

# THE LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

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## Voyager contributes II Society

When the Voyager Company initiated the concept of its *Criterion Collection* line, about ten years ago, the intention was to create a library of the world's great films on laser disc. What the founders of the series probably did not anticipate, however, is that the *Collection* would also become an important institution for the teaching of film and filmmaking, but as more contemporary movie directors became involved in Voyager's disc projects (these days they practically scrape and grapple to be given the chance to participate in Voyager's *Criterion Collection* 'Director Approved' releases) the more they began to share their insight and technical approaches in the commentary and supplementary portions of the discs.

Now, the first generation of filmmakers to grow up with the *Criterion Collection* and to acknowledge its influence on their work returns the favor by participating in a *Criterion Collection* disc themselves and sharing their insights for those who will follow. The twin brothers who directed *Menace II Society*, Allen Hughes and Albert Hughes, are so young they can still remember vivid details of the Big Wheels tricycles they had as children, probably around the time that the *Criterion Collection* was just getting started. They admit to a discomfort with eroticism, as is natural for honest young men barely in their twenties, and lament the censorship that forced them to squelch their most violent images from the general theatrical release of their film. Like many of today's young urban filmmakers, they grew up admiring the works of Martin Scorsese, and they cite, on the supplementary audio tracks of the *Criterion Collection* edition of *Menace II Society* (CC1371L, \$100), Scorsese's commentary on Voyager's *Taxi Driver* (Nov 90) and *Raging Bull* (Jan 91) as specific contributions to the core of their filmmaking approach. With little more than a year's participation in actual filmmaking classes, the insight they gleaned from Voyager's discs became a significant part of their working methods.

Perhaps *Menace II*, about young, violently inclined men living in a pervasively violent neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles, is such a mature work because although each brother is only 20 they share 40 years of life experience. It may also be the sense of balance that they bring to each other, since it is this sense of balance that makes the movie so good, allowing it to explore life, tell a coherent story, depict clearly delineated and very real characters, and generate both action and warmth from its milieu while studiously avoiding all the clichés young people are usually so eager to embrace. Stylistically the film is brilliant, making repeat viewings highly appealing.

Voyager has issued the 'Unrated' version of the film, with all the brothers' beloved squib shots re-inserted, on a two platter set. Side one is presented in CAV, side two in CLV, and side three in CAV. Side three also contains supplementary materials that then extend in CAV onto side four. Produced by Mikki Halpin and Michael Nash, the image quality looks great and the disc is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The stereo surround soundtrack is also well produced and the disc is not closed captioned.

(New Line Home Video and Image Entertainment have released the R-rated version of *Menace II Society* as a *Widescreen Edition* (ID2427LL, \$40). The letterboxing is similar to Voyager's effort. The differences in graphic content between the R-rated and Unrated cuts are extremely minor and often require side-by-side comparison to identify. The Image release would seem to have a presentable picture and sound transfer, but in direct comparison the Voyager presentation is far more satisfying. The Image disc looks pale and grainy, with bland fleshtones, while Voyager's effort is bright and solid, with deep, carefully detailed fleshtones. The sound on Voyager's disc is also significantly stronger and more detailed than Image's soundtrack. Image's disc is closed captioned with close attention to vernacular and some abridgments.)

We couldn't help chuckling at some of the supplementary material on the Voyager disc. Two of the brothers' student films are included, along with their report cards—hey you go with what you've got. Both films display antecedents to *Menace II Society* (one was actually called *Menace to Society*, which is why the feature film is titled as if it were a sequel, though the image of the twin figures in the center of the title is a good example of the brothers' far-reaching artistic sensibilities) and are worth a view. Two admirable music videos, *Brenda's Got a Baby* by 2Pac and *Throw Your Hands in the Air* by Raw Fusion, in which the brothers established themselves as viable commercial filmmakers, are also presented, and these contain anticipations of *Menace II* as well. Other features include a pair of deleted scenes from the film, a brief comparison of some partially illegible storyboards to the completed sequences, an alternate view of the film's opening sequence, and interviews with the two brothers who sit together on a couch. (What we wish the disc might have provided was lyrics to the songs featured in the musical score, but no luck.) As the film itself unfolds, each brother also speaks individually on a separate audio channel. Allen, apparently the extrovert, has a confident voice and talks about working with the performers and what the film's dramatic goals were. Albert, apparently the introvert, speaks in a softer and more fragmented manner, and talks about the technical aspects of the shoot and the complications that were surmounted in each scene. They both feel comfortable in crossing into the other's turf, however, and combined they provide an extensive and valuable description of the practicalities of quality filmmaking in a commercial environment, a contribution they generously pass along to all of the future filmmakers racing around on Big Wheels today.

## Barrio epic

According to Variety it lost more money in relation to its cost than any other big budget film made last year, but Taylor Hackford's *Blood In...Blood Out*, released theatrically as *Bound by Honor*, is a magnificent novel-length work and is perhaps the greatest non-wartime American prison film ever made. Long after the more profitable films, such as *Rookie of the Year*, have sunk into obscurity, *Blood In...Blood Out* will be recognized and honored as an outstanding achievement in dramatic and political filmmaking.

