Moridrome* regular Robert Aldrich.

Neighbourhood watch  
– THE PROWLER





# RABID

CANADA 1976

**DIRECTOR**  
David Cronenberg

**PRODUCER**  
John Dunning

**SCREENPLAY**  
David Cronenberg

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Rene Verzier

**WITH**  
Marilyn Chambers  
Frank Moore  
Joe Silver  
Howard Rysghpan

*Rabid* is one of the finest cult films of all time. David Cronenberg is, of course, the director of *The Fly* (remake) and *Shivers* and *The Naked Lunch* and *Scanners* and *The Dead Zone* – an unsurpassed roster of cult horror movies. Not Wes Craven, not Tod Browning, not Mario Bava, not Dario Argento, not John Carpenter, not even the ineffable James Whale, made as many genuinely weird and unsettling horror films.

Of the above-mentioned, only Argento has as thoroughly thought-out a world view and consistent 'take' on vicious horror lurking behind the most mundane things. Yet Argento is preoccupied by a rather infantile misogyny of the de Palma brand, and like de Palma makes ultimately boring films. Cronenberg, on the other hand, transcends misogyny and even misanthropy. He stands, like Philote in Moliere's play, aside from things; disgusted by them yet amused and

physically and fiscally involved as well, the ultimate celluloid cynic.

Cronenberg's movies portray an unmatched sense of physical horror at human sexuality. In addition, they are preoccupied with the mechanics of surgery and the transmission of disease-bearing viruses. Many of the early ones, including *Rabid*, bear a considerable debt to *Night of the Living Dead*. Cronenberg is one of the only English-speaking directors allowed the luxury of an unhappy ending.

Could the whispered rumour that Cronenberg is actually a renegade US Army colonel from Fort Detrick Biological Weapons Station, Maryland, attempting to blow the whistle on secret releases of airborne viral toxins in the New York subway system, actually be true?

No. Cronenberg is in fact a Canadian, formerly a biochemistry student. I had the pleasure of reading one of his scripts in the office of

the assistant to the producer, and it was highly pleasurable because there were no embarrassing elementary mistakes of spelling and grammar such as you normally find in screenplays and directors' scripts. In fact there were no mistakes at all! I mean, this guy is not only a great film maker, he is literate!

*Rabid* is, in my opinion, Cronenberg's best. It was made in 1976 and is the story of one Rose, played by Marilyn Chambers, whose unfortunate involvement in a motorbike accident has bizarre and disastrous consequences. Marilyn Chambers, you may recall, was as a child the Miss Purity Soap advertising symbol all across the United States, and in adulthood became a major porno star. Combining the twin American obsessions of cleanliness and sex, Ms Chambers is the quintessential Cronenberg actor.



Animal attraction – RABID

# REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

US 1955

**DIRECTOR**  
Nicholas Ray

**PRODUCER**  
David Weisbart

**SCREENPLAY**  
Stewart Stern

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Ernest Haller

**WITH**  
James Dean  
Natalie Wood  
Jim Backus  
Sal Mineo

You know that poster you see all the time? The one that's a painting of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, all sitting in a diner? Maybe it's not Elvis, maybe it's JFK, but you know the poster that I mean – it has the Edward Hopperesque illumination and it's called something like 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams'?

Certain individuals become cult heroes on the basis of a body of work which has a genuinely curious or idiosyncratic nature – the novelist Philip K. Dick, for instance; comic

book artists like R. Crumb or Steve Ditko; actors like Helen Mirren or Warren Oates; directors like Kurosawa or Buñuel. Nicholas Ray is one such director. He, of course, made *Johnny Guitar*, seen earlier on *Moviedrome* (see *Guide 1*), and approximately 20 other features, the last of which – a collaboration with Wim Wenders – was a documentary about the final months of his own demise from cancer, called *Lightning over Water*. His was a personal cinema of disaffected loners, including *Rebel without a Cause*. Before becoming a film-maker, Ray studied architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1964, after directing two blockbusters, *King of Kings* and *55 Days at Peking*, Ray became disenchanted with Hollywood, and left for Europe. He rarely directed thereafter, but had already become the subject of a substantial cult.

However, Ray's considerable cultist credentials fade into insignificance beside those of the star of this film – the aforementioned James Dean. Dean, as a romantic figure of admirable aimlessness, has few equals in the latter part of the twentieth century. He has a remarkable hold on the official vision of pop culture: we are all supposed to like him, like we're supposed to revere Marilyn Monroe as an actress, or believe that Kennedy was this great president. But is it true? It is possible to say on the

basis of all the work he's done that the actor Jack Palance is really great. You can say the same about Nicholas Ray, or Fassbinder, based on their body of work. But James Dean? He only made three films!

This is not to say that he might not have become a great actor. It's hard to know. He's certainly good in *Rebel*, as indeed are all the actors: watch out for Jim Backus as Jimmy Dean's father (Backus, of course, was the voice of Mr Magoo) and the young Sal Mineo as Plato, and the even younger Dennis Hopper in the role of Goon.



Troubled teens – REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

# REQUIESCANT

ITALY 1968

DIRECTOR

Carlo Lizzani

PRODUCER

Carlo Lizzani

SCREENPLAY

Andrew Baxter

Denis Greene

Edward Williams

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Alexander Clark

WITH

Lou Castel

Marc Damon

Ninetto Davoli

Franco Citti

Sometimes also known as *Kill and Say Your Prayers*, *Requiescant* is a spaghetti western directed by Carlo Lizzani in 1968. Lizzani was a journalist and film critic who published a major survey of Italian film, *Il Cinema Italiano*, in 1953. He has written and directed a number of films, many of them social dramas 'marred' (in the words of Ephraim Katz's *Film Encyclopaedia*) 'by the director's overly dogmatic Marxist ideology on the one hand and by commercial requirements on the other.' He is also a theatre director.

Unlike Godard, whose leftist ideology led him to experiment with film form in a way guaranteed to alienate the general audience, Lizzani was attempting to communicate with as many people as possible. I think commercial requirements will always create the dichotomy to which Katz refers; popular cinema seems to require considerable dollops of violence and the depiction of women as victims, and hence may be a dubious vehicle for social reform. Nevertheless, some of the best art has a moral purpose and contains a

message – consider Picasso's *Guernica*, a great painting born from the artist's grief and outrage over Nazi atrocities during the Spanish Civil War.

Anyway, about this spaghetti western. *Requiescant* (as in *requiescat in pace*: 'rest in peace', or, in this case, pieces) is the name given to the central character, played by Lou Castel. Castel is an interesting actor, little seen. He was the bad guy in *A Bullet for the General* (see **Guide 1**), and appeared sinisterly playing the piano in Wim Wenders's *The American Friend*. Here he's a young innocent found wandering in the desert – a trainee preacher with the soul of a murdered gunfighter crying out for revenge. You get the picture? The film has a dark sense of humour and some genuinely bizarre moments that rival anything in *Johnny Guitar* (see **Guide 1**) or *Django Kill*. Check out the scene among the skeletons or the ingenious murder games. Even more interesting is some of the casting – Marc Damon is an excellent villain, and several of Pasolini's actors, including Ninetto Davoli and Franco Citti appear as indeed does that Great Italian Director himself, in the role of a machine-gun-packin' priest.

The previous year Lizzani, under the pseudonym 'Lee W. Beaver', made another western with the magnificent title of *The Hills Run Red*. Unfortunately it didn't live up to the promise of its fine name. *Requiescant* does.

