

NUMBER ONE

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MONSTER!



INTERNATIONAL



GIGANTEN DER VORZEIT

EINE PRODUKTION
DER TOEI
COMPANY, TOKIO

EIN GAMMA FILM
IM VERLEIH DER
CINERAMA



MONSTER!

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WELCOME TO MONSTER! SPECIAL NUMBER ONE, THE INTERNATIONAL ISSUE. WHAT, YOU MAY ASK, IS MONSTER!? THREE YEARS AGO I STARTED MONSTER! AS A ONE PAGE, SILLY NEWSLETTER WITH ARTICLES LIKE "THE CHILD AS MONSTER" AND SO FORTH. IT TOOK TIME, BUT GRADUALLY THE SCOPE OF MONSTER! NARROWED ITSELF INTO THE FINE-HONED, REASONABLY INTELIGENT MONTHLY FANZINE IT IS TODAY. THIS SPECIAL IS AN ANNUAL OF SORTS FOR THE YEAR 1991. LURKING WITHIN THESE 36 PAGES ARE REPRINTS FROM THE PAST TWELVE ISSUES OF MONSTER! THE FANZINE, NOT TO MENTION A FEW NEW REVIEWS AND SOME REVISED ONES. IT'S TITLED THE INTERNATIONAL ISSUE BECAUSE I UNINTENTIONALLY FEATURED ONLY TWO U.S.-RELATED PRODUCTIONS OUT OF THE 31 FILMS REVIEWED (THE MANSTER WAS A U.S.-JAPAN CO-PRODUCTION, AND THE SPANISH-LANGUAGE DRACULA WAS PRODUCED IN THE STATES FOR THE FOREIGN MARKETS). MAYBE THAT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT THE PRODUCT THAT COMES OUT OF HOLLYWOOD TODAY.

THIS ISSUE IS DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS. THE FIRST INCLUDES 19 REVIEWS BY MYSELF. MOST ARE ASIAN PRODUCTIONS, SPOTLIGHTING THE HONG KONG SCENE WITH CHOICE TITLES LIKE **POSSESSED**, **GHOST FEVER**, AND **MAGIC OF SPELL**. SECTION TWO FEATURES REVIEWS BY SOME OF FANDOM'S MOST TALENTED WRITERS: STEVE FENTONE, JEFF SEGAL, CONRAD WIDENER, BETSY BURGER AND JOHN VELLUTINI. THE FINAL SECTION IS THE COMPLETE, REVISED, AND UPDATED TRAVELLING MONSTER HUNTER SERIES WHICH ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE NEWSLETTER, AND WRITTEN IS BY HORÁCIO HIGUCHI.

SPECIAL NOTE: ALL TRANSLITERATIONS OF ASIAN TITLES AND NAMES FOLLOW STANDARD METHODS. ORIGINAL TITLES, DIRECTORS AND CHARACTER NAMES OF FILMS PRODUCED IN HONG KONG OR TAIWAN ARE GIVEN IN THEIR MANDARIN FORM, USING PINYIN TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM. ROMANIZATION OF JAPANESE WORDS AND NAMES FOLLOWS A MODIFIED VERSION OF THE HEPBURN SYSTEM, WITH MACRONS REPLACED BY CIRCUMFLEX ACENTS FOR TYPOGRAPHICAL SIMPLIFICATION.

IF YOU LOVE CREATURE FEATURES AS MUCH AS I DO, THEN I BELIEVE WITH ALL MY HEART THAT MONSTER! IS FOR YOU. IT IS THE **SOLE MONSTERS-ONLY MAGAZINE ON THE MARKET TODAY**. EVEN THOUGH THE SPECIAL IS A BI-ANNUAL PRODUCTION, YOU CAN SUBSCRIBE TO THE NEWSLETTER WHICH IS A MONTHLY AFFAIR. A ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION IS ONLY \$12 FROM KRONOS PRODUCTIONS. SINGLE SAMPLE ISSUES ARE \$1.25.

MY HEARTFELT APPRECIATION GOES OUT TO HORÁCIO FOR THE KIND WORDS, HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH MADE THIS SPECIAL POSSIBLE. MANY THANKS ALSO TO DAVE AND BETSY FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND DESIGN SENSIBILITIES, AND LYNDALE FOR THE MAGNIFICENT COVER.

OH YEAH, THE INSIDE FRONT COVER IS THE GERMAN POSTER ART FOR **THE LEGEND OF THE DINOSAUR AND THE MONSTER BIRD**. ENJOY!

Z.



SPECIAL WRAP-AROUND MONSTERAMA COVER BY CARTOONIST LYNDALE FERGUSON.

LYNDAL'S COVER CREATURE CHECKLIST:

THE MONSTERS YOU CAN CLEARLY SEE ON THE COVER ARE: (1) GOLDAR FROM "SPACE GIANTS", (2) MIL MASCARAS, (3) VAMPIRE FROM **MR. VAMPIRE 2**, (4) MECHAKONG, (5) JOSÉ MOJICA MARINS, (6) NAI BONET AS "NOCTURNA", (7) **INVASION OF THE SAUCERMEN**, (8) **IT CONQUERED THE WORLD**, (9) PAUL NASCHY'S **FURY OF THE WOLFMAN** (or is that **FURRY OF THE WOLFMAN?**), (10) **BLOOD OF DRACULA**, (11) **THE TOXIC AVENGER**, (12) ODERUS URUNGUS OF "GWAR", (13) **CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON**, (14) VAMPIRE FROM **RETURN TO SALEM'S LOT**, (15) ELVIRA, (16) **TERROR BENEATH THE SEA**, (17) **ULTRAMAN**, (18) RONDO HATTON AS **THE CREEPER**, (19) **I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF**, (20) HERMAN MUNSTER, (21) GENE SIMMONS OF "KISS" (HEY! HE WAS IN MY FAVORITE BAD -- REALLY, REALLY BAD -- MONSTER MOVIE **KISS MEETS THE PHANTOM OF THE PARK**), (22) **DEVILMAN**, (23) TOR JOHNSON, (24) **SCREAM, BLACULA, SCREAM**, (25) **PREDATOR**, (26) **THE SPANISH DRACULA**, (27) **THE MANSTER**, (28) **THE GILL-MAN FROM THE BAT WOMAN**, (29) **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, AND OF COURSE, (30) **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH**

BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE

Original Title: **UCHÛ DAISENSÔ**

1959, D: Inoshiro Honda

I was under the mistaken impression that **BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE** was going to be another **THE MYSTERIANS** (1957). I was dead wrong. Even though I wasn't too severely disappointed, by the time the end credits began to roll I was devastated as the alien invasion force. **BATTLE** is without a doubt Toho's dullest fantasy film ever. Period. It isn't a bad film, just overly talky and negligent in any real action which would have made any part of the film tense or exciting. I must say (though this may sound sacrilegious, coming from such a Godzilla fan as myself) that I wished Toho had stuck to straight science fiction as opposed to their giant monster series. **THE MYSTERIANS** remains the classic all out alien invasion film any country has ever fabricated, and Honda's equally ingenious **THE H-MAN** and **THE HUMAN VAPOR** (1961) proved that he could handle SF films without resorting to leveling Tokyo via a green-skinned behemoth. It would seem that the studio apparently went to where the money was and stuck to their tried and true (if not tired and worn) giant monster epics. Despite all its faults, **BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE** featured a rousing score by Akira Ifukube, who gave Godzilla his best battle air as well as the amazing military score from **THE MYSTERIANS**.

The year is 1965 and the Earth has been routinely plagued with occasional alien flying saucer attacks. When a research space station is blown up by these marauding pests, it's up to the United Nations to assemble a team of crack scientists and military minds to confront this stellar menace. The invaders go as far as to use anti-grav rays to pull train tracks apart, divert rivers, and cause other hazards to humankind. They have to be stopped. Two spaceships are hastily assembled and a group of energetic (if not kind of stupid and naive about space flight) astronauts are sent towards the dark side of the moon where a suspected alien base lies. One of their crew is infected with an alien mind probe, and when the team lands their spaceships and embark on their mission to locate and destroy the base, he blows up one of the them. Luckily for the others, he regains his senses when they demolish the invaders' outpost and sacrifices his life to see that they get aboard the remaining spaceship and rocket home.

Back on Earth the crew tell their tale and the planet unites to build a fleet of super rocket jets. Each ship is equipped with a thermal ray gun in the nose of the craft. Just as the alien mother ship and a fleet of saucers begin their final assault on the Earth, the fleet is prepped for battle and sent on their mission. A drawn-out space dogfight liquidates all but the mother ship, one saucer, and three "space bombs" which destroy much of New York and two other capital cities. Even though our fleet was devastated by the aliens, the military on the ground (centrally located in Tokyo of course) use mammoth versions of the thermal ray guns and eventually manage to obliterate the alien menace. We mop our brows and pray for the dead. Will another alien force dare to invade our peace-loving world? Sure enough, a few years down the line **GODZILLA VS. MONSTER X** and **DESTROY ALL MONSTERS** rampaged through the theatres...

The biggest disappointment has to be the alien themselves. Honda opted not to show them, or rather only to have suited-up monsters threaten the only female astronaut on the moon. The diminutive critters are never seen without their space suits on, nor when they broadcast their conditions for Earth's surrender. This is odd considering that we saw so much of the space beings in **THE MYSTERIANS**. Of course, keeping the alien threat at a distance and not parading them throughout the film does add a sense of mystery to the production. You fear what you cannot see. Unfortunately, Honda didn't see fit to supplement this dread with any doses of excitement, as the film is kept at an even drone throughout its duration. It could have been a lot better. Too bad.

ESCAPE FROM CORAL COVE

Original title: **TAOCHU SHANHUHAI**

1986, D: Zhang Jiazhen (T. Chang)

Unlike other more popular Chinese zombies flicks, the mean-spirited demon that pursues human prey in this film doesn't hop or sport Qing Dynasty burial clothing. In fact, if you were to stroll into your local Chinese video rental outlet and look for **ESCAPE**'s box you would be hard-pressed to spot a monster on its cover. What looks like someone struggling underwater, close-up of a skull with eyes and four busty babes in bikinis are your only clues to what the film within is about. Could it be a thriller? A sex comedy? Whatever your first impression may be, if it wasn't for a trailer to the film I had seen I probably wouldn't have touched the title. Being the zombie nut that I am, I'm glad that I dared to rent the unknown,



AN ALIEN FROM TOHO'S **BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE**

because I came home with a winner. **ESCAPE** features a rare species of the undead: the aquatic zombie. Sure, this branch of the zombie family isn't all that unique, since its relatives have popped up in Edward L. Cahn's **ZOMBIES OF MORA TAU** (1957), Ken Weiderhorn's **SHOCK WAVES** (1977), and Lucio Fulci's **ZOMBIE** (1979), but they are scarce enough to be interesting. **ESCAPE**'s very existence, bordering on the time when Tsui Hark's productions ushered in new sensationalism and interest in the spiritualism of "ghost films," is in itself fascinating. In fact, if you were to compare Jiazhen's film to any other Chinese director's from this time period, I wouldn't hesitate to nominate Dennis Yu as a realistic contemporary. Yu produced two of the most unusual monster films in the pre-ZU days of Hong Kong cinema, **THE EVIL CAT** and **THE IMP**, and Jiazhen's film is almost as good as one of his projects.

ESCAPE FROM CORAL COVE opens as a desperate group of Coral Cove villagers gather at their beach to bear witness to the burial at sea of a demonic creature. It's corporeal body rendered inert and secured aboard a floating pry, the creature resembles a young man. No matter how attractive the "corpse" is, it is without a doubt an evil creature that must be burned to ashes to be totally eliminated. The priest at the dock mumbles prayers to the gods and magically sets the boat a flame, and as it sinks into the brine the people disperse believing the evil is gone from their lives. However, as the charred body sinks to the ocean floor it begins to twitch...

Enter four happy-go-lucky travelers who unknowingly stumble upon Coral Cove and the monster (which has already dispatched a nubile young female swimmer). After a series of false frights which sets both us and the principal characters in the proper mood to be scared, the monster emerges from the sea. Charred and hideous to look at, the crispy yet water-logged beast sloshes to a nearby barn where it begins to peel away its blackened skin. Once stripped of its old shell, the creature now resembles a man which, except for his oddly albino eyes, could pass for a handsome model. Driven by some incredible need for brutality the thing begins stalking our four helpless protagonists, stopping on occasion to kill a few other vulnerable humans along the way. One of these faceless victims is a security guard whose uniform the beast acquires to clothe itself. Armed with the best of disguises, the creature resumes its relentless tracking...

THE ESCAPE FROM CORAL COVE was not as wild as it could have been, but there are enough surprises to keep a viewer happy. The film's lack of truly disgusting gore, and the absence of any *really impressive* action sequences was a sore point, but its pacing and direction kept me glued to the set. Two well handled scenes occur on the boat at the climax of the motion picture. The first occurred when the heroine stabs the monster with a knife only to have brine instead of blood spray out of its wounds. The second is the final underwater struggle between human and inhuman. Impressive without being too flashy, don't expect the bizarre as in **THE SEVENTH CURSE** or **THE BLACKMAGIC WITH BUDHA**, as **ESCAPE FROM CORAL COVE** takes time to build up to its suspenseful last half hour where black magic and white magic clash and Good triumphs over Evil... at least for now.

STARS, and other comedies. Despite the fact that the film has borrowed a great deal of its material from other sources (**POLTERGEIST**, **EVIL DEAD 2**, **BEETLEJUICE**, **GHOSTBUSTERS** and contemporary Chinese ghost productions), the director has taken those elements and mashed them into a lumpy concoction of spooky happenings. Get ready for the atypical in a sub-genre of Chinese horror that has been otherwise played out: the comic ghost story.

Businessman Xu Jiangwang is on his way home from his office job and offers to share a cab with a very charming young woman named Pinky (her English nickname she confesses). On their way he starts a conversation. It is discovered that the woman lives a short distance from his new home which he bought for himself and his wife, Ling, who is pregnant with their first child. Everything seems to be normal as he drops her off at her house and leaves. However, when we are introduced to the rest of her relatives, they turn out to be a bunch of vile ghosts on the lookout for a human family into which they can reincarnate themselves. To make matters worse for our young executive, his buddies, Mr Ou and company, convince him that he should have a fling while his wife is in the hospital for an unexpected illness. Timidly, he seeks out the woman he gave a ride to the previous night and unexpectedly finds her in front of him. He offers her a ride home and ends up coupling with her at her "house." If the woman being a spook wasn't bad enough, he then discovers that the ghostly brood is out to get him, his wife, and their unborn child! To make matters worse, the house he just moved into was the sight of that very clan's wholesale slaughter. It seems that a few years ago the mother of the dead family was blackmailing the lover of her daughter, and extorting hundreds of thousands of HK dollars out of the man. Fed up with the predicament, he attacked the family with an axe and eliminated them all. He was caught and is serving a life's sentence in a prison *just down the road!* Now it's up to our young adulterer and his office buddies to put an end to the matter of marauding specters.

Here's where the real fun begins. When it becomes evident that the ghosts are out for blood, Mr. Ou talks Jiangwang into hiring a flashy, expensive, know-it-all exorcist to rid the house of the pesky spirits. One by one each human is subjected to hilariously spooky encounters with the undead. In one incident a man is sucked into a television set and gets to "star" in various TV programs. In one he guest-stars as an evil white-haired kung fu master who gets his butt kicked by another kung fu master (via stock footage). His horrified friends watch and in a desperate move to free him from his hell, pick up the television's remote and switch channels. Unfortunately, they tune into a late night horror film featuring hopping vampires who then set upon their victim with fangs flashing! The priest in the group puts a spell on the boob tube and the group attempts to pull their buddy from the grasp of the televised terrors. The TV set explodes, hurling their friend across the room and pieces of cinematic vampires spraying onto every body! A decapitated vampire head sprouts legs and attacks Mr. Ou. The monster nibbles at the man's nipples causing him to grow large, fully-formed female breasts (something that doesn't get reversed until the end of the film). The spooks go hog wild at this point, possessing another man when he accidentally swallows the eyeball of a vampire. On a serious note, the ghosts then force the priest-for-hire to repeatedly smash his head against the brick of a fireplace, crushing the poor human's head in. When the haunting is over for the day, everyone alive stumbles out of the house screaming in pure fright.

Sensing that her husband has cheated on her and that he is being persecuted by a vengeful and bitchy ghost, Ling decides to take matters into her own hands and contracts a proper exorcist. She enlists the help of Elizabeth Lee, a small woman who is very familiar with the ways of the black arts and has had dealing with ghosts before. At this point the story takes a grim turn as the ghost family suspect that their possession plans are

now under dire threat, and things get deadly. Some of the better scenes include the first confrontation between the female exorcist and the spooky family. As the ghosts attack, the little woman signals her boyfriend (a bald giant of a man) to speak, and he utters a frightful bellow that actually stuns the spirits and causes them to retreat — but not before they snatch the wife's grandfather and her eight-year-old sister. In a desperate bid to destroy the creatures, it's up to Mr. Ou and a friend to paint themselves with magical runes and make their way to the graveyard where the evil family's remains are buried. There they encounter a zombie that almost kills them, although they are saved by some very special runes which one of the men has painted on his bare ass. He drops his pants and wiggles his butt at the monster, which then explodes into bones and ash! Amazing. The last twenty minutes are just as fun, as the convict who originally murdered the family returns during a blinding, driving rain storm to finish the job he started. YIKES!

Definitely not a classic, but you can't get much better considering the type of film it is. The script is fun and you may actually get a belly laugh out of some of the spoken lines (well, subtitled text) as well as the slapstick. The effects are very good, and the hauntings remind me of Japanese-style ghost entries rather than the more popular **A CHINESE GHOST STORY**, **HAPPY GHOST**, and even Liu's more recent **MY NEIGHBORS ARE PHANTOMS**. A silly, feel-good production if there ever was one!

THE GHOST OF YOTSUYA

Original title:

TÔKAIDÔ YOTSUYA KAIJAN

1959, D: Nobuo Nakagawa

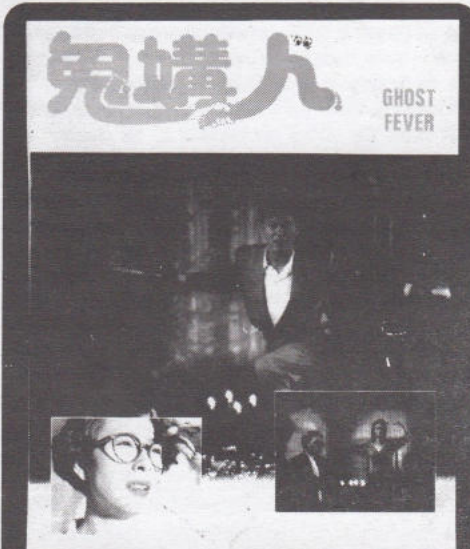
When it comes to late 50's and early 60's gruesome cinema few countries could have beaten Japan for the sheer abundance of artistically accomplished gore. Sure, France served up **LES YEUX SANS VISAGE/EYES WITHOUT A FACE** (1959, D: Georges Franju) and its nasty face-carving scene, H.G. Lewis made a splash (or was it splatter?) with his flicks, and Mario Bava gave a brief squirt of B&W gore when Barbara Steele had a spiked mask fixed to her face with a sledgehammer in **LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO/BLACK SUNDAY** (1960). But for gallons of gore watch practically any Japanese action/monster/samurai flick. Godzilla and his pals spray blood whenever they're cut or bitten, and in the final duel from Kurosawa's

GHOST FEVER

Original title: **GUI GOU REN**

1989, D: Liu Shiyu (S. Y. Lau)

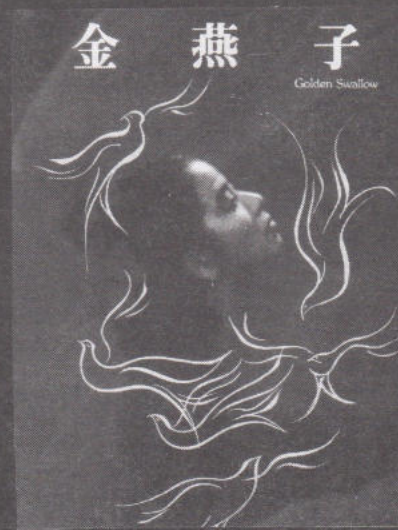
Yes, **GHOST FEVER** is another of those silly and dumb spook experiences that populate the shelves at your local Chinese video shop. You're likely to find this gem sandwiched between **PICKLES MAKE ME CRY** (a favorite title of mine), **LUCKY**



VIDEO BOX ART FROM **GHOST FEVER**



MONSTER!



ABOVE: VIDEO BOX ART FROM *GOLDEN SWALLOW*
LEFT: THE HIDEOUS GHOST OF YOTSUYA

SANJURO (1962), Toshiro Mifune opens up his opponent from crotch to chin with his sword in a visceral (and literal) bloodbath. Then there's some of that nasty spookiness of Nakagawa's **TÔKAIDÔ YOTSUYA KAIDAN** (THE GHOST OF YOTSUYA).

Based on a 1825 Kabuki stage play (which in turn is based on a 300-year-old ghost story) Nakagawa's flick rivals other spooky cinematic efforts like Jack Arnold's **THE INNOCENTS** (1961) and Robert Wise's **THE HAUNTING** (1963) with its terrifying tale of vengeance. **THE GHOST OF YOTSUYA** may not be much for those of you too hyped on gore to get into a film that's anything pre-**DAWN OF THE DEAD**, but take it from me it's a chiller. The fact that this old tale was filmed many times is a testament to its powerful narration. The Japanese love samurai period pieces, revenge tales, and ghost stories—and Nakagawa's production has all three rolled into one exciting little number.

The tale is a simple one: a ruthless social climbing young samurai (penniless, and masterless to boot), Iuemon, kills the father of a beautiful woman, Iwa, and convinces her to be his wife. He vows to kill some fabricated villains, and Iwa agrees to marry him—though he lives to regret his rash action when his wife continues to badger him to follow through with his word. Iuemon soon realizes that his lowly wife will not help him in his climb on the social ladder, so with some help from his slimy partner in crime, Naosuke, he poisons his wife so he can marry Ume, the daughter of a rich official. The poison is a horrid one—it hideously disfigures the woman before killing her. In her final death throes she curses her husband for his cruelty. The haunting which follows is grim and at times surrealistically ghastly. Iuemon is driven to murder his new wife, mother and father-in-law, and his "pal" Naosuke.

The SFX and make-up are pluses in this beautifully filmed spook tale. The physical gore comes from Iwa's disfigurement when blisters and boils erupt on her face and her hair and scalp fall away from her skull, sending blood streaming everywhere. Iuemon nails her corpse and that of another (a man he owed a lot of cash) to a door and pushes them into the backyard pond. In numerous grisly scenes their battered and bloated corpses rise to the surface of the water spouting curses; rotting hands reach out of the earth to grapple with Iuemon, and snakes drop down upon the terrified man. There are scenes of dismemberment, skull splitting, and vicious swordplay. A fascinating film to say the least.

GOLDEN SWALLOW

Original title: **JIN YANZI**
1987, D: Ke Xingpei

What at first would appear to be a shameless rip-off of the Tsui Hark/Ching Siu-Tung production **A CHINESE GHOST STORY**, then a comedy, then monster movie, makes Ke Xingpei's **GOLDEN SWALLOW** a hard film to pin down. Probably the best definition for it is fun. **THE GOLDEN SWALLOW** isn't the best of its ilk, but after seeing at least two dozen Asian fantasy-oriented (not straight ahead horror or horror comedies) flicks, it is a breath of fresh air. Yes, the film does center around a young scholar who falls in love with a demon/ghost, but that's where most of the **A CHINESE GHOST STORY** similarities end. However, the plot does borrow heavily from one source. It is an elaborated and convoluted re-working of the famous Japanese Snow Demon legend "Yukionna" which made it to screen in Masaki Kobayashi's ghost film **KWAIDAN** (1964), and recently Westernized in **TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE** (1990). For both of those films the tale was only a segment from an anthology, while **GOLDEN SWALLOW** attempts to flesh the tale out to a full 90-plus minute extravaganza. That isn't to say that the film is an artistic or plagiaristic flop. Director Xingpei made exceptional use of additional sub-plots, extended battles and ghostly encounters to pad his film. Not a first class fantasy film, but not a loser either.

The story unfolds as a small boat is seen ferrying a man across a river to the Black Mountains. On the way, the carpsman questions his sole passenger, warning him about the evils of the land he is about to trespass upon. The traveler shrugs off the threats. It's then that the owner of the boat announces that he is a demon and is about to devour his passenger. The human brandishes a huge sword and splits the monster down the middle! The swordsman finishes steering the boat to shore himself. There he encounters and does battle with the Ice Demoness, a cruel and frightening demi-goddess who thrives on human blood. In a pitched battle both are severely wounded and call it a day. "We will meet again," the supernatural crone cries and vanishes. The swordsman grunts and trudges on through the forest.

The credits roll, and we are introduced to Lao Zhiqiu, a young Taoist scholar who is on his way to sell paper lamps to the people across the river. He's a nice sort of guy who unknowingly saves a she-demon disguised as a swallow from a gang of mischievous young boys. He releases what he thinks is a small bird and continues on his way to sell his wares. He turns his back, not noticing that the sparrow has transformed into the image of a beautiful woman who flies away into the forest. On his way he encounters two roguish brothers (one brother played by actor Robert Ng, star of countless movies including monster films like **MR VAMPIRE 3**, **WATCH OUT!**, and **EXCUSE ME PLEASE**) who are continually trying to see who is the best swordsman of the two. An uneven relationship is struck up between the trio as they encounter a band of roving bandits. While the brothers are busy chopping up the bad guys, our hero stumbles into a camp previously devastated by the Ice Demoness and her two maids Xiaxue and Xiaoshuang. Bodies are scattered everywhere, frozen stiff with their life energies sucked out of them. Lao Zhiqiu meets up again with Xiaxue, the demon which he saved from the boys, and after a battle between her and the two brothers, which our hero breaks up, she promises not to harm him. The two fall in love, have sex, and vow to never hurt each other again. That is, until the Demoness discovers that her maid is sleeping with a mortal! She is about to suck the life out of our hero when his lover intercedes and begs for his life. The Monster agrees to do so on one condition: that the scholar must never speak of what he has seen or the Maid which he loves so dearly will return to kill him. The two part, he back to his life of selling paper lamps, and she back to luring men into the forest for her mistress to devour.

You might guess what happens from there if you have seen either of the films mentioned earlier. If not, I'll give you a little more of the story. Years later Zhiqiu is pretty rotten at selling paper lanterns. His wares net him only a few pennies a day if he's lucky. It's then that he encounters a beautiful woman (guess who) whom he eventually falls in love with and marries. Xiaxue is able to make wonderful paper lanterns which sell very well. They soon live in a fine house. It's then that the two brothers, now priests, meet up again with the scholar and recognize his wife as what she really is: the demon which they fought with in the haunted forest years ago. She begs the men not to interfere with her love life, and that she has given up the ways of evil. The two finally agree with her and leave, but not before informing her that she's pregnant and no longer a true demon. In no time the happy husband and wife have the child and life is wonderful ... until

stupid happens to remember a fling he had with a snow demon and tells it to Xiaxue.

From there the film really gains momentum and we are re-introduced to the Demoness and the Swordsman. The scholar begs the rough and tumble Swordsman to save his child from the clutches of the monsters. Visually the film is exciting, and the effects are wonderful. I could have done without the mushy bits, but I guess you have to put up with that stuff when you watch Chinese ghost films. I was glad to see that the ending is virtually the same as in the Kobayashi film, and not anywhere as dark and final as in the **TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE** segment. **GOLDEN SPARROW** is a must-have for any fantasy zealot, and I highly recommend it if you can't find **A CHINESE GHOST STORY**, **ZU WARRIORS OF MAGIC MOUNTAIN**, **THRILLING SWORD**, or **PEACOCK PRINCE** at your local Asian video rental store.

THE H-MAN

Original title: **BIJO TO EKITAI-NINGEN**
1958, D: Inoshiro Honda

Major weirdness from Toho! You must admit the people who run the monster branch of that studio have concocted numerous bizarre scenarios for their films. Mixing gangsters up with monsters still wigs me out. This was their first such mutant monster film, another one is **DAGORA THE SPACE MONSTER** (1964, also an Inoshiro Honda project). Imagine blending two of the Japanese favorite 50's/60's genre films together with a pinch of grossness and a touch of romance (only a smidgen mind you!) and you have a quasi-adult approach to science fiction/creature cinema. Not unlike **THE HUMAN VAPOR** made two years later (again Honda) along with Jun Fukuda's **SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN**, this project attempted to break away from what was already an obvious box office draw for Toho: the giant monster flicks. Maybe it wasn't enough for the monster-hungry populace, for this unusual approach to Nipponese science fiction died in its infancy.

During a police investigation into heroin smuggling by rival Tokyo drug lords, people begin to mysteriously disintegrate. One moment they are there, the next they scream and dissolve into a puddle of goo. After a number of such incidents atomic energy researcher Dr. Maki approaches the police with a fantastic story told to him by two very ill sailors. The seamen are suffering from a rare form of radiation sickness. The two contracted the sickness from a ghost ship they encountered off the shores of Japan. On the wreck the two swear they witnessed three of their fellow crewmen being eaten by a mass of repulsive, puke-like jelly which oozed up walls and occasionally took the bipedal shape of human beings. From the captain's log book discovered aboard the abandoned vessel it seemed that the ship wandered too close to a Hydrogen bomb testing site in the South Pacific. There the unlucky captain and crew encountered "H-Men," creatures once Homo sapiens that mutated into "liquid creatures" now on the prowl for humankind!

