

Video Watchdog[®]

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 89
\$6.50



THE OUTER LIMITS

Beyond TETSUO: Shinya Tsukamoto!
3 New HAMMERS! ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST!

TAPES • DVDs • SOUNDTRACKS • BOOKS

\$6.50 U.S. / \$9.50 CANADA



WATCHDOG NEWS

BOOK 'EM, DEADITE

Anchor Bay Entertainment's Limited Edition reissue of Sam Raimi's **THE EVIL DEAD** (with the added subtitle, **THE BOOK OF THE DEAD**, #DV11904, \$49.98) does not contain Raimi's **INTO THE WOODS**, the short that provided the basis for the film, as the company originally announced. It does, however, feature marvelous cover packaging that imitates the *NECRONOMICON EX MORTIS* ("Book of the Dead"), sculpted by artist Tom Sullivan, who designed the nefarious prop book seen in the original film.

The DVD itself resides in a clear plastic sleeve attached to the last of several pages that turn in imitation of the book seen in the film. While the packaging is delightful, Anchor Bay's presentation is not particularly an improvement over the Elite Entertainment DVD (#DD7265) issued in 1999, which frankly had a better transfer. In contrast to all previous issues of the film, which were derived from 35mm prints presented in full-frame, unmatted transfers, ABE's anamorphic transfer is apparently derived from 16mm negative elements that have been matted at 1.72:1. Compared to the earlier Elite issue that was derived from 35mm elements, however, ABE's transfer slices visual information off the top and bottom of the frame to accommodate 16:9 enhancement, without adding significant information to the sides. Arguably, this may contribute to the film's claustrophobic atmosphere, but otherwise the transfer is unremarkable.

**Reported by
Rebecca & Sam Umland**

The cover of Anchor Bay's new "Book of the Dead" repackaging of THE EVIL DEAD.

However, ABE's transfer reveals some hitherto invisible hard-matted exterior shots erased by earlier 35mm blow-ups—at 16:17, for instance, during an exterior of the cabin with the moon in the upper right center of the frame. While ABE's disc is the first anamorphic transfer of the film, Elite's earlier transfer was crisper and more colorful. Yet in contrast to the Elite disc, which presented the soundtrack remastered in DD-5.1, ABE's disc is presented with newly remixed DD-5.1 EX and DTS ES soundtracks. We prefer the DTS soundtrack because it is more resonant and has slightly better detail.

The two audio commentaries on ABE's disc duplicate those found on the Elite DVD, one of which includes Sam Raimi and producer Robert Tapert, while the other offers Bruce Campbell's amusing anecdotes. Also duplicated on the ABE disc are 18m 7s of outtakes (labeled "Bits and Pieces" on Elite's earlier DVD). Elite's disc included the theatrical trailer (2m 3s), while ABE's same trailer runs shorter (1m 52s), omitting for some reason Bob Dorian's opening commentary. Supplements unique to ABE's issue include an engaging short film by Bruce Campbell, "Fanalysis" (26m 3s), about his travails on the fan convention circuit, originally shot on digital video. The disc also includes an informative documentary made especially for this release, "Discovering Evil Dead: The Palace Boys Meet The Evil Dead" (13m 3s) about British film distributors Stephen Woolley and Nik Powell of Palace Pictures, who first released Raimi's film (simultaneously) in theaters and on video in England in the early '80s. This documentary, coupled with Michael Felsner's 20-page essay, "Bringing the Dead Home for Dinner: A History of THE EVIL

DEAD in Your Home," included as a booklet with the Limited Edition, suggests that **THE EVIL DEAD**'s rise to "cult" status is inseparable from the technological changes in the 1980s that altered film consumption by the masses—that is, the period that saw the incredibly swift rise of home video.

Like **THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE**, **THE EVIL DEAD** made the rather extraordinary transition from the drive-in circuit to art house film; the reason for its gentrification (from drive-in to art house, and its corollary, from the original Thorn-EMI VHS rental edition of 1983 to ABE's Limited Edition DVD of 2002) is an issue that remains unexplored in documentaries that this, and other home video editions, have cared to include. The four 30s TV spots included on ABE's disc (whose 1.33:1 framing suggest that they were taken from video sources taped from television) reveals that the film's first venues, at least in Michigan, were primarily at drive-ins. Other extras include a poster and stills gallery (with many of the production stills duplicating those on the Elite disc), the requisite talent bios, and two hidden ("Easter Egg") features, a trivial 1m 7s "Special Make-Up Effects Test" and 7m 17s of video footage taped at the American Cinematheque in Los Angeles in connection with a screening of **THE EVIL DEAD** on Halloween Night 2001, featuring Robert Tapert and actresses Betsy Baker and Theresa Tilley (billed as "Sarah York" in **TED** credits).

Anchor Bay has also issued the film without the Limited Edition packaging (#DV11903, \$19.98) in a standard snapcase which contains both audio commentaries, the outtakes, Campbell's "Fanalysis," the trailers, TV spots, poster and still

gallery, and talent bios, but omits "Discovering Evil Dead" and the hidden features. In contrast to the Limited Edition, however, the snapcase contains a booklet which reproduces an important interview with the film's three female cast members, not included in the Limited Edition issue, thus making both issues (sigh) necessary for serious collectors.

We also happened to discover a DVD edition of the film at our local Blockbuster with a unique catalogue number (#DV12190) that is apparently the Limited Edition disc but in a standard snapcase with different artwork than the other, no-frills, ABE disc. All the discs feature a French language track (in DD-5.1 and 2.0 options) and are closed-captioned.

SPELLBOUND By Criterion

The tangled video history of Alfred Hitchcock's **SPELLBOUND** enters yet another phase with the September "Criterion Collection" release on DVD (\$39.95, DVD-1), its second appearance on the format in the US. Apart from the usual array of extras associated with the company's Hitchcock releases (a radio adaptation, gallery, trailer, and so on), the disc contains three points of significance for VW readers.

First and most obviously, the on again/off again red tinted sequence—a few flickering frames in an otherwise monochromatic film—have been restored. Though the tinting was present on the Fox laserdisc, international video releases, and some cable screenings, the gimmick was omitted from Anchor Bay's 1999 DVD (still in print). Secondly, for the first time on home video, the original 4m overture by Miklos Rosza has