

5 UNDER-SEEN SPAGHETTI WESTERNS*

*IT'S JUST A COINCIDENCE THAT 4 OF THEM STAR GIULIANO GEMMA. by Matt

□ 1) DAY OF ANGER (1967, Tonino Valerii)

An epic of greed and revenge wherein the lowly town street sweeper (Gemma) in the town of Clifton falls under the influence and tutelage of notorious gunslinger Frank Talby (the legendary Lee Van Cleef in one of his very best performances). While going about his own elaborate plan to take over Clifton and become its despotic landlord, he trains Scott to become a ruthless killer in his own right, and it's only a matter of time before the apprentice comes into conflict with his master. Imagine the entire original STAR WARS trilogy as a Spaghetti Western.

□ 2) THE PRICE OF POWER (1969, Tonino Valerii)

This time Gemma is pursuing his own revenge against his father's killers when he finds himself embroiled in the conspiracy to assassinate President James Garfield. The film draws loosely on the real account of Garfield's murder but is also an explicit, deliberate parallel to the Kennedy assassination, and its intricate plotting and political subtext make it one of the most unusual entries in the genre.

□ 3) A PISTOL FOR RINGO (1965, Duccio Tessari)

Here Gemma plays "Angel Face" aka Ringo, a notorious killer who at the outset is arrested for gunning down four men in a duel. While he's locked up, a gang of bandits storms the Mayor's hacienda and takes him and his family hostage. Ringo offers himself up to help infiltrate the gang in exchange for his freedom and a cut of their stolen loot. More of an action-comedy than a straight western, this is frequently playful and quite funny even with its sharp turns into violence. Probably Gemma's best and most iconic performance, and features a terrific Ennio Morricone score.

□ 4) THE RETURN OF RINGO (1965, Duccio Tessari)

Filed and released the same year as A PISTOL FOR RINGO and with the same cast and crew. This time Gemma is a Civil War soldier who returns home after the war to find his family lost, his land taken over by bandits, and his fiancée now set to marry the gangster who stole it all. His only choice is to go undercover, join the gang, and seek revenge. Much darker and more violent than its predecessor, this is frequently expressionistically stylized and full of grim melodrama. Morricone also returns to score, and his English-language theme song is one of the best of its kind.

□ 5) CEMETERY WITHOUT CROSSES (1969, Robert Hossein)

Technically a French production but still well within the Spaghetti boundaries, and certainly one of the genre's bleakest. After a feud between families spirals into murder and theft, a widow (Michele Mercier) takes her share of stolen money to a deserted town to plot her revenge, where she meets a mysterious gunfighter with a terrible past (played by director Robert Hossein). The whole film seems to exist in this empty, windblown, almost post-apocalyptic desert, as if life were so cheap that everything's already gone and there's nobody even left to bury the dead. Features an incredible theme song by Scott Walker.



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