

The Tarzan Pages



Tarzan Flicks

Tarzan, both as legend and as movie role, has been recast many times. At the best of times, he's an action hero, a good role model, and even provides an interesting commentary on the value system of Western culture. At the worst of times, he's a drooling moron in a really trashy flick.

For those who do not yet know, none of the films, despite claims to the contrary, bear the slightest resemblance to Edgar Rice Burroughs' original works. The Tarzan novels are exciting, adult, heroic thrillers. If you're looking for good old fashioned fun reading, I highly recommend them (right after Burroughs' Martian series).



Reviewed films in chronological order
 -- for a complete Tarzan filmography, see below.

TARZAN OF THE APES

(1918 - silent) dir: Scott Sidney; w/ Elmo Lincoln, Enid Markey.

The first film Tarzan -- Lincoln makes a rough-hewn Lord of the Apes, but doesn't look at all bad in the part. The story is sometimes very faithful to the novel, and at other times veers way off into the ozone. There is a long episode detailing the childhood of young Tarzan, and a very entertaining episode where he is discovered by his long lost relatives. The film ends abruptly when Tarzan wins Jane's heart. There's also some highly inappropriate stock jungle footage to snicker at.

TARZAN THE APE MAN

(1932) dir: W. S. Van Dyke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Neil Hamilton, C. Aubrey Smith, Maureen O'Sullivan.

This first Weissmuller flick has less polish & effort in it than many that follow. There is some low budget silliness and it moves rather slowly -- it relies on a lot of wildlife footage to pad it out. On the plus side, we get the classic scenes when Jane first meets Tarzan, and the elephants get to stomp on the bad guys (dwarves in blackface, believe it or not). Fun, 'though it drags a bit.



TARZAN THE FEARLESS

(1933 - feature version of a serial) dir: Robert Hill; w/ Buster Crabbe, Jacqueline Wells (aka Julie Bishop).

The budget was so low, I'm not sure they could afford a script. Tarzan gets to do a rescue somewhere in the middle of the flick, but mostly he's just swinging around while everyone else is off in an entirely other movie, most of which consists of standing around looking concerned. Crabbe wears more of a thong than a loincloth & his buttocks seem to be the focus of far too many shots. And if you thought Weissmuller's Tarzan was a little thick-witted, Crabbe's Tarzan is a hopeless retard.

TARZAN & HIS MATE

(1934) dir: Cedric Gibbons; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, Neil Hamilton.

An old flame returns to try to tempt Jane back to England, and to loot the elephant's graveyard. These early Weissmuller movies (this is the second) were not intended for children, I think. The action is sometimes pretty grim & grisly for a picture of this era. And not only is O'Sullivan wearing her next-to-nothing jungle outfit, but there is a lengthy underwater swimming scene featuring a totally butt-naked Jane (this was probably body-double Josephine McKim, an Olympic Swimmer. To appease critics, the studio shot another version of the scene with a clothed Maureen O'Sullivan). Although it's sometimes just as sexist as any flick of the period, unlike in many films, Jane is shown as an intelligent, resourceful and brave jungle babe. Actually, this one is pretty good even if you're not a Tarzan fan, with plenty of excitement & a nude scene, it's a real *guy* flick.



NEW ADVENTURES OF TARZAN

(1935 -- feature version of the serial, also recut as Tarzan and the Green Goddess) dir: Edward Kull; w/ Bruce Bennett (Herman Brix), Ula Holt. Shot on location in Guatemala.

Tarzan searches for a lost city and his friend D'Arnot in South America. Athlete Brix makes a decent looking Tarzan, although he's skinny like a runner, he looks tuff 'cause he's got zilch body fat. Of course, he can't act his way out of a revolving door. To be honest, this flick is low-budget dreck. The special effects are laughable and the acting is on par with an over-enthusiastic high school play. Good points include outstanding locations & sets, and when Tarzan kills the obligatory lion, he gets up with bloody claw marks on his body. But there's still cute monkey crap. This was the one done by ERB's own production company, and it is genuinely more Tarzan-correct. It is definitely not more politically correct, as they machine gun down the entire lost civilization!

TARZAN ESCAPES

(1936) dir: Richard Thorpe (et al); w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, John Buckler, Benita Hume.