Hollywood Home Video has released the film as an *Exclusive Director's Cut* (2015AS, \$50). At 199 minutes it is some ten minutes longer

## Annual Consumer Poll Results (see Page 12)

### The Ten Best Discs of 1993

1. Terminator 2: Judgment Day
2. The Abyss Revised Edition
3. The Star Wars Trilogy
4. The Ultimate Oz
5. Bram Stoker's Dracula (Voyager)
6. Beauty and the Beast (CAV)
7. The Killer
8. The Player
9. Pinocchio (CAV)
10. 2001: A Space Odyssey

### The Ten Most Wanted Discs

1. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
2. 101 Dalmatians
3. Aladdin
4. The Wild Bunch (Ib)
5. Jurassic Park
6. Dune (long version)
7. Once Upon a Time in the West (Ib)
8. The Bridge on the River Kwai (Ib)
9. The Big Country
10. A Star is Born (Ib)

### The Ten Best Discs of All Time

1. Terminator 2: Judgment Day
2. The Abyss Revised Edition
3. The Star Wars Trilogy
4. The Ultimate Oz
5. Apocalypse Now
6. Alien
7. Spartacus (Voyager)
8. Aliens
9. Fantasia
10. Bram Stoker's Dracula

**Annual Poll (Continued)**

**Terminator**, **Sunset Boulevard** (Paramount), **Total Recall** (Image no longer has the rights), **American Graffiti**, **Around the World in 80 Days**, **Bridge on the River Kwai**, **The Day the Earth Stood Still** (a strong possibility from Fox), **Jaws**, **Legend** (MCA/Universal is encountering legal problems), **Once upon a Time in the West**, **Dr. Zhivago** (an anniversary is planned in 1995 by MGM/UA), **Platoon** and Paramount's **Star Trek** movies.

**The 10 Worst Discs**

1. **My Fair Lady** lb
2. **The Sound of Music** lb
3. **La Femme Nikita**
4. **Halloween**
5. **Superman** lb
6. **Basic Instinct—Director's Cut**
7. **Horror of Dracula**
8. **Planet of the Apes**
9. **The Thing (VidAmerica)**
10. **Body Heat** (remaster)

We gave respondents an opportunity to vent their frustrations by citing four titles that they felt were the worst laser discs they had tried to watch in the past year or two. Fox's pale letterboxed releases of **My Fair Lady** (Apr 91 and Jul 92—they tried twice) received 5.5% of the votes to win the top spot, with Fox's greenish letterboxed release of **The Sound of Music** (Sep 89), currently being remastered, coming in second with about 5%. Vidmark Entertainment's partially cropped monaural release of **La Femme Nikita** (Aug 92) was third with 3% and Image's squeezed-looking **Halloween** (Oct 85) was fourth with just under 3%. Warner's letterboxed **Superman** (Sep 90) was next with 2.5%, followed by Pioneer Special Edition's **Basic Instinct—The Director's Cut** (May 93) with 2%, Warner's **Horror of Dracula** (Feb 92) and Fox's **Planet of the Apes** (Feb 91) with just under 2%, VidAmerica's **The Thing** (Nov 85) with a little over 1.5% and Warner's grainy remaster of **Body Heat** (Jun 93) with 1.5%. Other titles that consumers agree should best be avoided included Paramount's **Grease**, Republic's **The Quiet Man**, VidAmerica's **Top Hat** (will probably be restored this year by Turner Entertainment), both versions of **The Highlander**, HBO's version of **The Terminator**, Image's attempt to restore the original **Invaders from Mars**, Fox's **The Bible**, Image's letterboxed version of **Dressed to Kill** (currently being remastered), Paramount's awful rendition of **1900** (it gets our vote), Paramount's **Harold and Maude**, Nashville, MGM/UA's **New York, New York** (currently being remastered), **Road Warrior**, **The Star Wars Trilogy** (due to the sporadic nature of the supplementary materials), Fox's **Breaking Away**, RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video's cropped **Bridge on the River Kwai**, United Video's **A Christmas Carol**, Vestron Video's **Escape from New York**, Fox's hazy **Home Alone 2**, RCA/Columbia's **It Happened One Night** and Paramount's **Shane**.

**10 Titles To Be Remastered**

1. **The Road Warrior**
2. **My Fair Lady**
3. **Halloween**
4. **The Wild Bunch**
5. **Amadeus**
6. **Grease**  
**Superman**
8. **A Star Is Born (1954)**  
**Vertigo**
10. **La Femme Nikita**

We asked which titles respondents would most like to see remastered without an increase in sticker price. Number one on the list was **The Road Warrior**, which we reported on above, receiving a little over 3% of the votes. **My Fair Lady** received just under 2%, followed by **Halloween**, **The Wild Bunch**, **Amadeus**, **Grease**, **Superman**, **A Star is Born**, **Vertigo** and **La Femme Nikita**, all with a bit more than 1%. Earning just under 1% and still strong candidates for remastering are **Bridge on the River Kwai**, **Dune**, **Once Upon a Time in the West**, **Planet of the Apes** (under consideration by Fox), **Superman 2**, **American Graffiti**, **Around the World in 80 Days**, **It Happened One Night** (Columbia TriStar has announced the release of the AFI restored remaster) and **Once Upon a Time in America**.

