



Bette Davis (left) and Joan Crawford take sibling rivalry to new heights in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

rubbing elbows and crotches with nymphomaniacs, transsexuals and perfectly chiseled studs. This is a free-loving, anything-goes world where people say things like, "I'd like to strap you on sometime!"

Despite lots of straight sex and *Playboy* center-fold moments, *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* easily qualifies as a queer film. There are several same-sex make-out sessions and some scorching babe-on-babe boudoir antics.

Set aside a whole lazy afternoon for all the extras. Ebert provides excellent commentary, but the commentary by various cast members on another audio track is scattered and dull. Bust out disc two for eye-popping photo galleries and excellent featurettes that show how the film reflects the chaos of the late 1960s.

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Let the battle of the bitches begin!

Because of an ongoing rivalry that served them well in their roles as battling sisters, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford never worked together prior to *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* But by 1962 Davis desperately wanted to win her third Oscar, and Crawford thought *Baby Jane* was a surefire hit that would catapult her back to the box office glory of her early career.

Directed by Robert Aldrich, the low-budget black-and-white production became a sleeper hit and earned five Academy Award nominations. Crawford, who was not nominated, reportedly campaigned

Camp Counselor

Now that you've overdosed on dolls and Joan Crawford, why not take these other campy flicks for a spin?

- **Showgirls:** Except for a revolting rape scene near the end, Paul Verhoeven's update of *All About Eve* is a marvelously lurid vision of Las Vegas garishness, glittery boobs and lesbo catfights. Invest in the "V.I.P. Edition" for fabulous extras like lap dance lessons, commentary by gay Seattle actor David Schmader and a naughty parlor game called "Pin the Pasties on the Showgirl."

- **The Bad Seed:** Nothing says "camp" like an evil little girl with pigtails and spookily good manners. The DVD of this corny thriller includes a behind-the-scenes featurette with former child star Patty McCormack and commentary by McCormack and gay actor Charles Busch.

- **Catwoman:** Who knows if Halle Berry's litter box stink bomb will ever become a legitimate camp classic, but for now fetishistic fans can derive plenty of pleasure from her skintight leather suits, whip-wielding dominatrix maneuvers and strategic utterances of the words "meow" and "purrfect."

against her co-star to ensure that she went home empty-handed on Oscar night. No wonder Davis arranged for Crawford to get the boot on their follow-up project, *Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte*.

Over-the-top even by horror movie standards, *Baby Jane* is the eerie, hilarious and occasionally

sluggish tale of a reclusive former child star (Davis) who thrashes her wheelchair-bound sister (Crawford) with verbal abuse. On special occasions she serves her fancy dinner platters that conceal dead rats.

All the while, Davis wears girlish wigs and so much makeup that it looks like a five-pound bag of pancake batter exploded in her face. Crawford's expressions are so anguished that you can't tell if she's terrified, constipated or both.

One exchange is especially popular with drag queens, according to DVD commentators Charles Busch and John "Lypsinka" Epperson:

"You wouldn't be able to do these awful things to me if I weren't still in this chair," says Crawford.

Davis grins, rolls her eyes and replies: "But you are, Blanche! You are in that chair!"

The best bit on the new two-disc set is a comprehensive Davis documentary hosted by Jodie Foster.

Mommie Dearest


If you're not sufficiently frightened by Joan Crawford after watching *Baby Jane*, pop *Mommie Dearest* into your DVD player and you'll be forever traumatized.

As the child-abusing Crawford, Faye Dunaway delivers an astonishingly intense performance that might have won her an Oscar if the movie weren't so patently ludicrous.

Who could ever forget her screaming, "No wire hangers!" or the image of her chopping down a tree like some drag queen Johnny Appleseed? And who can blame her for forcing her little brat daughter, Christina, to eat her cold, raw, rotting steak? Doesn't anyone understand just how hard it is to be a single working mother?

Paramount originally released *Mommie* on DVD in 2001. The main reason to scoop up this new "Hollywood Royalty Edition" is the commentary by *Pink Flamingos* director John Waters. As funny and articulate as ever, he dishes out some good gossip about Dunaway and argues that this much-maligned picture is actually "so good it's perfect."

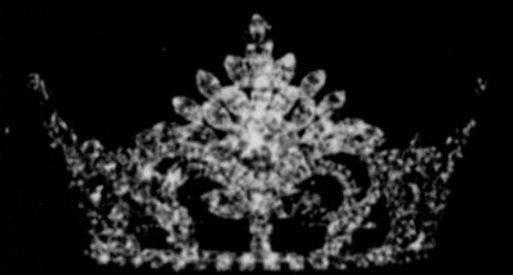
He seems a bit out of touch with the movie's ceaseless ridiculousness when he says that there are only a few scenes that are so campy that they cannot be taken seriously (such as the tree-chopping scene). The whole movie is a campy train wreck as far as I'm concerned.

The disc also contains three featurettes about the film's production, its cult following and the screen adaptation of Christina Crawford's famous tell-all biography. 

Portland freelance writer STEPHEN BLAIR believes the feud between Joan Crawford and Bette Davis resulted from a secret lesbian love affair gone bad.

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