A great white hunter tries to bag Tarzan himself. By this time, the studio may have been moving their aim towards the children -- apparently, the original cut of this film was too gory, so it was extensively reworked. Unfortunately, it shows -- the resulting script is simplistic, sappy, and abrupt. A good deal of footage from *Mate* is re-used, but on the whole, it's still kinda fun.

TARZAN AND THE GREEN GODDESS

(1938 -- recut of The New Adventures of Tarzan)

TARZAN FINDS A SON

(1939) dir: Richard Thorpe; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, John Sheffield, Ian Hunter, Laraine Day, Henry Wilcoxon.

Boy makes his debut in a nice entry featuring a decent story, a little action, and great photography. If Jane's actions seem a bit, um, inconsistent, it's explained by the off-screen reality. O'Sullivan was pregnant (if you look real close, you can tell) and this was to be her last picture, so they wrote her out in the script. Apparently, there was a last-minute arrangement and the ending was reshot so that she stayed with Tarzan.



TARZAN'S REVENGE

(1938) Dir: D. Ross Lederman; w/ Glen Morris, Eleanor Holm.

Well, this was a surprising little-known gem. Decent script, outstanding characters, & good performances -- definitely one of the best ever Tarzan flicks. Decathlete Morris isn't impressive, but makes an okay Tarzan, and at last he is paired with a Jane who's equally athletic (Olympic swimmer Holm) -- actually she's called "Eleanor," but what the heck. Tarzan is still an uneducated mute, but at least he's not a moron. The stock footage is pathetic (mostly zoo shots), it's painfully obvious that they're filming in South or Central America, and there's some padding & cute monkey crap, but all around it's a fun-to-watch movie.

TARZAN'S SECRET TREASURE

(1941) dir: Richard Thorpe; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, John Sheffield, Reginald Owen, Barry Fitzgerald, Tom Conway, Philip Dorn.

The less scrupulous members of a safari make big plans for the escarpment when they find a rich vein of gold. This one features good photography and some of the best (least cheesy) animal action scenes in any Tarzan flick. It's exciting and well played. Although they re-used some bits from *Escapes*, and they made Jane too quivery, this may be the second best Weissmuller Tarzan next to *Mate*.

TARZAN'S NEW YORK ADVENTURE

(1942) dir: Richard Thorpe; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan (her last appearance in this series), John Sheffield, Virginia Grey, Charles Bickford, Chill Wills.

A solid entry in the series, in spite of an overdose of Cute Monkey Crap. Boy is taken by greedy hunters & sold to a circus; Tarzan & Jane come to the big city; Tarzan gets a suit. A decent plot & some hair-raising urban "vine-swinging" stunts make this a fun one.

TARZAN TRIUMPHS

(1943) dir: William Thiele; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Johnny Sheffield, Frances Gifford, Stanley Ridges, Sig Ruman.

The first of the RKO Tarzans, we lose Jane temporarily (she's off visiting her ma), and add jungle princess Gifford. Nazi troopers invade the peaceful Hidden City, and Tarzan has to go from ardent isolationist to nazi-stomping hero. It's awfully silly in spots, and ends with a really bad joke, but there's some new stock footage and more action scenes than usual. Actually, this one's a lot of fun, but the anti-German propaganda gets a bit steep -- even Boy gets to shoot a nazi dead... and then he grins about it!

TARZAN'S DESERT MYSTERY

(1943) dir: William Thiele; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Nancy Kelly, Johnny Sheffield, Otto Kruger, Joe Sawyer, Lloyd Corrigan, Robert Lowery.

Tarzan & Boy (Jane is absent nursing soldiers in London) team up with a lady Vaudeville magician to rid an Arab town of an evil racketeer. They visit a jungle that has giant lizards; the bad guy gets eaten by a giant spider. The horse & the chimp are smarter than the humans. The Arabs have names like "Achmed Nogosh Say-golly." It's kinda cute, but it's just sappy matinee pablum.

TARZAN & THE AMAZONS

(1945) dir: Kurt Neumann; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Brenda Joyce (1st appearance as Jane), Johnny Sheffield, Henry Stephenson, Maria Ouspenskaya.