The police are skeptical of his claim and insist on sticking to their own troglodyte theories on gang hits being responsible for the apparent murders (gee fellas, even though there are piles of clothes and no bodies?). It isn't until they themselves confront the vomit monsters, during a raid on a gang-controlled night club, that they come face to—uh—face with the H-Men. There a few cops are eaten (in a great gross-out scene we see one man's head being dissolved, goo streaming out of his eyes, nose and mouth). That changes their minds! When the wreckage of the ghost ship is discovered off Tokyo Bay the police regretfully



JAPANESE POSTER ART FOR H-MAN

acknowledge that the monsters are really invading Tokyo. From then on it's a race against time to stop the H-Men from lunching on the citizens of the city!

It's clear that Honda must have loved this project. The film is shot with care, and the acting, while over-indulgent at times, is restrained with little joking or comic relief to spoil any of the suspense. I was disappointed with Masaru Sato's score though. It just didn't fit into the film. Eiji Tsuburaya's effects work, especially in the dissolving of people, and the clean matte work is some of his best. An obvious difference from the hurried, lame look that **BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE** stumbled into two years

later. **THE H-MAN** is definitely a monster movie for people fed up with the Japanese fascination with Godzilla and his buddies.

THE HAUNTED MADAM

Original title: **SHIJIE ZHUANGXIE**
1986, D: Lu Jungu (Tony C. K. Lo)

Unlike most other Hong Kong silly spook flicks with its witless but entertaining action, **THE HAUNTED MADAM** creates unique fantasy sequences mixed with genuine humor and heart-felt direction. Director Lu Jungu (pseudonymed as "Tony C. K. Lo" on my video print) can handle an action sequence as well as a shock-filled possession or a monster segment. He manages to blend the two into a high-brow mutant form of the John Woo action film (like **A BETTER TOMORROW**) and the usual ghost/possession/comedy fare which seem to stream uncontrollably from that island country.

The film's opening credits roll over alternating images of a group of police women Jazzerciseing and that of a hired killer psyching himself up for a hit. After the work-out, four of the women head to their favorite restaurant for dinner. There they witness the killer's line of work: this amazing killing machine blows people away with ease as well as punching completely through the mid-section of his chosen target, a crime boss. After the hit he strolls out of the restaurant, patrons stunned at the sudden hurricane of carnage that exploded all over their dinner tables. The four police women hurry after him, guns drawn. They corner the "superman" in an alley and shoot him, but he mysteriously disappears. Confused, the four consult the local occult master. He predicts their future: one woman will be raped, another will have her head broken, one will commit suicide, and the last will die... all at the hands of one man. To their horror they discover that the destructive force in their immediate future will not be the supernaturally powered killer, but their own boss! YIKES!

Silly hijinks follow where two of the predictions come true: one girl has an object bop her on the head (thanks to their clumsy boss), and another "commits suicide" but survives when she deliberately jumps off a building to confuse a crazy gun man (following orders given by her boss). She survives with bumps and bruises. When all four track down "Mr. Superman" to a deserted shipyard they discover that the man cannot be killed by natural means. Bullets bounce harmlessly off his body until his occult concentration is broken when his fear of fire is discovered. Momentarily distracted by a Bic lighter, he is shot dead by one woman who unfortunately then becomes possessed by his malignant lifeforce.

From there the film escalates into scenes of carnage as the possessed woman spatters a few cops, including two of her friends. One attack on the remaining police woman is foiled when her boss breaks into the room (after being chased by the demon) and apologizes to her insisting that they must make love right away to ward off the monster. They do, and the third prediction comes true in a manner of speaking. The monster is repelled by the sight of the two fornicating ("Shame on you," it screams), and retreats back into the possessed woman's apartment.

Sounds silly? It is, but it works! The final confrontation between good an evil is just as crazy. A great film if you don't mind reading subtitles that make little sense most of the time anyway.

HAUNTED TV STATION

Original title: MENGGUI DIANSHITAI

1987, D: Ju Jueliang

If you love a good ghost story, the cheap, chintzy shot-on-video look, and understand Chinese, you're a rare breed of monster movie lover and you should then thrill to the exploits of the **HAUNTED TV STATION**. Despite the drama's exotic approach to an evil spirit's spooking an office building, and the occasional odd camera angle, this video production lacks one important dynamics: if it had been completed on film stock rather than video tape, **HAUNTED TV STATION** would have been a decent entry into the Asian horror market.

Tina, actress and producer (?) at a Hong Kong TV station, unwittingly releases an evil spirit that was imprisoned in an empty room by the building's janitor. The ghost then rampages throughout the building, causing all sorts of damage, not to mention possessing various people including an actress whom it sends crashing out of windows to her death five stories down (in the film's only really powerful scene). Various people are called in to try to exorcise the demon. A Catholic priest attempts to remove the ghost, but is killed when the spirit causes the ceiling to collapse on top of him. When Tina is attacked at her home along with her boyfriend, things really begin to get serious. It's up to her boyfriend's pal, a Taoist priest, to battle it out with the entity. After a series of exploding props, flying boxes, and magical spells the demon is exorcised. The TV station is safe. Or is it?

HAUNTED TV STATION is well directed, and it's crew (especially whoever played Tina) gives it their all. But the cruddy video look kills any cinematic credibility that could have been associated with it. The effects work suffers from their cheap video presentation, and the editing (while good for this kind of thing) is, at best, choppy. The production is presented in two parts, which convinces me it was originally made for Hong Kong TV. However, if that is so then their TV programmers are less strict than ours as blood and boobs make ample appearances. Still, unless you have the guts to sit through 90 minutes of an all Chinese, shot-on-video, subtitle-less ghost story, then **HAUNTED TV STATION** is not for you.

LEGEND OF THE DINOSAUR AND THE MONSTER BIRD

Original Title: KYÔRYÛ — KAICHÔ NO DENSETSU
Export Title:

LEGEND OF DINOSAURS AND MONSTER BIRDS

TV title: **LEGEND OF THE DINOSAURS**

1977, D: Junji Kurata

Imagine a film with the guts to have a title like **LEGEND OF THE DINOSAUR AND THE MONSTER BIRD** without even attempting to live up to it. Sure, this Toei production generates two monsters by the time the film runs its course, but what occurs between the opening credits and the last fifteen minutes is absolute boredom. An easy comparison could be Amando de Ossorio's **THE SEA SERPENT** (original title: **SERPIENTE DE MAR**, 1985), a film made roughly three years later, and by a Spaniard to boot. As we all know the Spanish film industry is renowned for its giant monster epics, so when De Ossorio pulls off a film with more style and excitement than the masters of the genre who brought the world the Gamera series, I had to wonder! I was crushed to say the least. I had such high hopes when I sat down to watch the film. Visions of titanic battle sequences

between Godzilla hopefuls had me pumped up through the first half of the film. By the time our sea serpent (the **DINOSAUR** in the title) showed its face, I had almost given up on the movie; by the time the pterodactyl swooped into action (the famed **MONSTER BIRD**), I had begun to fall asleep. While I wouldn't call the film a total waste of ninety minutes, it comes very close to that definition.

THE DINOSAUR AND THE MONSTER BIRD opens with a woman hiker tramping through the hills of Mt. Fuji. It isn't until she stumbles onto a hole in the ground, falls through, and



plummets to an ice cavern below that any excitement (or credits for that matter) begins. There in that subterranean womb she discovers a batch of dinosaur eggs that miraculously happen to hatch that very instant. A menacing eye peers at the frightened woman who high-tails it out of there and somehow makes it back to the surface. Reports of titanic earthquakes and discoveries of fossilized dinosaur eggs dominate the news for days after the woman's frightening experience. She is all but forgotten, and her story of newly hatched monsters falls on deaf ears.

Months later at a springtime festival near a small lake at the foot of Mt. Fuji, a fully grown aquatic dinosaur attacks and eats a few people. Reports of the monster intensify as more and more people vanish in pools of blood. But there are accounts of tourists disappearing from the mountain as well. Can the lake monster fly as well as swim? NO! There are two monsters, and they are both snacking on as many humans as they can chase down. Can these ravenous creatures be stopped before they depopulate the entire surrounding villages?

Just when I was about to call the film quits (you never get a clear view of the monsters), two of the main characters are cornered by the Dinosaur in a forest clearing. They are about to be gobbled by the rubbery critter when out of the night sky the Monster Bird strikes! Yes, it seems with nothing better to do, our two monsters must battle it out between themselves in order to see who will dine of the humans. The ensuing struggle triggers (?) another regional earthquake, and the ground opens up and swallows both of the monsters. **THE END**.

Boy, what a thriller that film turned out to be. I had expected a real giant monster bash in the spirit of any decent Godzilla or Gamera film, but I was falsely set up. Where there promised to be chills, there were none. It was nothing but a poorly dubbed (and I mean poorly) talkfest that tried to keep the monster genre

under control with lame reasons for the title creatures' existence. When the monsters *did* show their faces, they were two of the most pathetic suits fabricated for any Japanese monster epic ever ... period (hey, even Megalon's costume from **GODZILLA VS. MEGALON** was more imaginative and real!) A must have for serious monster fans ... but only if you are as masochistic about the genre as I am.

MAGIC OF SPELL

Original title: QUMOTONG

1989, D: Zhao Zhongxing

Have you ever seen a film which has so filled you will itchy-twitchy energy that you had to see it three or four times to get it out of your system? I'm sure monster fans world-wide had that feeling when they sat through **ALIENS** for the first time (I know I was glued to my seat, even when I had to piss halfway into the picture). It's that, "Damn, this is so cool I don't want to blink or I'll miss something!" experience. While a film like **MAGIC OF SPELL** doesn't quite measure up to that weird awareness of paralyzed fascination, it is a fantasy production which holds your attention and leads you through a complicated tale of gawky amplitudes — and all without subtitles! Ninety minutes of Chinese babbling (which I can only catch a few words of) is enough to send anyone not familiar with the tongue nuts. However, the actors and actress in this wild fantasy adventure are able to keep the action on a steady roll and carry each bizarre scene with a certain sense of skill and energy. If it is a sequence where a fanged green-skinned invader is clubbed by a giant peach, or a humanoid ginseng root "child" fascinated by toy windmills, you are catapulted into that weird environment and enjoy being in disbelief. **MAGIC OF SPELL** is different from the US made "kiddie" films where the youngsters act as if they were adults, and there are morals to be told by the end of the production. What nonsense. Forget **WILLOW**, forget **DRAGONSLAYER**, forget most of the Saturday morning kid-vid — find and rent this video.

As with a number of other Hong Kong productions **MAGIC OF SPELL** relies heavily on the concept that magic and the supernatural are an everyday occurrence. Not unlike the more mainstream horror and fantasy productions from Hong Kong, their world is populated by spirits benevolent and bane. This isn't something to be scoffed at, as it is in our Western, material-oriented mentality. Where we as a cultural whole have turned our backs on the spirit world and cultivated our religion into a bastard hybrid of hypocrisy and hyperbole, there is, at the very least, in the Hong Kong populace and surrounding ethnic groups, a true belief that humankind is but an element in the natural and not-so-natural existence; we are surrounded by ghosts, demons, witches and warlocks. If a person has problems with monsters, he or she would then consult their local exorcist for assistance in getting rid of the pesky critters. This reliance on the supernatural to keep one's self healthy is a delightful constant in these films. It's this spiritual assurance and identification which keeps the viewer connected with his or her surroundings — that is, if you first accept what occurs in these films to be the norm. There is black magic and there is white. Evil is not a relative subject, but a definite source of trouble for humans. **MAGIC OF SPELL** features an evil who takes on the form of a powerful, white haired and wild-maned magician which is looking for enough life force to keep himself from degenerating into a crippled tyrant. This evil is countered by the chaste good of our heroine, Suichang, who must keep the embodiment of 1,000-year-old Ginseng (a humanoid root-boy) out of the wizard's clutches. However, all is not that easy!

Our heroine becomes involved in the plight of the humanoid

ginseng-boy when her mother is attacked and killed by two demons. This duo of mythological monsters are sent by the evil wizard to put a pesky Suichang out of commission. Revenge-minded, she and a troop of seedy but able-bodied fighters boldly attack the wizard's castle. However, in the melee that follows the tyrant is able to power himself up, sucking vital life forces from various people and even jewels (via the magical, blood-red waters of his wading pool). The resulting conflict is full of silly and exciting acrobatics and special effects — more than enough to satisfy any ZU-jaded fan out there. True to form, the Evil is vanquished at the cost of most everybody in the film — even the root-boy sacrifices his mystical energy (by jumping into the bloodied mouth of Suichang and settling in her stomach) to assist in destroying the monster. Although the film ends rather ambiguously—as we are left wondering just who did survive and if the evil is actually destroyed as promised (could there have been a sequel in the works?)—there is still that satisfaction that Good has somehow won out, even if it was itself eradicated in the process.

Highlights of the film include: a giant, demon-clobbering peach (yes, the fruit), a bald and hideous, boulder-tossing wind demon and his buddy, an equally ugly cannon-packing creature; the goofy ginseng root-boy trying on some dainty slippers; the ludicrous antics of two scrappy skeletons out for retaliation on one of Suichang's friends; just about any fight scene involving wild special effects, and the piecemeal score which includes tracks taken from what must be the most popular source of bootleg HK soundtracks: the score from **PHANTASM** (1979). Entertaining and completely fun!

THE MANSTER

Alternate Japanese Poster Art Title: **THE SPLIT**
Japanese Title: **SÔTÔ NO SATSUKINKI**

1959, D: Kenneth G. Crane & George Breakstone
Over the years I had read reports on either how good **THE MANSTER** was or how bad. Famous Monster gave it a four page spread in an early issue. Imagine a movie that almost reaches the absurd brilliance of Joseph Green's **THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE** (1959) and combine it with the idiotic charm of Ray Kellogg's **THE KILLER SHREWS** (1959) and you have **THE MANSTER**. The production values weren't bad, neither was the acting or the photography. What hampered the production and made it a minor disappointment in my book, was its lack of guts. There wasn't enough of the monster. The film promised so much more but failed to reach the manic level of "a real good monster movie" to stir my blood. Directors Crane and Breakstone could have elaborated on the horrid aspects of having a man turn into a two-headed, evil-minded creature who relished strangling Buddhist monks with their own prayer beads. **THE MANSTER** was an American-Japanese production that may have benefited more if the entire mess was directed by a Japanese instead of Crane (who wrote the screenplay which was based on his short story "Nightmare"). Instead of a sense of creepy terror which should have emanated from the man-turned-monster, Crane and Breakstone's wooden direction detracted from the overall sleaziness. There were also uneven instances which made no real sense in the plot (loads of American newsmen in a Tokyo police station during a monster-oriented debriefing), and weird racial undertones which made me uneasy (the Asian "evil slut" who wooed our American hero away from his wife is, in the end, destroyed by the very monster she helped create—even though she actually loved the man!). But let those things stop you from seeing the film if you so choose. There are still enough bizarre elements in the film to make it worth keeping. If I was into rating films, **THE MANSTER** would get a 7 out of 10.

THE MUTANT SEPARATES FROM ITS HUMAN HOST IN A CLIMATIC STRUGGLE OF GOOD VERSES EVIL FROM THE MANSTER



Larry Stanford (Peter Dyneley), a world-trotting American journalist, visits the mountain top (actually a volcano top!) laboratory of Dr. Robert Sazuki (Canadian-born Japanese actor Tetsu Nakamura), an amoral scientist attempting to solve the mystery of evolution. The madman had already turned his brother into a murderous ape-man, and experimented on his own wife, transforming her into a swollen, bloated, flesh-twisted idiot he keeps locked up in his lab. Seeing a chance to continue his experimentation on a white man he slips our hero a powerful mickey, knocking the man unconscious. With the American out cold, Sazuki injects his victim with a potent "evolutionary-enzyme" serum, and instructs his assistant Kara (sexy Terri Zimmedi) to follow the man when he leaves the lab.

Later that night Larry suffers his first attack of mutation: his hands get hairy. A murderous lust swells in his breast and he lumbers out into the night and murders a monk (in one of the film's only really powerful scenes). His animal self soon begins to take control of his mind, he gets horned out, and sleeps with Kara. His wife arrives in town only to be shunned by her husband who dumps her for his new found sex-slave. However, the week's end finds him mutating into a two-headed monster which goes on a killing rampage.

The film wraps up with the two-headed monster's return to the lab where he kills our crazy doctor, abducts Kara, and climbs up the volcano to the lip of the hissing crater. There the hairy, ape-like mutant actually tears free from the man. Now independent from its human counterpart, the monster tosses the screaming Kara into the volcano before being gunned down by local law enforcers. Our journalist is back to his normal self, his wife by his side, and the credits roll.

Not a major monster film from the late 50's, but it is one of the weirdest.

THE BEAUTIFUL JAPANESE POSTER ART FOR THE 1959 FILM THE MANSTER

POSSESSED POSSESSED 2

Original titles: **MENGGUI CHULONG & YANGGUI FAKUANG**

1983/84, D: Li Dawei (David Lau)

Being a big fan of possession flicks, I found both of these Hong Kong productions amply filling the bill. Despite the fact that the second movie isn't a direct sequel in any fashion whatsoever, it's safe to say that **POSSESSED** and **POSSESSED 2** are both fine examples of the gritty, classic Chinese ghost/demon/monster human possession productions I find so absorbing. It's easy to sit through these films at one evaluation and chalk them up as



exploitative junk. Both of Li Dawei's (better known under his pseudonyms "David Lau" or "David Lai") end products have all the trappings that are essential for your black magic yarn: the unexpected or accidental release of the ghost (usually vengeful for some reason), the slaughter of close relatives of the central character by the irate spirit, the failed attempt at exorcising the critter by way of an inexperienced exorcist, and the final unorthodox manner in which the hero vanquishes the undead. However, when you compare Li's masterful chaos to other similar projects, it's easy to see who is the better filmmaker. Maybe it isn't just his direction, but the adequate production values which garnish both films. Li's work may look a little junky by the big-budgeted standards that we Americans associate with the majority of Hollywood-oriented horror (at least the ones released legitimately to the theatres first) and to some of the Euro-productions like Michele Soavi's **THE SECT** or Lucio Fulci's **THE BEYOND** (one beautiful shock-filled extravaganza, and a film I think everyone should see), nevertheless when compared to other contemporary Hong Kong efforts (and to, sadly enough, recent US production which, despite having a "polished" look, are terrible and lack any atmosphere or thrill), **POSSESSED** and **POSSESSED 2** shine.

POSSESSED begins as we are introduced to two policemen, Kung Xiaoming and his partner Xiao Yaolung, emerging from a party. Kung is obviously drunk, simultaneously hanging and dribbling onto his buddy who is desperately trying to get the both of them to their squad car. A pick-pocket attempts to rob Kung, who captures him and proceeds to puke on the suspect. The criminal escapes and the two inebriated cops set off on a high speed chase through the dark streets of Hong Kong. They lose the perpetrator but end up at a creepy-looking mansion where both men believe they see another crime in the making. A middle-aged man is chasing his wife with a hatchet. Xiao clubs the man and hand-cuffs him to a pole in the house, and while Kung covers the suspect with his gun, Xiao searches the abode for the woman. Then something odd happens. It seems that the suspect's arm begins to grow and Kung is frightened (and drunk) enough to empty his entire gun into the man. Xiao returns with the frightened woman to find that his partner just blew away her husband — she breaks down, cursing both men and weeping over the bloodied corpse. The two cops are reprimanded for acting rashly (no joke!).

Stunned by the killing, Kung gets religious and proceeds to place Taoist charms all over the place: in the squad car, in his house, in the office, etc. Strange things happen and it soon becomes clear that by killing the old man, evil forces are beginning to build. Hsiao's Korean girlfriend, San, unwittingly disturbs a paper charm in their apartment and releases demonic energy. The vile entity is soon discovered to be that of an accomplice of Hsiao's father, a former police officer now in an asylum, who made a bargain with three crooks. He was to make sure they would get off with minor charges for stealing a large sum of money, but instead all three mysteriously died in custody, including the ring-leader who swore revenge. A fortune teller informs Xiao that he hasn't long to live. Chaos erupts as Kung becomes possessed by a demon when a paper charm he was wearing becomes dislodged. Driving back from a simple White magic examination of Hsiao's father (to find out more about the demon), Kung attacks his partner. The resulting auto accident leaves Xiao injured and his father and Kung dead. Terror mounts as the surviving cop discovers his sister impaled on a ceiling fan and dribbling green goo.

Desperate to save himself from eternal damnation and torment by the ghost, our "hero" enlists the aid of Master Chen and his sister who set up an elaborate exorcism. During this titanic battle of Good versus Evil, Chen becomes possessed and his eyes burst from their sockets. Chen's sister attempts to continue the exorcism and is attacked by the demon as well. Her body swells and she is lacerated by the monster; a copious amount of green slime pours out of her wounds. Xiao finds himself alone against the spirit. Just when all seems lost, the Great Buddha comes to the mortal's rescue and destroys the demon. Covered with slime, blood, and sweat, Xiao stumbles out of his room vindicated but alone in the world.

POSSESSED 2 has nothing to do with the sad tale of Kung and Xiao, but that didn't stop director Li Dawei from capitalizing on his first film. Taking the general idea of a wicked spirit and placing a young married couple and their child in the midst of possession terror, Li was able to one-up himself with the resulting spooky chaos. Despite this film's lean towards comedy, he was still able to pull off frightening and often bizarre images with expertise.

If you thought that the plot to the first film was convoluted (and I gave you just the basics!), then I'll just gloss over the story of **POSSESSED 2** and give you the highlights of its best moments. The film opens with a group of rotting, pasty-faced US sailors gobbling down "dog soup" and barfing it back up (Li has a fondness for vomit). In the next room spectral images of a woman chained to a pole and being whipped by an equally ghostly little boy chill the soul. His ghost mother slinks into the room and encourages the boy to beat the woman harder. The click of a door's lock being opened causes all the spooks to vanish into a hole in the wall and then the hole is plugged. Moments later a young couple and their child are escorted into the apartment by a real estate salesman. Mr. Xiao and his family are sold on the charming little home, even though the window faces a cemetery. A week later the family is settled in and despite the husband two-timing on his wife with Michelle, a sexier woman, things would seem to be happy.

However... the evil in the apartment begins to make itself known!

The woman discovers that she is pregnant and tells her husband. Elated the man rushes out and cheats on her again. The next day, miserable and bored, the wife ascends the stairs to her apartment but runs into the ghostly image of a woman who frightens her so much she falls down the stairs and suffers a miscarriage. Being the understanding husband he is, Mr. Xiao screams at his wife in her hospital bed, accusing her of trying to ruin his life by killing his unborn son. A real loving man; a character we can sympathize with, right? Once the woman gets home from her stay in the hospital, she discovers that her TV set

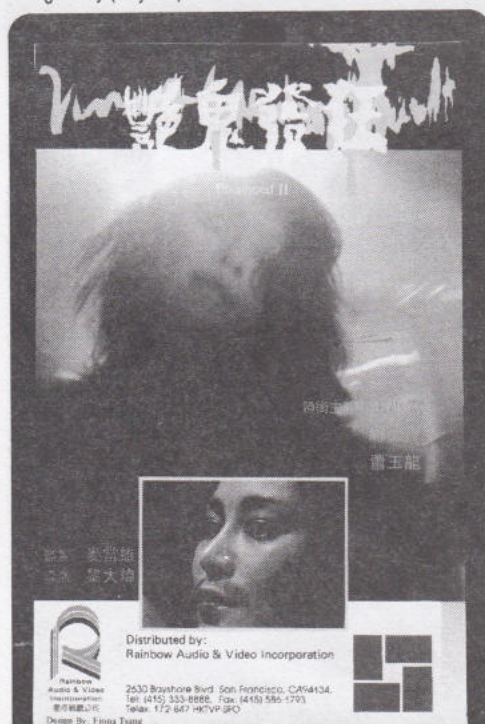
is possessed by the ghost, her child becomes a little hellion and beats up the neighbors, and any attempt to exorcise the apartment ends in failure. The husband is beside himself as to why his wife is acting so weird, so he spends most of the time away from her... leaving more time for the ghost to totally possess his wife!

While Mr. Xiao is away cheating on his wife with Michelle, Mrs. Xiao and her little girl become a tag-team of possession. First the youngster is taken over by the evil and does some mischief, then her mother is possessed and wanders out of the house to hunt for MEN. Dressed in a slinky dress she lures a portly butcher into a refrigerated meat truck. Once inside, she strips and entices the fat man to do the same. Expecting some kinky sex, the man sheds his garments and stands amongst the hanging halves of hogs waiting for the woman to make her move. She does, turning into a furry werewolfette as they copulate. The two fumbling and tumbling coincide with her husband screwing his sweetheart. Mrs. Xiao murders the man by impaling his oversized body on a meat hook; simultaneously, her husband loses his erection and disappoints Michelle.

The next night Mrs. Xiao meets up with a former "friend" of the ghost in the local USN bar (where the ghost used to hang out - in her former corporeal existence - as a highly paid whore). She causes the woman's arm to puff up, in a sickening **SCANNERS**-like manner. She screams and flees the establishment (later to die a horrible death). The possessed woman tempts a Black man in the bar by wiggling to the tune "The Love is On." He offers her cash for a night of hot sex. They wander out into the darkness and wind up at the local zoo where he proceeds to amaze her with his prowess. In a ridiculous scene the man rips open his flashy shirt to expose his hairy chest to the woman. She oohs and ahhs as he rubs it and proclaims, "Hey, look at this," as he pulls off one of his shoes and takes out his cigarette lighter. "I'm a real African warrior," he announces as he sets the lighter to high and sticks it under his naked foot. The flame licks the bare flesh. "Look at that," he grins proudly, thumping his chest, "no pain." She strips. He strips. They proceed to couple when he notices a mustache on the woman. "Hey, kinky," he says, then screams as the woman's breasts begin to wiggle! Hair streams out from all over her body. Her nails split and claws emerge. Fangs emerge from her gums. His screams don't last long.

Meanwhile, our possessed starlet threatens Michelle by tearing off her face and throwing the flesh at the trembling woman. This grisly act sends her husband's terrified ex-girlfriend screaming into the night. It's obvious to her husband that his wife is fully possessed by the spirit of some evil demon. While in a bar trying to figure things out, an American Hare Krishna approaches him. The white garbed, pig-tailed Richard Johnson lookalike leads the confused man back to the Krishna temple. There he explains that the ghost terrorizing Mr. Xiao is that of a woman named Lucy, a whore who got knocked-up by an American soldier named Tim Burton during the Korean war. He left her to have the child, but later died of a mysterious ailment inflicted by the bitter prostitute. Later, despondent and depressed, she jumped from her apartment window and was killed when she landed in a pen full of hungry dogs. She leapt from the window of the very same apartment that Mr. Xiao and his family now occupy! Lucy is going to kill Mr. Xiao because he is her son, and she hates him! She'll polish off his wife and daughter in the process! There is a way of stopping the possession, although it involves a great deal of very special preparation...

I won't give away the ending, but I can safely say that it is one of the wildest exorcisms you'll likely see from any studio - Hong Kong or otherwise! It contains high-tech Hare Krishna techniques, the exhumation of Lucy's corpse, lots of blood, and a climax that will leave you slack-jawed. Utter craziness is probably the best way of explaining it all. A must see for any possession film fan.



VIDEO BOX ART FROM **POSSESSED 2**

WHO IS THE GHOST IN THE SLEEPY HOLLOW?

Original title: **PIAPIOAO FENG**

1981?, D: Xu Wenxian (Hsu Wen-hsieh)

Here's a film I have watched at least three times, and I have yet to figure out what the hell really happened in it. Was there a ghost involved? I'm sure of that, but what was its relationship to the people in the film? The box art promised some really interesting ghostly encounters as we see a man confronting a hideously disfigured female ghost, arms out-stretched toward the frightened man, and the words **WHO IS THE GHOST IN THE SLEEPY HOLLOW?** scrawled across them both. "Cool!" I said and rented the video, only to find out that the film wasn't subtitled, and my very limited knowledge of Chinese (Cantonese or Mandarin) didn't help either. But it is about a ghost, I'm sure of that. In fact there are scenes where more than one appear. From the looks of the clothing, cars and haircuts of everyone in the film it's probably a late 70's or early 80's film. I'll do my best to give you an idea of just what the film is about.

You know that there's at least a ghost in the beginning of the film because a young man picks up a hitchhiker who speaks with a hollow, echoing voice—a sure-fire sign in Chinese films that the person you have encountered is an apparition. The young man offers the phantasm a ride on his motorcycle only to be startled when his passenger vanishes as they pass a graveyard. Terrified, the young man crashes only to have a run-in with two monster spirits. It's all too much for him and he faints.

Cut to a household where a panicky family is plastering up various paper spells to ward off ghosts. Apparently the young woman of the domicile is being spooked by the image of dead girl. Her boyfriend (?) is behind the hauntings as he is able to call up various spirits to torment the young lady. His aim: to force her into marrying him.

More and more ghosts appear and it's up to our young motorcyclist and his pals to stop the warlock from forcing the marriage. Fake specters encounter real specters, but in the end it's the warlock who is scared to death.

WHO IS THE GHOST IN SLEEPY HOLLOW? is better than it sounds. Despite the fact that there are terribly boring parts throughout the film with the main characters chattering away for ten minutes or more, there were always enough mystical elements present to keep me amused. Not a movie to be high on your list of wants, but one you may want to rent if you find it. If you happen across a subtitled copy, let me know as I am dying to find out what the real story is about!