Like *Face to Face*, (see page 13) *Requiescant* works on a psychological as well as a political level – here as a weird meditation on how biology determines destiny, in the form of a boy born with gunfighter's genes.



Rest in pieces – REQUIESCANT

# ROMANCE OF A HORSE THIEF

*Romance of a Horse Thief* is one of the oddest films we've screened on *Moviedrome*.

It's not really a cult film – there is absolutely no cult of fanatic admirers devotedly following this film around, for reasons which will rapidly become apparent. Nevertheless, it contains certain cult elements that seem to be commendable to your attention, namely Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg. If you're very, very old you may remember a time called the sixties and outrageous things such as Carnaby Street and the breakdown of the draft system in the United States. One of the cult or iconic items of that bygone decade was a single called 'Je t'aime, moi non plus', which got banned by British radio stations because it supposedly featured the sounds of the chanteurs making love. This was long before the similar row occasioned by Donna Summers's 'Love to Love You Baby'. Aren't you glad that I'm reminding you of all this important stuff?

'Je t'aime, moi non plus' was by a girlfriend-and-boyfriend, maybe husband-and-wife team called Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg. Jane Birkin has done some movie acting over the years, mainly in French films. In *Romance of a Horse Thief*, both she and Serge appear on screen. Oh boy! Also notable are Yul Brynner and Eli Wallach, who looks much as he did in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (see **Guide 1**) five years previously, and sporting the same all-purpose Coarse Actor's regional/ethnic accent.

The director, Abraham Polonsky, was an American OSS (undercover intelligence) man during the Second World War, who wrote the script for *Body and Soul*. His career as a director was cut short by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and after refusing to confirm or deny his political allegiances, he was blacklisted by the movie industry. As a result of the blacklist he became a TV scriptwriter and secret Hollywood script doctor, and ended up financially better off than before. Only in 1968 was he allowed to receive a screen credit: he got it, predictably enough, on a Don Siegel movie, *Madigan*. His first film as a director, *Force of Evil*, had been made in 1948. His second, *Tell Them Willy Boy Is Here*, was made in 1970. His third, *Romance of a Horse Thief*, was made one year later. The 22-year enforced hiatus in Polonsky's directing career does not seem to have been entirely beneficial.

The other notable element in the production of this film is that it was shot in what was once called Yugoslavia. From the early sixties, the old state of Yugoslavia was a popular destination for film-makers from both East and West. The old sauerkraut westerns based on Karl May novels – *Old Shatterhand* and *Winnetou* – were made on the Yugoslavian prairies. Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron* was filmed there – can you imagine the old barnacle-encrusted Ahab with his bottle of tequila sitting down to a ceremonial dinner with the local Politburo? *The Tin Drum* was also made there, at Yadrin Studios.

I don't know what the current state of domestic film production is in the former Yugoslavia. If it's anything like the other former Communist countries, it's practically zero. The Russians and the local Commissars provided state support for film-makers, always assuming the film followed a certain politically correct line. In the same way, the Spanish used to subsidise Basque and Catalan cinema, and the BFI Production Board occasionally made forays into Scotland. The dictates of the free market now being God, domestic film production is almost universally in decline – except, ironically, in countries like India and Hong Kong, where a vast volume of production has always existed, funded entirely by the private sector.

Certainly there are no official international co-productions being made in Serbia or Croatia at the moment. The staff of Yadrin Studios are reputed to be looking for work abroad.



Fashion slavs – ROMANCE OF A HORSE THIEF

# RUN OF THE ARROW

US 1957

DIRECTOR  
Sam Fuller

PRODUCER  
Sam Fuller

SCREENPLAY  
Sam Fuller

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Joseph Biroc

WITH  
Rod Steiger  
J. C. Flippen  
Charles Bronson  
Ralph Meeker  
Sarita Montiel

The renowned cult director Sam Fuller was a former newspaperman and front-line infantryman in World War II – his style is described by the *Virgin International Encyclopaedia of Film* as characterized by 'shrill anti-Communism, a protagonist who is a borderline psychopath, film noir sensibilities, bursts of graphic violence, unapologetic sentimentality, and fluid, almost athletic camerawork', along with a 'concern for identity, whether racial or national.' Phew! O boy!

Fuller made some great films – including *Shock Corridor* and *The Naked Kiss* – and also one of the truly bad ones *Dead Pigeon on Beethoven Street*. In later life he became something of a raconteur and devotee of film festivals, and played film directors in several films, including Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* and Hopper's *The Last Movie*. His best acting role may be the gangster boss in Wenders's *The American Friend*.

*Run of the Arrow* was made in 1957, written and produced by Fuller, and shot by Joseph Biroc, whose lighting is quite exceptional. It is an exciting western in the classic mould, a film completely forgotten by the current generation of film critics whose idea of a classic cowboy film is something directed by Kevin Costner or Clint Eastwood.

It stars Rod Steiger, as the man who fired the last shot of the Civil War. Steiger, in an outstandingly scene-chewing role (he sounds like an Irish Brando) plays a white farmer who decides to become a Lakota Sioux because he can't stand his own team any more. It also features some fine, larger-than-life acting from J. C. Flippen as Walking Coyote, the young Charles

Bronson as Blue Buffalo, and Ralph Meeker – who played Mike Hammer in *Kiss Me Deadly* – as the Custeresque Lt. Driscoll. The love interest, Yellow Moccasin, is played by the Spanish movie star Sarita Montiel, which made the film outstandingly popular throughout Latin America. Ms Montiel was married to the bullfighter director Anthony Mann. In the finished film she was dubbed with the voice of Angie Dickinson.

This is an ace western with long takes, an absence of unnecessary TV-style editing, an anarchist hero, and a highly improbable quicksand scene.

So Sioux me – RUN OF THE ARROW



# THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW

US 1987

DIRECTOR  
Wes Craven

PRODUCERS  
David Ladd  
Doug Claybourne

SCREENPLAY  
Richard Maxwell  
A. R. Simoun

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
John Lindley

WITH  
Bill Pullman,  
Cathy Tyson  
Zakes Mokae  
Paul Winfield

Wes Craven's splendid *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is a story of voodoo and black magic filmed in mysterious Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Craven is the director of various successful low-budget and cultist horror movies, including *The Hills Have Eyes*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *People under the Stairs*. Like George Romero and Dario

Argento, Craven is an exponent of the modern horror genre: he also bears a striking resemblance to a tall Edgar Allan Poe.

*The Serpent and the Rainbow* is based on an almost-true story about an innocent American Michael-Douglas-lookalike anthropologist victimised by the evil Ton-Ton Macoutes, a deadly gang of hoodlums vaguely connected to one of those gangster governments they have over there. As such, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is part of a long and honourable line of American movies such as *Under Fire*, *Missing*, *Frantic*, and *Not Without My Baby*, in which innocent American journalists' wives and peace corps workers are kidnapped and even on occasions murdered by swarthy foreigners who scatter zombie powder and drive tanks. In my view, films like these do a tremendous service to the American travelling public, warning them what countries are

safe to travel to, and what movie star to resemble while they're over there. It's outrageous to think that any American or English-speaking person isn't safe on the streets of Beirut after dark. And furthermore ...

(That's enough ranting. Ed.)