A slow & boneheaded rehash of the "hidden tribe with lots of treasure" gimmick. At least this hidden tribe features a bevy of starlets in leopard skin. Ouspenskaya,

looking mighty old & frail, lends a touch of class as the Amazon queen. A passable entry, I suppose, but even at 76 minutes, it feels like it goes on way too long.

Either first-time Tarzan director Neumann had a thing against violence, or Weissmuller was ill during the filming of this flick. Tarzan has one brief fight with a crocodile at the start, then just *walks* through the rest of the picture. He's about to fight a lion, but the lion just runs away -- then he's about to fight the last two bad guys (the Amazons killed all the rest in the flick's only action scene), but they just back up into quicksand & Tarzan watches them sink. There's a remarkable dearth of action in this film.

TARZAN & THE LEOPARD WOMAN

(1946) dir: Kurt Neumann; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Brenda Joyce, Johnny Sheffield, Acquanetta.

An annoying little family melodrama. Tarzan is devolved into Dagwood Bumstead, and there's more comic relief than action (maybe it's action relief?). Despite a lot of "native tribes," there's not a black person to be seen in this film -- the 1940's Tarzan movies went for an arab-polynesian look -- perhaps it was an early civil rights thing.

TARZAN AND THE HUNTRESS

(1947) dir Kurt Neumann; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Brenda Joyce, Johnny Sheffield, Patricia Morison.

A mediocre & messy plot involving greedy zoo-procurers & a greedy prince. eh.

TARZAN & THE MERMAIDS

(1948) dir: Robert Florey; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Brenda Joyce, Linda Christian.

Um, there's this African tribe that talks like gypsies, acts like polynesians, & builds like Mayans (that last may be because this was filmed in Mexico). Weissmuller's 12th & last Tarzan flick. Silly, but there's more effort in this one than in most of the RKO Tarzan drivel. I could have done without the songs, though.

TARZAN'S MAGIC FOUNTAIN

(1949) dir: Lee Sholem; w/ Lex Barker, Brenda Joyce (Elmo Lincoln is supposed to have a bit part in here somewhere).

Your basic *Lost Horizons* ripoff, the script is too slow & erratic, and features way too much cute monkey nonsense. Barker takes over the role -- he makes an okay Tarzan, I suppose, but he's so nice looking (not to mention the little slippers he's wearing in some scenes).

TARZAN & THE SLAVE GIRL

(1950) dir: Lee Sholem; w/ Lex Barker, Vanessa Brown, Robert Alda.

A lost city kidnaps some chorus girls -- er, native girls. Featuring an all-white native tribe, a catfight between Jane & some bimbo who wants Tarzan's butt, & lots of Cute Monkey Crap. In spite of it all, this may be the best of Barker's Tarzan flicks, thanks to a more creative & action-filled script than the usual lackluster plots of this period. It almost qualifies as an adult movie -- Tarzan actually kills a bunch of people (they were all bad, 'though).

TARZAN'S PERIL

(1951) dir: Byron Haskin; w/ Lex Barker, Virginia Huston, George Macready, Dorothy Dandridge.

One of Tarzan's old enemies escapes from prison, sells guns to the natives, and is a really bad man. This flick is notable for including a lot more genuine African flavor & footage than in most other Tarzan flicks of any era -- there are even scenes filmed in Africa with lots of native extras (however, the black tribes are still depicted as simple primitives who need the guidance of a white man). The plot is almost coherent, but the film's approach to the material flip-flops madly. We get a weird jumble of grim scenes, cutesy scenes, and unrelated action. There are some ruthless murders while Tarzan is off fighting fake snakes and killer plants, and a stupid monkey-joke happens during the death of the villain! Okay, it's kinda fun, but it's also oddly disorienting.



TARZAN'S SAVAGE FURY

(1952) dir: Cyril Endfield; w/ Lex Barker, Dorothy Hart, Patric Knowles, Charles Corvin, Tommy Carlton.

(Okay, he does get angry, but there's no way that Lex could look *savage*.) The "Boy" schtick worked so well in the 40's that RKO decided to try again, tossing in an orphan (played by young acrobat Carlton) to accompany Tarzan & Jane in a potboiler about communist jewel thieves. A cute flick for the kids.

TARZAN & THE SHE-DEVIL

(1953) dir: Kurt Neumann; w/ Lex Barker, Joyce MacKenzie, Raymond Burr, Monique Van Vooren, Tom Conway.

