Before I get into my critique of the monotonous, silly and lamentably predictable THE TRAVELER (now out on DVD from Paramount Home Entertainment), I have to make a few comments about the film’s star, Val Kilmer. Or should I say SHALLOW VAL? I guess I haven’t seen the TOP GUN actor in a movie in a while, because the formerly fit and hale Kilmer is now a flabby and hefty fellow.

I thought Steven “STOUT FOR JUSTICE” Seagal had packed on the pounds, but Kilmer is giving him a run for the rotund money. He can be my buffalo wingman any time! I remember when Kilmer starred with a bulging Marlon Brando in the 1996 ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU remake, and seeing the paunchy performer now, I kept expecting Kilmer to put on white pancake makeup, change into a flowing robe and kerchief and start playing piano alongside his own mini-me… OK, enough with the jelly-belly jokes. It’s just hard seeing the man who essayed a lean Jim Morrison in tight-fitting jeans going L.A. WOMAN with the waistline. And while Kilmer has recently appeared in THE BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL—NEW ORLEANS and will soon be seen in Francis Ford Coppola’s TWIXT NOW AND SUNRISE, he’s also slumming it in flicks like THE THAW and, now, THE TRAVELER.

Getting back to Steven Seagal for a second—he was the star of THE TRAVELER director Michael Oblowitz’s earlier OUT FOR A KILL and THE FOREIGNER, and it appears Kilmer raided the “HARD TO FILL” actor’s wardrobe in order to conceal his corpulence behind a dark, oversized overcoat. That’s what Kilmer is wearing when he shows up John-Doe-in-SE7EN-style at a police station during a dark and rainy night and announces, “I’m here to make a confession.” Heavy pause. “Murder.” (And, no, that “heavy” wasn’t another weight crack.)

Kilmer’s character then surrenders to the police, giving his name as “Nobody” and confessing

that he’s slain six people. Detective Alexander Black (Dylan Neal)—whose little girl was abducted and killed a year before—and the other cops working the night shift are creeped out by this mysterious man, and when it turns out that Nobody doesn’t have fingerprints, they begin to wonder just who this fellow is. (My guess: Kilmer sucked the prints off his fingers while savoring some Colonel Sanders.) It’s impossible to go into the rest of THE TRAVELER’s story without giving away the so-called surprises, so all I’ll say is that strange and inexplicable things start occurring at the station, and the cops get knocked off one by one while Kilmer divulges his crimes.

I just noted that I didn’t want to spoil THE TRAVELER’s twists, but I guess screenwriter Joseph C. Muscat didn’t mind, because his script suffers from “premature explication”—by that I mean all of the movie’s shocks are given away so early that you know exactly who Nobody is, what he’s up to and what’s going to happen over the next hour or so. But it isn’t as if THE TRAVELER’s surprises are bombshells—even if the movie didn’t so untimely spoil them, any horror fan worth their merit will figure out what’s happening by the 15-minute mark. This makes for a predictable and stale viewing experience as you watch redundant scene after scene of each cop being bumped off until the obvious and inevitable showdown between Black and Nobody. Add Kilmer’s uninspired and unmenacing performance, delivering “confessions” that basically amount to clichéd, laughable and corny preachifications on vengeance and sin that would make John Doe puke in disgust and disdain and even have the superficially sanctimonious Jigsaw shaking his head in disbelief. “Let he without sin cast the first stone” is about as inventive and insightful as this dumpy, didactic nutcase gets.

I could take a hell of a lot more potshots at this picture (especially the atrocious ending) if I spoiled THE TRAVELER’s storyline, but I think I’ve already taken enough cheap shot jabs and punches at Kilmer. Unfortunately, there are no special features on the DVD to discuss—perhaps he ate them all—and in fairness, I’m sure when I’m 51 I’ll be a BIGGEST LOSER candidate and look like a combination of Nick Nolte’s mug shot and Gary Busey. So my apologies. I guess THE TRAVELER did teach me one valuable lesson: I should’ve listened to Nobody. “Let he without flaws cast the first joke.” Damn it, and I had a RED PLANET humdinger I was just dying to tell…

{jcomments on}