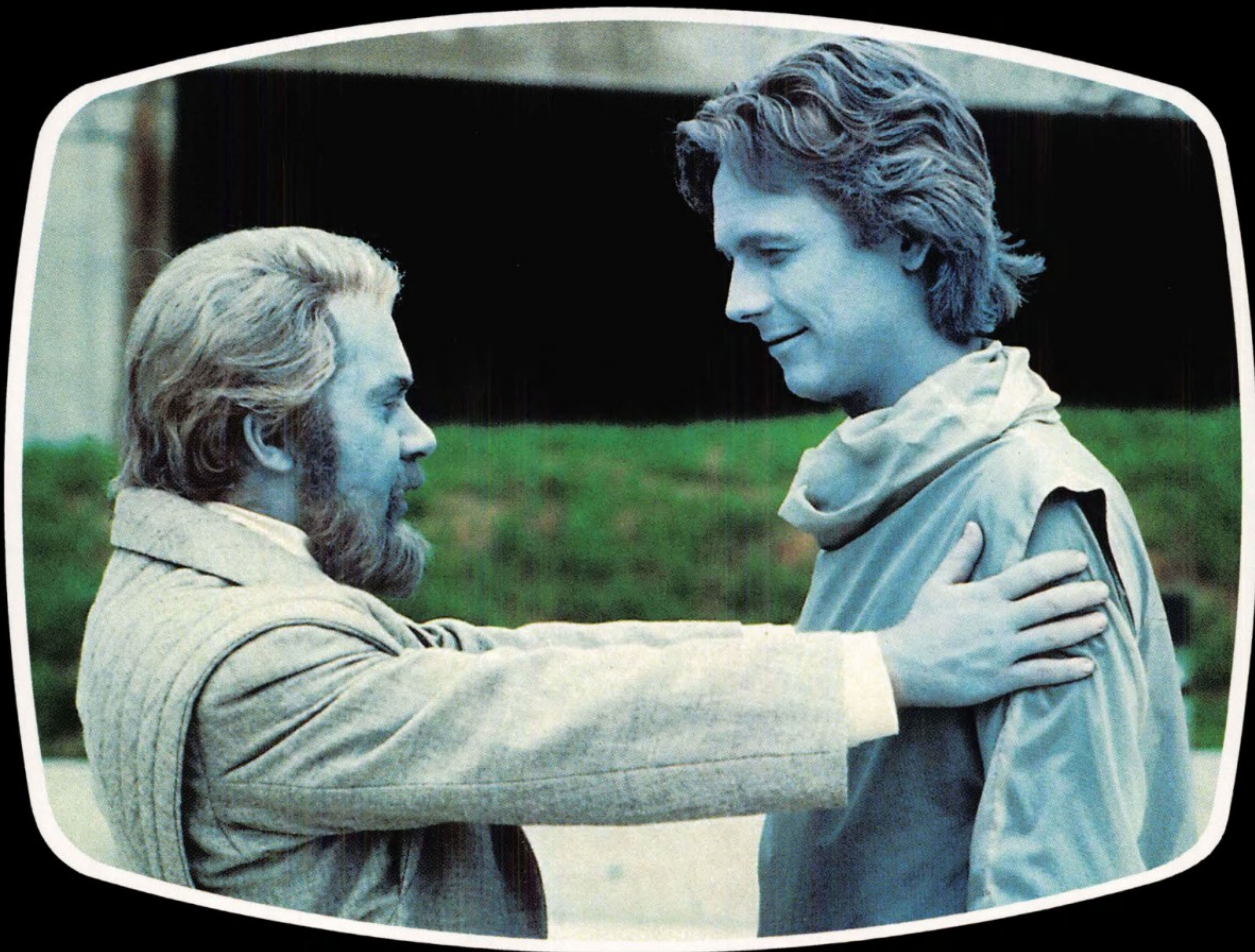


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MOGRAPHY, director Young failed to complete **VAMPIRE CIRCUS** in its allotted six week schedule and had to cobble together the final cut from the footage he had shot. The result is uneven, let down by some amateurish blue screen shots and crude in-camera effects, undeveloped and altogether disappearing characters, and some major irrationalities of plot. (For instance, if Mitterhaus could be revived by simply removing the stake from his chest, why wasn't this his dying instruction to Anna, instead of this ambitious 15 year plan?) That said, **VAMPIRE CIRCUS** is also an unusually poetical Hammer film, full of nods to Ingmar Bergman, Charles Finney, Ray Bradbury and Val Lewton, and one of the few British horror films to understand the difference between nudity and eroticism. Likewise, though Young revels in startling his audience with extreme violence, he is equally playful with touches of suggestive horror. We especially liked the shot in which the evil little clown (Skip Martin) lures a family through the woods, toward what appears to be the head of the black panther waiting in the foreground—which is revealed to be part of a charred log... just seconds before a panther really does attack! Similarly, Dora (Lynne Frederick)'s discovery of the slaughtered family is preceded by her cowering from what appear to be the shining eyes of the panther in repose, which—in a shot worthy of Val Lewton—are then revealed to be golden medallions on the boots of a human tracker.

Of these three Hallmark/Image releases, **VAMPIRE CIRCUS** alone would be impossible to make in today's conservative climate; not only is it nakedly sexual and graphically violent (David Prowse takes a bullet hit that

would have done Sam Peckinpah proud), it dares to be homoerotic, suggestively bestial and incestuous, and goes so far as to break the ultimate taboo of unleashing violence against young children. (Needless to say, all of these factors were aborted in the US theatrical cut, which ran slightly over 83m and rendered the film's climax incomprehensible.) Though devoid of star power—Professor Mueller is the central heroic character, but Laurence Payne is given sixth billing—the film is bolstered by many good performances, with Tayman and Corlan outstanding vampires, and the romantic leads (John Moulder Brown and Lynne Frederick) are perhaps the most believable young couple of any Hammer production.