Barker's 5th & final Tarzan flick. The plot is a bit more intricate than the usual drivel RKO gave Barker -- it features ivory thieves, double-crosses, slavers, and a wonderfully vile performance from Burr as the chief heavy. Of course, there's gobs of stock footage (some of it obviously from India), Cute Monkey Crap, and

whites & hispanics subbing for Africans. Not a high point in Tarzan flicks, but above average for this era.

TARZAN'S HIDDEN JUNGLE

(1955) dir: Harold Schuster; w/ Gordon Scott (1st appearance as Tarzan), Vera Miles (Mrs Scott), Peter Van Eyck, Jack Elam, Rex Ingram.

An entertaining if simplistic & abrupt tale featuring a good doctor, a primitive tribe, and a bloodthirsty hunter (played by the young & skinny Jack Elam!). Notable is that the tribe is actually played by African-Americans instead of Hispanics. But then the whole thing is wrapped up by a shot of two chimps french-kissing... Aiyeey!

TARZAN & THE LOST SAFARI

(1957 - British) dir: H. Bruce Humberstone; w/ Gordon Scott, Yolanda Donlan, Wilfrid Hyde-White, George Coulouris.

The first color Tarzan -- gorgeous Technicolor with all new stock footage! A slow & predictable tale of a bunch of spoiled rich people who crash their plane into Tarzan's back yard. The film is partially rescued by some good characters & a few good lines.

TARZAN'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

(1958) dir: Bruce Humberstone; w/ Gordon Scott, Eve Brent, Rickie Sorensen, James Edwards, Woody Strode, Carl Benton Reid.

Some gorgeous scenery shots (including African locations!) surround some empty calories about a grudge match between an old western medical doctor and a snotty young witch doctor. Boring & predictable, but pretty.



TARZAN & THE TRAPPERS

(1958) dir: Charles Haas & Sandy Howard; w/ Gordon Scott, Eve Brent, Rickie Sorensen.

A feature stitched together from 3 episodes of an aborted TV project. A dull story about yet more evil white hunters. Scott has a good build (his muscles even

have muscles), but his boyish good looks don't impress, and his stepped-right-off-of-Rodeo-Drive coiffure is a bit much.

TARZAN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE

(1959) dir: John Guillermin; w/ Gordon Scott, Anthony Quayle, Sean Connery, Sara Shane.

Tarzan stalks a dangerous murderer through the jungle. By far the most polished, professional, & adult Tarzan production since the first couple of MGM talkies. Quayle & Connery are terrific in their villainous roles.

TARZAN the MAGNIFICENT

(1960) dir: Robert Day; w/ Gordon Scott, Jock Mahoney, John Carradine.

Similar in style to *Greatest Adventure*, both flicks eschew a lot of Tarzan staples -- Jane, the animal shtick (even Cheetah, thank God) -- in favor of a more traditional action-suspense flavor. This was Scott's last Tarzan flick, villain Mahoney takes over the role in the next picture.



TARZAN GOES TO INDIA

(1962) dir: John Guillermin; w/ Jock Mahoney, Jai the Elephant Boy, Leo Gordon, Mark Dana, Feroz Khan, Simi.

Tarzan races to save an elephant herd from a dam project. Mahoney makes a scrawny & unexciting Tarzan, but at least he doesn't have a coiffure. The script is just empty calories, but the locations are good and the photography is beautiful.



TARZAN'S THREE CHALLENGES

(1963) dir: Robert Day; w/ Jock Mahoney, Woody Strode.

A so-so adventure with Tarzan going to Thailand to take sides in a succession dispute. The real stars of this flick are the gorgeous location shots, although they mostly just interrupt the story.

TARZAN & the VALLEY of GOLD

(1966) dir: Robert Day; w/ Mike Henry, David Opatoshu, Nancy Kovack, Manuel Padila, Jr. Filmed on location in Mexico.

Henry's 1st Tarzan flick. Ya know, if the screen title had read *007 & the Valley of Gold*, it would be a good twenty minutes before you thought, "Hey, that isn't James Bond." Still, a fun flick with Tarzan matching wits against Spectre -- er, I mean, a psycho criminal mastermind. A few great scenes make it memorable.