Voodoo to do – THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW

# SOLARIS

USSR 1972

DIRECTOR

Andrei Tarkovsky

PRODUCER

Mosfilm

SCREENPLAY

Andrei Tarkovsky

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Vadim Yusof

WITH

Natalya Bondarchuk

Donatas Banionis

Yuri Yarvet

Anatoli Solonitsin

*Solaris* is a Russian science-fiction film, based on a novel by Stanislaw Lem, who was at that time the Soviet Union's major science-fiction writer. It's the story of a mission to the remote planet of Solaris, to find out what happened aboard a space station whose crew have disappeared – or almost disappeared, for there are a couple left: Snauth, a cybernetics expert who has turned to drink, and the biologist Dr Sartorius. Also on board the space station, it turns out, is the hero's late wife, various dwarfs, and other eerie manifestations of a planet which is really a ... ah, but that would be telling.

*Solaris* was described when it came out over here as the Russians' answer to *2001*. It isn't really that: there isn't much technology in it, save for a good scene when two characters get trapped in a rocket

launch tube, and long, weird driving sequences on the motorways of Tokyo. In a lot of ways, it is closer to *The Shining*, another Kubrick film: much of its strangeness is internal, rather than visible, and it's quite a long film at 165 minutes.

Although *Solaris* is long, it's actually one of the shortest of Tarkovsky's films. According to the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Tarkovsky was a specifically Ukrainian artist, owing little to the mainstream of Soviet culture. I'm afraid I'm unable to elaborate: I'm ashamed to say I know nothing at all about Russian or Soviet culture, which is disgraceful, given the size of the former Soviet Union and its importance in world history.

This is the first Soviet film we've shown on *Moviedrome*. Not every country shares our institutional ignorance about the Soviet

Union. In Mexico and Cuba they are quite knowledgeable about Soviet cinema; and one of the most popular films ever screened in Nicaragua was a Russian movie called *Come and See*, a story about Russian resistance fighters fighting Nazi soldiers during World War II. *Come and See* is actually a great war movie and you should make a point of seeing it if you get the chance. The Russians are our neighbours, right? And 20 million of them died on our side in World War II.

I'm not saying that by watching *Solaris* on TV you'll make an immense leap in international understanding. But who knows? Maybe it'll inspire you to see *Andrei Rublev*, or *Ivan the Terrible*. And if you make it to the end of *Solaris*, you'll be rewarded with an ending which – on a conceptual level – is better than that of *2001*.



Lost in space - SOLARIS

# SOMETHING WILD

US 1986

DIRECTOR

Jonathan Demme

PRODUCERS

Jonathan Demme

Kenneth Uhl

SCREENPLAY

E. Max Frye

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Tak Fujimoto

WITH

Jeff Daniels

Melanie Griffith

Roy Liotto

Margaret Colin

Jonathan Demme is an American director from the Corman School, a sort of work-study film programme run in Los Angeles by the benevolent entrepreneur and former film director Roger Corman. (Actually he's not a former film director any more, having recently directed *Frankenstein Unbound*.) Other graduates of the Corman School were Joe Dante, Jack Nicholson, Francis Coppola and Monte Hellman. The Corman School produced very low-budget action and horror films. Demme directed several women-in-prison movies and *Crazy Mama* before graduating from Corman's august academy, and heading out to seek his fortune in what is sometimes called the Real World.

He had a notable cult success with *Melvin and Howard*, but was greatly frustrated with his first major-studio-type picture, *Swing Shift*. Having studied under Corman, the greatest of all cult directors, Demme imagined that the Director was in some way the auteur or person responsible for the artistic content of the picture. Of course, in the Real World this is not the case, and Demme was driven out into the wilderness, while *Swing Shift* was re-edited by its leading lady, who was also the producer. Lo! and there was much gnashing of teeth among the lovers of cult and obscure movies, who cried out, 'When will Jonathan return with *New Product*, such as that which up until this date we have enjoyed? For verily, we did not like *Swing Shift*, nor did anyone else.'

And lo! their prayers were answered. And Jonathan returned from the wilderness, which shall

be called *Orion*, pushing before him on a cart six reels of *Something Wild*. Since which time he has directed *Swimming to Cambodia*, *Married to the Mob*, and the extremely successful *Silence of the Lambs*.

What can be said about *Something Wild*? Lots. It's a funny film, and like a lot of Mr Demme's work it has a weird twist to it. It has a fab music score featuring John Cale, Laurie Anderson, David Byrne, Celia Cruz, Big Audio Dynamite, Big Youth and The Fine Young Cannibals, *inter alios*. It also has cameo appearances by Sue Tissue, and directors John Waters as a used-car salesman, and John Sayles as a motorcycle cop.



Lost in America - SOMETHING WILD

# THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM

(STRATEGIA DEL RAGNO)

ITALY 1970

DIRECTOR

Bernardo Bertolucci

PRODUCER

Giovanni Bertolucci

SCREENPLAY

Bernardo Bertolucci

Eduardo de Gregorio

Marilyn Parolini

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Vittorio Storaro

CAST

Giulio Brogi

Alida Valli

Tino Scotti

Pino Campanini

Bernardo Bertolucci is an Italian director, the son of a film critic, whose first job was as assistant to Pasolini. In 1964, he directed *Before the Revolution*, and published an emotional critical diatribe against the French New Wave director Godard, called 'Versus Godard'. In 1968, he directed *Partner* and wrote one of the first drafts of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

In the seventies Bertolucci came to be regarded as one of the great European directors on the basis of films such as *Last Tango in Paris* and the extremely long 1900. Making extremely long films is of course one of the secrets of being considered a great director: Bertolucci may have learned this from Sergio Leone. In the eighties Bertolucci fell from grace following the insufficiently long *La Luna*, but returned to critical and box office favour with the sufficiently long *The Last Emperor*.

*The Spider's Stratagem* isn't long at all – about 97 minutes. It was released in 1970, the same year as another short but brilliant Bertolucci movie, *The Conformist*. In a lot of ways, *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist* are Bertolucci's finest films, and it's extraordinary to think that they were both made within a 12- or 18-month period. *The Spider's Stratagem* was made for Italian television in six weeks. It's the story of a son, Athos



Web of coincidence – THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM

Magnani, and his search to find the murderers of his father, also called Athos Magnani, who was murdered by unknown fascists 33 years before. It's based on a short story by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, and the original – 'The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero' – was set in nineteenth-century Ireland and was only two pages long.

Bertolucci and his two co-screenwriters make a brilliant job of translating those two pages to the screen, setting the film in Mussolini's Italy in lieu of Eire under the British Crown. It's one of the most Borgesian of all feature films: only surpassed, perhaps, by Nicholas Roeg's and Donald Cammell's *Performance* (see page 24). Lest this starts getting a little too heady, let me add that *The Spider's Stratagem* works best as a weird thriller, very stylized, at times naturalistic (as in the scene with the salami enthusiast), at others completely surreal. It contains some very fine use of colour and camera movement by Vittorio Storaro – who later went to the States to be Coppola's cameraman – and Franco di Giacomo.

*The Spider's Stratagem* also features a good double performance by Giulio Brogi as the hero and the hero's dad, and the obligatory Bertolucci dancing scene. Borges is a great writer; not just a great Latin American writer, but one of the great writers of the world, and you are urged to nip down the library and borrow one of the old man's books, for example *Ficciones*.

