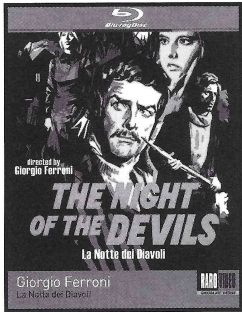


taste of an old rural legend. After a trippy opening sequence sprinkled with gratuitous nudity and gore, an amnesiac (spaghetti western vet Gianni Garko) is found wandering the countryside and a bed is booked for him at the local mental hospital. The man, identified as Nicola, seems unnaturally terrified of the dark and freaks out when he meets

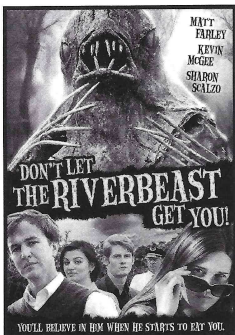


a woman from his past. What made him such a traumatized basketcase? In flashbacks we see how, after wrecking his car in the woods, Nicola was invited by a farming family to stay the night. They're an odd, unfriendly lot though — whispering about some sort of curse, locking themselves

securely into their home the moment it gets dark and fearful of an evil witch they've repeatedly tried to kill. Unfortunately, those who fail become infected and transform into pale, red-eyed, undead "Vourdalaks" (conventionally known as vampires) who thirst for human blood. The only bright spot in his stay is Sdenka (Agostina Belli), the sultriest farm girl in all of Italy, who promptly bounces into Nicola's bed. One of the final features from director Giorgio Ferroni (MILL OF THE STONE WOMEN), it's stunningly shot and thick with atmospheric menace. Although the set-up is a little on the slow side, Ferroni artfully draws the viewer into his sinister saga, complete with goey decomposing heads (gotta love Carlos Rambaldi's old-school practical effects!), wooden-staked hearts, creepy possessed children, plus a chillingly tragic conclusion. The Blu-ray includes a half-hour interview with composer Giorgio Gastini.

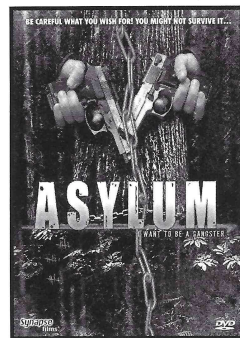
Most low-budget DIY monster movies tend to rely on cheap gore or gratuitous sex, but director/co-writer Charles Roxburgh's ingratiating creature feature satire, **DON'T LET THE RIVERBEAST GET YOU!** (Brain Damage Films) — the latest effort from the creators of FREAKY FARLEY and MONSTERS, MARRIAGE AND MANCHVEGAS — instead offers redemption, romance, eccentric humor, a cheap-ass beast costume, plus a squeaky-clean, oddly-timeless veneer that resembles a Larry

Buchanan-directed episode of THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW. Disgraced Neil (co-writer/producer Matt Farley) returns to River Town, USA for a family wedding, but the poor guy is still a local laughing stock due to his past tirade regarding a creature called the Riverbeast. Once his town's finest tutor, Neil accepts a job teaching recently-expelled Allie (Sharon Scalzo), who shares his inquisitive streak. When the pair aren't trying to dig up proof of the Riverbeast's existence, Neil hopes to win back ex-fiancée Emmaline (Elizabeth Peterson), who's currently engaged to a dickhead. Of course, we viewers know that this Riverbeast is real, since we've seen it (complete with a big ol' seam running down its back) wandering about the woods; unfortunately, guess who becomes a prime suspect when townsfolk are murdered? The script is littered with absurd con-



versations (such as the many uses of kitty litter, or a wild new dance called "popping"), oddball characters — from muckraking local reporter Sparky Watts, to a famous big game hunter hired by Neil — and even squeezes in a musical interlude when local legends The River Mud Warriors reunite! Plus it's hard to consider this Riverbeast a genuine threat since it only tends to slaughter the town's biggest assholes. The performances might range from goofily inspired to "Er, don't quit your day job," but it's all kept afloat by the production's small-town charm and boundless ingenuity. The DVD includes a cast and crew commentary.