TARZAN & THE GREAT RIVER

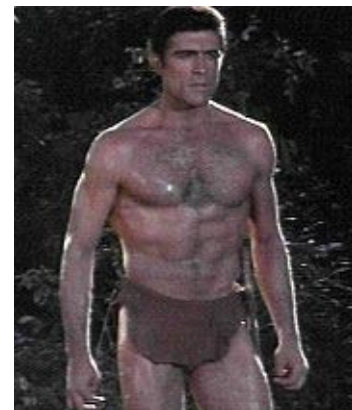
(1967) dir: Robert Day; w/ Mike Henry, Jan Murray, Manuel Padilla, Jr., Diana Millay, Rafer Johnson.

Well, if you've got to film a Tarzan flick in South America, one way to get around trying to make it look like Africa is to have Tarzan actually visit South America. So here he is trying to put down an evil Amazonian cult. Rather dull, actually. This one shows a distinctly lower quality than other Tarzan flicks of this era. Okay, they're in Brazil, but they still use African wildlife footage. And when Tarzan releases his pet lion to get something to eat, the footage clearly shows a *lioness* taking a kill. Fun for the kids, perhaps, but still a loser.

TARZAN & THE JUNGLE BOY

(1968) dir: Robert Day; w/ Mike Henry, Rafer and Ed Johnson (real life bro's playing brothers in the film), Alizia Gur, Ronald Gans, Steven Bond.

Henry looks his best in his third & last outing as Tarzan. He journeys into hostile territory in search of a boy lost in the wilderness years ago -- of course a bitchy National Geographic photographer follows along just to get into trouble. Not a bad story, but if you snipped out all the stock footage of African wildlife, I doubt it would run 60 minutes. Make it 40 minutes if you also snip the scenes of various people just walking through the jungle.



TARZAN & THE LOST CITY

(1998 US/German) dir: Carl Schenkel; w/ Casper Van Dien, Jane March, Steven Waddington.

After a 13 year dry spell we finally get another Tarzan flick and it doesn't totally suck! The production is quite well done, it's mostly Burroughs-Correct, Van Dien makes a good Tarzan, and there's lots of action & a dash of magic. The story is your basic Opar shtick, but good fx, photography, & music help make it fresh. Although it is similar in tone to the Joe Lara TV series, at least here Tarzan is made out to be an *action* hero. And this Jane is real cute. The flick falls short of being remarkable, I think, only because the script is so very predictable, and it relies a bit too much on jungle magic for plot resolution. Although it's not a great movie, as far as Tarzan flicks go, it's definitely among the best made, although I'll admit it's unlikely to become anyone's favorite.



Bad Cinema Diary

Well, that's not *all* the Tarzan flicks, but darn near. I will fill the gaps as opportunity permits.

And no, I'm not going to mention that Christopher Lambert flick -- it was almost an 'A' film, plus it was boring as urine.

And no, I'm not going to mention that Bo-Derek's-Boobs movie that has a title that might lead one to believe it's a Tarzan movie. The world will be a better place if there's less discussion of that monstrosity...

And just as an entertaining footnote, there are several illegitimate Tarzan films cranked out in countries that don't subscribe to the international copyright convention. Such as:

TARZAN AND COBRA

(197? - India) writ & dir: Bhagwant Chaudhari; w/ Viju Penkar (Mr. India), Shobni Singh, Jay Shree T., Leena Dass. No skin; no gore.

In this unlicensed rip-off from India, our hero is called Simba on-screen, but he does all the usual Tarzan gimmicks, including swinging from a vine (just once, they keep repeating that footage), riding elephants, and hollering like an opera singer with gout. Anyhow, this beefy Tarzan finds himself a plump Jane and together they save her daddy from bad men. But then Tarzan/Simba has to fight a witchy snake priestess and her tribe of overweight bodybuilders. Okay, there were no subtitles and I don't speak the language, but I honestly don't believe even a good translation would help make any more sense of this. It's played mostly for giggles -- Tarzan's fights fall into the pro wrestling category, there are several song & dance numbers (rather decent, actually), and the plot is periodically interrupted for some unrelated comedy skits performed by some guy doing his best Hindi impersonation of Lou Costello. In the end, Tarzan tosses a bad guy into a campfire which somehow sets off a major volcano which kills everyone else including the dinosaurs (!?), leaving the pudgy couple to wander off into the jungle to a happy ending (reprise love song). After that, I either need an eye exam or a CAT scan.