CONQUEST

Alternate titles: **MACE IL FUORILEGGE LA CONQUISTA DE LA TIERRA PERDIDA EL BARBARO**

1983, D: Lucio Fulci

My man Fulci. While a good deal of his work seems junk to those unfamiliar with this Italian director, the movies I have been lucky enough to see have convinced me that he is a filmmaker who suffers from a predominating fascination with fantasy—bloody fantasy at that! True, there are probably a good twenty of films of his I haven't had the pleasure of viewing (comedies, dramas,

and a western), but if you examine **GATES OF HELL**, **HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY** (a personal favorite of mine), **ZOMBIE**, **CAT IN THE BRAIN**, and **THE PSYCHIC** (terribly dull, but with some neat scenes) there is a fantastic, unreal undercurrent just itching to surface. Zombies are his forte, but if the man stuck to straight fantasy (as he did with **CONQUEST**) and took it seriously, then he could have carved himself a nice niche in that elusive genre. But fantasy has never been a real popular genre for any length of time, and Fulci no doubt felt he had more of an audience with the horror fans. Too bad, because he showed promise.

CONQUEST is a murky and crude fantasy film. Probably the best I have seen in a long time. That isn't to say that it is technically a great production, but Fulci smothers us in enough atmosphere and lore to keep his meager budget cleverly disguised. A director can save loads of money if the tale is about two wandering warriors in a country sparsely populated by primitive cavepeople. No need to rent out horses, medieval armor, thousands of extras or employing big name American stars... all you need are a few muscle-bound idiots and beautiful women. That's a Fulci fantasy.

Illiate, a young man sent into the bad parts of the world by his father to right wrongs, carries a weapon not seen by the people of distant lands: a bow and arrow. While marauding gangs of beastmen attack him with clubs, claws, and fangs, he can easily—and from a distance—dispatch them, sending a streaking arrow into their vital parts. It's this "magical" weapon and continual nightmares that frighten the evil matriarch of the land. Queen Oprum commands an army of monsters and holds the people of her meager kingdom in a grip of fear. However, she will not rest until the "Wanderer" in her visions is dead and she can eat his brains (Oprum delights in having the heads of her subjects brought to her so she can crack open their bloody skulls and chow down on the funky grey matter inside). Luckily for Illiate, he encounters the brutal, man-hating, and animal-loving barbarian Maken. After a fierce battle between the duet and a hoard of beastmen, Maken befriends the young man just so he can have access to the magical bow. Together they transverse the countryside to battle evil.

After a good number of Oprum's werewolf henchmen are eradicated by the dynamic duo, the evil queen calls upon the demon Zorra to assist her in killing the Wanderer. She pledges her body and soul to the monster and in return he must summon all the creatures from the Valley of Evil to smote our boys. Despite an onslaught of various monsters and creepy-crawlies, and the death of Illiate, Oprum's vision does come true as Maken is able to conjure up the hidden magical powers of the bow. Maken sends death-dealing bolts of energy into the bodies of the queen's pathetic monster army, and is able to pick her off as well.

This Italian/Spanish/Mexican production rates high on my list of recommended fantasy films. Fulci plunges the viewer into a cloudy, anti-logical realm somewhere in a time that never existed. The skies are purple, then orange. The land

is shrouded in eternal mist. Werewolves snort cocaine. A naked, golden-masked queen makes love to snakes and conjures up demons. Zombies rise out of quagmires to attack the living (gee, it wouldn't be a Fulci flick if there weren't any zombies). A demon from the depths of Hell whips up monsters and evil winds. This is pure, pure fantasy.

As to be expected, Lucio doses actors with buckets of grue in his films. Each time a person is barely scratched blood sprays forth. When Illiate is infected with poisonous quills his skin puffs up and distended boils seep blue gook. Heads are broken and the brains are extracted. Eyes are gouged and teeth are smashed. His use of opticals and fog machines makes the world of the Evil Oprum and the Wanderer a place thick with atmosphere. It's so dense at times, in fact, that it obscures the action that takes place within it! Former leader of the Italian rock group Goblin, Claudio Simonetti provides the quasi-Fabio Frizzi **ZOMBIE** score which beeps and thrums like any of his other synth-oriented soundtracks (such as **BODY COUNT**, among others). An amazing production.

LEGEND OF THE EIGHT SAMURAI

Original title: **SATOMI HAKKENDEN**

1983, D: Kinji Fukasaku

Anyone familiar with Fukasaku's **SAMURAI REINCARNATION** (**MAKAI TENSHO**, 1981) will be prepared for this amazing Japanese fantasy flick. Fukasaku unleashed the potent power of high-budget when he heaved giant killer centipedes, exploding swords, destructive ghosts, and gallons of blood into a convoluted plot about family vengeance and stoic friendship. If you get a chance to see it you'll be blown away. The film is worth all of its two hour plus running time.

The tale is a complex one, not unlike most Japanese myth and fantasy films in general. Princess Shizu is the sole survivor of the Satomi family. The evil witch Tamazusa of the Hikita clan has bewitched the family, and each member comes to an unfortunate end. It's all because of a famous sea battle where the Hikita clan was all but massacred (for good reasons, though), and the witch Tamazusa swore a ghostly retribution. Only eight magical stones can save Princess Shizu and her family. A stone will appear when one of the eight samurai of legend proves that he or she is worthy enough to protect the Princess.



A ll'inizio della storia dell'uomo, il crudele Ocron domina sul mondo, con sororsi di ogni genere. È uno strano essere, con il volto coperto da una maschera e col corpo di donna.
A lato, Andrea Occhipinti (30).
Di L. Fulci,
avv., It., 1983; dur.: 1 h e 24'.

FILM

THE ITALIAN TV GUIDE AD FOR FULCI'S **CONQUEST**.

The film follows the quest of the Princess and her retainers to gather together the eight samurai. Once banded they will defeat the evil Tamazusa and the blood demon/god she worships. But numerous horrors stand between our heroes and their destiny. One is a giant centipede which explodes out of an old woman's face to attack our unsuspecting gang of do-gooders. Then there horrors such as an eighteen-foot-long snake, a gang of young girls who emit deadly vapors from their mouths, ghosts and minor demons. As in most products of this type, once in the abode of the evil clan our samurai do their stuff and die heroically one by one.

Beautiful production values, quick editing, cool monsters, and great battle sequences make you forget that this film is 133 minutes long. Director Fukasaku almost outdoes himself, although his **SAMURAI REINCARNATION** (1980) is a more powerful film visually. Very few international filmmakers can match the fury and feel of a good Japanese fantasy film.

HERCULES PRISONER OF EVIL

Original title:

URSUS, IL TERRORE DEI KIRGHISI

1964, Ds: Anthony Dawson (aka Antonio Margheriti) & Ruggero Deodato

Being a fan of the Peplum Epics, you have to learn to expect disbelief. Can a man toss a horse cart as if it were a bundle of sticks? Can a man vanquish a three-headed monster dog? Can a man uproot a tree and bash down the reinforced gates of a city wall? For the most part I would have to hazard to say no ... but then that would only be in correlation to the real world. Ah, for the days of lore, when Maciste, Hercules, and Ercole stood their respective grounds and fought for the purest of Goods against the purest of Evils. That was an age when monsters roamed the Earth, maidens screamed themselves hoarse, and musclemen crushed wizards under stone monoliths. It was a time of wonder, a time of marvels, and a time that, sadly, never was. Of those existences, the artificial wonderland of fabulous creations, director Antonio Margheriti humbly fashioned a winner when he made **HERCULES, PRISONER OF EVIL**.

Hercules makes a beardless appearance and sports a leather jerkin in this wild musclem adventure in which he must destroy a monster and keep two clans from conflict. For those of you used to the chariot-hopping, dragon-smiting, gladiator-punching antics of other "Hercules" adventures, this offers none of those clichés. Instead Hercules (originally Ursus, like Maciste, a mythical Italian musclem popular in many films — Hercules rarely appeared in any of them, and was adopted by US distributors to keep their dumb audiences from being confused) is running around in a barbaric land peopled by savage tribes which dwell in either beat-up castles or hide-covered tents. Both camps are at the edge of warfare and it's up to Hercules and his brother Eilo to kill a monster which is antagonizing both sides. The rampaging, hairy, muscle-bound, ape-faced, black-caped creature appears out of nowhere and slaughters people. These senseless acts of barbarism cause tension between the bickering clans. Prince Zarras plans on using these incidents as proof that Hercules isn't a fit leader of his tribe and insists that the invasion of Herc's people is his only choice of action. As tensions rise, the monster keeps on a steady roll of pounding peasants and even wounds Hercules. But what is this creature? And what does the beautiful Princess Amiko and her love affair with our muscle-headed hero have to do with it all?

As the plot thickens, the film reaches its exciting climax and we are horrified by the realization that both Hercules and his brother were in fact the very monster they were vainly hunting down through the rocky countryside. Princess Amiko is, in reality, a witch who

routinely slips a powerful mickey into a mug of her favorite wine. With a serene smile, she then serves it up to her boyfriend, Hercules. Even though she loves the dolt, the potent magical liquor she offers him turns Herc into a mindless monster. She then takes control of the creature and sends it out into the countryside on a frenzy. If Amiko can antagonize Prince Zarras into attacking Herc's people, then her man will surely destroy Zarras. With her man in power she will rule, and in turn keep Herc under her thumb via various magical potions. Ah, the sweet taste of power!

In the meantime, this Jekyll and Hyde tale has the witch turning not just Herc into the monster, but his brother and even a lowly soldier. Of course, everything backfires in the last twenty minutes and it is discovered that Hercules' blond slave girl is actually the real Princess Amiko. The evil witch is snubbed by Herc (who questions his love for the witch as she is now just a comely whore and could never share his throne—what a jerk!), but who she then turns her spiteful lover into the monster again. Spitting venom she sends the beast out to kill Cathia, the salvage-girl-cum-princess. In the end, love conquers all and the witch dies, Herc returns to normal just in time to save his true love, and the evil Prince Zarras kicks the bucket. The sun sets and the balance of Good and Evil is restored to its proper position in the cosmos.

Director Margheriti, the man responsible for **THE VIRGIN OF NUREMBURG** (1963) and **WILD, WILD PLANET** (1965), cooked up a decent entry in the Peplum cycle. Despite some of the film's oddities (some of the interior shots at Prince Zarras' royal abode must have either been on a sound stage or in an actual castle where it was near freezing — as you could actually see the breath of various actors as they spoke) and the lack of gore usually associated with Margheriti, **HERCULES, PRISONER OF EVIL** is actually one of the more entertaining musclem epics I've seen in ages. It was disorienting seeing Reg Park without a beard, and the lack of traditional peplum motifs had me scratching my head. Some of the film's jumpiness could be due to the fact that Margheriti abandoned the project in mid-production and the movie was completed by Ruggero Deodato (famed director of **ULTIMO MONDO CANNIBALE**/THE LAST SURVIVOR and **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST**). Nevertheless, as this sort of film go, it's surprisingly cohesive and well acted. Mario Bava's **HERCULES IN THE HAUNTED WORLD** it's not, but the team of Margheriti & Deodato together produced a film which was both pleasing to look at and fun to sit through.

TONIGHT I'LL INCARNATE INTO YOUR CORPSE

Original Title:

ESTA NOITE ENCARNAREI NO TEU CADÁVER

1966, José Mojica Marins

José Mojica Marins' **TONIGHT I'LL INCARNATE INTO YOUR CORPSE** had plagued my mind for years. After seeing a few pics from the film in oddball issues of **FAMOUS MONSTERS**, and then reading about it and director José Mojica Marins in Phil Hardy's **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR FILMS**, issue #5 of **PSYCHOTRONIC**, and Horacio Higuichi's detailed account in **MONSTER** #55/56, I was desperate to see it. Heartfelt recognition (and my first born) goes to Mike Vraney, the man responsible for bringing six of Marins' delightfully twisted films to the Northern hemisphere for all of horrordom to enjoy. Vraney acquired the rights to distribute the Brazilian filmmaker's movies and his **SOMETHING WEIRD VIDEO** now has them available for purchase. Consider then my review. I am no scholar when it comes to Marins' films. This review is then a gut reaction to a movie which I and many have, until now, only dreamed of seeing. Thanks Mike!

Scribbling, jumping opening credits writhe and twist over scenes from Marins' previous film **A MEIA-NOITE LEVAREI SUA ALMA**. Our antagonist Zé do Caixão ("Coffin Joe" played by Marins himself), a notoriously nasty and mean-spirited undertaker with a jet-black beard and long insidious fingernails, confronts maggot-ridden creatures from beyond the grave. He is grabbed and mutilated, his face resembling hamburger and blood streaming from his eyes. As the credits continue, we see a wounded Zé on trial for his crimes, a cloth bandage around his head covering his damaged eyes. After a stint in the hospital a healed Zé is released, whereupon he dons his traditional top hat and black cape and returns to his village. On the way there he saves a small boy from being crushed under the wheels of a reckless motorcyclist. Subsequently comforting the boy and verbally reprimanding the cyclist, Zé takes up residence in his old mansion. Despite his heroic action, Zé proceeds to take up where he left off: creating mischief and chaos in his home town.

Feeling lost and without purpose, Zé decides he must find the perfect woman and father a child. Of course our man can't go about this in any normal fashion. This snarling undertaker is no Brazilian crooner with a shiny guitar. Marins has this madman kidnap several women and subject them to various tortures. The woman who can stand Zé's delight in tormenting his harem with spiders, snakes, disfigurement with acid and so forth will be the one to share his marital bed. Unfortunately no one lives up to his lofty expectations and, sadly, all the women die.

However, all is not lost for the ("ahem") man with a vision, as he spies a delicious maiden who fears him not. She doesn't flinch from Zé, even when he has her boyfriend's head crushed under a huge rock (a pretty intense scene for 1966!); under threat of having her throat slashed by the razor-packing madman. They fall in love. They are wed. After a few nights of marital bliss the real visual horror of the film kicks in and Zé is taken from his bed by a black zombie and dragged into Hell itself! There he is witness to the creatures of Hell pounding iron nails into the foreheads of the damned, bodies frozen in the ice walls and dangling from the ceiling of Hades, body parts writhing about the floor, and a wicked Devil which resembles Zé himself. Satan delights in subjugating the mortal to sights of torture which even Zé cannot bare to watch. Then when he is set upon by the spectral figures of the very women he killed he cries in terror ... and awakens from his dream. Is he a changed man? A madman purged of all his notions of evil-doing? Naw!

The rest of this wild roller-coaster has Zé do Caixão battling it out with various members of the townspeople, those men whose wives and girlfriends fell victim to the monster's depraved vanity. After splitting one man's head with a hatchet and sending the rest of them into quicksand-ridden swamps, Zé returns home victorious. Meanwhile, his wife, now discovering that she is pregnant, takes a drug which causes her to collapse in painful spasms. She dies the moment our "hero" enters his mansion, his life in turmoil and his plans of fathering Coffin Joe, Jr. destroyed. A depressed Zé wanders out into the night and stumbles into the quagmire which claimed the lives of many of his victims.

Technically not a monster film, except in Zé's zombie-ridden nightmare venture into Hell and his acid-scarred hunchback assistant, Marins' **ESTA NOITE ENCARNAREI NO TEU CADÁVER** sports enough other horrors to keep any monster fan delighted. Yes, the film is in Portuguese, but when has that stopped any serious horror film buff from enjoying their favorite pastime. **ESTA NOITE...** ranks as one of the most extreme examples of quality filmmaking on a meager budget. Despite Hollywood's attempts at creating sheer terror via big-budgeted slaughter-feasts and bloated creature features, José Mojica Marins was able to fashion his own personal image of Hell and populate it with one of the screen's most notorious bogeymen, Zé do Caixão, and all on limited funds. Try as they might to duplicate Marins' inspired mania, few directors have matched his ferocity of imagery and imagination. Remember this was 1966, a time when nudity and gore was not that popular, let alone

possible. It's a wonder why some enterprising importer didn't pick this up (along with other Marins films) up and dub them for a hungry US audience. Whatever their reasons for not doing so, the films are at long last now available.

GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH

Original Title: GOJIRA TAI KING-GIDORA

1991, D: Kazuki Ohmori

GODZILLA VERSUS KING GHIDORAH is the third installment in Toho's new Godzilla series, the previous editions being **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** (1989) and **GODZILLA 1985**. Despite the fact an old, Pre-1985 enemy is back, the entire history of Godzilla and his current presence on our planet is radically different. Gone forever is the "nice" monster that gave up leveling various Japanese cities and in turn began assisting mankind against numerous flagitious elements. In productions from the late 60's to the early 70's, it seemed that our hero had totally forgiven mankind for all our previous attempts at eliminating him. Instead, Godzilla — with help from whatever "good" monster was around at the time — tangled with a giant shrimp and a nuclear-weapon-packing bunch of baddies (**GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER**), humankind's pollution incarnate (**GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER**), intergalactic apemen (**GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA**) or oversized cockroaches (**GODZILLA ON MONSTER ISLAND**) and so forth to help us out of a tight squeeze. The monster could have turned his back on our bedraggled and alien-swamped world and let us rot. Nevertheless, true to his post-**MONSTER X** lobotomy Godzilla stomped whatever monsters threatened our way of life and sent them into oblivion. Now, with this new series, Godzilla isn't the mamby-pamby critter we all grew to love. Instead the new Godzilla sports a mean disposition, and he doesn't give a damn about the measly mammals collectively known as Homo Sapiens. Despite what may have been said about this brute in the past, Godzilla has never been so nasty since his first film in 1954. Thank God!

As a film, **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** is pretty close to being the ultimate giant monster motion picture for the nineties. While **BIOLLANTE** was a more original production as a whole — its poetic beauty and soul aside —, it lacked the *nostalgic punch* that was delivered when Ghidorah was reintroduced into the 90's. When we last saw this three-headed creature (at least Stateside — omitting the cameo in Tim Burton's **PEEWEE'S BIG ADVENTURE**) it was dragged out of intergalactic mothballs and utilized by vicious aliens as a last ditch effort to thwart Big G. Of course it failed, and because of the lame-o way the monster was used in the 1971 film, **GODZILLA ON MONSTER ISLAND** was one of the last truly painful Godzilla movies on record (of course, nothing can match the ineptitude of **GODZILLA VS. MEGALON** shot three years later — although short on style, it did pack some interesting punches during the opening segments). As distressing as it may be, Toho's choice in which monster was to the return was a good one. Ghidorah has always been a favorite of mine, and I still kick myself in the head for not picking up the model kit for this critter back in the early 70's. Setting Big G against this venerable adversary, along a dash of techno-silliness with the appearance of a bilingual android, really wacky time-travel bits, and great special effects does all add up to one hell of a picture. If you ignore the usual nonsensical anomalies which are always present in a Godzilla

flick (however, there were less in **BIOLLANTE**), you're sure to love **KING GHIDORAH**.

The production on the whole is excellent... although it may be too good, and too sterile for its own sake. What I mean by that remark, is that the film tried too hard to be something that it is not: a techno-thriller on par with **TERMINATOR 2** or **TOTAL RECALL**. The effects are amazing, and the final battle between Godzilla and MechaGhidorah is astonishing. Picture a huge, muscular Godzilla who takes no quarter when it comes to leveling cities and at the same time tangling with his opponent. But what's all this with the silly android and a cheesy attempts at serious time travel plot? That gripe aside, the reemergence of MechaGhidorah is as pleasingly startling as the all-flesh Ghidorah was in its initial explosive appearance in **MONSTER X**. Overlook these techno-sillies and wade deep in the waters of Japanese surrealism as the battling behemoths attempt to annihilate each

other for territorial domination.

The biggest surprise is the return of Akira Ifukube, and his reprise of many of his giant monster themes for this production. It doesn't consist of any of those canned Godzilla scores which resurfaced in just about every post-**DESTROY ALL MONSTERS** production. Ifukube re-orchestrated and re-scored the old battle airs and even the mournful "death of Godzilla" theme which, when it was played at the end of the 1954 flick, had me in tears as a child. This was the proverbial icing on the cake for me.

If **GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA** is the next installment (to be released in 1993 according to one report), and there seems to be a reemergence in monster movie nostalgia in Japan, then it's only time before more and more of these productions pop up. According to one source there is a national script competition for a new Majin film. If this is true, then maybe Gamera will come out of mothballs as well. Then who knows where all this will end?



RIGHT: JAPANESE POSTER ART FOR
**GODZILLA VS.
KING GHIDORAH**

GUTS OF A VIRGIN

Original Title: **SHOJO NO HARAWATA**

1985, D: Gaira (aka Kazuo Komizu)

A Japanese Sex and Splatter Monsterthon dissected by Jeff Segal

The gory enthusiasms of the Japanese film world favor with Stateside fans. Nipponese manufactured laserdiscs and videotapes are prized since they spill difficult-to-locate productions into the underground movie market. European, USA and Asian obscurities turn up on Japanese entertainmentware, often subtitled in Nipponese with English dialogue. Many of these versions are uncut in terms of violence, containing splatter excised from circulating Western hemisphere prints.

Their own films rarely shirk away from violence. Gore in traditional Japanese cinema apparently reached its apex with the Babycart series, consisting of a half dozen feature length movies and episodes of a less explicit television series. The most famous Babycart epic was the domestically released mutant, **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** (1972/81). These samurai films discarded much of the grim social context of their source, Koike and Kojima's *Lonewolf* and *Cub* comic book saga. Instead, each movie offered surrealistically photographed ultra-violence and Rambo-sized body counts. Countless human beings were sliced wetly apart, heads were cantalouped in twain, eyeballs were gouged out, and limbs were sundered via surgically sharp sword blows. In almost every murder, ketchup colored blood hosed from the wounds. The overall body in pieces effect of the Babycart films were finally replicated years later by energetic efforts such as **DAWN OF THE DEAD** (1979), **THE EVIL DEAD** (1982/83), Paul Verhoeven's **ROBOCOP** (1987) and **TOTAL RECALL** (1990), and the Chinese bloodbaths of director John Woo.

However, the Japanese had already overwhelmed the digestible grue of their traditional action and horror movies with another breed of cinema. In issue one of **DEEP RED ALERT** (Fall, 1991), comic book artist/author/horror connoisseur Steve Bissette documented the rise of "pinku eigas" throughout Japan during the 1960's. These "pink films" mated sex and sadism into a disturbing confection. Ahead of their time, the pink eigas spanned numerous genres; examples can be found in exploitation, fright flicks, and serious dramas. Nagisa Oshima's **IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES** (1976, available through Fox Lorber Video dubbed or English subtitled) is a controversial story set in 1930's Japan where a lusty businessman's mistress slays and castrates the grateful guy after their affair descends into X-rated kinkiness. Along with earlier pink eigas, this beautifully lensed film dwelled on sensuality, death and disfigurement with such assurance that comparable Western world titles (for instance, the splatter work of director H. G. Lewis) comes off as crude and harmless fluff.

During the past decade, the pink eigas graduated into industrial strength horror films. **GUINEA PIG** was a completely shot on video atrocity released a few years ago. It biographed the ritual dismemberment of a girl by a modern day loon in samurai garb. The featurette's snuff film style special effects got it banned in Japan for supposedly prompting copycat murders. Ironically, this short, also known as **FLOWER OF FLESH AND BLOOD**, is but one episode in a whole series of **GUINEA PIG** videos. Several other shorts are almost as strong. Regardless of controversy, the Japanese coupled this form of explicit violence with deviant sex in numerous state of the art animated production. Nippon cartoons span the rating system from "G" level fare

to hard-core nightmares about supernatural torso bursting rapists and city leveling battles. Originally known as **SHOJO NO HARAWATA**, **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** is the live action counterpart to these animated horrors. Shot on film, director Gaira's (a pseudonym for Kazuo Komizu, a long-time associate of legendary exploitation director Koji Wakamatsu, who specialized in S&M stuff like **WALL OF FLESH**) maggoty masterpiece is available without English subtitles on a letterboxed Japanese laserdisc. Clocking in at approximately an hour in length, **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** packages enough repellent sights to offend even fans of cannibal movies and period piece torture flicks. One need not be fluent in the language to comprehend much of the story.

Wearing tinted glasses that he will keep on throughout **GUTS OF A VIRGIN**, a brutish criminal slurps down a dinner of noodles prior to rendezvousing with friends. This unsavory group, consisting of a tattooed stud and two grunting yahoos, have cornered a young Japanese girl in a warehouse. After fondling her, Eyeglasses permits his pals to vicious gang rape the horrified teenager; the ordeal which follows drags on for a short eternity and compares to similar crimes in **I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE** (1978). Finally, the unmotivated Eyeglasses squirts a weird narcotic into the battered girl's arm. The chemical pulsates her flesh, causing the victim to thrash around. She is permitted to stagger away from the area. Even as the drug continues to work its dark magic by veining the teenager's bare feet with purplish swellings, the girl encounters a woman on duty (a young physician? a nurse?). To this individual's shock, the girl leaps off the building rooftop, tumbling through the night's air until pulping against the lot far below with a sickening thump. Her guts splash across the ground for yards in all directions.

Meanwhile, Eyeglasses is sitting motionless on a bed while his alluring mistress masturbates. He is not amused by her sexy contortions. The man does not even express relief when the frustrated female fellates him. It is interesting to note that Asian censors digitally tampered with this scene, obscuring specific details; the oral sex is outlined as a silhouette, albeit a noisome one. This prudish bit of censorship does not occur anywhere else in **GUTS OF A VIRGIN**. A phone call drags Eyeglasses away from the lady's attention.

The cute doctor (or nurse) we saw earlier is busy coupling with a male friend in her office. Just enough Kama Sutra style love making is shown to lend what would otherwise have been explicit, a very sensual edge. When the fellow's ego sags, the doctor takes matters into her own tiny hand ("ahem").

The film careens from eroticism to unparalleled violence as a quarrel between Eyeglasses' lackeys results in one thug getting a knife through the shoulder. Another creep gut-shoots the culprit. The assailant is slammed by the bullet into a wall. His belly is again punctured, this time with a metal rod that is twisted around the bleeding wound. Later, the culprit is chained in a warehouse while his former comrades hack off unneeded limbs. Severed hands sail through the air. He writhes as both his torso and legs are chopped apart. A few well placed gunblasts silence the screams of what is now human hamburger.

The gang soon dopes the woman doctor into unconsciousness (was that her boyfriend reduced to coldcuts?). The goons precede to gang rape their protesting captive. Also in attendance is the mistress. She makes lesbian overtones to the struggling woman. Eyeglasses fills a syringe with the same bizarre drug he shot into the first victim. He injects the doctor. Her ivory flesh ripples. The lady has a seizure and apparently dies. One yahoo is ordered to drive the body into the night for disposal.

The doctor is not dead, however. She awakens from her dope induced coma as a massive, raw skinned monster. The beast

interrupts the thug's roadside piss long enough to tear the surprised man to pieces which steam in the cool air. In true vigilante fashion (refer to **DEATH WISH**, **THE TOXIC AVENGER**, **ROBOCOP**), the creature crashes after the rest of the guilty party. Recalling a similar effect in **NEKROMANTIK** (1988), another creep has everything above his lower jaw splintered off. Fountaining thick blood where the brainbox had been, his remains career against a wall before sliding to the floor. The beast reverts back to its sexy human form to lure the tattooed stud home for a love session. After a long bout of foreplay, the girl digs her fingers through the man's throat and breaks every vertebrae in his neck. He had been caught with his pants down. The grotesque highlight of **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** quickly follows. The doctor shapeshifts, becoming a towering monster. The drug addled mistress of the gang allows the creature entry into her residence. Obviously guided by a black sense of humor, the hulk sprouts a sausage thick penis. The phallus has a mind of its own as well as a mouth and the mistress willingly wraps her lips around the moist, hissing **THING**. After blowing the beast, she invites it to love her. The monster complies. Since it is here for revenge, not procreation, the creature adds a yard or two of length to the organ. The moaning mistress lives long enough to see the python-sized **THING** chew its way out of her body, rising in triumph from a ruined breast. When Eyeglasses drops by, the creature knocks him down and molds its hindquarters into a ghastly simulation of the woman this scumbag abused. The last thing the whining idiot sees is the monster's lower quarters descending heavily onto his face and the ... splat, crunch. Eyeglasses perishes with the rest of his comrades, slime curtaining now crushed facial features. **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** concludes with ambiguity. Our heroine, again human, suffers a physical reaction/flashback to the narcotic and exits her office. She rolls sensuously around, half naked, before transforming into the monster. Wistful music accents the scene.

As with other depraved Japanese productions, **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** boasts a professional appearance inspite of an obviously low budget. Repeated camera views through a fish-filled aquarium, plus the long panning shots typical of Nippon film, enhance this spatter movie's visual narrative. Location footage is utilized effectively to isolate protagonists from the rest of society; most of the depravity occurs in dirty warehouses, isolated offices and lonely homes. The main characters are, even in a bustling crowd, alienated. The bulk of the film occurs at night in well lit scenes that allow us to see what is happening. Surprisingly low key save for the gory set pieces it underscores, the music never descends into the rhythmless mush many horror movies rely on.

The frisson in **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** is generated by its platter of coitus and carnage. Domination of women is threatened in many Japanese film so this movie's rape scenes are only an extension of that cruel theme. Director Gaira insures most reviewers are offended when the criminals are sketched as vicious animals; as they pounce on their helpless prey, we can only gaze in shock. On the other hand, the non-coerced love scenes (especially the encounter between the doctor and her male "patient") own their eroticism to careful camerawork and censorship that leave just enough sex to the audience's imagination. Save for **IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES** and **HAKUJITSUMU** (a Japanese witch dressed as a dentist dominates her unwilling girl companion), many X-rated Nippon films censor out overt crotch shots, rendering implicit what had been pornographic. While one may question the hypocrisy governing their cinema (which, as we'll soon see, allows the most unbelievable atrocities to occur onscreen), this custom proves that the Land of the Rising Sun regards sexuality as complexly as we do.