# TO SLEEP WITH ANGER

US 1989

DIRECTOR

Charles Burnett

PRODUCERS

The Magnificent Seven

SCREENPLAY

Charles Burnett

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Walt Lloyd

WITH

Danny Glover

Richard Brooks

Paul Butler

Mary Alice

This film is by the best of the black American directors, and one of the better directors of the modern American cinema itself. He is Charles Burnett. It's very possible you haven't heard of this film, and even more likely – unless you're French or a devotee of *Cahiers du Cinéma* – that you haven't heard much about Burnett, although he was a guest of the London Film Festival several years ago. *To Sleep with Anger* is Burnett's third feature, made in 1989, and given a limited release in the United States the following year. Like his other films, *My Brother's Wedding* and *Killer of Sheep*, it's set in the home of a black family in South Central Los Angeles. It may come as a surprise to UK viewers in its depiction of what life in LA is like. It's certainly not the imaginary LA of Alan Rudolph, devoid of blacks, devoid of Mexicans, and totally devoid of smog. But it's an equally far cry from the gangbanging uzi-fixated madhouse of *Colors* or *Boyz n the Hood*.

What it is – and this is typical of Burnett – is a film about more or less regular people in their normal lives. And what's even more amazing – and this is Burnett's speciality – is that it isn't boring, which for a film about 'ordinary' people is usually a *sine qua non*. *Killer of Sheep*, photographed by Burnett in a quite magnificent way, was the story of a guy who works in a slaughterhouse. It was made for about \$8,000 in the late seventies, and in this viewer's opinion it is the best film ever to come out of UCLA film school, that august edifice which also turned out Francis Ford Coppola and would-be film-maker Jim Morrison.

Charles Burnett's second feature, *My Brother's Wedding*, was about exactly that: the tale of a hapless dude with a car in bad condition who has to make it to his brother's wedding (he is the best man, carrying the ring) on the other side of LA. In *To Sleep with Anger* the parents are Mississippi farming people, first-generation immigrants to LA, the children strive to be 'buppies' – black upwardly mobile urban professionals – and work for loan companies and banks; the grandchildren simply rush around creating havoc. Into this strained but still functional environment comes the bad guest, Harry – excellently played by Danny Glover – quoting Pushkin and setting a strange influence to work throughout the house.

*To Sleep with Anger* was treated as Burnett's first 'major feature'. Though the budget was still minimal by Hollywood standards (\$1.4 million) no less than seven white producers managed to gnom their names on it, a fact that often provokes amusement as the opening credits roll. The credit sequence is, by the way, sensational: a very clever visual illustration of the film's central combination of gentleness and barely suppressed rage. It's also the first film Charles didn't shoot himself: the excellent colour photography is by Walt Lloyd.

As in all Charles Burnett's films, LA is the inertia capital of the world: women are enslaved to domesticity and rampant children; men are always trying to fix things that inevitably break worse. Sound familiar? You see, it's not only about LA... Watch out for some fine acting from Glover, from Richard Brooks, Paul Butler and Mary Alice – and 'guest appearances' by Vionetta McGee, last seen on *Moviedrome* in *The Big Silence* (see Guide 1), and Sy Richardson, late of *Repo Man*, and author of Mario Van Peeble's new black western, *Posse*.

Satan in the suburbs – TO SLEEP WITH ANGER



# TRACKS

US 1976

DIRECTOR

Henry Jaglom

PRODUCERS

Howard Zuker

Irving Cohen

Ted Shapiro

SCREENPLAY

Henry Jaglom

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Paul Glickman

WITH

Dennis Hopper

Taryn Power

Dean Stockwell

Topa Swape

Henry Jaglom was one of the editors of *Easy Rider*. Today he is best known as a director of genteel, moderately bawdy comedies such as *Eating and Sitting Ducks*. These films tend to feature the talents of his brother, Michael Emil. For this reviewer, this type of movie is the equivalent of that French film where the two aesthetes sit around digesting a big meal and endlessly jawing; but there is no doubt that as a sub-genre, or genre, or whatever it is, the witty, sitting-around-talking kind of movie has its constituency. But ...

Henry Jaglom was not always the director of this kind of film! On one occasion at least he made a sterling contribution to the best genre of all: the road movie. That film was *Tracks*.

Following the un-dreamed-of success of *Easy Rider*, so the story goes, Bert Schneider – the executive producer – offered all the principal participants money to direct a film. Dennis Hopper went to Peru and made the extraordinary *Last Movie*; Peter Fonda directed *The Hired Hand*, another weirdo western, previously featured in *Moviedrome* (see *Guide 1*). Jack Nicholson directed his first film, *Drive He Said*. And Henry Jaglom made a film called *A Safe Place*.

*Tracks* was made in 1976, three years after President Nixon ordered the evacuation of American troops from Vietnam. It's always interesting to see one of the few films made about that subject in the immediate aftermath of the war, while it was still regarded not as a mistake or a noble cause gone wrong, but as a moral outrage which brought shame on the United States in the eyes of the entire world. In the almost 20 years since the US lost its all-out South-east Asian



Stranger on a train - TRACKS

war, the cinematic history of US involvement in Vietnam has been rewritten at least three times; first by film-maker Jaglom and Karl Reisz, who rejected the John Wayne analysis featured in *Green Beret*; again by Francis Coppola and Michael Cimino, proponents of the 'tragic error/loss of innocence' theory; and finally by the Rambo/Gene Hackman school of Vietnam movies which revert to the original John Wayne thesis of a noble enterprise betrayed by sandbaggers at home.

Jaglom's film, like Reisz's excellent *Dog Soldiers*, is set not in Vietnam but in the US. It concerns a US Army sergeant, played by Dennis Hopper, accompanying a flag-draped coffin across the country by train. The film was little seen in the United States; its structure, like that of *The Last*

*Movie*, is quite fragmented and strange, and the story operates on various levels of reality – do not assume that everything you see is 'true'. In particular, the choice of Hopper as the psychotic veteran was brilliant – he is excellent in the role – but perhaps a little off-putting to the large audience used to seeing Hopper play bikers or way-out hippies in films like *Easy Rider* and *The Trip*.

*Tracks* was made at the tail-end of the great period of American cinema, when it was still possible to play with structure and film language, to improvise whole sequences and to draw no clear distinctions between the real and the unreal. Jaglom said that for him, the whole story could take place in the mind of Hopper while he's sitting on a bench. Just to complicate matters, *Tracks* was made on Amtrak passenger trains without permission, so Jaglom, Hopper and the whole crew were regularly ejected.

# 200 MOTELS

GB 1971

DIRECTOR

Frank Zappa

Tony Palmer

PRODUCER

Raoul Pagan

SCREENPLAY

Frank Zappa

PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPERVISOR

Dave Swan

CAST

Frank Zappa

Mothers of Invention

Theodore Bikel

Ringo Starr

A 200 per cent cult classic: you must remember *200 Motels*. It was always playing at midnight on Saturday at the Scala, back when you were protesting against the Vietnam war and listening to *Atom Heart Mother*. That's right – it's that film. Probably you saw the advert in the paper or the Marquee. Equally probably you didn't go and see it. Now you can.

*200 Motels* was directed by Frank Zappa and Tony Palmer in 1971. Tony Palmer was a British television director who also made musical bio-pics including one in which Sir Richard Burton played Wagner. Frank Zappa was, as you're probably aware, the leader of a famous band from the sixties and seventies, called The Mothers of Invention. *200 Motels* is a 'rockumentary' – precursor to *Spinal Tap* and contemporaneous to the Monkees' *Head*. Unlike, say, early Beatles movies, where there was some attempt to find a plot – the disappearance of Paul's grand-dad, for instance – *200 Motels* has no plot, and consists of concert footage and comedic sketches of a *Rouvan and Martin's Laugh-In* nature, naturally featuring members of the band. There is also some animation, of a sub-Gilliam variety. The film was shot on video.