Are consumer's happy with their laser disc system? 94% responded affirmatively, a point above last year's 93%, but still below the 96% level of three years ago. We asked if respondents were planning to buy at least as many laser discs this year as they did last year and 79% said they would, with 11% saying they wouldn't and 11% undecided. 40% are renting laser discs on a regular basis, a rise from the 19% responding last year when we asked the question in a slightly different manner. The number of respondents using surround systems has leveled off at 70% this year after rising from 63% two years ago to 70% last year. Curious if people still care about the analog channel, we asked how many have players with digital sound capabilities and 97% said they did. When asked if they enjoy discs formatted in CAV, 66% responded that they do, with 22% saying they don't and 12% undecided. With the prolif-

eration of boxed sets, discs have also been packaged with a variety of extras lately. We wondered if this made the packages more enticing. Asked if the inclusion of a hard cover book with a video disc increased the likelihood of purchase, 27% said it would while 61% said it would not and 12% were undecided. Asked the same question about a CD, 29% said it would, while 59% said it would not and 11% were undecided. When asked about the inclusion of reproduced promotional materials, collectors were slightly more receptive, with 39% interested in the concept, 50% rejecting it and 11% undecided.

We also wondered if consumers liked saving money by obtaining double feature discs that are presented on as few sides as possible to hold down the sticker price and 56% said they did, although the 31% that did not were fairly adamant in their opinion. 13% were undecided. Are laser discs too expensive? Does Los Angeles have earthquakes? It becomes a viscous circle when disc producers are forced by weak sales to raise their sticker prices, only to have sales fall further as a result. Nevertheless, opinions have not changed much from last year. 61% feel discs are overpriced, just as they did a year ago, with 31% comfortable with the pricing structure and 8% undecided. As with the previous years, however, consumers went out of their way to blast Fox's sticker prices, **Miracle on 34th Street** and **An Affair to Remember** notwithstanding.

**Twelve Great Disc Jackets**

1. **Terminator 2: Judgment Day — Special Edition**
2. **Bram Stoker's Dracula**
3. **The Abyss Revised Edition**
4. **Beauty and the Beast**
5. **Spartacus (Voyager)**
6. **Casablanca (MGM/UA)**  
**Pinocchio (CAV)**
8. **2001: A Space Odyssey (MGM/UA CAV)**
9. **20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (lb)**
10. **Aliens (lb)**  
**It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World**  
**The Ultimate Oz**

Finally, we thought we would ask what jacket covers folks like best. Some respondents were put off by the question, wondering what it had to do with laser discs, but we often find ourselves leaving a jacket in display on a shelf precisely because of the aesthetic enrichment it gives to our room, and really good jacket art can be a significant factor in our decision to purchase a disc—in some cases it can prepare your frame of mind and make the disc itself more entertaining. Again, the **Terminator 2 Special Edition** placed first, with 6% of the respondents admiring the embossed leather box jacket, although one respondent was quite annoyed, pointing out that the video cassette has a 3D image on its box. Second, with 3%, was **Bram Stoker's Dracula**, with both Voyager and Columbia TriStar taking advantage of the film's highly subliminal advertising artwork. 2% preferred the box jacket on **The Abyss** and a little under 2% liked the artwork on **Beauty and the Beast**. About 1.5% admired Voyager's **Spartacus** design, with a little under 1.5% preferring MGM/UA's **50th Anniversary Casablanca** artwork, the deluxe **Pinocchio** box, Disney's **Exclusive Archive Collection—20,000 Leagues Under the Sea**, the **Aliens** box, the Jack Davis art on **It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World**, and the large green **Ultimate Oz** box. Other favorites include Voyager's amusing original artwork on **The Killer**, the big **Star Wars Trilogy** box, Voyager's unusual full color art for **Dr. Strangelove**, MGM/UA's nicely drawn art for the remaster of the 1935 **Mutiny on the Bounty**, MGM/UA's letterboxed **Clash of the Titans**, the **Fantasia** box, the engaging **Golden Age of Looney Tunes** artwork, Akira, Warner's standard JFK, Warner's **Batman Returns**, Voyager's **Close Encounters**, **The Compleat Tex Avery**, **The Connery Collection**, MGM/UA's letterboxed **Forbidden Planet**, Image's collector's art on **Invaders from Mars**, Voyager's **Kwaidan**, MGM/UA's lovely **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, **A River Runs Through It** and Image's **Silence of the Lambs**.

We would like to thank everyone who responded to our poll and remind them that even though a title they requested did not appear in this article, information about it is likely to be passed on to laser disc producers who, with a few exceptions, want to provide consumers with the titles consumers want to obtain.

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