The splatter effects throughout **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** are hard-hitting and usually realistic. For instance, the results of the drug injections into human bodies is chillingly demonstrated as each woman's flesh ripples; the strangeness of the sight suggests something other than bladder effects were used. The full body

monster suite (a rarity in modern creature features) is a huge glistening variation of Uncle Frank from **HELLRAISER** (1987). Its hideous sexual organs are animated by clever puppetry (or mechanics). If you expect the camera to cut away during the scene where the beats is blown, prepare for an unpleasant surprise. The woman actually takes the organ into her mouth as (hopefully simulated) mucus drools off of it. Were it not so outrageous, this deviant imagery would truly be taboo trashing. Instead, the fellatio from Hell stands out as the crowning moment of insanity in a movie full of similar sights.

Gaira's film meshes sick sex with dollops of gore in a way that would get him in legal trouble where he an American citizen. The monster's revenge, while extraordinarily disgusting, adds welcome catharsis to **GUTS OF A VIRGIN**. Also, the censor's relatively pitiful attempt to clean up the movie is worthy of a few chuckles. The film is as bleak as it is unsettling. Although not as close to the edge of an abyss as **THE GUINEA PIG** series, **GUTS OF A VIRGIN** should command the same kind of respect. Only the most thick-skinned of fans are invited to sample its dark pleasures. Perhaps, in its own way, this pinku eiga points the way to one possible future of horror cinema.

That is truly something to fear.

RATMAN

Original Title:

QUELLA VILLA IN FONDO AL PARCO

1987, D: Anthony Ascot (aka Giuliano Carmineo)

Rodent Terror captured by Steve Fentone

I didn't really want my review for the **MONSTER!** Special to be a diatribe against some crappy movie. I mean, if you ain't got nothing *nice* to say, don't say anything at all, and all that, blah-blah. Honest, I chose **RATMAN** specifically because I *wanted* to like it, and expected to. Heck, it's got a bonafide (if half-pint) monster and was directed by "Anthony Ascot" (none other than Giuliano Carmineo, helmsman of one of my favorite spaghetti westerns thus far, **IL MOMENTO DI UCCIDERE / THE MOMENT TO KILL**, 1968). I made up my mind to review **RATMAN**, so here goes ... and, non, it's not a sequel to Sondra Locke's reputedly lame-o **RATBOY** (1986).

Physical "deformity" has long been a popular topic for the exploitation entertainment media to capitalize on. From the pathetic acromegalic abnormalities of old Rondo "the Hoxton Creeper" Hatton to Richard "Jaws" Keil's larger-than-life portrayals, to the innumerable malevolent midgets that have served as veritable horror fiction archetypes in scores of films and literary melodramas; to the elongated erotic appendages of such sex stars as Long Dong Silver and Chesty Morgan: the lure of freakish Mama Nature is a potent one (observe the repellant photography of ill-minded shutterbug Joel Peter Witkin for the *ultimate* exploitation/glorification of human deformity).

Few films that employ "physically different" personalities really succeed in portraying them in compassionate humanistic terms: more often than not there unique individuals are relegated to the level of low-paid bogyman bit players (a notable exception being Tod Browning's humane testimony to beauty being only skin deep, **FREAKS**). Usually such beings are presented as cheap sideshow exhibits rather than as thinking, feeling fellow humans. **RATMAN** is certainly no exception to this mean-spirited general rule.

I must confess to faintly feeling the contemptible lure of the freakshow mentality myself as I witnessed advance stills from the film in an issue of the French magazine **L'ÉCRAN FANTASTIQUE**. I couldn't believe a guy as tiny as Nelson

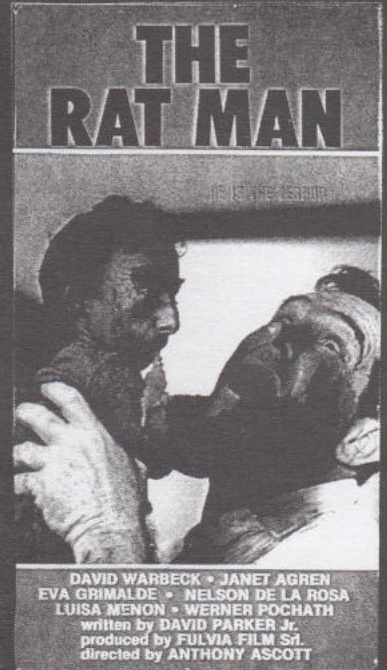
Aquino de la Rosa — only 72cm high, a true modern-day General Tom Thumb — could exist: surely **L'ÉCRAN**'s photo of the Ratman must be some sophisticated animatronic robot, or at the very *least* a stop-motion puppet, I thought. I will admit to being a bit intrigued just to see how the title monster would be presented...

RATMAN gets off to a decidedly inauspicious start, exuding that cut-rate aura common to latter-day Ital horrors, and populated by stubbornly-stereotyped and mainly non-enduring "characters". Right off, the bat (or is that — forgive me — RAT?), a superficial sub-plot pads things. This concerns a ritualistic knife-killer, who — when the Ratman ain't getting them first — has a penchant for molesting young girls (my, *that's* a real first, huh?). Before all you loyal **MONSTER!** readers can cry "none of that slasher stuff", David (Mr. Supreme Non-Charisma) Warbeck shows up as a hack horror scribe who gets his nose in on the mounting murder mystery. Various mutilated corpses are found with the appearances of being chewed on by — guess what? — rats.

Most of the time the film (or is it strictly the fault of mediocre vid-transfer?) is just too damn dark, which often hinders comfortable comprehension of visuals. No-frills plot outline involves the diminutive end-product of a sleazy doctor's genetic tampering (he foolishly injects "the sperm of a rat into the ovum of a monkey"). This produces Ratman (affectionately nicknamed "mousey" by his creator), a rodent/simian hybrid equipped — rather inexplicably — with razor-sharp, fatally-toxic teeth and talons. Of course, Ratman succeeds in escaping from his cage and runs amok. And of course, Ascot wastes little time in "showing off" his title mutant, the film's sole marketable commodity (next to Eva Grimaldi's breasts).

This sleazy film sure doesn't do a thing to advance the cinematic humanization of "freak" actors. I mean, playing a specimen of repulsive super-rodent — who in one of his initial scenes is shown emerging from a toilet bowl a la a lowly John Buechler ghoulie, fer Chrissakes — how much common dignity could poor de la Rosa be left with? As might be expected of a frail-looking 2-foot mini-man (not much taller, and actually smaller than my 4-month old son, Charley) the Ratman generates more pathos and empathy than any genuine terror. His overall demeanor reminded me somewhat of the unfortunate Progeria-victim-cum-"extraterrestrial" in Jim McCullough Jr./Sr's period piece **E.T.** wanna-be, **THE AURORA ENCOUNTER** (1985). De la Rosa's bucktoothed appearances does, however, manage to invoke some simple revulsion, and is disturbing for the very reason that the tiny man's stunted humanity shines clearly through. Ascot inserts sundry emphatic "shock" close-ups of Ratman's chisel-like dentures (clearly the costly facet of a limited make-up job), which invokes memories of the transforming monsters in Lamberto Bava's **DEMONS**. But, even all the disorienting shadow and murky photography (masquerading as "atmosphere") can't really show the monster as anything other than the vulnerable non-intimidating little person he actually is.

What about the rest of the film? Totally token story with only rudimentary and unconvincing exposition of the "scientific" origins of the little critter (from this generic zoology lecture we derive such nuggets of knowledge as "a pair of rats in one year can produce over 2,000 offspring"); the cast, besides heroine Janet Agrena and boring Warbeck (he of such Margheriti adventures as **L'ULTIMO CACCIATORE / THE LAST HUNTER**, 1980 and **I CACCIATORI DEL COBRA D'ORO / THE HUNTERS OF THE GOLDEN COBRA**, 1982) is heavily populated by the usual shrieking/shrinking violets or bikini bimbettes (translation: "aspiring models"). One of these (Eva Grimaldi) does the required nude shower scrub-down scene: soaping her snoots while moaning "ooooo-aaah!" noises as if she's really having sex. Gee, could this be a blatant sexploitation technique we have here? When you realize that Grimaldi also stripped in a nasty nun flick from the same period called **LA MONACA DEL**



VIDEO BOX ART FROM RATMAN

PECCATO aka **CONVENT OF SINNERS** (photographed by none other than Aristide Massaccesi aka Joe D'Amato) it keeps **RATMAN**'s token T&A in perspective.

Low-angle POV shots and screen-filling eyeball close-ups represent the Ratman's world view as he scuttles around the unsuspecting ankles of all these low-rent starlets. I hope they at least paid unfortunate Nelson de la Rosa well for his degradation. But, *of course*, they didn't...

ASSIGNMENT TERROR

Original Title:

EL HOMBRE QUE VINO DE UMMO

Original Spanish Title:

LOS MONSTRUOS DEL TERROR

West German Title:

DRACULA JAGT FRANKENSTEIN

Italian Title: **OPERAZIONE TERROR**

Spanish Export Title:

EL HOMBRE QUE VINO DE UMMO

Spanish Production Title: **OPERACIÓN TERROR**

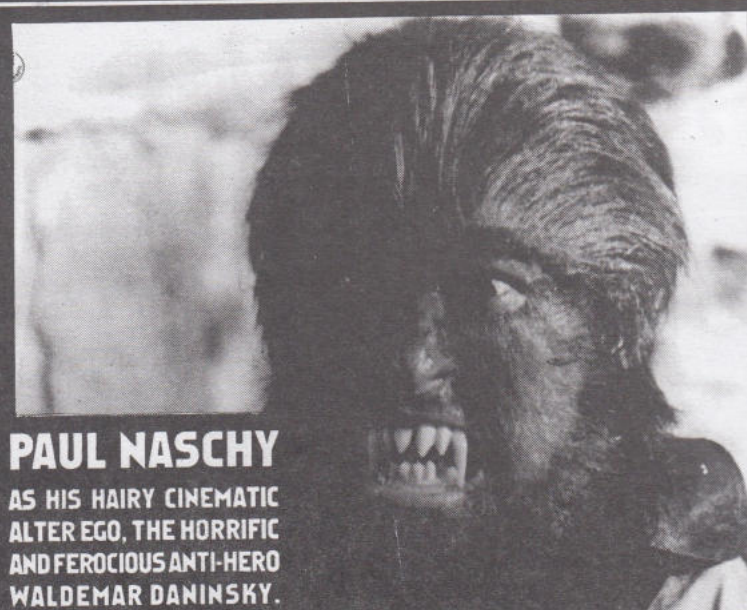
British Release Title/US Video Title:

DRACULA VERSES FRANKENSTEIN

1969, D: Tulio Demicheli

Monsterthon review by Conrad Widener

For his third outing as the Wolf Man, Jacinto Molina, came up, with a concoction of horror and science fiction resembling the Universal monster rallies of yore such as **FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN**, **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, and **HOUSE OF DRACULA**. While the quality of the monsters is closer to those found in a Santo or Blue Demon movie (which is fine by me 'cause I enjoy the heck out of those wrestling heroes from Mexican productions), **ASSIGNMENT TERROR** will bring a smile to fans of multiple monster mashers.



PAUL NASCHY
AS HIS HAIRY CINEMATIC
ALTER EGO, THE HORRIFIC
AND FEROCIOUS ANTI-HERO
WALDEMAR DANINSKY.

The planet Ummo is dying. In order to survive the ummoians plan to invade and conquer Earth. As not to draw attention to their plan, the folks from another planet take over the bodies of dead earthlings. Spearheading the first mini-invasion (the big invasion will come later) is Dr. Odo Warnoff (Michael Rennie of **THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED** and **THE YOUNG, THE EVIL AND THE SAVAGE**). He also had important roles in **CYBORG 2087** and **THE POWER**. Aided by Maleva (Karin Dor, also seen in **BLOOD DEMON**, **STRANGLER OF BLACKMORE CASTLE**, **YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE**, and others) and Kirian, Dr. Warnoff feels that rounding up some of the Earth's most famous monsters will add punch to their plot. First, Warnoff and friends find the skeleton of a vampire (not Dracula, at least not in the AIP TV version) at a carnival sideshow. The sideshow barker is killed and his assistant, Ilona, is kidnapped. Taking residents in an old castle, the Ummites add a mummy, a Frankenstein-like creature, and, yes, none other than wolfman Waldemar Daninsky (our buddy Jacinto Molina, also known as Paul Naschy). After Waldemar kills a young woman, inspector Henry Toberman (Craig Hill of **THE BLACK BOX AFFAIR**, **THE SWINGER**, and many more) begins an investigation into the two killings. Henry learns of another woman who saw the wolfman and survived. The young lady, Ilsa (Patty Sheppard, also on view in **THE WEREWOLF VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMAN** and **WITCHES' MOUNTAIN**), explains to Henry that her father knows about Daninsky and his curse. About this time the invaders from Ummo, who feel no emotion, begin to experience love. And, yes, non-invader Ilona falls in love with Waldemar. Incensed when he views Maleva in bed with Kirian, Warnoff orders the Frankensteinish creature to choke Kirian. Dr. Warnoff then tortures Maleva with sound waves. Fairly upset by these developments, Maleva helps Waldemar and Ilona escape. After receiving a hot tip, Henry heads for Dr. Warnoff's castle where he is captured and subjected to bat torture. Doc Warnoff has also snared Ilsa and placed her in the same room with the vampire. Just as things look bleak for inspector Toberman, Waldemar and Ilona show up to free him. Arriving just in time to save Ilsa, Henry drives a long wooden spear into the vampire's foul heart. Now Waldemar has transformed into his hairy alter ego and tangles with the mummy! Daninsky destroys the dusty one with a trusty torch. Next up in the mini-battle royal, the wolfman slugs it out with the Spanish version of Frankenstein's monster! The werewolf is victorious over the man-made monster by way of electrocution. Then, right on cue, Ilona shows up to blast Waldemar, who in turn kills Ilona. With all his monsters dead, Dr. Warnoff admits defeat. He informs the Ummites that love is perhaps the most powerful force on Earth. The folks from

With a few exceptions, throw in two or more monsters in one film and I'm hooked. As a tyke I loved **FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN**. I lost count of how many times I watched the film on Chiller Theatre. The battle doesn't last very long, but it was worth watching again and again just to see Lon Chaney's wolfman fight Bela Lugosi's Frankenstein's monster. Unfortunately, **ASSIGNMENT TERROR** suffers from too much talk and not enough monsters on the rampage. Here we have a vampire, mummy, Frankenstein-type creature, wolf man flick in which they do next to nothing through much of the picture. Maybe their exploits were cut from the AIP TV print. But if you can handle some snappy romantic subplots (romance is great, but it doesn't work here) then you will be rewarded during the final 20 minutes or so with some decent beastly brawls.

The cast also helps ease the slow spots. While this is far from Michael Rennie's greatest role, he is used to better advantage than other fading stars. At least he didn't play a butler. Karin Dor and Patty Sheppard are pleasing to look at and perform their roles well, given the fact the script doesn't allow these ladies to be anything more than damsels in distress. Craig Hill is handsome and properly dashing as the hero. Jacinto Molina, who derived his Paul Naschy pseudonym from pope Paul VI and a Hungarian friend by the name of Naschy, is in the background more than usual this entry, but he's *always* fun to watch.

Fans who demand first-rate make-up will cry foul as the monsters are not so hot in the cosmetics department. Naschy looks closer to Bela Lugosi in **THE APE MAN**. The excellent make-up Luis Ruiz did for him in **FRANKENSTEIN'S BLOODY TERROR** is sorely missed. Worse yet is the Frankenstein monster clone. Even John Bloom's get-up in Al Adamson's **DRACULA VERSES FRANKENSTEIN** is positively inspired when compared to this "monster". However, the mummy isn't bad at all. Not up to Karloff or Christopher Lee, but still creepy in a cut-rate kind of way.

Tulio Demicheli's direction is pretty languid. This could have been due to the rushed shooting schedule. Whatever the reason, Demicheli seems interested in simply moving from scene to scene without any special style. The atmosphere found in the films of Leon Klimovsky would have been welcomed here.

While **ASSIGNMENT TERROR** is one of the weaker installments of the Waldemar Daninsky saga, there is enough monster action for the undemanding to enjoy.

Ummo decide to call off the invasion (Martians are better at this sort of thing) and blow the castle (and Dr. Warnoff) to bits. As the castle crumbles, Henry solemnly proclaims, "While there are men willing to sacrifice themselves for others, nothing will destroy us." The silver bullets have silenced Waldemar Daninsky for now. Nevertheless, the full moon will return, and with it, Waldemar Daninsky will rise again.

BLOOD THIRST

Alternate Titles:

THE HORROR FROM BEYOND BLOOD SEEKERS

1965, D: Newt Arnold

Filipino Fright Fare bagged by Betsy Burger

What can be said in defense of **BLOOD THIRST**? Well, for one thing, it looks presentable. Not that this in itself is reason enough to spend the necessary 90 minutes playing slave to the screen, but it helps. **BLOOD THIRST**, being for the most part, a routine detective potboiler, with elements of, well, just about anything else one could imagine (within the limits of 60's mainstream Filipino film making, that is) is worth watching, in my book, because it fails to accomplish what it sets out to.

In brief, our story revolves around a series of murders near the Barrio Club. "Escorts" from the club are found, with neatly incised wrists, drained of blood. Inspector Miguel Ramos, feeling pressure to "get the darn thing under wraps", enlists the help of long time personal friend and law enforcement associate, American Adam Rork. He and his life-sized dummy, Harvey (a really wacky gimmick), race from obvious clue to obvious clue, narrowly escaping various and sundry "big knife" attacks and bar room brawls in search of the killer (Disturbed psycho? Crazy blood cult? Who knows?).

Assisting Rork in his venture are Sylvia, Ramos' sister, and Hererra, a grungy, streetwise monoped and cop. Sylvia develops a healthy romantic interest in Rork after he puts her in her place with a manly display of affection — a firm slap. The titillating sparks are soon fanned into a virtual inferno of sensuality. Imagine, if you will, a cheesy facsimile of Don Adams meets Audrey Hepburn in Manila — tender, yet, well, ... ridiculous.

Perhaps even more ridiculous though is Hererra. An interesting character, he appears out of nowhere, temporarily disabling our hero (sending the camera rolling up to sky) only to feed him important and timely bits of information.

These enlightening tips coupled with assorted offhand encounters at the Barrio Club, lead the crime fighters to suspect Mr. Calderone, the club's proprietor. It seems that Calderone and the Barrio's belly dancing beauty, Serena Brioso, are indeed, remnants of an ancient Aztec or Inca (it's never really spelled out — rather par for the course, I'm afraid) blood cult.

Now we're diving into what I really expected to be the meat and potatoes of this U.S.-Filipino co-production... the monster. This monster's more along the lines of a side of cole slaw, however, and as in other areas of the film, doesn't fail to disappoint. In one scene, we bear witness to the murder of a young nubile by this bad Incredible Melting Man imitation... what a treat. He cuts into her wrists (using a more than adequately sized knife for the job, I might add) and the blood exits into a large bowl attached to a pivoting rod. The whole thing is vaguely reminiscent of a rather low-tech Ronco juicer. This having been accomplished, a tired-looking Serena, seated before a flashing TV screen (harnessed solar energy, of course) completes the process by dropping some oregano (or something) into the blood creating a cloud of smoke and, thus, restoring her youthful beauty.

In the film's climax, Sylvia nearly falls victim to the pair's bizarre ritual. Big surprise there, eh? She's rescued and, in one of my favorite scenes, freed from the monster's grip when the fast-on-

his-feet ... (excuse me, foot) Hererra, clubs the monster with his prosthetic limb! Serena, then, unable to put herbs to blood, becomes, behind a cloud of smoke, an old Filipino woman, and dries up. Oh, did I forget to mention that (up until this point) Serena looks about as Filipino as Debbie Harry?

What, then, you ask, becomes of our friend the monster? Well, he is killed, naturally, and in death his true identity is revealed. I'm really not worried about spoiling this for you, it's Calderone. The reason for his transformation into a walking Italian restaurant candle, like so many things, is never explained. For my money, he could have killed just as easily in human form, and looked scarier doing it.

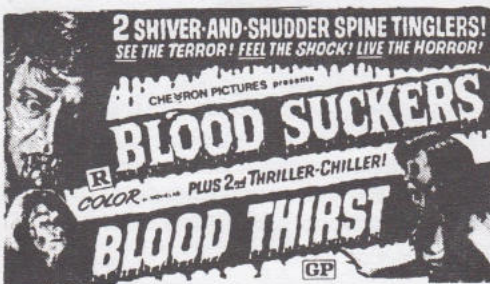
BLOOD THIRST was released in the U.S. in 1971. It played on the bottom half of a double bill with **THE BLOODSUCKERS** and I can't help but wonder what movie goers must have thought about this extremely rough diamond. It makes several attempts at horror, suspense, and comedy and faithfully misses the mark every time ... with the arguable exception of the last element - comedy. The remarkably laughable dialogue and the stilted light-heartedness that just oozes from every pore of this monstrosity coupled with the jazzy period soundtrack make watching **BLOOD THIRST** a surreal experience.

This rings true especially in the case of the main character, Rork, played by Robert Winston. Time and again I found myself saying aloud, "I can't believe the man is actually saying this!". It is almost as if the producer had in his employ, a writer who's sole purpose was to write the lines only for this ludicrous character. I'll give you an example: in the beginning of the film, Ramos explains to Rork, that because of the modus operandi, the killer could only be one man. Rork replies (and I'm paraphrasing here) that there might be more than one killer ... if they happen to be Siamese twins! And it only gets better. When Rork is surprised in hotel room by a swarthy-looking character wielding a knife, and kills him, he says afterward, "I can't believe there's that much of a room shortage!" ... brilliant!

But I digress. Incidentally, I can't quite let you off the hook without a few words about Harvey. Rork carries this thing around with him in a suitcase - it saves his life in the aforementioned hotel scene when the would-be assassin mistakes Harvey for Rork. personally, I find the entire concept of Harvey to be mind-blowing ... really. I mean, one just has to wonder about this man, the famed author of "Sex Crime Motivation and Investigation", lugging around this life-sized dummy — and naming the damn thing to boot!

As a going away present, Ramos, Sylvia and Hererra have Harvey repainted and overhauled. It makes for a touching farewell.

At any rate, see **BLOOD THIRST**. If you have an appetite for watching clueless people in uncomfortable situations, making fools of themselves, you'll treasure it. I do.



CRAZY SAFARI

Original Title: FEIZHOU HESHANG

1991, D: Chen Huiyi (Billy Chan)

Slapstick Chinese Vampire Chaos on Safari

Reviewed by John Vellutini

Slackjawed with amazement I stared intently at a movie poster displayed in the window of a Chinese dry cleaning establishment ("The Happy Iron"), vainly attempting to sort out the disparate images that threatened to overwhelm my senses. Mr. Vampire does Africa? Lin Zhengying in Taoist robing astride an ostrich? And was that, could it be, yes it was Bruce Lee! Had he tired of rooming with Elvis all these years and was just now making a comeback? Or had I dropped too much acid in my misspent youth and all this was nothing more than some bizarre hallucination? Thankfully, for my sanity, both the poster and the movie it

advertised turned out to be real. The English title was **CRAZY SAFARI** and it was playing at the Great Star in Chinatown. I promptly hid my backside down there, full of eager anticipation and curious to see what havoc a Hong Kong film crew set loose in the darkest Continent might accomplish.

The movie opens at an auction house in England where the perfectly preserved remains of a "15th" century Chinese corpse is being offered for sale. (The stated age of the corpse is all wrong, as it wears the typical robing of the Qing dynasty and sports a braided queue in back. Therefore it could not date from a period earlier than the mid-17th century.) In attendance are a Taoist priest and his youthful patron, whose "great great great grandfather" which the the corpse is. A brief movie is shown to illustrate the differences that exist between the European vampire and the Chinese gyonsi, particularly the latter's tolerance of light. (Although traditionally incorrect as well, it does provide the makers of the film the excuse needed to shoot most of the scenes involving the gyonsi in broad daylight.) Bidding is opened and the Chinese youth finds himself being outbidded by some foreign devil with apparent necrophiliac leanings. The young man convinces the roundeye that if his Taoist companion succeeds in



ABOVE: HONG KONG POSTER ART FOR **CRAZY SAFARI**.

LEFT: AD MAT FEATURING **BLOOD THIRST** ON A DOUBLE BILL.

reviving the corpse it should then be his. The skeptical white agrees to this bizarre proposition and the corpse is subsequently brought to life, causing panic in the auction hall before being subdued by the Taoist priest. The dutiful descendent obtains his ancestor's remains and departs with his precious cargo for home. Unfortunately, the private plane transporting them back to Hong Kong develops engine trouble over Africa and a crash is imminent. The gyonsi is outfitted with a parachute and pushed out of the plane, while the Taoist priest and his young patron follow suit.

The three are separated on land and the corpse is recovered by a tribe of primitive Bushmen, one of whom learns how to control the gyonsi's movements by using the paper spell attached to its forehead. Eventually, after numerous encounters with the local wildlife, the Taoist priest and young man succeed in locating the Bushmen village and lay claim to the corpse. The natives resist their efforts to retrieve it, as the gyonsi is now being revered as their tribal ancestor. Using his magical skills as before, the Taoist priest succeeds in convincing the natives the corpse is rightfully the young man's property. As a Bushman leads the three of them back to civilization, a flaming arrow alerts the native to the fact that his village is now under siege. They return and discover the villagers being held captive by a white woman and her African cronies, the purpose being to extort information concerning the source of the Bushmen's secret diamond cache. During the ensuing fracas the Taoist priest pits his magical skills against an African witch doctor, while the gyonsi matches his brawn against

a native zombie. Although both Chinese are victorious in their respective encounters, the villagers are still hopelessly outnumbered. The Taoist priest now conjures up the fighting spirit of Bruce Lee from a photograph and infuses their Bushman companion with it. Thus fortified, the native proceeds to kick ass, interspersed with clips of Bruce Lee from *ENTER THE DRAGON*, and the tide is dramatically turned in the villager's favor. Their enemies are routed and outside contact is made with civilization. A helicopter now arrives to rescue the stranded trio, but not before the Taoist priest presents his ceremonial dress and the gyonsi's robing to the bushmen-cum Bruce Lee. In return he receives a sack of raw diamonds and the gyonsi a fetching set of leopard skins with which to clothe itself. The film ends with the Bushman in full Taoist regalia standing before an unresponsive straw effigy dressed in the corpse's robing, no doubt privately berating himself for not asking for a cellular phone instead.

CRAZY SAFARI can be considered a bizarre addendum to the **GODS MUST BE CRAZY** series, as it stars the same native lead (Nixau, or Nixau without the suction stop) featured in the preceding two films. In the event the viewing audience is too dense to note this connection, the film hammers this point home by blitzing the African countryside with Coke bottles (*Coke Classic* at that) and soda cans. Indeed, in one scene, we are even treated to the sight of a costumed reveler dressed as a Coca Cola can! Why the producers of **CRAZY SAFARI** chose this series to exploit is anyone's guess. Perhaps they had failed to secure the sequel

rights to **GONE WITH THE WIND**. Or perhaps this film represents a tacit bid on the part of South Africa, where the movie was lensed and a country hurting for foreign capital, to lure the thriving but threatened Hong Kong film industry their way in the future.

Be that as it may, the movie is essentially a slapstick comedy. Although the jaded Western viewer might consider the attempts at humor puerile at best, the film contains some genuinely amusing moments and the largely Chinese audience I saw it with laughed throughout. I personally enjoyed the film and, despite its crude stereotypical portrayal of African natives, believe it represents an unique contribution to the gyonsi genre. And as always, the mere presence of Lin Zhengying as Taoist priest lends a touch of call to the proceedings.

One further aspect worth mentioning is that the gyonsi assumes a heroic role at the film's finale. If **CRAZY SAFARI** proves relatively successful at the box office, one may well see more gyonsis depicted in a benevolent light, a transformation that similarly occurred with Godzilla in the mid-60s. This may also prove to be a politically astute transition, as Communist China assumes control of Hong Kong in 1997 and no doubt will cast a jaundiced eye on some of the more exploitative aspects of its film industry. So in the future, one may have to get accustomed to hearing Mr. Vampire referred to as Comrade Vampire. Or worse, Senior Party Member Vampire. Now Bwana Vampire, that has a certain ring to it...

CHINESE LANGUAGES, FILM TITLES AND CREDITS

An Informative sidebar by Horácio Higuchi

The use of Chinese names and words in English-language articles poses a number of problems, mostly centered on two general areas:

(a) **Language.** The peoples of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong all speak one or more of the dozens of Chinese languages — Mandarin, Cantonese, Fukienese, Hakka, Amoy, etc. (These are considered full-fledged languages, not mere dialects.) The sounds and inflections are particular to each of these languages and make them mutually unintelligible, yet they all have in common the same basic ideographic alphabet. So a text written in Chinese characters can be read using different sounds by people who speak, say, Cantonese or Mandarin, but the exact same meaning is communicated to all. (That's why a Chinese movie is usually subtitled in Chinese characters that match the full dialogue word for word.) Mandarin, or North Chinese vernacular, the language spoken by the largest number of individuals in the world (literally, more than 1 billion served), is the official language of mainland China and Taiwan. Cantonese is, however, predominant in Hong Kong, and movies made in that soon-to-be-ex-English colony — the kind of exploitation flicks we all love — are mostly shot in that language.

As English is still the official language of Hong Kong, the majority of movies produced there have a double title — one in Chinese, one in English, not necessarily with the same meaning. The transliteration (see below) of Chinese cast and crew names, however, follows no particular standard even as to how they are pronounced. The once all-powerful Shaw Bros. empire had many branches all over the Far East, and usually credited its production personnel in the more widespread Mandarin language, even in their Cantonese-speaking films. Its major competitor, however, the still active Golden Harvest studio, generally uses the Cantonese pronunciation in its Romanized credits, as do many Hong Kong independents.