There is actually some very funny stuff, much of it centring around the character of Jimmy Carl Black, who at one point remarks 'Just as long as I get some beer and get paid, I'll do anything! I'm professional!' It's interesting to note that *200 Motels* was made over here, at Pinewood Studios. This was the time when American studios were actually coming to England to do productions because it was so much cheaper. Now European production costs have driven the Americans – and in many cases the Europeans – back to the United States.

Apparently Frank Zappa conceived *200 Motels* as a musical work to be performed live. He attempted to have the London Philharmonic Orchestra play it, but venue officials declared the libretto 'obscene' and refused to allow it to be performed. Undaunted, Zappa turned the *magnum opus* into a film, incorporating footage of the Mothers of Invention shot over the previous five years. The results include Keith Moon as a nun, Ringo Starr on the Final Solution to the Orchestra Question, and Jimmy Carl's immortal 'Lonesome Cowboy Burt'. Oh, and the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Frank Zappa is by any standards an extraordinary man. In addition

to this film and records too numerous to mention, he owns a mail-order business, Barfko-Swill, which turns over a million dollars a year. He once said that he was 'Never a hippie. Always a freak, but never a hippie.' According to current biography he works 14 hours a day, and thinks of himself as a 'devout capitalist' and 'composer-businessman'. He seldom leaves home – where he maintains his family, his computers, grand piano and synclavier – except to go on overseas business trips. In politics he sees himself as a traditional conservative, although he views politics not as a matter of left wing and right wing, but rather of 'Fascism versus Freedom'. As a pragmatist, he is a registered Democrat, but says he might prefer to vote Republican 'if you were to extract the evil influence of the religious Right from the

Republican Party.'



Mother of invention - 200 MOTELS

# VAMP

US 1986

DIRECTOR

Richard Wenk

PRODUCER

Donald P. Borchers

SCREENPLAY

Richard Wenk

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Elliot Davis

WITH

Chris Makepeace

Sandy Baron

Robert Rusler

Grace Jones

*Vamp* is the perfect *Moviedrome* film. I don't mean the perfect film artistically – *Vamp* is not a perfect film by any means. But it is the perfect *Moviedrome* film: a rarely seen cult exploitation movie with irrelevant actors, average direction, a daft script borrowing from other, equally daft movies, and guest appearances by such cult luminaries as Grace Jones and feminist body builder Lisa Lyon, plus original furniture by Keith Haring and Andy Warhol.

*Vamp* is the story of some horrid college fraternity boys who go to the Big City to hire a stripper to perform in their clubhouse. Could anything sound more loathsome? Don't worry. Luckily for us the film

is directed without any pretensions. The actors are completely mindless; they just point these big blue and red lights at them, and GO! Actually there's one good actor hidden in there: his name is Sandy Baron and he plays the cockroach-eating nightclub owner, Vic. Grace Jones ain't bad, either. It's her best role to date, even better than in the James Bond film. In fact they ought to let Richard Wenk – the director of *Vamp* – loose on a couple of James Bond films, or maybe the next *Batman*. He certainly keeps the pace going, though he's no Herk Harvey.

Like Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* (see page 6), and the Romero *Living Dead* pictures, *Vamp* owes a considerable debt to the old EC, alias Educational Horror Comics, which if you're very very old you may remember were the subject of Parliamentary debate and banning in the 1950s. These comics, with titles like 'The Crypt of Terror' and 'The Vault of Horror', had a sort of gleeful blankness about them till the Mask of Fear was torn away and Ultimate Horror revealed in the final panel on the last page ...



State of Grace – VAMP

# VERBOTEN!

US 1958

DIRECTOR

Sam Fuller

PRODUCER

Sam Fuller

SCREENPLAY

Sam Fuller

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Joseph Biroc

WITH

James Best

Susan Cummings

Tom Pittman

Paul Dubov

There's plenty of moral purpose in *Verboten!*, which, like another Sam Fuller film shown on *Moviedrome* – *Run of the Arrow* (see page 28) – begins with a shot of dead bodies on the battlefield. It is the story of an American GI in World War II, who violates the non-fraternisation rule and falls in love with a German woman, played by one Susan Cummings. She, like Yellow Moccasin in *Run of the Arrow*, wants to know: 'What is a honeymoon?'

*Verboten!* has an anti-racist message; it also has a theme song by Paul Anka, 'Our Love Is Verboten', with additional background themes by Beethoven and Wagner. It's beautifully illuminated by Joseph Biroc, but unlike in *Run of the Arrow*, on which he also collaborated with Fuller, the camerawork is curiously static, so that when Fuller intercuts World War II footage the contrast makes *Verboten!* look somewhat insipid or ridiculous. Why, one wonders, didn't they just take the camera off the tripod so it would match the real footage better? The hand-held camera had been around for long enough: Kubrick used it for the battle sequences in *Dr Strangelove* only three years later.

Nevertheless, *Verboten!* merits your attention. How often do you get to see a war drama about re-emergent Nazism in Germany, the Marshall Plan, and the rat lines via which many of Hitler's cronies managed to escape to comfortable retirements? How often do you get to hear Sam Fuller's equation of juvenile delinquency with the Hitler Youth: 'It's the same problem – all over the world?'



War and peace – VERBOTEN!

# WALKER

US 1987

DIRECTOR

Alex Cox

PRODUCERS

Lorenzo O'Brien

Angel Flores Marini

SCREENPLAY

Rudy Wurlitzer

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

David Bridges

WITH

Ed Harris

Richard Masur

Rene Auberjonois

Keith Szarabajka

*Walker* is an American film made in Nicaragua. It was written by Rudy Wurlitzer, the author of *Two-Lane Blacktop* (see **Guide 1**), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Candy Mountain*. Wurlitzer has recently worked on a story about the Buddha for Bernardo Bertolucci. Walker is portrayed by Ed Harris, an outstanding American actor who specializes in half-charming, half-psychoic anti-heroes. Harris has also appeared in *Under Fire*, *To Kill a Priest*, *Alamo Bay* and *The Abyss*. He also played the astronaut John Glenn in *The Right Stuff*.

William Walker was an adventurer from Nashville, Tennessee, who in the mid 1850s invaded, and made himself president of, Nicaragua. Walker was something of a renaissance man – newspaper publisher, lawyer, Edinburgh University medical student – and was betrothed to the most beautiful woman in Nashville, who happened to be a deaf mute. He had extraordinary luck in battle, and was reputed to be impervious to gunfire, although he was wounded several times. Walker was funded by the shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt, and for several years was reported to be the most popular man in the United States.

There's not much more I can say about this film, since I am its director. I personally am very fond of it. There are those who are not. For an impartial assessment, why don't we turn, as always, to the BFI's *Monthly Film Bulletin*:

'The contemporary parallels are there for the taking, and the film not only takes them but gleefully tramples all over them. Its leering, loony, comic style at first suggests that the film-makers, and their expected audience, are so hip to what Manifest Destiny was really all about, that nothing more than a dig in the ribs and a frothingly over-the-top cameo from Peter Boyle as Vanderbilt are sufficient to deal with the subject and, more

importantly, to pin the film's politics on its sleeve ...