The fullscreen transfer is not unduly depriving of Moray Grant's original 1.66 compositions. The transfer looks a little dark, but this has the positive effects of ripening the color and concealing the rough edges of some bad blue screen shots (the shadows on the flapping vampire bats remain transparent against the night sky, making real bats look less believable than the string driven ones seen at the climax of Hammer's **KISS OF THE VAMPIRE**). The mono track is strong, showing off David Whitaker's eerily dissonant score to its best advantage. The music is also poised for deeper appreciation on this laserdisc by having the music and effects tracks isolated on analog. The side break is acceptable, and Side 2 presents the last (grisly) half hour in CAV.

All in all, Hallmark/Image's restoration of these three films is sure to help Hammer fans—particularly American ones—to re-evaluate these long-abused films in a more favorable light. If you've seen these films before and were

thinking about passing these discs over, think again. —TL

EVIL DEAD 2: DEAD BY DAWN

1987, Elite Entertainment
#EE3845 (LD), D/LB/MA/+,
\$49.98, 83m55s
Anchor Bay Entertainment
#10320 (VHS), D/LB/+, \$14.98

Although Sam Raimi's **THE EVIL DEAD** (1982) gained a strong cult following during the years before the release of **EVIL DEAD 2: DEAD BY DAWN** (1987), it was this latter film that made Raimi and his star, Bruce Campbell, real Hollywood players. To put a persistent issue to rest, **EVIL DEAD 2** is neither a sequel to **THE EVIL DEAD** nor its remake. Stylistically and technically, the film is a quantum leap beyond its predecessor, due in part due to the contributions of cinematographer Peter Deming, who was later to lens **LOST HIGHWAY**, **AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY**, and **SCREAM 2** (all 1997). In addition, **EVIL DEAD 2** is a wonderfully imaginative hybrid, consisting of Gothic elements (eg., the isolated haunted house), splatterpunk (before it had a name), Lovecraftian demonology, European psychodrama, horror film spoofs, and—perhaps most importantly—Three Stooges slapstick comedy. The film's peculiar strength (putting aside, for a moment, its giddy inventiveness) is that it is so difficult to pigeonhole.

Put away those murky, old, full-frame Vestron Video incarnations of **EVIL DEAD 2** (on both laser disc and video) and invest the money you might spend on the Japanese import (also full-frame) on one of these long overdue reissues of the film in newly remastered, widescreen editions,



"Alright, Laughing Boy! Come to Poppa!"
Bruce Campbell takes charge in *EVIL DEAD 2*.

supervised by director Sam Raimi himself.