The 2008 feature debut from French writer-director Olivier Chateau, **ASYLUM** a.k.a. **I WANT TO BE A GANGSTER** (Synapse), takes some bold twists as it follows a wannabe gangster through a bloody, sadistic, stylish, and occasionally surreal comedy of errors. Jack (Julien Courbey) has always dreamt of being an honest-to-goodness gangster, and as this film begins,



he's pulling off scams on other low-lives. But this time around, he's stolen from the wrong guy, with a cache of dope belonging to one of the city's top Mafioso only the beginning of Jack's voyage into the most twisted niches of the criminal underworld. Although Jack turns out to be more cunning than you might

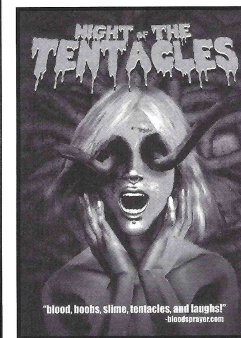
initially expect, one teeny, gun-related screw-up soon lands the poor schmuck in a world of shit, by severely pissing off "Le Grand Patron" [The Big Boss] (a cameo by WEEKEND's Jean-Pierre Kalfon). His punishment? Jack is chained to a tree in a remote forest and left to die like some kind of animal — and we're not even halfway into the film! Determined to find some way out of this dire predicament, days soon turn into weeks, with Jack making rambling confessionals into a found video camera, having the occasional strange encounter, and becoming increasingly crazed from hunger, thirst, paranoia, and his own nightmares. Chateau wrings a good deal of suspense out of this seemingly modest situation, lacing it with stylish directorial touches and a brutal comic edge — practical-jokester hitmen, bizarre stand-offs, unlucky ricochets, right down to its remarkably futile finale — while the film's grainy, washed-out cinematography adds grit to this unpredictable story. The disc includes a making-of featurette, plus Chateau's 2003 short film **HOMER**, the comically-destructive misadventures of a psychotic pet rabbit while his human owner is out of town.

2013 isn't even half over yet and filmmaker Dustin Mills already has a pair of micro-budgeted horror-comedies under his belt! For the last few years, synthetic drugs known as "bath salts" have kept the fearmongering media stoked with stories of zombie-like behavior, savage violence and even cannibalism. I'm surprised it took so long for an enterprising filmmaker to exploit the concept; I'm even more surprised at the amount of ridiculous fun unleashed by **BATH SALT ZOMBIES** (MVDvisual), courtesy of director/editor/cinematographer Mills (who also co-wrote the script with producer Clint Weiler). Brandon Salkil stars as New York City bath salt junkie Richie, but after just a few puffs of an insanely-potent new strain, he's tripping out and peeling a woman's face clean off. This dude is instantly hooked and seriously fucked! The *real* culprits are bath salt pusher

Bubbles (Ethan Holey) and his chemist buddy (once again, Dustin Mills!), who've used a military chemical weapon in their latest batch of the shit, transforming Richie and his friends into twitching, grimacing, super-strong killers responsible for a nightclub massacre. Meanwhile, Josh Eal plays Agent Forster, a lawyer so macho that he singlehandedly annihilates the city's most notorious bath salt gang, and is now tackling these recent murders. In addition to the low-rent gore, gratuitous nudity, pathetically dumb-ass characters, and pounding punk soundtrack, Mills concocts some outrageous throw-aways (e.g. a drug-transformed canine), genuinely impressive sequences (kudos for that S.W.A.T.-team slaughter finale!), as well as ingenious ways



to stretch his tight budget (like having his star, Salkil, also play *all* of the conveniently-masked S.W.A.T. and gang members). Still, a few stock shots of NYC can't hide the fact that *nothing* else even remotely looks like it was shot there. It's 70 demented minutes of top-notch schlock, and the DVD includes a commentary with Mills and Salkil... Next up is writer-director Dustin Mills' **NIGHT OF THE TENTACLES** (MVDvisual), a riotous mix of cut-rate monster shenanigans, skewed laughs, plus the ultimate meet-cute premise — boy likes girl; boy jacks off to girl while eavesdropping on the sounds of her masturbating; boy and girl fall for each other, despite his blood-soaked Faustian pact. Brandon Salkil once again tackles the lead role as Dave, a gawky digital artist who specializes in "fantasy erotica" and is smitten with pregnant, unwed, downstairs neighbor Esther (Nicole Gerity). Following a surprise heart attack, Dave is visited by the Devil (a cheapie beastie with



four glowing eyes), who offers him a deal that's hard to pass up. All of Dave's heart problems will be eliminated, but in exchange he must care for a voracious "heart" that resides inside a small wooden chest, speaks to him and requires human meat to survive! Luckily, Dave has a lot of asshole neighbors — one of

whom even threatened to kill his cute little dog — and in the finest LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS tradition, begins rounding up its meals. Eventually the demands made by this tentacled monstrosity become too great though, with Dave spiraling into drunken despair. Mills keeps the energy high, the weirdness non-stop, its gory laughs tempered with moments of dread, and his budget low by setting most of it inside this one apartment. Salkil gives the type of wildly overwrought performance that makes Crispin Glover look sedate, but grounds his character in true emotional turmoil, with Mills popping up as his horny landlord. Although the film unloads some seriously dodgy digital-FX during the creature carnage, it's refreshing to find DIY horror fare that's genuinely inventive and unpredictable, instead of the usual interchangeable drek. The DVD has a director's commentary.