Ed Harris's performance is contained, fixated and charismatic enough to make sense of Walker's constant switching along the spectrum from liberator to dictator, but the film is too post-Freudian smart either to leave the character alone or really to explore him ("I have a weakness for small men," coos his treacherous Latin *enamorate*: "Small puritans obsessed by power.") Cox's direction does a lot of switching of its own, along the spectrum from Peckinpah westerns to the apocalyptic scenarios of Jodorowsky and the visionary excesses of Herzog. Closer to home, Walker may have been intended as a political cut-up on Lester lines that has unfortunately come out as *Carry on Contras*.'

The American way - WALKER



# WEEKEND

FRANCE 1967

DIRECTOR

Jean-Luc Godard

PRODUCTION MANAGERS

Ralph Baum

Philippe Senne

SCREENPLAY

Jean-Luc Godard

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Raoul Coutard

WITH

Mireille Darc

Jean Yanne

Jean-Pierre Kalfon

Valerie Lagrange

*Weekend* was written and directed by Jean-Luc Godard in 1967. Godard, you may recall, was one of the French New Wave's *enfants terribles*. Starting his career as a critic for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he directed his first and most intelligible feature, *Breathless*, in 1959. In general, intelligibility is not what Godard's cinema is all about. *Breathless* was a relatively straight-ahead thriller about a gangster and his moll. *Alphaville*, which you may recall seeing on *Moviedrome* many moons ago (see **Guide 1**), is an indescribable science-fiction film in which lightbulbs and domestic objects take on the same sinister high-tech mystery as the spaceship interiors in the *Alien* films or the monolith in *2001*. His films (they cannot be called 'movies') are filled with alienation devices, narrative inconsistencies, loose ends, long monologues in which dustmen talk to the camera about Marxism. His films are usually quite cheaply made, partially because – according to a possibly apocryphal story – it's hard to raise more than a quarter of a million dollars for a film without a script.

Ironically, or perhaps not, since after all Godard is a French bourgeois, there has been talk of his doing a Hollywood movie: he was approached by the writers of *Bonnie and Clyde* but proved unable

to make a deal with the American producers. He was also considered as director of Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders*, and in the early eighties he attempted to get an elaborate American production of the Bugsy Siegel story off the ground. It was to have starred Diane Keaton, but it foundered. Barry Levinson and Warren Beatty took up the colours of a very different Bugsy Siegel movie ten years later.

*Weekend* was made immediately after the *Bonnie and Clyde* deal fell apart. It begins with an unusually strong and comprehensible narrative, and as usual features the Godard touch of a foxy French chick who either takes her clothes off or sits around in her underwear talking about politics or sex. Brechtian titles advise us to analyse and exaggerated music works both in sympathy and at odds with the image.

The script is extremely good. It's very cynical and clinical, and as such reminds one of the brilliant French novelist Céline. Céline was of course a noted right-winger and fascist stooge; Godard is a man of the left. Yet interestingly, through their extreme cynicism and stylistic experiments, they find themselves in the same artistic camp. Actually, it's not so strange. People on the extreme right tend to view human beings as fundamentally evil and in need of absolute control; those on the far left often share a not dissimilar view. In *Weekend* we witness Godard's view of life as a traffic jam, as all the inhabitants of Paris try to leave town for the weekend and a Hobbesian nightmare ensues.

It features a famous, seemingly endless tracking shot worthy of one of J. G. Ballard's modern apocalypses. In some ways *Weekend* is Godard's most Buñuelian film. It is filled with malevolent, anti-Semitic bourgeois and at times recalls *Exterminating Angel* or *The Diary of a Chambermaid*. It also has a splendid Marxist analysis pertaining to the class war and the colonization of leisure time by capitalism. French farmers make war on Parisian parasites. There is no time for leisure: leisure is work. If you're one of those enthusiasts who likes to drive your car into the city centre and then spend £20 to park it, you already reside in Godardlandia. Me, I'll take the train.



Waiting for Godard - WEEKEND



# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?

US 1962

**DIRECTOR**  
Robert Aldrich

**PRODUCER**  
Robert Aldrich

**SCREENPLAY**  
Lukas Heller

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Ernest Haller

**WITH**  
Bette Davis  
Joan Crawford  
Victor Buono  
Maidie Norman

The director Robert Aldrich has contributed more films to *Moviedrome* than anybody else. *Baby Jane* is the story of two sisters, the eponymous Baby Jane Hudson, a former child prodigy billed as the 'diminutive dancing duse from Duluth', and the neglected sibling, Blanche. A ghastly accident has put an end to Blanche's career and now she and Baby Jane inhabit a house somewhere in Hollywood, where the events herein described take place.

Baby Jane Hudson is played by Bette Davis, Blanche by Joan Crawford. Both are outstanding in their roles. Aldrich and Billy Wilder were Hollywood's greatest character assassins. While Truffaut looked



at the film-making process and saw nothing but sweetness and light, artistry and challenge, Aldrich and Wilder saw only a vile cesspool in which the scum rises to the top and all-winners losers alike - are ego-mutilated freaks. Wilder, of course, made his feelings plain in *Sunset Boulevard* (see **Guide 1**), then went after the journalistic profession in *Ace in the Hole* (see **Guide 1**). Aldrich's greatest hatchet job on Hollywood was probably *The Big Knife* (see page 4), the story of a weak-willed, narcissistic movie tough-guy, brilliantly played by Jack Palance.

*The Big Knife* is a really good film, but it pales in comparison to *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* Aldrich is a great, straightforward, angry man, and as always, he peppers his diatribe with bizarre humour and grotesque effects. Watch out for the supporting performances of Victor Buono (alias *The Strangler*) and Maidie Norman as the housekeeper, Elvira Stitt. Members of the Aldrich stock company of actors crop up from time to time, and if the beach with its square box house that appears at the end of the movie looks familiar, it's the same house that gets blown up by the atomic bomb at the end of Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*.

*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* was remade as a TV movie recently, starring Vanessa and Lynn Redgrave as the sisters Hudson. Which is not bad for casting, but the original choice of Crawford and Davis is impossible to beat. The TV version also featured a little dog instead of a parakeet. *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* was a tremendously successful movie, so much so that Aldrich himself made two sort-of sequels, *Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte* and *Whatever Happened to Aunt Alice?* Accept no substitutes. This is the one, and only, the original *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

**Sibling rivalry - WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?**

# WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?

SPAIN 1984

**DIRECTOR**  
Pedro Almodovar

**PRODUCER**  
Todeo Villalba

**SCREENPLAY**  
Pedro Almodovar

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Angel Luis Fernandez

**WITH**  
Carmen Maura  
Luis Hualstot  
Angel De Andres-Lopez

Pedro Almodovar is the premier director of the New Spain. Obviously I say that with a certain cynicism: being the premier director of the New Spain is rather like being the premier novelist of Milton Keynes. *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* is actually a pretty good Almodovar film: more slick than some of his other movies, with less plot, it is the everyday story of a dysfunctional family living among the horrible tower blocks of contemporary Madrid. It's the first Almodovar I've seen that doesn't open with a scene involving a movie being dubbed. But the characters, as always, are writers and media people, prostitutes and junky kids, burnt-out housewives and funereally clad grandmothers.

