DVD Select: A serial killer's made, not born

by Robert_J_Hawkins

While movie studios are focused on rolling out major summer blockbusters - they hope - into theaters, their home entertainment divisions have gone on hiatus for the Memorial Day holiday.

'HANNIBAL RISING' - Gaspard Ulliel stars as a young Hannibal Lecter in the thriller 'Hannibal Rising.' CNS Photo courtesy of Keith Hampshere. How do we know this?

Just look at the movies that are arriving on DVD this week.

There aren't any. Well, hardly any.

Well, hardly any worth watching.

Which is probably OK, since movie buffs are still reeling from the deluge of titles that debuted in the past few weeks. Or, they are out watching "Spiderman 3" for the fifth time.

You know a week is tanking when the biggest two or three movies are in the horror/serial killer genre.

The "hottest" movie this week is a prequel to a movie that was made before most of us were born: "Silence of the Lambs."

Yes, because we've all been wondering "Just how did Hannibal Lector get so screwed up?" Hollywood has rushed in with the answer, many decades later.

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the $1 bin

The answer is: "Hannibal Rising" (Weinstein/Genius, 1 star), the roots of the blood-soaked saga of the serial killer with a penchant for cannibalism and good red wine. There's even an unrated version, which I have not seen, which promises material too gruesome and horrifying to be shown in theaters.

Here, you have to ask yourself: Do I even want to know anyone who would rent that?

To save you some time: At the end of World War II in Eastern Europe, young Hannibal witnesses the brutal murder of his parents. And, yes, it messes him up enough to fill three previous movies - only one of any stature. I can't say it better than the press release: "Igniting an insatiable lust within a serial killer who was not born, but made."

Takes your breath away.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Blood and Chocolate" (Sony, 2 stars) Curiously enough, in this slasher a young girl living in Colorado's mountainous regions witnesses her family's murder at the hands of a pack of angry men - after which she moves to Eastern Europe. Unlike Hannibal, she vows to never kill, which, being a werewolf, would be really easy for her. Instead, she goes to work in a Bucharest chocolate shop where stuff remains mostly dormant until she encounters an artist researching ancient relics and art for a graphic novel. Their involvement stirs anger in the young woman's familial pack and endangers the life of her artist. There's some camp factor to this movie which makes it a guilty pleasure. Stars include Agnes Bruckner and Hugh Dancy.

More psychopathic killers can be found in "Mem-o-re" starring Billy Zane as a researcher who ingests a Brazilian potion that transfers to him the twisted memory of a serial killer; and "The Final Patient" in which an old country doctor (Bill Cobbs) discovers the secret to eternal youth at a horrible price (and I'll bet you can guess what it is). Both titles are from Echo Bridge Home Entertainment. In the satirical horror flick "Kill House" (Trinity Home Entertainment) somebody is roaming around knocking off real estate agents. Now that's funny.

"Loveless in Los Angeles" (Allumination FilmWorks, 2 stars) Not a horror film! What a difference moving to L.A. and finding success can make though in the personality. Dave Randall (Dash Mihok) was a nice guy before moving to L.A. Seven years later as producer of a TV dating game show, he's a major jerk. That is, until he bumps into his college crush (Brittany Daniel) and must undergo a huge personality transplant if he is to get the girl. Well, sure it is a romantic comedy.

"The Hawk is Dying" (Strand, 2 1/2 stars) Based on the 1973 semi-autobiographical novel by writer Harry Crews. Paul Giamatti is Fred Gattling, a Florida car detailer who lives with his sister and her mentally challenged son (Michael Pitt). The two men share an interest in falconry. Fred's only other diversion is a casual sexual relationship with a psychology student (Michelle Williams) more than half his age. Fred's obsession with falconry and his attempts to tame the majestic wild bird take on metaphorical magnitude when tragedy strikes his small family.

Documentary of the week: "Heavy Petting" (Docurama) Lets go back to the dark ages of sexual relationships - the 1950s - and study the mores of celebrities like David Byrne, Spalding Gray, Sandra Bernhard, Abbie Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg and many more. Wait. The sex lives of Hoffman, Ginsberg and Bernhard? I think I'm going to throw up.

IT CAME FROM TV

Season two of Kyra Sedgwick's cable TV police procedural "The Closer"; season two of the early Western classic "Rawhide"; another oldie, the second season of the sitcom "F-Troop"; and season six of gay-blade sitcom "Will and Grace." Also, the reality series "One Punk Under God" in which the tattooed evangelist Jay Bakker tries to make it in the world of his notorious dad and mom, Jim and Tammy Faye - but under his own terms.

FROM THE VAULTS

Earlier this month, Hollywood and the media celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of their most intriguing and unglamorous figures - Katharine Hepburn, who died in 2003. As the old girl was fond of saying in the warbly voice: She didn't "give a fig" for Hollywood or its people. None the less, Hollywood enabled her to make great movies with great co-stars.

Warner Home Video is releasing six of those films to DVD for the first time this week:

- "The Corn is Green," (1978) George Cukor's TV version of the classic in which Hepburn plays a teacher determined to make a difference in a Welsh community.

- "Dragon Seed," (1944) Amazingly, the aristocratic Hepburn plays a Chinese peasant woman in this adaptation of the Pearl S. Buck novel.

- "Morning Glory," (1933) A best actress Oscar went to Hepburn for her role as Eva Lovelace, a country girl who pursues fame on the Broadway stage.

- "Sylvia Scarlett," (1936) One of four films in which Hepburn was paired with Cary Grant. Here they are a pair of con artists - and Hepburn bends gender as Sylvia and Sydney.

- "Undercurrent," (1946) A noirish melodrama directed by Vincente Minnelli in which Hepburn is a young bride unable to see the true dark nature of her new husband (Robert Taylor).

- "Without Love," (1945) This is the third pairing of Spencer Tracy and Hepburn, a romantic comedy about a couple who share lodging in overcrowded Washington, D.C., during the war.

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