(b) **Transliteration.** Transliteration is the rendering of words from a given alphabet into a different one — for instance, the conversion of a word in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet into a form using our 26-letter Roman alphabet. (It should not be confused with "literal translation", contrary to the repeated practice of a certain media zealot magazine.) Of course, it is impossible to faithfully reproduce with our alphabet all the different sounds and nuances the human voice can generate, so standardized systems of transliteration have been created by linguists. Chinese languages are especially difficult to Romanize (that is, transliterate into our alphabet), and many systems have been proposed. The most widely used ones for Mandarin are the Wade-Giles and the Pinyin systems. Wade-Giles has been used more traditionally in the Western print, and is still in practice in

Taiwan, while Pinyin is the official standard in China and has in the past two decades replaced the former system in the world press. (Ever wondered why Mao Tsé-Tung started being referred to as Mao Zhedong, and Peking as Beijing? That happened when the Western press shifted from Wade-Giles to Pinyin.) The Shaw Bros. people always transliterated names in Wade-Giles, while Pinyin is the method adopted in films from mainland China. As for Cantonese, it also uses many Romanization systems — IPA, Meyer-Wempe, Yale, etc. — but, as far as I know, none used preferentially over another.

Now you ask: what does all that linguistic stuff have to do with the movies? Thing is, because there is no standard language or transliteration system for Chinese/Taiwanese/Hong Kong movies, a given title or person can be mentioned in the Western press under various different ways — in Cantonese, in Mandarin/Pinyin, in Mandarin/Wade-Giles, in whatever way one can express a complicated sound alien to our ears. (Of course, the name written in Chinese characters doesn't change.) For instance, I've seen the monicker of current ultracool superstar Chow Yun-Fat (Cantonese) variously rendered as Chou Jun-Fa (Mandarin/Wade-Giles) or Zhou Runfa (Mandarin/Pinyin). Megadirector Tsui Hark (Cantonese) can also appear as Hsü K'o (Mandarin/Wade-Giles) or Xu Ke (Mandarin/Pinyin). Many Hong Kong industry people also use English given names — Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Sally Yeh, etc. — which appears helpful. But sometimes more than one appellation in English is adopted by the same person, and we're back to the old mess. That drop-dead gorgeous star of **A CHINESE GHOST STORY**, Wang Xuxian (in Mandarin/Pinyin, often credited as Wong Tsu-Hsien), is listed elsewhere as Amy Wong or, more recently, Joy Wong. (Notice also how the spelling of some Chinese names was Anglicized in colonial times: I doubt producer Run Shaw is related to playwright George Bernard.)

So what? Well, for the sake of consistency, **MONSTER!** has decided to follow the practice of the majority of Western journalists and scholars and use the Pinyin system of Mandarin transliteration to Romanize film titles, credits, character and place names, etc., regardless of the origin of the production. After all, Chinese languages share the same written alphabet — and with the continuous interchange of film crews between Taiwan and Hong Kong, co-production deals involving all three countries, plus the imminent takeover of the former British colony by the People's Republic, it is important to avoid unnecessary duplication of names and facts. So we know that the John Woo who just out-Peckinpahed all American gangster flicks combined in **THE KILLER** is the same Wu Yusen who, twenty years ago, was an assistant director for Shaw Bros. in the heyday of the chop-socky genre.

Vampire Love Stories

19

Locating the Singular of **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR**

NAILING NOSFERATU FOR FUN AND PROFIT BY JEFF SEGAL



ANNETTE VADIM
AS THE SENSUOUS VAMPIRE
CARMILLA VON KARNSTEIN

English Release Title:
BLOOD AND ROSES
1960, D: Roger Vadim

"Why you must die — everyone must die, and all are happier when they do."

— J. Sheridan LeFanu, "CARMILLA"

Bram Stoker authored *DRACULA* in 1897 and it has since become firmly entrenched in the Western world. To this day, *DRACULA*-inspired multi-media gushes through our pop culture. However, fans with a working knowledge of horror literature recall that *DRACULA* owes some of its impetus to Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's novella, "CARMILLA" (1872). Although not as well known, the lore-rich "CARMILLA" spawned numerous film adaptations. Carl Dreyer's monochromatic *VAMPYR* (1931) replaced the novella's theme with surreal visuals and the illogic of a nightmare. Hammer Studios in England released three "CARMILLA"-inspired features during the sexually open 1970's. Their atmospheric fangfest, *THE VAMPIRE LOVERS* (1970) is, in some respects, a literal adaptation of LeFanu's tale. Belgian director Harry Kuemel, French auteur Jean Rollin, and Spanish horror movie-makers Jess Franco, Vicente Aranda (*LA NOVIA ENSANGRENTADA / THE BLOOD SPATTERED BRIDE*, 1972), and Joseph Larraz (*VAMPYRES*, 1974) contributed "CARMILLA" influenced entries. Although Franco's *THE LOVES OF IRINA* (1973) and its variants misspell Carmilla Karnstein's surname as Karlstein, its vampiress (Lina Romay) can be viewed as the ultimate seductress — burdened with a centuries old melancholy, she still manages to nurse a life-consuming passion

probably unmatched by any other cinematic nosferatu.

Three years after he completed *AND GOD CREATED WOMEN* (1957), Roger Vadim updated "CARMILLA" with *ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR*, emphasizing the blood and withering roses of the film's English title. Vadim indulged in his fetish for sensuously directing women while stirring new elements into the story. By its conclusion, "CARMILLA" had developed into a clash with evil from which justice emerged triumphant. But Vadim's adaptation, as a result of its modern setting, adopted the cynicism of the 20th Century. After outlining the plot of novella and film, we will be able to better savor the loss of purity that pervades *ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR*.

LeFanu's "CARMILLA" is set in late 18th/19th Century Styria, Austria. The bulk of the tale is recorded in the diary of nineteen-year-old Laura. Thus, it is her voice that delivers "CARMILLA" to us. Since Laura's home is remote from civilization, she understandably longs for the company of Bertha Rheinfeldt, niece/ward to their closest neighbor, the old General Speilsdorf. Unfortunately, Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt succumbs to a mysterious and fatal blood loss prior to making the journey. One day, Laura and her father greet a carriage full of travelers. A noblewoman wails that her daughter Carmilla is too ill to complete their journey. The young lady is invited to stay with Laura as a convalescent until the travelers return. Though Laura expresses joy over a new companion, she uneasily recalls a half-forgotten childhood visit by a strange girl who caressed Laura one night prior to sinking fangs into the adolescent's breast for the warm blood. Was it a dream, a premonition, or...? As she recovers, Carmilla increasingly becomes a moody companion for Laura. The guest sleeps late, dines but a little, and shies away from strong sunlight whenever out on a walk. Carmilla's languid calm breaks down after she is repelled by the funeral services held by the villagers for several peasant women who had been slain by a strange blood-depleting ailment in recent weeks; the religious hymns sung during the burial pain Carmilla, causing her to cringe against Laura. Throughout her stay, the strange guest is a constant presence, haunting Laura with gentle caresses and seemingly affectionate stares. Carmilla is growing stronger. But Laura herself has fallen ill. Her dreams are continually interrupted by what she imagines are nightly cat attacks. Regardless of a cause, Laura is losing blood every evening as something drinks from her veins. Finally, Carmilla is seen in a blood-spattered gown. She vanishes. Laura's father and his servants search for the missing Carmilla in and around the house, forcing open her locked bedroom door in a futile hunt for clues. Finally the truth spills out. The mourning General Speilsdorf rushes to Laura's father with an incredible, yet tragic story about supernatural betrayal. During a social gathering held some months before, a young woman named Millacara gravitated toward Speilsdorf's niece, Bertha Rheinfeldt. The General invited Millacara into his dwelling as company for the lonely Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt. Under her guest's attention, Bertha fared poorly. Finally, she dies of the condition that nearly killed Laura. Millacara disappeared into the quiet night countryside. Braced with information from recent allies, Speilsdorf summarizes just what they are up against — the mutual guest of both households, confined by the limits of magic to always re-order her name anagrammatically, is actually Mircalla, a countess from the supposedly liquidated Karnsteins. Local superstition claims they were a family of vampires who plundered the land for victims until each nosferatu was slain in return. Yet Mircalla enjoyed existence as a vampire during the century following her mortal death in 1698; she has been preying on peasant and noble women since that date. Countess Mircalla Karnstein is the last survivor of a clan of unnatural killers. The tiny, almost unnoticeable

fangholes marking one of Laura's breasts testify to the vampiress' efficiency. Carmilla unexpectedly returns to the house, manages to disarm General Speilsdorf before he can sword her head off and flees. Unfortunately for the Countess, the gentlemen are armed with lore on the nosferatu. Carmilla has to return to the coffin she had been buried in every so often. The humans trace her to the hidden lair and swiftly finish off the last of the dreaded Karnstein family.

Vadim's delicate *ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR* is framed in 20th Century Italy, circa the mid-1960's. A 500-year-old vampiress calling herself Countess Mircalla Karnstein narrates the film. Mircalla will be a constant presence throughout *ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR* and the movie's sole guiding force. The Countess is singularly unimpressed with the airliner jetting her from Paris to Rome - Mircalla knows that the world of the Spirit outshadows human technology. Her cool observance foretells the ending of the unusual horror film.

In a castle secluded among the rolling hills of rural Italy, Leopaldo (Mel Ferrer) is conferring with guests about his wife-to-be. The tall aristocrat wishes to throw a costume party for the raven-haired Georgia (Elsa Martinelli) and crown the festivities with a glory of fireworks. Leopaldo's pyro-technician announces that the display would be exhibited to the best effort in the ruins 450 meters from the castle. Moody Carmilla Von Karnstein (Annette Vadim) is startled by this news. As Leopaldo's first cousin and childhood playmate, she has become strangely obsessed with their family's checkered past. Sensing her unease, Leopaldo digresses about the old days to his curious guests. In 1765, legends say the peasants revolted against the Karnstein vampires who had been preying on them. From then on only mortals wore the family name.

Standing beside a portrait of the blond Mircalla Karnstein, whom she could pass for as a twin, Carmilla relays the rest of the tale. Legend had it that Mircalla's first cousin Ludvig swore eternal love to the Countess and she for him. Prior to the villagers' violent vigilantism, he rushed into the Karnstein burial site. By the time the mob arrived, her coffin was empty. The rest of the vampires were staked and burned. Of course, Carmilla notes dryly, Ludvig was unfaithful, but each one of his marriage attempts climaxed with the mysterious death of the betrothed. Miss Von Karnstein elaborates on a withered rose clenched in the portraited Mircalla's hand — the touch of a vampire curls flowers up in death. The last member of the far-flung Karnstein family's Austrian branch, Carmilla had matured under the shadow of its legacy. This might account for her fascination with the past.

During the costume party Carmilla sulks, finally exploding into a tantrum at Leopaldo's presence. Afterward, the voice of Mircalla drones over the film's soundtrack, coaxing the woman into garbing herself with the Countess's still-preserved wedding dress. Tugged into compliance by the vampiress's spell, the bewitched woman prepares for a walk outside.

The fireworks set off World War II munitions hidden for over a decade in the ruins. Leopaldo and his startled guests agree to wait until dawn before investigating the damage. However, guided by Countess Karnstein, Carmilla safely navigates a path through the smoldering cemetery. She steps into a huge tomb uncovered by the blasts. Something greets her.

In the days which follow, Carmilla's behavior grows aberrant. She begins showing more-than-causal interest in Georgia. Every move made by Leopaldo's fiancée fixates the blond's attention. During a casual walk, Carmilla closes in on the other

woman, who is cuddling a trapped fox meant to be shot as vermin. The vulpine squirms loose at Miss Von Karnstein's approach and flees. Carmilla absently notes the painful effect concentrated sunlight has on her pale flesh. Later, she frightens a horse Leopaldo wished for her to ride. The animal sensed Carmilla's "otherness" and started rearing in a frenzy. At home, she has difficulty dancing to music whose modernness suddenly made it unfamiliar to Carmilla.

Her obsession with the dead darkens still further. Late each evening, Carmilla returns to the cemetery. On one silent walk, she is glimpsed by the caretaker. He starts telling other castle staff about a white gown ghost passing too far in front of him to be recognized that night. During a lonely stroll home from the castle where she works, a young maid named Lisa is stalked, bitten and murdered by Carmilla.

Leopaldo slaves over the piano sonata left unfinished by the Karnsteins two centuries before. As though another intelligence peers out of her eyes and guides her hands, Carmilla completes the musical theme. Leopaldo asks his first cousin if she'll accompany the newlyweds on their honeymoon cruise into the

Caribbean. The woman agrees. Carmilla looks into a mirror and gasps at the reflection of her dress splattered with blood. She rushes out of the room. Though pure and white to an unaided eye, the gown is revealed by each mirror to have a splash of red across its bodice. Carmilla frantically shatters the glass from one frame.

Leopaldo comes to the aid of his cousin. They fall together on a bed, reveling in each other's embrace for a few minutes. Carmilla quietly states that she can no longer love.

After the aristocrat and his servants are called into town to identify the shattered remains of Lisa (authorities question how she fell from a cliff), Carmilla redoubles her effort to seduce Georgia. In the greenhouse, the bride-to-be touches a thorn-pricked finger across her lip. Carmilla gently kisses the jewel of blood. The ladies are interrupted by their returning companions.

When a distraught Leopaldo announces that the wedding will be held in Venice, Carmilla angrily pops a drinking goblet at the dinner table. After everyone has fallen asleep, the woman expedites her plan to take over Georgia, body and soul.

Carmilla caresses the slumbering fiancée of her first cousin, facilitat-

ing a psychic bond with Georgia. A bizarre dream ensues as the sleeping victim's mind is commandeered. Carmilla seals the deal with a nip to the throat.

In response to Georgia's screams, Leopaldo darts to the side of his beloved, finding her half-awake in an otherwise empty bedroom. Consultation with a doctor and Georgia's father confirms that the physical damage to the stricken lady is apparently superficial. In spite of the haunted background of the Karnsteins, an attempt is made to psychoanalyze the situation — it is theorized that Carmilla's constant brooding and love for Leopaldo forced into striking against Georgia.

The following day, Carmilla (who has been left unrestrained in spite of her mischief) walks into the ruins as the unexploded bombs are detonated. She perishes and Georgia springs up from her bed clutching at her breast.

In time, Leopaldo does get married. But the woman who accompanies the young aristocrat from the wedding to honeymoon is not his Georgia. Countess Mircalla Karnstein has shed her old flesh and now looks into the fawning eyes of Leopaldo, safely nested in a new body. The couple are on board a jet plane, returning from their extended trip. Gazing with amusement at her modern, technology-worshipping husband, the woman who no longer is Georgia contemplates triumphantly, "It is I, Mircalla. I who lived in the past, I live now and Leopaldo is mine."

A fresh rose withers in her slender hand.

♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥

Though LeFanu's novella served as its inspiration, **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** is unhampered by 19th Century notions of good and evil. As envisioned by Roger Vadim and co-scriptwriters Claude Brule, Claude Martin, and Roger Vailland, body-hopping Mircalla Karnstein is little more than a supernaturally manipulative businesswoman. Her character is in keeping with our amoral times. In fact, her esanguivagous attack on the maid, Lisa, remains one of the few times the Countess reverted to purely vampiric behavior. The pivotal figure in the film, Mircalla otherwise focused her craving into a means for advancement in this new world. Though a stranger in a strange land, Vadim's nosferatu swiftly grew savvy to the pulse of modern life. Her remorseless seduction and soul-swapping with Georgia accents this point; in one measured step, Mircalla defeats a rival and gained influence and power. By contrast, actress Ingrid Pitt essayed a more traditional interpretation of Carmilla/Mircalla with **THE VAMPIRE LOVERS** (1970). Her Countess, a lascivious creature, is concerned with little more than the next meal. This is why she loses her head to the sharpened saber of General Speiltsdorf (Peter Cushing). Even the undead are wise to be as tactful as possible.

ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR is a fascinating study in symmetry. At the movie's core are legends of Karnstein infamy summarized by Leopaldo and Carmilla. Considering the nature of the vampiress's climatic victory, it must be ironic that Mircalla waited centuries to finally consummate her love affair with a first cousin. Leopaldo became a suitable replacement for the unfaithful Ludwig. For Countess Karnstein, the past was now linked to her present. Mircalla's insistence on keeping it all within the family make the film a remarkably intimate one. Released at a key point in the sexual revolution of horror cinema, Vadim's work was able to touch upon a forbidden love LeFanu avoided in his tale. The title character of "CARMILLA" sought sustenance with the blood of hapless strangers. Her sexual preference for female victims was an interesting but novel idea. Vadim



CARMILLA BITES THE DUST IN BLOOD AND ROSES

was able to elaborate on the incestuous element of desire running throughout **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR**. Carmilla's identification with her notorious ancestors left the young woman vulnerable to the spirits of the past. Fully fleshed, Mircalla can devote most of her energies towards seducing Leopoldo and his fiancée. During their most illustrious period, Carmilla notes early in the film, the Karnsteins raged across the twilight countryside as vampires. Under the Countess's assured control, this grim legacy could easily be resurrected in a world grown too sophisticated to believe anymore in ghost stories.

Because the movie is set within an era of spiritual dismissal, Countess Karnstein achieves her goal thoroughly unopposed. **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** is not deficient in the trappings of a routine horror film, either, so its protagonists should have been but were not clued into the creature's activities. Their castle and estate has dark memories kept alive in the modern yet superstitious Italian village nearby; the strange attacks on Lisa and Georgia involve telltale neck biting; a mirror, the bane of most self-respecting vampires, is dramatically shattered; the aristocrats themselves are grounded in the lore of the undead. To their eyes, unfortunately, the events which unfold biographed the remaining days and death of the neurotic Carmilla Von Karnstein. The villagers may sense a recurrence of the supernatural, but they are powerless to effect a change in the situation. It is the Karnsteins and their friends who rule the land. Mircalla's stoic contempt for the technological innovation of "the age of knowledge" may, in this case, be justified.

Throughout "CARMILLA" and the Hammer film which were contemporary to **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** (**HORROR OF DRACULA**, 1958; **BRIDES OF DRACULA**, 1960; **KISS OF THE VAMPIRE**, 1962), pre-20th Century protagonists did not shirk away from the surreal. In lieu of a comfortable scientific answer (which often lost credibility trying to explain the unexplainable),

each character fell back on an acceptance of the supernatural that permitted them to deal with their bizarre antagonists. Recent Hong Kong productions, set in China's past or present, are full of people who routinely control the magic around them (**POSSESSION**, 1983; **THE ACCIDENT**, 1985; **GHOST FEVER**, 1989; and others). Unlike the bulk of modern European and North American releases, the Chinese have not allowed innovation to kill a belief in the supernatural. The creatures of the night have to work harder these days to frighten sophisticated film and video audiences. But their efforts may ultimately prove futile. Movie fans knowledgeable in current events are finding more immediate horrors to believe in.

As with **HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER** (1986), Roger Vadim's story unfolds from the viewpoint of the lead monster. The scenic Italian countryside is never allowed to take on a menacing caste because there is nothing for the antagonist to fear. Though it shares fright film imagery with a slew of other vampire entries, **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** mutes the horror behind the polish of an art movie. Most of the dramatic encounters are played out in daylight or shadowless rooms. Blood is kept to a minimum, obviously to heighten the impact when it actually flows: the death and aftermath of Lisa, and Georgia's final vampire-induced nightmare involving spillage of the red stuff. The slow, deliberate camerawork is complemented by the Irish harpwork of Elene Polanska (an approximate spelling since the title credits were difficult to read); this musical theme elaborated on the Karnstein sonata Leopoldo and Carmilla play on the piano. Overall, the score is as undramatic as the rest of the film. The effective motif of decaying roses (along with the rare splash of blood, these flowers exhibit the most startling shades of color in the film) is an unusual touch. The inclusion of several lesbian encounters censored out of the English-language version, **BLOOD AND ROSES**, is unlikely to make Vadim's movie more explicit than the vampire productions which soon followed.

The sublimated directorial style of **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** is reflected in most of the lead performances. Mel Ferrer's portrayal of Leopoldo is adequately characterized to win him sympathy. However, since he rarely ventures into the far end of the emotional spectrum, it is difficult for us to believe Leopoldo shares the intense melancholy of the Karnsteins. As Georgia, Elsa Martinelli is quite easy on the eye, but her character registers as little else put a pawn of the script. Her emotional fire is subdued beyond even Ferrer's quiet performance. Annette Vadim makes the most of Carmilla/Mircalla (who also is known as Millacara throughout the movie) is a showy role. As with the bright contrast of blood or a rose against **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR**'s dulled visual canvas, she is permitted to stand out from the other bland thespians. In her more domestic moments (when she is vamping, not vampirizing fellow cast members) Annette Vadim manages to suggest the more famous actress.

ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR does more than merely nod toward its source material. By updating "CARMILLA" to our era — a time when injustice steamrolls over millions of individual lives in spite of international laws — Vadim's movie anticipates the tone of horror cinema for the next few decades. Of course, many fright films conclude with an irresolution that has become a cliché as cop-out endings and last minute shock attempts. The epic battle between Light and Darkness in pre-World War II horror fiction (literature as well as film) no longer could be viewed as anything other than fondly remembered nostalgia. The complexity of modern existence rendered this struggle into wish fulfillment; there can be no more easy solutions, in **ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR** or the era which spawned it.

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22 THE TRAVELLING MONSTER HUNTER

BY HORÁCIO NIGUCHI

This column describes and reviews little-known or poorly reported monster movies from all over the world, based whenever possible on their original versions. Because many of those titles have not been written about in English-language publications, cast and credits are provided to correct or supplement reference materials dear to all you serious buffs out there (you know who you are!). All dialogue quoted is guaranteed 100% authentic and translated to the best of my abilities.

DRACULA

The Spanish Language Version

¡Escuchalos! Son los hijos de la noche...

¡Hermosa música componen!

The line is familiar, the language less so. In the early days of sound the great Hollywood studios produced simultaneously-shot, alternative versions of their major titles for the Spanish-speaking market. (Sure, they could have dubbed the original pictures, as they later found more practical to do, but the novelty of having the actors' voices being heard was what attracted audiences those days.) Universal made about a dozen such export versions in the period 1929-1930; of these, **DRACULA** is certainly the most famous. This Spanish-language alternative to the Tod Browning/Bela Lugosi film was mostly restored by the American Film Institute in 1977; unfortunately, nitrate decomposition of the negative had then caused the loss of the entire third reel of the movie. Through the circuitous route of the bootleg video market, a poor quality tape of what appears to be this restoration has surfaced recently: just watch it, ignore the dropouts and the multigenerational picture degradation, and don't ask any questions.

Some movies are considered classics less for their intrinsic qualities than because of their significant contribution, for better or worse, to the development of a genre, a trend or a style. Tod Browning's **DRACULA**, based not directly on Bram Stoker's novel but on a stage play adapted from it by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston — *Dracula, the Vampire Play* (New York opening, 1927) — is one such classic. After an impressive, wonderful start in an atmospheric castle in Transylvania, the picture soon becomes static and stagebound, with the camera doing little else than registering the histrionics of a cast still unaccustomed to the possibilities (and challenges) offered by the then-emerging "talkies". However, public acclaim prompted Universal and its rivals to make new and better horror movies, and it is safe to say that the entire American monster film production owes it all to that creaky, often dull frightfest.

The Spanish-language version of **DRACULA** was directed by George Melford (1889-1961), helmer of some prestigious silent productions (including a 1920 version of **THE SEA WOLF** and the Rudolph Valentino vehicle **THE SHEIK**, made the following year) and of three other alternative renditions in Spanish of Hollywood "talkies" — among which the horror film **LA VOLUNTAD DEL MUERTO** (1929), an adaptation of **THE CAT CREEPS**.



CARLOS VILLAR AS THE SPANISH COUNT DRACULA

How does it compare with Browning's work? Frankly, not badly — even better in places, but overall quite similar to the English-language version both in virtues and defects. Oddly, many sequences rendered by Browning in long-shot are replaced by similar setups by Melford in medium-shot, and vice-versa; sometimes the characters flip positions (say, Van Helsing walking left to right in one version and right to left in the other), and parallel actions are cut differently. Both productions shared the same Garrett Fort script, with most of the English lines faithfully translated into Spanish for Melford's cast. The locales were kept the same — Transylvania, London — but, curiously, some of the character names were changed, probably to make them sound more familiar to Hispanic audiences: Mina Seward became Eva Seward, Lucy Weston was translated as Lucia Weston, and good ol' Jonathan Harker — 'John' Harker in Browning's film — hailed as Juan Harker.

Since everybody knows the plot, let's review only the major differences. To simplify matters, I'll refer to Tod Browning's version as TB and George Melford's as GM. The dialogue quoted is from the Spanish-language version, and corresponds to a faithful translation of the original script by Garrett Fort; ironically, the English-spoken film itself eliminated many lines that remained in Melford's work. The introduction with Renfield spooking the colorful Transylvanians at the mere mention of the Borgo Pass is virtually identical in both versions, incorporating the same exterior long-shots showing the carriage against the mountain landscape. TB, however, favors more medium close-shots for long-winding dialogue.

The Spanish version introduces Dracula in a more sinister way. In the first appearance of the character in TB, we see a hand with stretched fingers creeping out of coffin, followed by snapshots of an opossum and a cockroach; then there is a view of a female vampire rising, cutting quickly to a travelling-shot of Dracula fully standing, wrapped in his black cape. In GM the same hand creeps out of coffin and we are treated to different shots of the opossum and the cockroach; the scene with the vampire woman is deleted in favor of a long-shot of Dracula slowly rising from his coffin. (Here the inner lining of the count's cape is fully visible, while Lugosi hides it most of the time.) The first repartee between Renfield and Dracula is much better handled in TB, although GM scores an interesting sequence with a travelling-shot of the vampire holding a candle and coming down the stairs to greet his guest.

A more curious variation happens during Dracula's table conversation with Renfield. In TB, the count discusses his interest in purchasing Carfax Abbey as his London residence; the real estate agent accidentally cuts his finger with a paper clip, causing immediate bloodlust reaction in Dracula — who, discouraged by the sight of a crucifix, offers "very old wine" to his guest and then leaves. In GM, Dracula serves full dinner to the famished Renfield, who cuts his finger with a bread knife; the vampire lusts for blood, sees the crucifix and controls himself — then he offers wine, explains his plans on Carfax Abbey property and finally retires. Somehow Dracula is a kinder host in the Spanish version, providing his guest with a meal before getting into business... and drinking his blood.

At this point there is an abrupt cut in the video print: this is where the missing third reel should be. As described further below, the lost footage comprises: Dracula warding off the three vampire women and preying on Renfield, still in his castle; the trip to England on the 'Vesta'; the discovery of corpses on the abandoned ship; Dracula introducing himself to the Seward family at the theater. The print I saw cuts from the end of the second reel to scene in a boudoir where friends Lucia Weston and Eva Seward chat, both very impressed by the fascinating foreign gentleman they've met earlier that evening. (Both women are brunettes, as opposed to their bleached counterparts in TB.)

After Dracula attacks and kills Lucia, Dr. Van Helsing performs her autopsy. GM shows a close-up of the victim's neck showing teeth punctures, probably a first in vampire movies. (Instead of this shot,

TB focuses on Renfield's mad antics at the sanitarium.) When Van Helsing and Victor Seward interview the real estate agent — who came back completely deranged from Transylvania — GM digs more into the details. Renfield eats a fly in the presence of the two doctors (Van Helsing: "What makes you feel like eating flies?" Renfield: "The wings of flies, gentlemen, represent the airborne powers of psychic faculties."), and then the movie suddenly cuts into Eva's feeling ill, and to a moody shot of Dracula raising from his smoky coffin in Carfax Abbey. Renfield goes hysterical when he hears some kind of howling, and has a fit when Van Helsing presents him a piece of wolfsbane (a close-up of the plant, never clearly shown in TB).

The Spanish-spoken film omits the scene where Dracula first assails Eva/Mina: all we see is the girl describing the after-the-fact nightmare she had. While in TB Mina promptly shows Van Helsing where she was bitten, Eva in GM is more reluctant to reveal such intimate details and only exposes it to her father, Seward — who in turn shows it to the visiting professor.

One of the most interesting differences between the two versions is the reaction Dracula has when Van Helsing unmasks him with a small mirror. Lugosi only slaps it off the professor's hand, and his exit line — "For one who hasn't lived even a single lifetime, you are a wise man, Van Helsing..." — is delivered with an arrogant sneer. His Spanish-speaking counterpart Carlos Villarias, who wears a top hat in most of his outdoor scenes, responds more violently to the mirror trap: he smashes it with his cane and looks genuinely disturbed when he recites the famous line.

In a sequence with no exact counterpart in the release version of TB, Renfield defiantly scoffs at Van Helsing's promise to deliver him from Dracula's influence if he "spills all the beans" (as if the professor really needed further evidence of the Count's evil): "You fool!", gloats the madman, "And I thought you were some whiz! What have I got to gain if I tell you everything?" (pause). "This doctor," he points at Seward, "keeps me locked here all day. When I behave myself, he gives me a pinch of sugar so I can catch flies! But to serve the Master...! — a smart madman would rather serve those who can give him life!" In TB this pathetic character just begs for Van Helsing's help.

In GM, Eva tells she saw the mysterious lady in white (Lucia in undead form, not shown on screen) to fiancé Juan Harker and Van Helsing as they all meet in her room, not at the terrace like in TB. The sequences in GM that follow are either differently structured or totally absent in TB: Dracula hypnotically commanding Renfield and tormenting him as he prepares to attack Eva (this scene occurs much earlier in TB, even before Dracula and Van Helsing first meet, and the intended victim there is Lucy, not Mina); a maid, Marta, putting wolfsbane on Eva's pillow; and Dracula hypnotizing the maid to have the plant removed while Renfield keeps Van Helsing busy.