The problem with Spanish cinema is that it didn't really exist until comparatively recently. During the years of the Franco dictatorship the only films that got made were frivolous comedies; now that democracy has returned to the Iberian Peninsula the best they can come up with appears to be... frivolous comedies. Which is OK, but for a culture that produced Luis Buñuel, Picasso, Goya and Dali, one wonders where's the rest of it?

In a sense, Almodovar's funny, lightweight cinema is the New Spain: not so cheap but excessively cheerful; a Petri dish for garish advertising experiments to promote the sale of wide-screen televisions and little cars and vans. It's the equation of democracy with consumerism, the replacement of one form of oppression with another. And just as in the former paradise, the people in charge and the established systems of control remain the same.

Speaking of systems of control, note well the accent of the protagonists: being Madrilenos, they speak the 'official' Spanish with the lisped 's'. You could be forgiven for thinking everyone in Spain speaks this way. Well, they don't. The lisped 's' is no more ubiquitous in Spain than what used to be called 'BBC English' is in Britain. People in Huelva don't lisp; nor do they lisp in Oviedo or Gijón. And the Spanish accent that was exported to the New World contains a

hard 's', not a soft one. Woe betide you if you don't lisp, though: rather like BBC English, the Madrid 's' is used to enforce a certain urban norm across the nation. It indicates a certain status, a certain societal correctness. You are no more likely to hear the hard 's' in the Spanish media than you are to hear a Geordie or a Scouser reading the Nine O'Clock News.

All of which is, naturally, divisive and detrimental to the culture. The Spanish don't go to see Mexican films, for instance, because they 'sound funny'. It would be an injustice to Almodovar to suggest he isn't aware of this: he's actually quite an acute social commentator. And if you watch closely, you'll spot a photo of the great Mexican film director Emilio Fernandez: there to remind us of the immense richness of the 'unofficial' Spanish-speaking culture? Or maybe just there because Almodovar likes Fernandez's films? It's an odd notion - the sophisticated Madrilenos socialite paying homage to the Mexican Indio Macho.

But not as strange as it might appear. Although Fernandez was famous as a pistol-packing man of action, his films, like Almodovar's, feature strong female protagonists and delight in subverting expectations. If you get the chance, try and see some of Indio Fernandez's films, like *La Perla*, or *Enamorada*, or *Rio Escondido*, featuring the Mexican actress Maria Felix, Fernandez's heroine of choice, just as Carmen Maura was for Almodovar in his first films.

**Happy families - WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?**



# WISE BLOOD

US 1979

**DIRECTOR**

John Huston

**PRODUCERS**

Michael and Kathy  
Fitzgerald

**SCREENPLAY**

Benedict and Michael  
Fitzgerald

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Gerry Fisher

**WITH**

Brad Dourif  
Ned Beatty  
Harry Dean Stanton  
Daniel Shor

*Wise Blood* was John Huston's first film after *Fat City* (see **Guide 1**), and while likewise set in small-town America, it's completely different in tone. *Fat City* was about boxers in Stockton, California: resolutely naturalistic with great performances by Jeff Bridges, Susan Tyrell and Stacey Keach. *Wise Blood* is set in the South – it was filmed in Georgia, though the original novel is set in Tennessee, and it is anything but a slice of dramatic naturalism. Brad Dourif, a very fine actor who seems to appear exclusively in cult movies, plays one Hazel Motes, an atheist determined on setting up a Church Without Christ.

The film is based on a novel by Flannery O'Connor. The book was set in the late forties or early to mid fifties, but there is no specific time frame for John Huston's film. At the outset it appears to be the immediate aftermath of World War II, but as the film progresses, many fifties and seventies type elements, including even a rather irritating punkish character, appear. The performances are all larger than life: particularly noteworthy are Ned Beatty, in the role of Hoover Shoates, and Harry Dean Stanton as Asa Hawks, two sinister phoney evangelists.

Ned Beatty was the multinational media mogul in *Network*, and more recently played the lead in *Hear My Song*, a film which will never appear on *Moviedrome*. Harry Dean Stanton has had a long and respectable career playing small parts in Hollywood movies and larger roles in weirdo peripheral movies such as *Paris, Texas*, *Wild at Heart* and *Repo Man*.

*Wise Blood* has a very strange, dark quality, rarely found in modern English-language films. It was co-financed by Anthea Films in what was then West Germany. It's a tribute to the old director that, getting on in years and not in good health, he would choose such a dark and unusual project, and choose to make it in such a non-naturalistic and original way. Had *Wise Blood* been made by a young director, the critics would have come down on it like a ton of bricks for not being 'stylistically consistent' or for just being plain 'confusing'. Luckily the age and reputation of Huston, who also directed *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *Moby Dick*, forced them to like the film.



The God Squad - WISE BLOOD

# WITCHFINDER GENERAL

GREAT BRITAIN  
1968

**DIRECTOR**

Michael Reeves

**PRODUCER**

Arnold Miller

**SCREENPLAY**

Michael Reeves  
Tom Baker

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

John Coquillon

**WITH**

Vincent Price  
Rupert Davies  
Ian Ogilvy  
Patrick Wymark

Matthew Hopkins was a British Joe McCarthy type who in the seventeenth century claimed to have the 'Devil's List' of all the witches in England. Just as Tailgunner Joe's list of 160,000 Communists, or homosexuals, or whatever it was, shaped the domestic policy of his nation, so Matthew Hopkins made a thriving living chasing down witches and to a lesser extent warlocks in East Anglia 300 years ago.

Hopkins was paid £23 for a day's work, at a time when the average wage was sixpence a day. He was an industrious witchfinder, and hanged 168 women in Suffolk and 100 in Bury St Edmunds alone. In the fiscal year of 1665-66, Matthew Hopkins made over £1000. *Witchfinder General* tells his story and features an old



*Moviedrome* favourite, Vincent Price. There was a considerable outcry over its gratuitous violence when it first came out. Today, inevitably, in the wake of the Freddy saga, *Friday the Thirteenth* and Michael Douglas, it seems relatively tame.

Vincent Price is, as you might imagine, the best thing in it. Untroubled by his American accent, he cuts a swathe through England during the Civil War, behaving for all the world like a misogynist, serial killer and would-be Parliamentary appointee.

*Witchfinder General* was made by Tigon British Pictures. Tigon were at the time the principal rival of Hammer Horror Films and so you can expect the same impenetrable day-for-night shots, the same endless tortured yells, the same attention to period detail and the same proliferation of heaving breasts as a *Carry On* film ...

Something else *Witchfinder General* has in common with the British comic cinema is the presence of Wilfred Brambell, alias old man Steptoe, as Master Coach. Also look out for a cameo by Patrick Wymark as Oliver Cromwell.

All in all this is a fairly routine Price horror movie with none of the genius of the Roger Corman/Edgar Allan Poe films. (In the United States it was known as *The Conqueror Worm*, from a line by Poe – presumably to cash in on the success of those films.) Nevertheless, it has a certain cultish fame, and is a pretty persuasive warning against over-associating with black cats or stoats.

*Witchfinder General* was directed in 1968 by Michael Reeves, who was seen as one of the great white hopes of the British film industry but sadly committed suicide just after this film at the age of 25. It was shot like TV by one Johnny Coquillon, who went on to become the John Coquillon who shot *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, and several other movies for Sam Peckinpah.

Licensed to kill - WITCHFINDER GENERAL

# DEEP BACKGROUND

For those seeking further information on cult movies, the following books are suggested:

*Cult Movies (Volumes 1-3)*, by Danny Peary, published by Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989.