To rehash the plot of **EVIL DEAD 2** would be as potentially misleading as it would be to say that *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* is about the strange adventures of a ship's surgeon. The film utilizes a sort of Gothic, **ALIEN**-like plot, in which some latecomers arrive at a scene where, earlier, disaster had struck, although this is not immediately apparent. Ash (Bruce

Campbell), seeking a quiet weekend in the woods with girl friend Linda (Denise Bixler), arrives at the secluded cabin where, previously, Professor Knowby (John Peaks), an occult scientist and a sort of Lovecraftian intellectual, was engrossed in researching the *NECRONOMICON EX MORTIS*, "The Book of the Dead." Professor Knowby had recorded onto a tape recorder some "demon resurrection passages" from this

ancient, occult book (bound in human flesh), resulting in a horrific demise for himself and his wife, Henrietta (Lou Hancock). Unwittingly, Ash plays this tape on which Professor Knowby had recorded the incantation, unleashing once again the evil demons from the other world. In the meantime, Knowby's daughter, Annie (Sarah Berry) is travelling to the cabin with her boy friend Ed (Richard Domeier) to deliver some missing pages of the *NECRONOMICON*. Along the way, they meet two local yokels—Jake (Dan Hicks) and Bobbie Joe (Kassie Wesley, in a role designed as a sort of homage to Holly Hunter)—and enlist them as guides to the cabin. The foursome arrive at the besieged cabin in the midst of Ash's battle with the evil forces (referred to as "Deadites"), and in a comic twist, Annie and the others mistakenly blame Ash for slaughtering the Professor and his wife.

Struck from a pristine 35mm interpositive, the letterboxed image is exceptionally crisp and the colors accurate (the same transfer was used for Anchor Bay Entertainment's VHS release). While the disc jacket indicates the film is reproduced in its original theatrical ratio of 1.85:1, it is actually presented at 1.66:1. It has been slightly cropped at the top of the frame, but excessively so at the bottom, with only slightly more information given to the left than the right of the frame. A 1m 30s theatrical trailer is provided, and there is a short feature included on the disc, a "Making Of" video diary titled **BEHIND THE SCREAMS** (at 27m 35s). In addition, the disc's analogue track contains an amusing and largely technically-oriented audio commentary by director Sam Raimi, star Bruce Campbell, co-writer



Françoise Truffaut directs Anton Diffring (left) and Oskar Werner on the set of FAHRENHEIT 451.

Scott Spiegel, and special make-up effects supervisor Greg Nicotero. One is left with the overwhelming impression that they had fun making this picture; Campbell emerges as the most articulate about the film, although the others have interesting information to add as well.

The VHS edition (sans commentary) is attractively boxed in a clam-shell case, but as often happens with Anchor Bay releases, the jacket notes contain some glaring inaccuracies: Annie, instead of Linda, is listed as Ash's girl friend, and the *NECRONOMICON* is called the "Necromomekon." Furthermore, the Elite disc jacket incorrectly lists the film's year of

release as 1976. The disc was pressed in Japan in a unique, "Blood Red" Special Limited Edition, and Elite has cautiously added a shrink-wrap disclaimer allowing that it may not play on some machines. (We have yet to hear of any LD player that rejected it.) The interior contains an Errata sheet, pointing out that the digital track is missing from the first few seconds of the **BEHIND THE SCREAMS** featurette, as indeed it is, though the analogue track remains intact. The disc is not closed-captioned.

Count on the "Blood Red" Special Limited Edition laser disc to sell faster than you can say, well, "Groovy." —Rebecca Umland/Sam Umland

FAHRENHEIT 451

1965, Universal/Image
Entertainment #ID4231USDVD
(DVD), D/DD/LB/C, \$29.95,
112m 24s

François Truffaut considered his adaptation of Ray Bradbury's 1953 novel to be a failure, but it has dated somewhat better than the original, eliminating the book's robotic firehouse dogs and toast-butterers to austere emphasize the story's humanity, irony, and love for the written word. Oskar Werner (**JULES AND JIM**) is well-cast as the comfortably numb fireman Montag, whose job is to seek out books—illegal in this dystopian future, because individual reading encourages antisocial behavior and