Dracula's major confrontation with Van Helsing is also different, being longer and more dramatic in GM: "Don't you forget, Van Helsing", pontificates the vampire, "that in these past years, all those who crossed my path ended up paying with their lives — some of them quite unpleasantly". The professor retracts and the count raises his left hand. "Come... here! You will not move your hand until I want you to do so!" Van Helsing reaches inside his jacket. "Take out whatever you have there and put it in this box!" Dracula anticipates his antagonist has a crucifix and covers his face with his cloak; Van Helsing pretends to toss something into the box and closes it. "Did you do as I told you to?" "Yes", lies the professor, and abruptly raises the crucifix toward the vampire. Dracula screams (!) and runs for the terrace without looking back or covering his face.

The scene above in GM is intercut with a sequence with Eva in her room, asking Marta to take away all the wolfsbane and open the window to the terrace. After the count leaves, Eva seems to be in high spirits and impresses Harker. A bat flies by, Eva says "I'll do it" and hugs her fiancé — and tries to bite him in the neck. (In

TB, this scene occurs off the camera, centering instead on Van Helsing and Seward: only the voices of the two lovers are heard.) GM includes a well-framed shot of the two doctors in the foreground eavesdropping on the lovers in the background. The subsequent revelation that Dracula came to Eva, opened a vein in his own arm and made her drink his blood is made much clearer and more dramatic in GM: in TB, Mina has her face covered throughout and Helen Chandler rushes through her lines, muffling them as if she had to sweep them away under the carpet in shame. Not so in GM.

Van Helsing and Harker complete the off-screen staking of Lucia, and the professor adds: "It was an act of charity to drive a stake through her heart: now she can rest in peace". In TB, Dracula hypnotizes Mina and makes her walk in the woods after him toward Carfax Abbey; in GM, instead, the count carries Eva all along, as she is unconscious. (This may be the first time a vampire was shown carrying his female victim, a classic image in all Gothic horror movies.) In GM, as he reaches the abbey and walks down the staircase with the passed-out woman in his arms, Dracula spots Renfield and thinks he led his enemies there: he suddenly drops the girl, strangles his slave and tosses him off the stairs (not down the steps like in TB); then he picks up the still unconscious Eva and takes her down to his crypt.

The final act also presents many discrepancies in detail, and GM is more effective throughout: it is as though Browning completely lost interest in wrapping it up at this point, while Melford realized this had to be the big payoff. In a sequence not shown in TB, Dracula tries to bite Eva once again, but sunrise comes and he rushes for his coffin. The staking of the count occurs (unfortunately) offscreen in both versions, but differently covered. In TB there are a couple of boring shots of Van Helsing looking for Mina, and an isolated scene with the girl coming back to her senses as the vampire is being destroyed; only then the lovers are reunited. In GM, the staking happens at the precise moment Harker finds the dizzy Eva wandering around, as the professor hammers the stake three times: moans are heard at each bang. TB closes the movie with Mina and Harker going up the stairs as the professor stays behind for unclear reasons. GM, however, ends with Eva and Harker coming out of the abbey to the sun, while Van Helsing remains in the crypt "to keep the promise I made to Renfield". The last image in GM is that of the professor standing beside Renfield's body. **FIN — ES UNA PELÍCULA DE LA UNIVERSAL.**

All in all, a movie in no way inferior to the classic version, even superior to it in some instances. It surely has the unmistakable Universal style common to the genre productions of that studio's Golden Age. Melford's crew used the same sets as Browning's, and retained many of latter's collaborators but replaced ace cinematographer Karl Freund with George Robinson, later to shoot himself the second generation of Universal monsters — **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER, SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, SON OF DRACULA** and others. Much like the English-language version, the music in Melford's is limited to a passage from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* during the opening credits.

One of the outstanding aspects of Melford's version is its more overt approach to sexuality and the vampire myth. The main female character, Eva, wears a sleeveless, low-cut gown (in contrast to the much more modest outfit of her counterpart in Browning's film) and gets visibly unwound after Dracula's first bite: she starts acting livelier and sexier than before, much like Christopher Lee's victims would do in the Hammer series. That is not to say any of the versions endorse sexual liberation: in both it is a reason for shame — but Melford takes the risk of having Eva clearly describe her being forced to drink blood from a cut in Dracula's arm (and cower for her sin), while Browning has Mina dampen her lines so they are barely understandable. The "horror" of Dracula resides not in his unsavory condition of un-dead or in his drinking habits, but in those suppressed instincts he awakens in his female victims.

Although all the actors speak Spanish, there is a bizarre mixture of Castilian and Latin American accents that belie the motley origin of this cast recruited from expatriates and immigrants residing in Hollywood at the time. In the title role is Spaniard Carlos Villarias (credited as Carlos Villar), who appeared in many other American movies before returning to his native country. Here he displays a passing physical resemblance to the better known Hungarian star; his performance is silent-movie-hammy, all snarls and bulging eyes — but he has over his counterpart the advantage of fluency in the language he performs in. Perhaps that could account for the difference in tone as Dracula reacts in the aforementioned scene with Van Helsing's mirror: maybe Lugosi never understood the meaning of his lines and his delivery ended up sounding mocking and supercilious, while Villarias appears truly shocked at finally having met his match. Director Melford frames Villarias differently from Browning's treatment of Lugosi, favoring lateral extreme close-up of his star's eyes instead of full-face frontal shots. It would be interesting to check if Villarias could successfully cope with the transition from silent to sound films in his later works. His compatriot Pablo Alvarez Rubio relishes in overacting, though in all fairness it is nearly impossible not to ham up the role of Renfield. The best actor in the lot, clearly in full command of his abilities and use of voice, is Mexican Eduardo Arozamena, who looks a little like Jeff Corey and compares favorably to Edward Van Sloan. It is worth mentioning that, contrary to the English-language version, Melford's film doesn't burden Dracula and Van Helsing with thick Continental accents — something perhaps impossible, given the lack of a baseline "British" Spanish Eva, Harker, Seward, Lucia and Renfield should all be speaking.

In his well-documented and illustrated recent book *Hollywood Gothic — The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1990, 244 pages, now also available in softbound edition), horror & sf novelist David J. Skal includes an entire chapter on Melford's film. The author obtained special permission from the U.S. government to go to Havana to study in detail the only complete print known to have survived. That puts him in the privileged position of confidently affirming his favoring Melford's version over the better-known Tod Browning classic. (For some reason, he calls the former "the Spanish movie", as opposed to Browning's "American movie", but this is misleading: both were made here in the U.S.) Skal's account of the missing third reel is priceless, and sheds an entirely new light on early sound horror movie history, dispelling the belief that Browning's version was so stiff and contrived because of technical limitations. According to his description, this lost reel begins with Renfield, dizzy from the drugged wine given by Dracula, pulling at his collar and dropping his crucifix: he tries to open the window, and is startled by a flapping bat and attacked from behind by the three vampire women — who, unlike the "zombie schoolmarm" with tight braids and robotic demeanor" of the Tod Browning version, here are "wild, exotic creatures with flowing hair and low-cut gowns". (The author calls this scene "without question, one of the great, if hitherto unheralded, images from the horror films of the 1930s" — and proves it by sharing with us a mind-blowing frame enlargement showing the snarling, advancing *vampiras*.) The last thing Renfield sees is Dracula watching an earthbox being lowered onto a wagon. Then the film shifts to the doomed sea trip, with the count creeping out of the ship's hold to prey on the sailors, while "Renfield's face is glimpsed in a porthole, laughing maniacally". Once in London, Dracula rises from his coffin in Carfax Abbey and goes to the theater (it isn't clear from Skal's description if the count attacks the flower girl or other women), where he meets Eva, Lucia & Co. This later sequence is reportedly staged with an elaborate sense of composition and sophisticated camerawork, and closes with an outtake from a ballet scene from the 1925 *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*. (This lost reel should add some 8 to 12 minutes more to the 93-minute running time I clocked for the incomplete print. The Browning version, by the way, though officially running 85

minutes, was further cut by 10 after a studio sneak preview and released only at the shorter length. That means that in May 1931, when both versions were being shown at the same time in different theaters in L.A., the Spanish-language one was almost *half an hour* longer than its classic counterpart!)

Skal, who interviewed leading actress Lupita Tovar, also offers some interesting behind-the-scenes production notes. The movie was conceived by associate producer Paul Kohner (a protégé of Universal boss Carl Laemmle Jr. and later Tovar's husband) as not just a Spanish-language version of the official film, but a truly independent production deliberately *different* from it: he and director Melford took great pains *not* to copy Tod Browning's set-ups or camera angles — which would explain the puzzling reverse-shots and cross-cutting sequences mentioned above. The Browning cast and crew worked in regular daytime hours, and Melford's people took over the same sets at night, which allowed the latter to study the dailies of the "main" version in order to shoot everything differently. (Only Carlos Villarias was encouraged to deliberately imitate Lugosi, and wore the same makeup and hairpiece as the Hungarian actor to good effect.) Skal reports that one of Melford's greatest assets was cinematographer George Robinson, who made intricate settings and multiple-focussed shots to emphasize the tridimensional quality of the action: then perhaps he should get most of the credit for that well-framed scene when Dr. Seward and Van Helsing eavesdrop on Eva and Harker talking at the terrace. (There must be a whole lot of great set-ups like this, but the tape I saw was often too fuzzy for accurate estimation. Point taken: this is a good warning for those of us who write reviews based on smudgy, nth-generation video dubs — we miss a lot of important detail.) One movie extensively studied by Melford and Kohner was F.W. Murnau's *NOSFERATU* (then banned for copyright infringement): Skal points out many similarities in certain scenes between the two vampire epics. By making efficient use of studio space and the elaborate sets left by the daytime personnel, Melford's crew completed their movie in 22 nights, at a cost of about \$66,000 — less than a seventh of the budget allocated to Browning. The Spanish-language version had a highly successful preview screening a month *before* the opening date of its counterpart, which by that time was still having retakes shot. Melford's version had its official world premiere in April 1931 in Mexico City (where the posters billed homegirl Lupita Tovar above Villarias himself), and a month later it opened in L.A.'s Hispanic theaters: it remained in circulation in various Spanish-speaking countries until the 50s.

I disagree with Skal's claim that "contrary to some accounts", the Browning and Melford versions "have no footage in common". Many exterior scenes — such as the opening shot with the passenger coach rolling down the valley, or later when Dracula's carriage leaves the Borgo Pass with Renfield on, with a bat flying over the horses — are the very same in both movies, give or take a couple of frames trimmed. The first glimpse of the huge hall of Dracula's castle is also the same shot in the two films. But he rightly states that in many sequences Melford made use of outtakes of the "main" footage. And, yes, the dreaded armadillos

that cavort in Lugosi's lair are all gone.

In its truncated, blurry multigenerational video dub form, Melford's *DRACULA* is at least as good as, and often better than, Browning's version. In all probability a fully restored new print, shown on the big screen, would bring out its further qualities. Soon after the release of this picture, Hollywood dropped the costly practice of shooting alternative foreign versions in favor of simply dubbing the soundtrack into whatever language the market demanded. I'm personally convinced that Browning's version achieved classic status mainly because of historical circumstances. If, for instance, Philip II's Invincible Armada wasn't defeated by the English in 1588, it is quite possible we'd all be speaking Spanish now. And then Melford's *DRACULA* would have replaced Browning's as the First Sound Horror Film Classic...

(Revised from a version previously published in two parts.)



DRACULA. Universal Pictures (USA), 1930. Director: George Melford. Screenplay: [Garrett Fort, uncredited]. Spanish adaptation: B. Fernández Cue. Cinematography: George Robinson. Film editor: Arturo Tavares. Supervising editor: Maurice Pivar. Art director: Charles D. Hall. Producer: Carl Laemmle Jr. Associate producer: Paul Kohner. Cast: Carlos Villar [= Carlos Villarias] (*Count Dracula*), Lupita Tovar (*Eva Seward*), Barry Norton (*Juan Harker*), Pablo Alvarez Rubio (*Renfield*), Eduardo Arozamena (*Dr. Van Helsing*), José Soriano Viosca (*Dr. Victor Seward*), Carmen Guerrero (*Lucia Weston*), Amelia Senisterra (*Marta, the nurse*), Manuel Arbó (*Martín, the asylum guard*). Running time: 93 minutes.

LA MUJER MURCIÉLAGO

(The Bat Woman)

Holyguacamole! This Batwoman is a millionaire, a marksman, an expert rider and diver, a special agent for the International Bureau of Intelligence, and — what else? — a professional wrestler! Her compact converts into a handy gun, and she drives a mean black '57 T-Bird! But it is her costume that would give 'em prudes Adam West and Yvonne Craig the fits. No, I'm not talking about possible copyright infringement as she whams and barns through wearing a bat-cowl, a mini-bat-cape, and matching bat-boots and bat-gloves. It's the rest of her uniform — a bright blue bat-bikini that leaves most of her anatomy exposed to the scorching sun of Acapulco! She may think that's the proper attire for crimefighting in the mean streets and seedy corners from Tijuana to Cuernavaca — who am I to argue?

Mujer Murciélago's first and only film outing takes place in Acapulco, where the bodies of wrestlers recently reported missing are found on the beach with their pineal gland removed. The local police inspector enlists the aid of our heroine and her two IBI colleagues Mario Robles and Tony Rocca to investigate. (These two guys are the only ones privy to MM's secret identity, elegant socialite Gloria. There are hints of a three-way relationship — although, since this movie is aimed for teens, Tony doesn't hang out for long and Mario hits the couch while MM changes into her green baby-doll and goes to bed all by herself.) It doesn't take her more than a glance at the situation to deduce, with lightning-quick brainwork, that the prime suspect must be Dr. Eric Williams, a recluse fish collector who lives on a yacht. (But then, very few

innocent bystanders would call their boathouse "Reptilicus" and hire an assistant named Igor.) Williams, whose knowledge of science seems even more doubtful than his own sanity ("Increase pressure to 20 decibels!", he orders Igor, making us wonder what unit he uses to measure sound intensity), is bent on creating an army of amphibian superbeings. He kidnaps professional wrestlers for their top physical condition; then he extracts their pineal gland fluid — never mind that the gland is actually calcified and completely nonfunctional in adults — and injects it into the brain of a goldfish (!), hoping to "reverse evolution". In his first at-last-successful experiment, he creates a miniature fishman (footage of a scuba diver superimposed onto the side panel of a fish tank) that he later zaps with radiation (sic) and magnifies to human size. Now the long-awaited Monster appears in all his glory — a stuntman in a blazing red-orange neoprene diving suit and matching flippers, with poorly attached plastic dorsal fin and chest plates, clawed gloves and a Donald Duck-like full-head mask. Williams calls him "Pisces" and keeps him under control through a brain implant, while getting ready for Phase Two — in his own words, "the creation of a fishwoman, and I don't have to tell you who that'll be!" The good doctor had his face burned by acid in an early confrontation with MM and vowed revenge: now he sends the monster to abduct her, following a tracer he managed to clip on her bat-cape. (Since both Williams and Igor figured MM's secret identity, their ultimate fate is obviously already sealed.) After a number of failed attempts Pisces finally succeeds in bringing MM to the ship, where the scientist keeps both Mario and the police inspector in chains. (Mario: "You're mad!" Williams: "Perhaps, but only a thin, invisible line separates madness from genius!") Quick as ever, MM plugs the tracer on the doctor's back; the monster crashes into the lab on cue and attacks Williams: in no time the place is up in flames and the yacht explodes to smithereens. Later, just as the more full-blooded macho guys in the audience are beginning to feel uneasy with so much female bravery, our victorious heroine promptly screams in horror at the sight of a common mouse.

Very much watchable as are most Mexican fantasy flicks of the 60s, *LA MUJER MURCIÉLAGO* suffers nevertheless from a terribly structured script. The plotline is so hopelessly disjointed that I'd bet nobody would have noticed if the projectionist messed up the order of a couple of reels: it is basically a boring ping-pong game that goes nowhere, alternating Villain-Going-To-Town-To-Get-Heroine-And-Failing and Heroine-Going-To-Sea-To-Get-Villain-And-Failing situations. But the movie more than compensates for its clumsily-constructed story with sheer outrageousness: it's like those daily serial comic strips whose goings-on you don't care to follow, yet your eyes are attracted to by the bizarre imagery. The sight of a masked woman in a skimpy swimsuit fighting a mad scientist and his cheesy rubber-suit monster cheerfully transcends the narrow confines of common sense and reaches the state of sublime dementia. This exercise in logic deprivation is further enhanced by the blasé stance of the parties involved: much as the good citizens of Gotham City seem totally oblivious to the antics of two weird guys running around in silly costumes, jaded Acapulcans don't appear any more excited to watch this cute bikini-clad bat-babe engaging criminals.

Those similarities with Bob Kane's creations reportedly brought up some legal hassles. The movie was apparently blocked from entering the U.S. market by zealous corporate lawyers — those tireless defenders of the rich and the oppressive — on behalf of DC Comics and 20th Century Fox Television. They may have been right about audiences possibly confusing MM with some other copyrighted bat-character: all it would have taken her to offer serious competition to Barbara Gordon was to wear a blue-gray body stocking underneath that alluring two-piece. And all those chiropteran humanoid are pretty funny anyway — though while the *BATMAN* TV show was Designer Camp, this south-of-the-border movie succeeded in being hilarious without meaning to.

At times the movie looks too good for its production values. Nobody ever accused Cinematográfica Calderón of spending megabudgets, but for all those woefully underfinanced special effects, the movie is graced with gorgeous color underwater photography — well on a par with that of other contemporary waterlogged monster sagas like the Japanese *TERROR BENEATH THE SEA* and the American *DESTINATION INNER SPACE*. And it was really filmed in the ocean, for a change — later productions made by the same Estudios Churubusco personnel, like *SANTO CONTRA BLUE DEMON EN LA ATLANTIDA* (1969) and *CHANOC VS. EL TIGRE Y EL VAMPIRO* (1970), were mostly shot in a swimming pool or behind a fish tank. On the other hand, arch-veteran director Cardona the Elder used to be a more careful helmer back in the 40s: here he seems apathetic to the proceedings, as he churns out a string of one-takes with solemn indifference. The main cast is familiar: Armando Silvestre later repeated his mad scientist schtick (though a sympathetic one this time) in Cardona Sr.'s infamous *NIGHT OF THE BLOODY APES* (1968); Roberto Cañedo switched from hero to the deformed creation of Dr. Frankenstein's daughter in *SANTO CONTRA LA HIJA DE FRANKENSTEIN* (1971); and Maura Monti, a pert brunette whose figure and waterproof mascara are more impressive than her thespian abilities, also appeared as one of the title critters in the all-time Mil Máscaras-John Carradine confrontation *LAS VAMPIRAS* (1968).

It is curious that, even if this isn't nominally a wrestler picture, it sets forth once again the idea of those pro-ring sluggers being "superior" human specimens perfect for scientific experimentation — a notion explored in many Mexican horror movies since *LADRÓN DE CADÁVERES* (1956). This image of "superiority" may explain why our hyper, workaholic superheroine simply has to add some time on the professional mat to her already busy agenda. For wrestlers in Mexico are the stuff of legend: there must be a song down there asking mamacita not to let her chicos grow up to be luchadores.

**WATCH
OUT!!!!
GLORIA,
IT IS
PISCES
THE GILL
MAN!!!
EEEEK!!!**



LA MUJER MURCIÉLAGO. Export title: *BAT WOMAN*. Cinematográfica Calderón (Mexico), 1967. Director: René Cardona (Sr.). Screenplay: Alfredo Salazar. Cinematography: Agustín Jiménez & Genaro Hurtado. Music: Antonio Díaz Conde. Jazz music: Antonio Acosta. Film editor: Jorge Bustos. Art director: Javier Torres Torija. Monster created by Alfonso Barcenás. Producer: Guillermo Calderón Stell. Cast: Maura Monti (Gloria/Mujer Murciélago), Roberto Cañedo (Mario Robles), Hector Godoy (Tony Rocca), Armando Silvestre (Dr. Eric Williams), David Silva (Police Inspector), Crox Alvarado (Number One). Running time: 80 minutes. Eastmancolor.

DENSÔ-NINGEN

(Secret of the Telegian)

The suspect may look like a human being, but he is in fact a fiend with electric wiring in place of blood vessels, with electricity flowing through his body instead of blood!

— Science reporter Kirioka

By the late 50s Toho was getting good reviews and better profits for its large-scale spectacular epics — monster movies, space-opera, World War II battle recreations — produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and relying heavily on Eiji Tsuburaya's special effects unit. At that time the studio was also responsible for a tough yakuza/gangster series called **ANKOKUGAI** (literally, "Pitch-Dark Alley", meaning the underworld), with seven titles produced from 1956 to 1965. Those crime melodramas were the Japanese equivalent of the Warner Bros. gangster thrillers of the 40s, with elements of *film noir* thrown in and starring Toho's top contract players such as Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Mihashi and Koji Tsuruta. It didn't take long to producer Tanaka to imagine a combination of genres — crime thrillers with science fiction elements — and so he made three of these hybrids, aimed to an audience more mature (or simply older) than the giant monster crowd: **THE H-MAN**, with its *ekitai-ningen* ("fluid men"); **THE SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN**, about a *densô-ningen* ("electromagnetic wave man"); and **THE HUMAN VAPOR**, with a *gasu-ningen* ("gaseous man"). The connection with the gangster series is made explicit by the choice of some of the lead actors in them — respectively, Makoto Sato, Koji Tsuruta and Tatsuya Mihashi — all **ANKOKUGAI** veterans. (Some people lump **ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE** with this lot, but that's an entirely different matter.) They are all good, intriguing science fiction thrillers — **THE HUMAN VAPOR** is in my opinion the best Japanese movie ever made in the genre — but for some reason **TELEGIAN** remains pretty obscure. Although it was indeed picked up for U.S. distribution in the early 60s, the fact it was actually released in American theaters is open to question. It's a shame, for despite its flaws it certainly deserves to be seen.



TELEGIAN is structured like a mystery thriller. The body of a middle-aged man, Tsukamoto, is found in the spooky-ride premises of an amusement park in Tokyo. Investigative instinct leads Sho Kirioka, a reporter for the science section of a major newspaper, to explore the case: he notices the man was stabbed with a World War II Japanese Army issue bayonet, and finds a piece of metal coil nearby. While researching for an upcoming article on 3D television, Kirioka learns from his old professor Dr. Miura that the coil is part of a high-tech, ultraminiaturized semiconductor device, the cryotron (*), expected to replace the transistor. (Remember, the movie was made long before LSI chips became commonplace.) Miura explains that cryotrons are promising components but have a serious drawback: they require "an extreme low temperature of 4.2 degrees Kelvin" to work properly.

Akiko Nakajo, who works for an industrial-scale electronics company, is visited by a certain Goro Nakamoto from the Kotari Ranch — a creepy guy with a fixed stance who looks like a walking corpse. He says he only received two of the four deep-freezing devices he ordered; Akiko confirms the remaining units are on their way to the Ranch as requested. For no good reason, Nakamoto cracks into one of those unnerving, patented Mad

Genius horse-laughters, which gives the poor woman the creeps. Later, while looking for clues at Tsukamoto's modest apartment, Kirioka bumps into Akiko, who coincidentally happens to live in the same building. (Just a cute way of boy-meeting-girl, of course.) He also encounters police detective Kobayashi, a former school-mate, who is officially in the case: they continue their investigation at the Daihonei Club — a night spot owned by prosperous businessman Ohnishi, under whom Tsukamoto served during the war. While the two friends are chatting at the bar, a tense conversation takes place in Ohnishi's office involving the boss and associates Ryu and Taki: they're all worried about Tsukamoto's death. Someone delivers an audio tape to Ohnishi, containing a threatening message: "Don't you recognize this voice? I've waited for fourteen years! I have certainly not forgotten. First Lieutenant Ohnishi... Intelligence Officer Ryu... Engineering Corps Private Taki... This is Sudo... Corporal Sudo, who was murdered by you. I could never forget the fact I was murdered by scum like you... I have suffered all those years, and my turn has finally come. Sergeant Tsukamoto is already dead. The next one will be Ryu, then Taki — and finally First Lieutenant Ohnishi. Is that clear? I'll guide you all to hell — it will be my pleasure... (cackles)" In no time the tape disappears and a TV-like, low-resolution image of Corporal Sudo, in full uniform, appears before the terrified trio — and gouges Ryu with a bayonet. The others

flee, someone alerts the cops, and Kobayashi and Kirioka jump after the escaping suspect. They chase the man to a deserted warehouse, where Akiko (again!) just happens to be walking by. She recognizes Sudo as her client Nakamoto: his face looks distorted, and she faints. While Kirioka looks after her, Sudo/Nakamoto disappears. A sudden explosion destroys the warehouse, and Kirioka finds among the ruins a strange machine that seems to have something to do with deep refrigeration.

Kobayashi realizes Ohnishi and Taki are under threat and offers them police protection in exchange for telling it all. Ohnishi finally admits his wartime connection with the victims. The day Japan surrendered, he was ordered to escort eminent physicist Dr. Niki to an underground hideout in Nagano. But Lt. Ohnishi and his men — Tsukamoto, Ryu and Taki — grabbed the chance to smuggle gold instead of transporting the scientist's research materials. Their plot was accidentally discovered by Cpl. Sudo, a superpatriot who couldn't be bought off by Ohnishi's cynical words to the shocked Dr. Niki: "Professor, Japan lost the war. There is no more room left for things like scientific research. We're now in a dog-eat-dog world: instead of turning this gold over to the enemy, why don't we all ensure our well-being...?" The outraged Sudo ended up stabbed by Ohnishi, and a blast of dynamite sealed off the hideout. Years later the conspirators went back to

dig up the gold, but they saw no trace of the bodies of Niki or Sudo: all they found was the latter's dogtag.

Kirioka and Kobayashi suspect the doctor and the corporal are still alive. While getting cozy with Akiko, Kirioka learns of the Kotari Ranch involvement with that peculiar order of deep-freezing devices. Interviewed by the reporter, Dr. Miura reveals the nature of his colleague Niki's wartime work: he compares it to "a step further than 3D television" — the transmission of solid matter by means of electromagnetic radiation. He babbles about telepathy, telekinesis, yoga astral projection and speculates about the possibility of actual teleportation by "electromagnetically channeling" all those extrasensory phenomena. Kirioka quickly puts two and two together: the similarity between the destroyed apparatus found at the warehouse and a proposed electromagnetic camera that uses cryotrons, the fact that the latter require extremely low temperatures, and that someone at Kotari Ranch ordered four deep-freezers... Akiko agrees to join Kirioka and visit the sinister Nakamoto at the Ranch, under the pretext of providing him with "customer assistance". In the meantime, Taki gets a note announcing his imminent death "between 11:30h and midnight", which causes the cops to completely surround the man's house.

Kirioka and Akiko are coldly received by Nakamoto, who excuses himself to retire just before 11:30h. The couple checks out the Ranch: they hear strange sounds and realize there is someone else in the basement they can't see. Nakamoto/Sudo goes to a secret laboratory, gets under a brightly-lit chamber — and his body flashes and disappears: he is being teleported to one of the deep-freezers that was just being delivered near Taki's house. In no time the Wave Man kills some of the protecting cops, gets inside the house disguised as a policeman and bayonets Taki — then he runs away (his silhouette is sometimes outlined by a flash) and vanishes. A little later, the train carrying the deep-freezing unit blows up mysteriously.

Next day, Kobayashi asks his superior for a warrant to search the Kotari Ranch, despite the fact Nakamoto has an airtight alibi: he supposedly never left the place! Kirioka convinces the cops to get the warrant — he wants to find out who the person in the basement is (we haven't seen him but his identity is pretty obvious) and open all those locked doors. While they are debating the issue, the spooked Ohnishi moves with all his bodyguards to his cottage in the island of Hoshinojima. The minute he arrives there, however, he gets a letter from you-know-who saying he'll croak at noon.

Kirioka, Kobayashi, Dr. Miura and half of the Tokyo police force get to the Ranch. Nakamoto — by now openly addressed to by the cops as "Mr. Sudo" — tries to block them, but a voice coming from a loudspeaker invites them to come in. It is, naturally, Dr. Niki, crippled but still alive: he admits he indeed managed to build an operational teleporter using cryotrons. However, the radiation

can cause structural damage to the transmitted object — which, Kirioka speculates, may explain Sudo's slightly mangled face. Niki declares he knew Sudo was dabbling with the machine, but not that he was using it to commit murder. Sudo disappears again. Now they realize the corporal was using the deep-freeze devices to make cryotron-safe receptor chambers for his teleported errands — carefully destroyed shortly after each killing to avoid incrimination — and Kirioka and the others rush to warn Ohnishi. Miura invites Niki to come down to Tokyo, but he prefers to stay and remain a recluse. A volcano nearby fumes ominously and Niki's lab shakes from time to time (nudge-nudge). As soon as the party leaves, Sudo reappears and is reprimanded and dismissed by the old scientist. The vengeful corporal, now totally deranged and with his face ravaged by radiation, strangles Niki and beams himself away to Ohnishi's property in Hoshinojima, where he had already shipped his last receptor chamber.

The clock strikes twelve at the cottage when the Wave Man appears, dispatches all the bodyguards and skewers Ohnishi with the ubiquitous bayonet. The cops arrive as Sudo dashes for the storage room where his apparatus is: they can't prevent his getaway. But meanwhile, back at the Ranch, the dying Niki gives off his last gasp smashing the matter transmitter, a few seconds before the whole place comes down as the volcano erupts. Trapped with literally nowhere to go, the Wave Man is reduced to free atoms before the baffled Kirioka & Co.