Tarzan Actor Filmography

The Silent Era . . .

Elmo Lincoln:

Tarzan of the Apes - 1918
The Romance of Tarzan - 1918
The Adventures of Tarzan - 1921

Gene Pollar:

The Revenge of Tarzan - 1920

P. Dempsey Tabler:

The Son of Tarzan - 1920

James Pierce:

Tarzan & the Golden Lion - 1927

Frank Merrill:

Tarzan the Mighty - 1928
Tarzan the Tiger - 1929

The Sound Era . . .

Johnny Weissmuller:

Tarzan the Ape Man - 1932
Tarzan & His Mate - 1934
Tarzan Escapes - 1936
Tarzan Finds a Son! - 1939
Tarzan's Secret Treasure - 1941
Tarzan's New York Adventure - 1942
Tarzan Triumphs - 1943

Tarzan's Desert Mystery - 1943
Tarzan & the Amazons - 1945
Tarzan & the Leopard Woman - 1946
Tarzan & the Huntress - 1947
Tarzan & the Mermaids - 1948

Buster Crabbe:

Tarzan the Fearless - 1933 (serial)

Bruce Bennett (Herman Brix):

The New Adventures of Tarzan - 1935 (serial)
Tarzan & the Green Goddess - 1938 (cut & re-edited from the above serial)

Glen Morris:

Tarzan's Revenge - 1938

Lex Barker:

Tarzan's Magic Fountain - 1949
Tarzan & the Slave Girl - 1950
Tarzan's Peril - 1951
Tarzan's Savage Fury - 1952
Tarzan & the She-Devil - 1953

Gordon Scott:

Tarzan's Hidden Jungle - 1955
Tarzan & the Lost Safari - 1957 (first color Tarzan!)
Tarzan's Fight for Life - 1958
Tarzan & the Trappers - 1958 (recut from the TV pilot)
Tarzan's Greatest Adventure - 1959
Tarzan the Magnificent - 1960

Denny Miller:

Tarzan the Ape Man - 1959

Jock Mahoney:

Tarzan Goes to India - 1962
Tarzan's Three Challenges - 1963

Mike Henry:

Tarzan & the Valley of Gold - 1966
Tarzan & the Great River - 1967
Tarzan & the Jungle Boy - 1968

Ron Ely:

All these are recut from episodes of the TV series; the first two may only have been released in Europe:

Tarzan & the Perils of Charity Jones - (?)1967
Tarzan & the Four O'clock Army - (?)1968
Tarzan's Deadly Silence - 1970
Tarzan's Jungle Rebellion - 1970

Miles O'Keefe:

Tarzan the Ape Man - 1981 (gag me with a backhoe)

Christopher Lambert:

Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan - 1984

Casper Van Dien:

Tarzan & the Lost City - 1998

Disney animation (voice of Tony Goldwyn):

Tarzan - 1999

Television Tarzans . . .

Ron Ely - 1966-1968

Filmation animated series (voice of Robert Ridgely) - 1976

Wolf Larson - 1991-1992

Joe Lara - 1989 (Tarzan in Manhattan TV movie) & 1996-1997 (Epic Adventures series)

Travis Fimmel - 2003 (WB's Tarzan)

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Icon Glossary:



Good Stinker -- These are the films where a good deal of the entertainment comes from filmmaking incompetence; fun to watch in spite of themselves.



Goopy Gore -- These films exhibit distinctly above-normal quantities of unpleasantly abused body parts.



Naughty Nudie -- Films with this flag feature frequent and/or explicit nudity (almost always female) beyond that normally found in your average T&A flick.



Butt Stompin' -- These films feature at least one superior violent fight or shootout scene that will get the testosterone pumping.



Gold Star -- These are the flicks that I felt reached above their expectations or at least pleasantly surprised me; they may not always be actually good flicks, but I did find something in them worthwhile.



Blue Max Medal of Really Goodness -- These are flicks that I not only enjoyed, but I think are actually quite good films (not always the same thing).



Lethal Cinema -- These wretched viewing experiences go beyond being merely bad to become genuine sources of pain and regret; they should be avoided by all but the most masochistic trash cinema veterans. Don't say I didn't warn you.