*Cult Movie Stars*, by Danny Peary, published by Simon & Schuster, 1991.

*Film Noir: An encyclopaedic reference guide*, edited by Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, published by Bloomsbury, 1989.

*The Golden Turkey Awards*, by Michael and Harry Medved, published by Angus and Robertson, 1980.

*Hollywood Babylon 1/Hollywood Babylon 2* by Kenneth Anger, published by Arrow Books, 1986.

*The International Film Encyclopedia*, by Ephraim Katz, published by Papermac, 1982.

*The I was a Teenage Juvenile Delinquent ... Rock 'n' Roll Horror Beach Party Movie Book*, by Allan Betrock, published by Plexus, 1988.

*Joe Bob goes to the Drive-In*, by Joe Bob Briggs, published by Penguin, 1989.

*Nightmare Movies*, by Kim Newman, published by Harmony Books, 1988.

*The Psychotronic Encyclopaedia of Film*, by Michael Weldon, published by Plexus, 1989.

*The Time Out Film Guide*, edited by Tom Milne, published by Penguin, 1991.

*The Virgin Film Guide*, edited by James Monaco, published by Virgin, 1992.

*The Virgin International Encyclopaedia of Film*, edited by James Monaco, published by Virgin, 1992.

These and other books, as well as posters, stills, soundtracks and all kinds of ephemera, may be found at the following shops and mail-order firms:

## Arnolfini Bookshop

First Floor  
16 Narrow Quay  
Bristol BS1 4QA  
Tel: (0272) 299191  
Fax: (0272) 253876  
Open: 10.00-19.00 Mon-Sat;  
12.30-18.30 Sun

## B. H. Blackwell

48-51 Broad Street  
Oxford OX1 3BQ  
Tel: (0865) 792792  
Fax: (0865) 794143  
Open: 09.00-18.00 Mon, Wed, Sat;  
09.30-18.00 Tue

## Blackwell's Art & Poster Shop

27 Broad Street  
Oxford OX1 2AS  
Tel: (0865) 792792  
Fax: (0865) 794143  
Open: 09.00-18.00 Mon, Wed, Sat;  
09.30-18.00 Tue

## The Cinema Bookshop

13-14 Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3NH  
Tel: (071) 637 0206  
Open: 10.30-17.30 Mon-Sat

## The Cinema Shop

45 Summer Row  
Birmingham B3 1JJ  
Tel: (021) 236 9879  
Open: 11.30-17.30 Mon-Sat

## Geoffrey Clinton's Performing Arts Bookshop

44 Brazenose Street  
Manchester M2 5EA  
Tel: (061) 831 7118  
Open: 09.00-17.30 Mon-Sat

## Cornerhouse Books

70 Oxford Street  
Manchester M1 5NH  
Tel: (061) 228 7621  
Fax: (061) 236 7323  
Open: 12.00-20.30 daily

## A. E. Cox

21 Cecil Road  
Itchen  
Southampton SO2 7HX  
Tel: (0703) 447 989  
Mail order only

## Dress Circle

57-59 Monmouth Street  
Upper St Martin's Lane  
London WC2H 9DG  
Tel: (071) 240 2227  
Open: 10.00-19.00 Mon-Sat

## 58 Dean Street Records

58 Dean Street  
London W1V 5HH  
Tel: (071) 437 4500/734 8777  
Open: 10.00-18.30 Mon-Sat

## Film Magic

18 Garsmouth Way  
Watford  
Herts  
Mail order only

## Anne FitzSimons

62 Scotby Road  
Scotby  
Carlisle  
Cumbria CA4 8BD  
Tel: (0228) 513 815  
Mail order only

## Flashbacks

6 Silver Place  
Beak Street  
London W1R 3LJ  
Tel: (071) 437 8562  
Open: 10.30-19.00 Mon-Sat

## Forbidden Planet

71 New Oxford Street  
London WC1A 1DG  
Tel: (071) 836 4179/379 6042  
Fax: (071) 497 2632  
Open: 10.00-18.00 Mon, Wed, Sat;  
10.00-19.00 Thurs, Fri

## Heffers Booksellers

20 Trinity Street  
Cambridge CB2 3NG  
Tel: (0223) 358 351  
Open: 09.00-17.30 Mon-Sat

## David Henry

36 Meon Road  
London W3 8AN  
Tel: (081) 993 2859  
Mail order only

## Legends

406 Cranbrook Road  
Gants Hill  
Essex IG2 6HW  
Tel: (081) 554 5788  
Open: 10.00-18.30 Mon-Sat;  
12.00-15.00 Sun

## MOMI Bookshop

South Bank  
London SE1 8XT  
Tel: (071) 815 1343  
Open: 10.30-18.30 daily

## Movie Finds

2 Laurel Walk  
Juniper Close  
St Leonards on Sea  
East Sussex TN38 9RH  
Mail order only

## NFT Bookshop

South Bank  
London SE1 8XT  
Tel: (071) 815 1343  
Open: 10.30-18.30 daily

## National Museum of Photography, Film and Television

Pictureville  
Bradford BD1 1NQ  
Tel: (0274) 727 488  
Fax: (0274) 723 155  
Open: 10.30-18.00 Tue-Sun

## Offstage Theatre & Cinema Bookshop

37 Chalk Farm Road  
London NW1 8AJ  
Tel: (071) 485 4996  
Open: 10.00-18.00 daily

## Roxie the Shop

84 Wardour Street  
London W1V 4BX  
Tel: (071) 221 2233  
Fax: (071) 434 9990  
Open: 09.30-18.00 Mon-Fri

## Tyneside Cinema Shop

10 Pilgrim Street  
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6QG  
Tel: (091) 232 5592  
Fax: (091) 221 0535  
Open: 10.30-18.00 Mon-Sat

## Vintage Magazine Co.

39-41 Brewer Street  
London W1R 3FD  
Tel: (071) 439 8525  
Open: 10.00-20.00 Mon-Sat;  
12.00-19.00 Sun

## also at:

247 Camden High Street  
London NW1  
Tel: (071) 482 0587  
Open: 10.00-18.00 Mon-Fri;  
10.00-19.00 Sat, Sun

## Peter Wood

20 Stonchill Road  
Great Shelford  
Cambridge CB2 5JL  
Tel: (0223) 842 419  
Mail order and visitors by appointment

## A. Zwemmer

80 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 9NJ  
Tel: (071) 379 7886  
Open: 09.30-18.00 Mon-Fri;  
10.00-18.00 Sat



ALEX COX



Published 1993 by the British Broadcasting Corporation and Broadcasting Support Services to accompany BBC2's *Moviedrome*  
(sixth season shown from May 1993)

Written by Alex Cox and Nick Jones

Edited by Peter Millson

Designed by Leveller Graphics

Printed by Haynes Cannon

Distributed by Broadcasting Support Services

With special thanks to Hedda Archbold

Broadcasting Support Services is an educational charity which runs helplines and provides follow up services for viewers and listeners.

For further copies of this second guide covering the last three seasons of *Moviedrome*, please send a cheque or postal order  
for £3.00 (payable to BSS).

Copies of the original guide, covering the first three seasons of *Moviedrome*, are also available, priced £2.75.

Or you can acquire both guides at the special price of £5.00.

Your order should be sent to:

*Moviedrome 1 and/or 2*

PO Box 7

London W3 6XJ

ISBN: 0-906965-64-0

NICK JONES