On balance I think this is the weakest of the "monstrous-men" trilogy, despite the handsomely mounted production. This is director Jun Fukuda's second film, and his inexperience unfortunately shows. (Well, he was never one of my favorite helmers anyway; I wish all his Godzilla movies were directed by Inoshiro Honda instead.) The pacing is erratic and unsure: there are too many dead spots with cars and people running across the wide screen that are really irritating, distracting from the more intriguing aspects of the story. Which, by the way, could have been much better. The premise of teleportation (still quite rare in movies when **TELEGIAN** was made) deserves better than the laborious but underplotted screenplay (by Shinichi Sekizawa, who else?). The script insists on banging on and on with little details that would give additional clues to the detective and the reporter, while the audience was already introduced to the Wave Man and is constantly a couple of light-years ahead of the heroes. Too bad it prefers to emphasize this pseudo-mystery angle rather than concentrating on the characters (like in **THE HUMAN VAPOR**) or on further possibilities of the movie's scientific McGuffin (as in **THE H-MAN**). In fact, some characters seem to have been written in just to fulfill a studio contract. For instance, the only woman in the story, played by the beautiful and talented Yumi Shirakawa (the underrated veteran of **THE MYSTERIANS**, **RODAN**, **THE H-MAN**, **THE LAST WAR** and **GORATH**), is there only to provide

the hero a (platonic) love interest and a clue; once this is accomplished, she is unceremoniously dropped from the story. (She isn't even threatened by the villain, something unusual in the genre.)

That said, there is still much in the movie that catches our attention. The concept of the Wave Man is wondrously realized: the creature looks simultaneously ghostly and material, lapsing from time to time to a fuzzy, static-plagued, low-rez black-and-white TV image, or a shadow outlined in blue lightning, buzzing with that otherworldly sound effect we all know and love since at least **EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS**. The matter transmitter is an impressive machine with blazing blue neon lights, electric arcs, discharges and flashes all over: the image of the Wave Man spinning slowly in the chamber and becoming invisible is startling, at times suggesting the recent computer-enhanced invisibility effects in **PREDATOR**. The final dissolution of the creature is also spectacular — a classic image in science fiction film that effectively blends tragedy and excitement.

One of the most curious details in the movie is the Daihonei Club, the bar owned by Ohnishi. It is a particularly bizarre spot, where all the employees wear World War II Japanese military uniforms — the same ones Gen. Douglas MacArthur had banned during the Occupation years — and salute and shout orders like they're really in the army. Even the B-girls there wear Navy outfits and dance to a weird fox-trot version of the old Imperial Navy anthem. It is almost a masochistic/nostalgic escape to a past I'm sure most Japanese of that time would rather forget — but it is significant in terms of the plot, as Ohnishi owes his ill-gotten fortune to wartime misery. The memory of the war also resonates strongly in other movies involving secret scientific research (such as the little-known but remarkable **THE INVISIBLE MAN / TÔMEI NINGEN**, 1954): I guess the concept of sinister secret experiments having been conducted by the Japanese military command is inspired by the shocking facts (disclosed in the late 40s) concerning the infamous Unit 731 and its bacteriological warfare tests carried on human guinea pigs in Manchuria. (For a rather sensationalistic exposé of this incident, see the Hong Kong production **MEN BEHIND THE SUN / HEITAIYANG 731**.)

I've never seen the American version of **TELEGIAN**, which I understand is somewhat shorter than the original and in black-and-white — a pity, since the color photography of the Japanese print is simply gorgeous. At that time Toho was experimenting with Eastmancolor, and the movies the studio produced from the mid-50s to around 1963 (when they shifted to more subdued Fujicolor) are a true visual treat. Their science fiction series made the best use possible of the rich, saturated tones the process allowed — just check out a good print of **THE MYSTERIANS** to see what I mean. Most of the very competent cast should be overfamiliar to Toho monster flick buffs, but this is leading man Koji Tsuruta's only science fiction film. Tsuruta, who died a couple of years ago, achieved immense popularity after he left Toho for Toei and became the latter studio's quintessential yakuza movie star for over twenty years.

In short, even if it lacks the psychological complexity of **THE HUMAN VAPOR** or the sense of horror and suspense of **THE H-MAN**, this movie is nevertheless worthy of better appreciation. By the way, if I ever come across the US adaptation, I'll report back — maybe then I'll know who or what the heck is that elusive "Telegian" of the title.

DENSÔ-NINGEN. US version title: **THE SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN**. Toho (Japan), 1960. Director: Jun Fukuda. Screenplay: Shinichi Sekizawa. Cinematography: Kazuo Yamada. Music: Sei Ikeno. Film editor: Ichiji Taira. Art director: Hyoei Hamagami. Special effects director: Eiji Tsuburaya. Special effects crew: Hidezaburo Araki (optical cinematography), Sadamasa Arikawa (cinematography), Hiroshi Mukoyama (optical printing), Akira Watanabe (art director), Kuichiro Kishida (lighting). Producer: Tomoyuki Tanaka. Cast: Koji Tsuruta (Reporter Sho Kirioka), Yumi Shirakawa (Akiko Nakajo), Tadao Nakamaru (Goro Nakamoto, alias Corporal Sudo, the Wave Man), Akihiko Hirata (Police Detective Kobayashi), Seizaburo Kawazu (Ohnishi), Yoshio Tsuchiya (Police Detective Okazaki), Yoshifumi Tajima (Ryu), Sachio Sakai (Taki), Takamaru Sasaki (Dr. Kajuro Nita), Fuyuki Murakami (Dr. Miura). Running time: 85 minutes. TohoScope, Eastmancolor. US version announced for distribution by Herts-Lion, actual release uncertain, in black-and-white and reportedly cut to 75 minutes.

(*) The high-tech semiconductor device is pronounced *kururitoron* in the dialogue and often transliterated in publicity materials as "clariotron"; but the fact it operates at extremely low temperatures indicates the writer obviously intended to call it "cryotron".

AS SETE VAMPIRAS

(The Seven Vampiresses)

The young prince is tired after his long journey. He had left in search of his beloved, the fair Naiara... Little does he suspect, however, that he just arrived at the lair of the Lord of the Vampire Legions — Dracula, Prince of Darkness!... Unaware of the looming dangers, he sleeps — and dreams of the looming dangers, he sleeps — and dreams of a prancing satyr who plays the flute... Dream — or reality?... But there is the flute — the magic flute that will bring back to his arms his dear, sweet Naiara... Enter the Seven Vampiresses — and one of them is Naiara! Of his darling, lovely Naiara, nothing human remains... O bitter twist of fate — now she has become a demoness with a lust for blood, the blood of he whom she once loved! For his precious Naiara is now a vampire, one more of Dracula's brides: her supreme pleasure is to suck blood... The day breaks, and they — the cataleptic, the living dead — now return to their graves to rest, as Dracula awaits in his tomb... — Beware! One of them might just be next to you! But let's not take it too seriously, folks: all that blood out there is only ketchup...

— The Narrator (Ramos Calhelha)

Let's not take it too seriously indeed: the Seven Vampiresses of the title are *not* what this horror comedy is about. What the movie tries — not too hard, unfortunately — is to be both a tip-of-the-hat to and a send-up of not one but two kinds of B-flicks: post-war Hollywood poverty-row thrillers and Brazilian slapstick comedies of the 50s — all at the same time! And it also features a certified Monster to boot! If that sounds all too esoteric, read on for some background notes. But first the plot:

Rio de Janeiro, sometime in the early 50s. Intense, obsessed botanist Professor Fred Rossi gets busy with his most recent acquisition, a ferocious-looking, "little-known" carnivorous plant from Africa. "I'm well aware of the high risks I'm exposing myself to," he writes in his notebook, "[so,] as a precaution, I developed an antidote against its bite". To no avail: at his first break of concentration the scientist is savagely bitten by the plant's jaws and left for dead. His wife Silvia, a dance instructor, is also attacked: she survives, but starts acting strangely — she quits her job without explanation, shuts herself off from all social engagements and spends her late evenings wandering around in flimsy lingerie. In no time the city is terrorized by a mysterious, hooded serial killer nicknamed "The Vampire" by the press.

A few months later, the recluse Silvia is approached by her brother-in-law Rogério, the owner of a night club in the premises of the posh Hotel Quitandinha. The man needs a new act to revitalize his dwindling business and proposes her to be his choreographer and associate. Silvia accepts, and comes up with an elaborate production number, "The Dance of the Seven Vampiresses" — about a traveller who falls prey to seven topless vampire girls, one of them his long-lost love. The show is a hit, but the opening night ends gruesomely when Rogério is found slain

by The Vampire. The victim's girlfriend, featured performer Ivete, feels she is being stalked by the serial killer and enlists the help of Raimundo Marlow (sic), a third-rate private eye who spends most of his time reading pulp magazines and comic books, when not busy humping his bimbo secretary Maria.

After a short mourning period the club opens again, now with the added attraction of rock star Bobby Ryder — whose theme song's refrain runs something like, "I'm like a vampire in this scary flick/Don't give a damn I just want my chick". Raimundo snoops around but can't prevent his client Ivete from being found dead in the hotel's swimming pool. Maria then goes undercover and gets a job at the club's cloakroom. She overhears a phone call for Silvia (who is acting more and more mysteriously) concerning a midnight appointment and follows her with Raimundo — while they are all tailed by bumbling Detective Inspector Pacheco. It turns out that Silvia's caller is a sleazy photographer who threatens to expose her "real identity" if she doesn't pay him a cool million. Suddenly The Vampire shows up, kills the photographer and disappears: all that Raimundo, Maria and Pacheco get to see of him is a masked figure wearing a cloak and a long wig. Silvia also vanishes: her face is all wrinkled, but she gets rejuvenated after she drinks blood in the privacy of her room.

Back at the club, the carnage goes on: an Argentinian stripper is murdered in the pool, and a former suspect — a woman-hating security guard — is found stabbed. Raimundo, Maria, Bobby Ryder and Silvia's friend Clarice are trapped in the hotel and stalked by The Vampire. After a messy brawl Clarice is grabbed by the hooded killer: she pulls off his disguise and the shocked group realize he is actually Professor Rossi, disfigured but still alive. The Vampire is shot by another dishevelled character — Silvia, now a decrepit old hag who expires on the spot. In his last throes, the Professor tells it all: both he and his wife would have been turned into bloodsuckers by the carnivorous plant's bite, but the antidote he took spared him from such a fate, if not from permanent deformity. He then faked his own death and became The Vampire, so he could use his victims' blood to keep the real vampire — Silvia — always young. The klutzy Inspector Pacheco gets into the act and announces all parties are under arrest.

Brazilian slapstick, called *chanchada*, flourished about four decades ago as a peculiar blend of pratfalls, romance, melodrama, *Carnaval* songs, samba and scantily-clad leggy women. The man who pioneered this kind of movie was (now get this!) none other than Riccardo Freda — yes, the very same Italian director of *THE DEVIL'S COMMANDMENT*, *CALTIKI THE IMMORTAL MONSTER*, *THE HORRIBLE DR. HITCHCOCK* and other classic horror movies! Freda went to Brazil in the late 40s and worked there with his wife, genre icon Gianna Maria Canale, on stage and screen. He established the foundations of what was to become an enduring category of Brazilian popular film, which would later evolve (or regress, depending on your taste) into the raunchy sex comedies of the 70s and 80s.

AS SETE VAMPIRAS was directed by Ivan Cardoso, a one-time disciple/groupie of South America's most famous horror film *auteur*, the legendary José Mojica Marins (aka Zé do Caixão). Before this movie, Cardoso made a short, tongue-in-cheek documentary about his mentor and then the 1982 feature *O SEGREDO DA MÚMIA* (check your spelling, o ye poor souls who swear by Phil Hardy!), another horror pastiche. For all his professed love for the genre he hasn't yet come up with anything of much substance to garner serious attention. His all-knowing, nudge-nudge wink-wink, I'm So Much More Clever Than This Dumb Material attitude irritates more often than amuses: any Fred Olen Ray or David De Coteau can quote and fool around with horror movie clichés, but it takes a Polanski or a Ricky Liu to recast them afresh. Instead, **VAMPIRAS** just keeps itself happy recycling old chestnuts with no appreciable amount of imagination. The alluring title is just a decoy, as the script (by Marins's favorite

screenwriter, pulp novelist R.F. Lucchetti) chooses to focus on the exploits of The Vampire — which are every bit as hokey and predictable as those tired turns of any Monogram or PRC quickie. Given that most situations sketched in such flicks are intrinsically ridiculous anyway, I wonder why the filmmakers thought better to add more lame pratfalls and Jerry Lewisian mugging to the dismal plot, hardly raising the humor above a "duh" level. Visually, the movie is also mediocre: occasional Bavaesque, color-gelled shots play easy on our eyes, but the showpiece Dance of the Seven Vampiresses is shot in such a flat, uninteresting way that it practically insults the physical attributes of its performers. (There is, however, a striking, Hammer Dracula imitation shot with an all-black screen opening into The Vampire's cloak, as the character walks away from the foreground.) The eclectic soundtrack rips off from sundry uncredited (and certainly unpaid) sources, including Bernard Herrmann, Glenn Miller, Sinatra and even Verdi.

Although the movie can be easily followed even by audiences unfamiliar with Brazilian film and culture, here are some helping hints. A good chunk of the supporting cast is formed by surviving veterans of Estúdios Atlântida, the Rio-based production company that reigned supreme in the golden years of *chanchada*; other local personalities of the period are mentioned in the dialogue. (Of those Atlântida stars — Ivon Curi, Zezé Macedo, Johnny Herbert, Colé and Wilson Grey — I believe only the latter is still working regularly in movies. Grey, here in a choice bit as a Chinese magician, also played in Cardoso's previous feature, and was glimpsed by American audience in the "Nazi" film-within-the-film in *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN* [1985].) The Hotel Quitandinha was a high-priced resort that actually existed (still exists?) some thirty miles north of Rio. Its casino was a notorious gathering place for celebrities and international partygoers, until gambling was outlawed in Brazil in 1946: rumors say it continued to operate clandestinely into the following decade. The movie's background is cluttered with references and memorabilia from the 50s: a famous radio serial is heard in the soundtrack, as are some well-known American oldie tunes; a 1952 issue of the pulp magazine *X-9* and a *Sherlock Holmes* comic book get close-ups; and vintage American real-steel cars also roll on. However, the wittiest nod to the cognoscenti is the narration by Ramos Calhelha, a U.S.-based commentator with a signature delivery who made the Portuguese-language pitch in Hollywood coming-attractions trailers for over twenty years. Since stars Nuno Leal Maia and Lucélia Santos have proved elsewhere to be capable actors (she is extremely popular in China, of all places!), I presume the horribly stilted delivery of the entire cast is also meant to be a "period reference". (In fact, the dialogue is an odd, uneasy mixture of literally translated American movie-talk and foul language. The mock-Hollywood exchanges are deliberately contrived and funny: for instance, a character introduces himself as "Inspector Pacheco, Homicide" — a line no real-life Rio cop would say. But the excessive profanity is totally out of place in such a Period Movie Re-creation movie, sort of like having a Dick Powell role reenacted by Andrew Dice Clay.) Anachronisms of another sort also abound. The Americanized, pompadoured pop star "Bobby Ryder" is there obviously to showcase radio personality Léo Jaime and add to the dumb fun, but the character is wrong for the time frame: Brazilian-made imitation R&B, rockabilly and doo-wop only caught after the mid-decade, and for the focused period and place you'd expect instead some bolero crooner. And, of course, Hammer-style fanged female vampires were completely unknown at the time — especially the topless kind. (By the way, this being a post-70s Brazilian exploitation movie, gratuitous nakedness abounds: between casual undressing and shower-taking, no excuse is required to expose one more inch of skin, nipple or pubic hair. I'd love to see Senator Jesse Helms being forced to watch two hours of prime-time Brazilian TV, where full-frontal nudity, female and male, is as common as are condom ads.)

No, I haven't forgotten the Monster — the carnivorous plant.

Curiously, it is left unharmed at the end of the story: in fact it is dropped completely from the proceedings after the first ten minutes, just after biting the soon-to-become-vampiric couple. It is a not-bad, funny rubber creation that looks like a huge cabbage with teeth, surrounded by snake-like stalks, each with its own head and snapping jaws. I couldn't accuse Cardoso of plagiarism, as the Brazilian film came out before Frank Oz's popular remake of **THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS**; but, it is a strange coincidence that the critter looks like a not-so-distant poor cousin to Godzilla's recent foe in **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE**. Many plant species are anemochoric, that is, their seeds are dispersed by the wind. Could it be that some seed found a dispersal route from South America to Japan, and then settled and mutated there? Must be those damn sun spots...

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AS SETE VAMPIRAS. Cardoso-Taubman (Brazil), 1985. Director: Ivan Cardoso. Screenplay: Rubens Francisco Lucchetti. Cinematography: Carlos Egberto. Music: Júlio Medaglia. Film editor: Gilberto Santeiro. Art director: Oscar Ramos. Make-up and special effects: Antonio Pacheco. Carnivorous plant created by Bertoni Efeitos Especiais and Oscar Ramos. Producers: Ivan Cardoso and Mauro Taubman. Cast: Nicole Puzzi (*Silvia Rossi*), Nuno Leal Maia (*Raimundo Marlou, P.I.*), Lucélia Santos (*Maria*), Andréa Beltrão (*Clarice*), Simone Carvalho (*Ivete*), Carlo Mossi (*Professor Fred Rossi*), Léo Jaime (*Bobby Ryder*), Colé (*Deputy Inspector Pacheco*), Ariel Coelho (*Luís Terra, the photographer*), Zezé Macedo (*Rina*), Johnny Herbert (*Rogério*), Tânia Boscoli (*Eliza*), Ivon Curi (*Baron Paul*), Benê Nunes (*Silas*), Wilson Grey (*Fu Manchú, the magician*), Felipe Falcão (*Inspector Camargo*). Running time: 86 minutes. Eastmancolor.

This movie is available on Japanese video under the English title **LITTLE SHOP OF TERRORS**.



(The Boxer's Omen)

It is frustrating how monster movies made in the Far East are so poorly known in our half of the world. The Hong Kong film industry, for instance, has been tapping the rich Chinese folklore for ghost and demon stories since the silent era; yet it was only in the last five years or so that it started getting the attention of Western moviegoers, thanks to the talents of a Tsui Hark or the contagious popularity of the *jiangshi* (hopping corpses) hyperactive comedies. All reservations aside, *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, edited by Phil Hardy, should be credited with having revealed to the English-speaking world if only the mere existence of such a genre industry. But what you have there is the proverbial tip of the iceberg: there is much, much more yet to be uncovered. And, despite some hurdles in this country such as the language barrier, poor distribution (confinement to ethnic communities) and lack of familiar cultural reference points, Chinese horror movies are definitely worthy of a wider audience.

This frustration is aggravated when the little coverage those pictures get in the Anglo-American press is inaccurate and inappropriate. One such shortchanged item is Gui Zhihong's **MO** (literally, 'devil' or 'evil spirit'), exported under the official Hong Kong English title **THE BOXER'S OMEN**. This movie was "reviewed" in the aforementioned *Encyclopedia* and also in the groundbreaking all-Asian special issue of *Naked! Screaming! Terror!*; in both cases the accounts are misleading and a little lacking in the honesty department. The film came out about the time its producers, Shaw Brothers, were on the verge of shutting off their operations, a crisis made worse by the company's reluctance in dealing with homevideo. When Shaw Bros. finally got into that business, they decided not to release recent features on tape, worrying they'd lose their theatrical audience all over the continent. As a result, post-70s titles like **MO** were not made available on video, a situation that apparently persists to this day. I was lucky to catch a showing of this movie in the Boston Chinatown, at a theater long since gone after the onslaught of the video stores—a situation that confirms some of the Shaws' worst fears. The following is a detailed, almost blow-by-blow descrip-

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tion of this incredible catalog of horrors, monstrosity and outlandish imagery.

The picture opens with a visual pun. The ideogram *gui* [demon] fills the screen, and as the lugubrious theme music approaches the peak of a crescendo, it changes to *mo* [another form of devil, or evil spirit] — the title of the movie.

In a sports arena in modern Hong Kong, champion kickboxer Zhen Wei is treacherously outmaneuvered and crippled for life by his brutal Thai opponent Pa Po. Zhen Wei's brother Zhen Xiong, also a kickboxer but of a lesser rank, vows revenge and decides to go to Bangkok to challenge his sibling's killer. In the days prior to his departure, Xiong is saved from a gang by a ghostly Taoist monk, who also appears in his dreams. A down-to-earth materialist who lives fast and free, Xiong dismisses those visions and, once in Thailand, sets a match against Pa Po in three months hence to decide matters.

During his stay in Bangkok, Xiong visits a Taoist temple where, to his surprise, the abbot says his arrival was expected. Xiong learns that the phantom monk he saw in Hong Kong and in his dreams was the late Master Jing Chao, superior of that Thai order, whose mortal remains are kept in an urn at the temple. The abbot tells the visitor the story of how Master Jing defeated warlock Mai Kusu and suffered retaliation from the latter's own evil teacher. Jing and Mai had a deadly confrontation of powerful spells in an airport waiting room — somehow ignored by the hundreds of passengers in transit, I guess — that ended when Mai, transformed into a flapping bat-like creature, was promptly pinned down in a ritual Jing performed to prevent him from ever reincarnating again. (That's a fate much worse than death in those parts.) However, Mai's teacher, who calls himself the Black Wizard, prepared a diabolical concoction of cobra venom mixed with mashed human brains: then he fed a bunch of tarantulas (using little straws!) with this goo and sent them to attack the monk — who ended up blinded by the spiders, with a needle piercing each eye. (All these procedures are shown in loving and painstaking detail.) Worse, Master Jing was left unable to achieve immortality; but before dying he prophesied a foreign athlete would come to be his successor, and that there will still be hope if his body isn't decomposed by the time the man comes. The abbot now opens the urn and finds Master Jing's body mummified but still in good condition. As Xiong leans over, he hears the dead monk's voice from beyond, saying they were brothers in a past existence and thus bound in eternity: whatever happened to Master Jing will also happen to Xiong, so the kickboxer is called to enter the religious order and fight the sinister Black Wizard.

Xiong refuses to listen further and prepares to leave for home. That night, however, he is struck by strong stomach pains, feels sick — and a slimy, glistening, writhing, 2-ft. long *live moray eel* wriggles out of his mouth! (This is no trick: the bugger is real and the effect is truly shocking and nauseating.) After such a convincing demonstration of the power of the supernatural, our hero undergoes a spiritual conversion with the same quick and boundless enthusiasm former skeptic George Bush embraced voodoo economics. He rushes to the temple and accepts his fate. The monks give him the mystical name Haili Palo and put him through a period of intensive training in faith, patience, endurance, and mastery of martial arts. This is quite a hardship for a voracious womanizer like him, but he manages to put his act together. Then a duel between Xiong and the Black Wizard is set.

The contest begins. The Wizard kills a rooster and sprays its blood over a dozen crocodile skulls, from which a flock of bats emerges. Xiong shelters himself inside a protective mystic urn: sutra texts emanate from his body and destroy the bats. The Wizard then sprinkles salt over the skulls, which start to clatter their jaws and move toward the novice monk; but a couple of amulets placed between the jaws neutralize the attack. In his next move, the Wizard eats (animal? human?) offal, *throws up over a sheet* and regurgitates his own vomit — yecch! — and from that

yucky, pulsating puddle comes out a big-headed monster (a rubber mask that looks like one of the creatures from *INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN* attached to a wiggling snake body) that flies over Xiong. Some well-placed spells cause this flying head to explode. Furious, the Wizard then picks up some needles, pierces his neck and detaches his own head, which hovers around the monk and almost strangles him with its dangling blood vessels! Our hero is rescued by the time-honored savior of movie vampire hunters: the day breaks, and the Wizard, scorched by the sunlight, melts down like the Wicked Witch of the West.

The battle won, Xiong returns to Hong Kong and abandons his vows. But as he goes back to the accommodating arms of his girlfriend, three disciples of the Black Wizard cook up an elaborate ritual of revenge. (It seems that once you do something to a warlock you'll *never* get rid of his minions, unless you somehow manage to disintegrate all their bodily and spiritual atoms.) First they kill and disembowel a huge crocodile and — as the audience reaches again for the barf-bag — all three eat and regurgitate the beast's viscera. Then they exhume a decomposing human cadaver and sew it up inside the croc's belly for some time. In a sinister ceremony, they later remove the corpse and "restore" it to the shape of an attractive, nude young woman — who is revived, adorned with long nails and a G-string bikini (don't ask me why), and then ordered to destroy both Zhen Xiong and the body of the deceased-but-not-quite-out-of-the-picture Master Jing Chao.

Meanwhile, Xiong had successfully defeated Pa Po in a match in Hong Kong turned difficult by sudden disorientation and blindness. Feeling acute pain and barely able to see, Xiong returns to Thailand and finds the temple in great commotion. The abbot explains that a new, all-powerful evil force was unleashed and must be stopped. He takes Xiong to a remote temple in the forest, where the magical Hundred-Year Mushroom grows in a pit. From this fungus, the abbot extracts the Essence of Iron and stores it in an amulet that Xiong should insert into his own body in case of danger. Still confused, Xiong faces the other monks' hostility when they find out he is an adulterer and an unrepentant sinner. But the voice of Master Jing pardons him and orders he be sent to the Na To temple in Kathmandu to retrieve the mystical Golden Ashes — the ashes of his own first earthly incarnation.

In Nepal, Xiong is told the Ashes will appear just after sunrise on the palm of a giant statue of Buddha. As nobody is allowed to enter the temple at dawn, the kickboxer painfully cuts open his own wrist and sticks the Essence of Iron amulet inside his arm. (This scene is similar to that where, in another movie, the Terminator repairs himself, but our hero here is no robot — ouch!) The amulet then irradiates its power throughout his body. His energy boosted, Xiong sneaks into the temple, approaches the altar and uses his martial arts skills to overcome a live six-armed guardian statue. Still waiting for the sunrise, he now confronts a swooping figure — the zombie woman sent by the warlocks. A pair of dismembered claws suddenly grasp the boxer, and the she-zombie, dancing sensuously, commands a giant crocodile to attack him. When Xiong manages to trap the beast, he is overpowered by the undead woman, who sprays on his face tiny, furry, caterpillar-like bugs that penetrate his ears and nostrils!

Just when everything seems beyond hope, the sun rises and the Golden Ashes incorporate into Xiong. Master Jing's first incarnation and the kickboxer become one superbeing, who recovers and rips off the she-zombie's skin (!), reducing her to a heap of muscles and blood vessels. (This movie precedes *HELLRAISER*, but I'm sure someone in the staff must have seen *ALTERED STATES*.) In her last throes, the undead woman secretes a vile, bluish ooze, then collapses and rots away: her remains are quickly consumed by a million maggots. Now three tiny fetuses emerge from the gunk and grow into human-size mummies: these are the three disciples of the Black Wizard, who soon disembowel themselves (!) and give rise to tiny four-legged, one-eyed crested monsters. These creatures almost wreck the temple with their eye-beams, but a number of Buddha images suddenly come to

life and destroy them with magical daggers. At last, virtue prevails.

Xiong finds himself alone, somehow transported back to the Thai temple. The needles that pierce Master Jing's eyes stick out and fall. The revived monk finally achieves immortality and is praised by his order, while Xiong reverts to his mortal self and quietly walks away, once again a mere kickboxer. The end — for now.

Now, as you clean up the floor, have you ever heard of anything *half* as demented? This is quite simply the ultimate supercharged sorcery duel epic, the last sequence of Roger Corman's *THE RAVEN* looped endlessly and played straight for horrific effect. Sure, any Hong Kong horror movie worth its salt includes a big clash between a Taoist monk and some evil warlock, but, with *four* occult megabashes (plus *two* vicious kickboxing sluggings) shown in exquisite, meticulous detail, *THE BOXER'S OMEN* is a real embarrassment of confrontational riches. Made before the kung fu-horror-comedy cycle of the mid-80s, it is similar in theme and tone with the contemporary animal curse flicks produced by Nikko Films, like Keith Li [Li Bailing]'s *CENTPEDE HORROR/WUGONG ZHOU* (1982) and He Yonglin's *RED SPELL SPELLS RED/HONG GUIZI* (1983). And, like those yuckfests extraordinaires, it also pulls out all the stops — it is a take-no-prisoners frontal assault on your senses that grabs you by the neck, hammers its ooze-dripping fist down your throat, and gleefully slimes your innards before ripping them out.

This is an ambitious production actually shot in three countries, with actors speaking Cantonese, Thai and Nepali. The location work is quite remarkable, with little of the travelogue approach you'd expect in comparable Western productions filmed in remote places; the massive, otherworldly set where the final battle is staged recalls the Temple of the All-Seeing Eye of the 1940 version of *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD*. I don't know if the mythology and folklore shown in the movie are authentic or simply invented, but it is a common trend in Hong Kong curse stories set in present times to have the occult menace *come from overseas* — not from the West (perhaps not "exotic" enough?), but from Southeast Asia. (I guess urbane Hong Kong citizens feel westernized enough to fear the arcane lore and witchcraft of the Mysterious Orient...) What is particular about *MO* is a reversal in numbers: in a typical curse picture, an evil sorcerer threatens the hero and his entire household — but here the good guy is a loner (well, with a little help from his previous incarnations) while the villains (the Black Wizard and his faithful disciples) are a "family". Also interesting is how it structurally resembles those Shaolin movies Shaw Bros. made ten years before, essentially revenge stories involving rival martial arts schools.

Revenge indeed. The main theme in the movie — rather, the *only* theme — is retribution with extreme prejudice. Xiong wants to *avenge* his brother's death on the ring (sure he wouldn't be happy if he just punched his opponent fair and square, would he?); the Black Wizard pummels Master Jing *in retaliation* for the demise of his disciple; Xiong is made an instrument of the good monks' *vengeance* against the evil deeds of the Black Wizard; the followers of the latter wage a personal *vendetta* against the hero. These mutually-assured-destruction doubleheaders take place in arenas farther and farther removed from the "normal", "real" universe — from an ordinary kickboxing ring and an airport waiting room to a vast and remote temple full of ominous statues where time, space and the material world seem to be meaningless. Like in many other mystical martial arts fantasies of the 70s, these duels are so fierce and intense they suggest the fate of the entire universe is at stake at each blow. However, contrary to the general case in those movies, the warrior-hero here is flawed and unsure of his own responsibilities. (Remember, this was years before actor Yuan Biao carved his own niche playing similarly "imperfect" heroic characters in fantasy actioners like *PICTURE OF A Nymph*, *THE PEACOCK KING* or *THE ICEMAN COMETH*.) This *moral* vulnerability makes our hero-despite-himself much more likeable, and it is comforting to see, for a change, a superchampion who *temporarily* goes into self-discipline and

training for just a couple of larger-than-life feats but prefers to devote most of his existence to the pursuit of more earthly affairs such as, uh, getting laid. (I always felt Shaolin, Wutang, Taoism, etc., as shown in movies, are often too much business and no fun.) In Lan Nancai's **THE GHOST SNATCHERS** / **BI GUI ZHUO** (1986), the virginity of one of the characters was essential for the defeat of evil; here such a requirement is dropped by monastic decree, courtesy of an understandably impatient Master Jing.

Gui Zhihong is a director notorious for his hardline treatment of screen violence. He started his Shaw Bros. career in 1970 with the melodrama **LOVE SONG OVER THE SEA** / **HAIWAI QIANG**, co-directed by Shi Mashan) and, as a journeyman contract helmer, he handled 26 dramas, comedies and actioners through the decade, including a couple of titles in the much-maligned Babes Behind Bars / Women Wielding Weapons sexploitation category — **THE BAMBOO HOUSE OF DOLLS** / **NÜ JI ZHONGYING** (1973) and the Hong Kong-West German co-production **VIRGINS OF THE SEVEN SEAS** / **YANGJI** (1974, co-directed by Ernst Hofbauer). His first venture into the fantasy genre happened in 1972 with **THE GOURD FAIRY** / **HULU SHENXIAN**, but he entered the horror field with full force two years later with **GHOST EYES** / **GUI YAN**, a fascinating story about a woman who wears some strange contact lenses and sees she is being chased by a transdimensional vampire. His contributions to installments II, III and IV of the episodic crime thriller series **THE CRIMINALS** / **XIANGGANG QIANZHI** (1976-77) cemented his reputation for on-screen brutality, and he added supernatural elements to his equally ferocious **SPIRIT OF THE RAPED/SUO MING** (1976). **(THE TEENAGER'S NIGHTMARE** / **JIAN MO**, 1977, co-directed by Mu Dunfei) probably has occult overtones, too.) In the 80s he jumped into the gross-out horror fray with his "Hex" series and similar one-shots: **HEX** / **XIE** (1980), **HEX VS. WITCHCRAFT** / **XIE DOU XIE** (1980), **CORPSE MANIA** / **SHI YAO** (1981), **BEWITCHED** / **GU** (1981), **HEX AFTER HEX** / **XIE WANZAI XIE** (1982), **CURSE OF EVIL** / **XIE ZHOU** (1982) and this **THE BOXER'S OMEN** (1983). I don't know of any other movies he may have directed since the fall of Shaw Bros.

Perhaps the best-known cast members among Western audiences are Yang Si and Wang Longwei. Yang Si made his fame and fortune as the abnormally pumped-up henchman Bolo, who gave Bruce Lee quite a run for his dough in **ENTER THE DRAGON**. He is often billed as Yang Sze or (not surprisingly) Bolo Yeung, and even appeared in some recent American martial arts cheapies; here he plays the sly Thai kickboxer. Big, mustachioed Wang Longwei (sometimes billed as Johnny Wang Lung-Wei), perennial heavy of hundreds of kung fu epics —

usually as a renegade monk or a Manchu oppressor — gives it all as the evil Black Wizard. Fantasy film buffs may recognize him as the terrorist leader killed in the opening ten minutes of Lan Nancai's **THE SEVENTH CURSE** / **YUAN ZHENXIA YU WEISILI** (1986), or — for a change — as the rather unlikely hero of what is probably the first cyberpunk science fiction movie ever made in Hong Kong, Huang Zhiqiang's **FLASH - FUTURE KUNG FU** / **DALEITAI** (1983).

As mentioned above, previous English-language treatments have not given the proper scoop on **THE BOXER'S OMEN**. In the influential and valuable, but sloppily edited and error-infested *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, the entry on this movie — like those on many other international films — is a mixture of correct information and wild guesswork. I strongly suspect that many of the films in this book, despite being critically evaluated, were not actually seen by the contributing writers, much less by editor Phil Hardy himself. I have the impression in many cases those writers read a plot synopsis, saw some stills, went through other people's reviews and background information — and then speculated about the films' qualities, thematic contents, symbolic meaning and the like. If they had only stuck to the plotlines, fine, but they shouldn't have categorically judged movies they never watched. Yet there is evidence this happened often. Hardy (or rather the unnamed contributor who did all the legwork on the Chinese entries, a commendable effort otherwise) starts the article with a fairly accurate plot outline, probably lifted from some published synopsis, and then indulges in the following "review":

...The visceral external horror of **GU** (1981) is here replaced by the classic principle of man carrying within himself the seeds of his own destruction. This is graphically illustrated in one of the film's most effectively terrifying moments as coils of worms begin to emerge from the protagonist's eyes during a boxing match. While the magic spells and the use of a Nepalese monk's bones and amulets yield impressive scenes, they cannot compete with the surreal image achieved by Dario Argento's worm shower in **SUSPIRIA** (1976) and here are simply a crudely sensationalist device without any real metaphorical weight in the film's story. (p. 388)

This, of course, is utter nonsense. The reviewer makes a tremendous big deal about those "coils of worms" and even invokes an underlying "classic principle" of the hero "carrying

within himself the seeds of his own destruction" based on this minor detail alone. Now, this is a particular I frankly don't remember amid all the unbelievable abominations that happen throughout the story: yes, the hero is momentarily blinded in the kickboxing scene, and we are shown something happening to his eyes — but I can't recall having seen "worms" coming out of them. (While it is unlikely that the reviewer made up that image, it is also possible it might have appeared in a publicity still and cut from the release print.) In any case, there is nothing else in the rest of the movie to support that "classic principle". If the reviewer did in fact see the film, it is hard to believe such a "most effectively terrifying" scene should have stayed so vividly in his/her memory, while the endless parade of grotesque horrors that unfolds from start to finish is not even mentioned. The so-called "crudely sensationalist device" of the magic spells is central to the movie and justifies its very existence: to compare all that with the worm shower scene in Argento's flick is pretty much like correlating **PINOCCHIO** and **MOBY DICK** about some giant whale. (Actually, it reminds me of the pathetic Rex Reed matching Werner Herzog's **FITZCARRALDO** with **THE AFRICAN QUEEN**, probably because both films had rivers, boats and jungles.)

Much worse, however, is the "capsule review" that appeared in the Cinemasian Special issue of *Naked! Screaming! Terror!* This was a trailblazing little publication that had the merit of introducing the world of Far Eastern exploitation films to American readers. Its main value now is as a checklist of little-known titles, even if it should be consulted with caution — especially with respect to director listings. Its worst feature, however, is the fact it makes no distinction between the movies actually seen by the author and those whose write-ups were, uh, "borrowed" from other sources. A "star" rating system also helps in covering up those differences, misleadingly suggesting all films listed were seen and personally evaluated.

* [one star]

A routine possession film dealing with a boxer and a ghost monk. The worms-in-the-shower scene is the only redeeming moment. Barely. (p. 18)

Well, you don't have to be a genius to realize that, in this particular case, the "reviewer" not only never watched the film and purloined the entry from the *Encyclopedia*, but also got it all wrong! There is no "worms-in-the-shower scene" in it, that was a reference to **SUSPIRIA**! Furthermore, this is no "routine possession" movie at all — nobody gets possessed and, if this is routine, Jeffrey Dahmer is a harmless good neighbor. The one-star rating, supposedly based on its one "barely" redeeming moment, was bestowed by someone who obviously didn't sit through it.

MO. Official English title: **THE BOXER'S OMEN**. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong), 1983. Director: Kuei Chih-Hung [Gui Zhihong]. Screenplay: Szu-Tu An [Situ An]. Cinematography: Li Hsin-Yeh [Li Xinye]. Producer: Wong Ka Hee. Associate producer: Mona Fong [Fang Yihua]. Executive producer: Run Run Shaw [Shao Fuyi]. Cast: Philip Kao Fei [Gao Fei] (*Zhen Xiong*), Lin Hsiao-Yen [Lin Xiaoyan] (*Master Jing Chao*), Johnny Wang Lung-Wei [Wang Longwei] (*Black Wizard*), Wei Chia-Wen [Wei Jiawen] (*The Abbott*), Yang Sze [Yang Si] (*Thai Kickboxer Pa Po*), Hsu Chin-Chiang [Xu Jinjiang] (*Girl*), Som Jai Boon Song, Rolando San Juan, Victor B. Pumkpic, Major Oponpa & Edmund P. Meneses (*Kickboxers*). Running time: 98 minutes. Shawscope, color.

(Credits incomplete, from the film poster. Names in brackets are Pinyin transliterations of Mandarin; other names are as they appear in printed Romanized materials. This review is a revised and expanded version of a piece originally written for the *Martial Arts Film Fan APA*, and thanks are due to its editor and publisher Laurine White.)

THE BOXER'S OMEN is exciting and compelling, and at the same time lurid and unpleasant. It is filled with ritualistic details of the weirdest order and a never-ending procession of monstrosities and lethal mysticism, all done dead-seriously, with no room for comic relief. It is only cheerful when it unashamedly relishes in being disgusting and extreme. One could say that, at the gut level (pardon the pun), it recalls those infamous Italian cannibal/mondo gorefeasts — a genre I believe must indeed have been a major influence in the production of this movie. But while we may deplore and find unacceptable the racist and vulgar depiction of man's inhumanity to man in a Ruggero Deodato or Umberto Lenzi torture session, the horrors of **MO** are so absurdly removed from reality that we find ourselves waiting, fascinated, for the next bizarre and outrageous trick those duelling sorcerers have in their colorful sleeves. If the secret of Zen enlightenment is to hear the sound of one hand clapping, perhaps here we can attain satori as we feel the movie's lecherous tongue slurping in perverse pleasure, while we are offered one more yucky atrocity to watch, one more foul puddle of unnatural bodily fluid to smell.

OGÔN BATTO

(The Golden Bat)

Early Japanese movie and TV superheroes were not giants that wrestled with antisocial Godzilla-sized rubber creations over miniature sets. With names like Moonlight Mask, Prince of Space, Seven-Color Mask, Ironsharp and National Kid, they were humanoids about the height of your average Oriental movie star — and two of them looked suspiciously like soon-to-be-famous Shinichi 'Sonny' Chiba. Of course, some of their enemies were alien creatures bent on snatching this planet for themselves — but, contrary to the lumbering colossi that would face the still-to-come second generation superheroes, these hostile extraterrestrials were quite capable of thinking (well, not much) and speaking (a lot). Theatrical superhero features were often spin-offs of TV shows, invariably economical, assembly-line fare put out by second-rank studios such as Shinto Film (1947-1961) or the short-lived exploitation branch of Toei Films, Daini Toei (1960-61, later renamed New Toei and closing down after a few months in operation). Indeed, Toei had a long track record in the superhero sweepstakes, with its *GEKKEŌ KAMEN* series ("Moonlight Mask", 7 movies in 1958-1959 — about which more in the future), *PRINCE OF SPACE / YŪSEI ŌJI*, 2 episodes, (1959), *INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN / UCHŌ DAISOKUSEN* (1961) and the TV serial *NATIONAL KID* (1961). In 1966 the studio planned a screen adaptation of the adventures of what is probably the dean of all Japanese superheroes, *OGŌN BATTO* ("The Golden Bat"), first published in pulp form in 1930 by Takeo Nagamatsu. The popularity of those novels survived the war and Toei went ahead with the movie, with some of the cast and crew from their *TERROR BENEATH THE SEA*.

Akira Kazahaya, an amateur astronomer, discovers the planetoid Icarus is on a collision course with the Earth. He is offered to join the Space Science Center, a top-level scientific organization that investigates and counters possible threats to our planet. The SSC leader, Commander Yamatone, believes something deviated Icarus from its orbit and, expecting it will hit the Earth in ten days if it continues in the present course, hopes to deflect it in due time with a new weapon invented by his colleague Dr. Paal. This is the Highly Destructive Beam Cannon, which will concentrate the light irradiated from a nuclear explosion through a special lens, utilizing "the same basic principle as the one employed in the U.S. Air Force laser-beam weapon program." (Whatever that is: I don't make up those things.) Unfortunately, the scientists are still working on that special lens, and time is running short.

The SSC team receives a distress signal coming from a remote island and rushes there in their Super Car flying vehicle. The place is full of ancient ruins (a blend of classic and pre-Columbian styles) and there the group finds victims of severe burning, some reduced to skeletons. Yamatone quickly deciphers some hieroglyphics on the ruins and deduces the island must have been part of the lost civilization of Atlantis. Suddenly, the earth shakes and a huge, spindle-like tower emerges from the ocean: a booming voice announces Nazō, an alien being who deliberately altered the course of Icarus in his intent to destroy the Earth. (He was also responsible for the extermination of the Atlanteans.) Pursued by extraterrestrial minions, the scientists end up trapped in a deep cave, where they find a subterranean temple with an Egyptian-style sarcophagus. The hieroglyphics on the casket are ominous:



"Ten thousand years hence, humankind shall be in danger. At that time this lid is to be removed so that I, The Golden Bat, shall wake up from my slumber of ten millenia and fight again. My chest is to be moistened with a drop of water." The scientists push the slab aside and immediately find a huge crystal from which they will finally be able to build the lens for the Cannon. The mummy in the coffin begins to move and, when Dr. Paal's granddaughter Emily moistens its chest, it attracts a bat that sits there and becomes a sort of pendant. Now fully alive, the mummy — who holds a rod-like weapon — introduces himself as The Golden Bat and challenges Nazō's aliens, who retreat and disappear. As the island begins to sink, the team escapes. The Golden Bat flies away, but first gives Emily the bat-pendant through which she can call him whenever in danger.

With a week to go before the coming of Icarus, Yamatone and Paal complete the special lens and prepare the Cannon, with which they perform a successful test on a target satellite. (The

countdown is done in English, for no other reason than to sound cool — in Japan.) Meanwhile, Nazō installs his Tower on the bottom of the ocean and sends three of his agents in his Flying Submarine — the disfigured Keloid (a clowny character who vaguely recalls Batman's Joker), the werewolf-like Jackal and the femme fatale Piranha. Alien commandos attack the SSC base, and Piranha quickly turns herself into a duplicate of scientist Naomi Akiyama. Emily summons The Golden Bat (her broach becomes a real flying bat) and the resurrected hero comes to her rescue; but Jackal manages to abduct Dr. Paal and take him to the Nazō Tower. Yamatone realizes the aliens have stolen the Cannon, but he is not worried as the all-important lens is hidden somewhere else.

Nazō has a fit when he finds out the weapon is useless, and in vain tortures Dr. Paal. Then he uses the Human Duplicator to transform Keloid into a copy of the earthling, and sends him to the SSC base. The impostor doesn't fool Emily, however, and is

forced to kidnap her as well. One day before Impact Day, Icarus collides with the Moon — with no major effects on Earth shown. In the meantime, the false Naomi is unmasked, but she escapes and rejoins Nazō with the information that The Golden Bat himself must be holding the lens. The unappreciative alien leader promptly disintegrates her for "failing", and uses Emily to call the superhero through her bat-pendant.

The huge Nazō Tower comes out of the ground in the heart of Tokyo, pushing its way up like a gopher. At the top, Keloid gathers some hostages and starts pushing them down until Yamatone has The Golden Bat surrender the lens to the aliens. Nazō completes the Cannon and refuses to use it to deflect the incoming Icarus: "Now I'm going to sit back and enjoy the destruction of the Earth!", he gloats. (Then why bother coming to this planet, you may ask.) But The Golden Bat beats up Jackal and the entire crew of the Flying Submarine and rams the bottom of the Tower with the vehicle, paralyzing all systems. Yamatone and Kazahaya rescue Dr. Paal and Emily, while The Golden Bat fights Nazō to recover the superweapon. The alien leader detaches his mechanical hand and tries to strangle the hero, but the latter pierces his forehead with the rod weapon: Nazō vanishes in a puff of dark smoke and the Tower explodes. The scientists hastily assemble the Cannon right there, in the middle of the street, just in time to shoot at the planetoid and blow it to pieces. (And they wanted only to deflect it — who can tell how much collateral damage those fragments have probably caused?) The SSC team gathers to bid farewell to The Golden Bat, who offers them a plaque with the warning: "Those who try to subjugate the Earth by force, by that very force shall be destroyed".

Originally planned in color but shot in black & white because of financial constraints, **THE GOLDEN BAT** was supposed to be the first entry in a series — but it didn't work out and the character was later revised as a basis for an animated TV show. The glaringly inadequate production values and the monochrome photography — forget the silly plot — were probably detrimental to foreign sales: to my knowledge, the movie was never exported. No big loss to Western kids, sure, but also a missed opportunity to meet a superhero unlike any other they've seen before.

Yes, this Golden Bat is a *weird* dude. Lean and not very tall, his head permanently encased in a skull mask with a fixed grin (or is that bony mug his *real* face?), he wears a tight gold-seamed jumpsuit that suggests an uncovered skeletal ribcage, and swishes a huge, shiny cloak (red with black trim in the poster) with great relish. (Director Sato makes excellent use of this cloak, causing some intriguing shimmering effects in transitional scenes.) The hero's magic wand-like hand weapon, the Silver Baton, is a multi-purpose rod that throws light-beams from one end: it was apparently inspired by the mystic staff of Sun Wukong (or Songoku in Japanese), the Monkey King of Far Eastern folklore. A mystery-man who is probably a flying living mummy, certainly not of this world, constantly popping out of nowhere and bellowing a maniacal laugh, The Golden Bat is a most unorthodox hero that often looks like a serial villain: he could well be the Crimson Ghost's good twin. (Strangely, he also recalls the Aztec Mummy.) His villainous counterpart, Nazō — a pun with the word *nazo*, mystery — is totally outrageous. Clad in dark, with a bargain-basement cloth hood with cat-like "ears", he has four eyes that glow intermittently when he is furious (which is most of the time) and a detachable mechanical claw obviously made of rubber or soft plastic. Since he has no mouth, he gesticulates broadly to underline every word he spouts — the traditional body language of every Japanese film alien with an immovable rubber mask. (Compare, for instance, with the apelike Dr. Gori in the TV series **SPECTREMAN**.) The human characters are bland, and the whole issue of the planetoid colliding with the earth is treated almost like a subplot in the confrontation between these two nemeses.

Architecture plays an important role in the conceptualization of

futuristic movies, and here a number of interesting set designs are again compromised by the budget. The ruins of Atlantis are a curious mixture of Greek columns, Egyptian temple furnishings and Toltec statues; but the hieroglyphics in the Golden Bat's sarcophagus are, naturally, gibberish. (For some reason, the city is called Atlantis in the dialogue but referred to as its Pacific counterpart Lemuria in the movie's preview trailer.) The effect of the Toltec towers collapsing is pretty good, but when the entire island sinks, the miniature seems to deflate like a popped balloon. The Nazō Tower is a giant screw with tiny spikes along its turns — sort of like the business end of those "mole machines" in pulp novels — with a pointed top shaped like a squid's hood, with two large searchlights/laser guns that suggest a pair of sinister eyes. The interior of the tower is decorated in a perfectly 60s-ish fashion, complete with an Op Art sliding door; and Nazō's PA device looks conveniently like a boom-mounted microphone, which is what it precisely is. The Super Car is just a sport version of a flying saucer and the evil Flying Submarine has an aggressive, sharklike outlook. Conventional Western science fiction paraphernalia also abounds, of course. The Space Science Center has one of those transparent Giant Maps that seems to be there just so someone can be framed from behind it while doodling arrows and circles on. The Highly Destructive Beam Cannon is just a ray gun like any other — and for such a sophisticated, precise, computer-controlled weapon it appears to be quite adaptable for field operation, as Commander Yamatone successfully blows up the incoming planetoid hand-holding the Cannon like a common mortar. The SSC personnel seem to be of two kinds: bodyguards and scientists. The former are stereotypical Men in Black, complete with sinister shades, and seem to vanish completely halfway into the movie; the scientists wear white uniforms all the time, in or out the facilities, for no particular reason. (Reality-stranger-than-fiction dept.: a couple of months ago I had a good laugh when the Biosphere II crew appeared at their press conference/photo opportunity in their Regulation Science Fiction Uniforms, making their "Mission" look like some B-movie.)

But the saving grace of **THE GOLDEN BAT** is Hajime Sato's handling of this admittedly subpar material. When able to shed off the juvenilia, such as in the moody, suspenseful moments, his direction is exemplary. One of the best scenes occurs when Yamatone reveals to his colleagues that, although the aliens have stolen the Cannon, the goddamn special lens is still in good hands: we see the group chatting and cheering in a medium shot, while on the left corner of the frame, in the foreground, the treacherous false Naomi is looking at us in closeup, away from the others, pensive and sinister, slowly blending with the shadows. The Human Duplicator, through which Keloid turns into a replica of Dr. Paal, is a painfully cheap contraption, but Sato shoots the duplication sequence as if it were for an **OUTER LIMITS** episode and the result is startling. He also tilts the camera for the big brawl scenes — I doubt he saw the **BATMAN** show at that time — a technique he puts to good use in the widescreen format. All this makes us regret a more interesting, adult script wasn't trusted to his talents.

The special effects aren't negligible, either. Toei had a tradition of well-made space effects in black and white movies, and here, despite the general cheapness (some of the destruction scenes were stolen from **INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN**), they are again quite acceptable. With the exception of some unbalanced matte shots, the flying scenes with the hero are especially fine: with his extended arms and billowing cape, The Golden Bat is reminiscent of some of the Lydecker Bros.' best work for the Republic serials.

And now, by popular demand, a brief bio-filmography of director Hajime Sato. His theatrical feature career was disappointingly short, and his characterization as "prolific" by a well-known reference book is certainly misleading. Born 3 March 1929 in Urnagi, Saitama Prefecture, Sato's family soon moved to Fukuoka. The young Hajime was admitted to the Manchurian



A POPULAR GOLDEN BAT TOY

School of Medicine just as World War II was about over (and the former colony was liberated); he then went elsewhere to study economics, and, ever interested in movies, upon his graduation ended up finding a job at Toei Studios in 1952 as an assistant script supervisor. He soon ascended to assistant director and worked in that capacity for auteurs like Tadashi Imai and Shinji Murayama, as well as for less prestigious helmers like Eijiro Wakabayashi, Hideo Sekigawa and Tsuneo Kobayashi. (For the kind of movie that concerns us, this latter trio seems to have been an important influence, being the driving force behind the mystery-science fiction series **SHŌNEN TANTEIDAN** — where junior detectives fought mad scientists, an invisible man and a robot in 9 features made between 1954 and 1959). His first chance at directing came in 1960 with **JŪNANASAI NO GYAKUSHŪ: ORE WA KINŌ NO ORE JANAI** (literally, "Strike Back at Seventeen: I'm Not the Same as Yesterday"), the final installment in a youth-oriented trilogy started by Shigeaki Hidaka — the co-writer of **THE INVISIBLE MAN** (1954) and **GIGANTIS, THE FIRE MONSTER** (1955), and director of the little-seen **THE FINAL WAR** (1960, not to be confused with the Toho production **THE LAST WAR**). Sato followed with three crime melodramas, **GYAKUSHŪ NO KAI** ("Stand-up Street", 1961), **HACHININME NO TEKI** ("The 8th Enemy", 1961) and **KANGAERUHA** ("The Thinking Leaf", 1962) and contributed with two entries in the 24-episode, **DRAGNET**-like docudrama-style crime series **KEISHICHŌ MONOGATARI** ("Stories of the City Police Department"): **URAZUKE SŌSA** ("A Case with No Evidence", 1963) and **JŪDAI NO ASHIDORI** ("The Tenth Step", 1963). Then Sato made a groundbreaking, unconventional macabre comedy that got good reviews, **SANPOSURU REIKYŪSHA** ("The Hearse Takes a Ride", 1964, exported as **THE GLAMOROUS GHOST**), about a man who kills his wife and carries her body all over town in a hearse in an elaborate scheme to blackmail her many lovers, a yarn with many twists and turns. He followed that with the Gothic horror **KADAN SEMUSHI-OTOKO** ("Ghost Story: The Hunchback", 1965, exported as **HOUSE OF TERRORS**), a European-style shocker concerning a sinister house and a hunchback butler dedicated to follow the instructions of his deceased masters to the letter. Sato's next movie had the effect of associating his name forever with the science fiction genre: **TERROR BENEATH THE SEA / KAITEI DAISENSŌ** ("Great War on the Bottom of the Sea", 1966, exported as **WATER CYBORG** or **AGENT X-2 OPERATION UNDERWATER**), his best-known work in the West, previously

reviewed in this magazine (issue #61-62). **ÔGON BATTO** followed, underfunded and in black and white. The 1967 production **KYAPUTEN URUTORA** (usually listed as **CAPTAIN ULTRA** but, as far as I know, never offered for export) was a 51-minute featurette edited from two episodes (one his, the other helmed by Koichi Takemoto) of the cheap TV series of the same name — which, for the record, was *not* about masked superheroes: Captain Ultra was a space commander in the mold of Rod Brown or Rocky Jones, who met the cheesiest-looking man-sized aliens you ever saw on TV. Finally, he moved to Shochiku Studios and brewed up his masterpiece, **GOKE—BODY SNATCHER FROM HELL / KYŪKETSUKI GOKEMIDORO** ("Gokemidoro, the Vampire", 1968), a vastly entertaining re-interpretation of those **AIR-PORT** melodramas by way of **LIFEFORCE**. This was his last feature film: from then on he concentrated on television, where he had been active since 1962. His most acclaimed TV work was reportedly a telefeature tantalizingly entitled **JINNŌ BAIYŌ JIKEN** ("The Case of the Human Brain Culture") for the series "Mystery Best 21". At last report, he continues to work for television and lives in Tokyo.

It is a shame Sato never returned to the big screen after **GOKE**. Many scenes in that film and in **THE GOLDEN BAT** attest to his talent and intelligence, and only the shoestring budget conspired against his coming out with a better product. Through the 70s the big Japanese studios lost interest in science fiction: even genre giant Toho slowed down its output, while Shochiku cut itself off completely from the field (the only exception being Toshio Masuda's ridiculous 1974 gangster melodrama-cum-sf **ORE NO CHI WA TANIN NO CHI** — "My Blood Belongs to Someone Else") and Toei, after a passing flirtation with Kazuhiko Yamaguchi's 1974 Sonny Chiba vehicle **URUFUGAI—MOERO! OOKAMI OTOKO** ("Wolf Guy — Enrage, Werewolf!"), only returned to it in 1978 with **MESSAGE FROM SPACE** — a movie your editor has nicer things to say about than I do. The sad fate that awaited the Japanese science fiction film was the exact same pitiful destiny that met **THE GOLDEN BAT** — cookie-cutter cut cute character-crammed, Western-ways wishful weaseling, jerky jejune juvenile Japanimation.

ÔGON BATTO. Export title: **THE GOLDENBAT**. Toei (Japan), 1966. *Director*: Hajime Sato. *Screenplay*: Susumu Takahisa. *Based on characters created by* Takeo Nagamatsu. *Cinematography*: Giichi Yamazawa. *Music*: Shunsuke Kikuchi. *Film editor*: Fumio Soda. *Art director*: Shinichi Eno. *Special photographic effects*: Sadao Uemura. *Production supervisor*: Koji Kuwata. *Executive producer*: Yo Aozawa. *Cast*: Shinichi Chiba (*Commander Yamatone*), Hirohisa Nakata (*The Golden Bat*; also, *Suzuki*), Emily Koken (*Emily*), Wataru Yamakawa (*Akira Kazahaya*), Andrew Hughes (*Dr. Paal*), Hisako Tsukuba (*Naomi Akiyama*), Koji Sekiyama (*Nazoh*), Yoichi Numata (*Keloid*), Keiko Kuni (*Piranha*), Keiichi Kitagawa (*Jackal*), Kosaku Okano (*Nakamura*), Yukio Aoshima (*cop*). *Running time*: 73 minutes. ToeiScope, black & white.

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HORÁCIO HIGUCHI

In his own words: "Horácio Higuchi doesn't write about movies for a living."

TIM PAXTON

Wildman Fischer impersonator and **MONSTER!** editor, Tim Paxton caught creature feature fever at an early age and, fortunately for us, never looked back. His unhealthy obsessions include a peculiar fascination for the routinely unwatchable space operas of Al Bradley and writing seemingly endless essays on his sexual devotion to Paul Blaisdell's **SHE CREATURE**. Mothers lock up your daughters!

JEFF SEGAL

Jeff Segal is a supremely talented free-lance film scholar and noted Yukari Oshima enthusiast whose rather fine scribbings have graced the pages of such trailblazing publications as **EUROPEAN TRASH CINEMA**, **ASIAN TRASH CINEMA**, **SKAM**, and, of course, **MONSTER!**

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John Vellutini is Mr. Vampire. Author of the seminal (and sadly out-of-print) **JOURNAL OF VAMPIROLOGY**, John takes on the rather unenviable task of wading through mountains of Hong Kong hopping gnoysi videotapes in his constant search for the elusive diamond. Many Thanks!

CONRAD WIDENER

Pennsylvania's proud son, the prolific Conrad Widener has reviewed more Italian 60's space sagas and fright films than he would probably care to admit. Legendary for his encyclopedic knowledge of spaghetti screen sirens, Conrad is a regular contributor to a wide array of fanzines the world over.

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