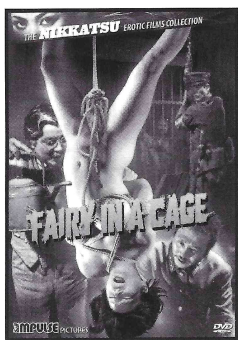


Undoubtedly one of the roughest entries in Nikkatsu's Roman Porno line, director Kôyû Ohara took a respite from the usual sex, fetishes and rape we've come to expect from his kinky productions, in favor of sado-masochism and the abuse of power for 1977's **FAIRY IN A CAGE (Impulse)**. Set during the World War II era, unscrupulous Judge Murayama (Minoru Okochi) uses political influence to satisfy his darkest desires, by having the military — who routinely torture anti-Emperor dissidents in their private jail — arrest pretty women on trumped up charges, so the judge can get his kicks watching them being punished (a hobby that he considers "noble"). His latest target is Kimiko (Naomi Tani), a jeweler's young wife, who's falsely accused of funding an anti-war protester and hauled out of her home in the middle of the night, with our judge supervising



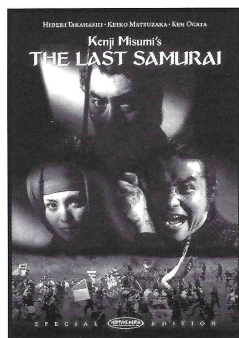
her highly-unorthodox 'interrogation.' Kimiko is stripped, hung by her ankles and tickled with a feather, plus there's genital torture and a humiliating urination gag, as Murayama and his equally kinky colleagues revel in her suffering. Amidst Kimiko's torment, there's also Taoka, a moral young soldier who eventually real-

izes that he's following the orders of an unconscionable sadist, plus an imprisoned kabuki star taken advantage of sexually by Murayama's crazy mistress. Tani makes an all-too-convincing victim, and this is one incredibly grim, 71-minute dirge, with even the slightest glimmer of hope quashed within minutes. Still, it certainly gives S&M fans plenty to enjoy, even as Ohara subversively paints Japan's high-ranking military and judiciary as abusive perverts, with corruption endemic throughout the system. It's a beautiful widescreen transfer and the lone extra is an essay by Jasper Sharp.

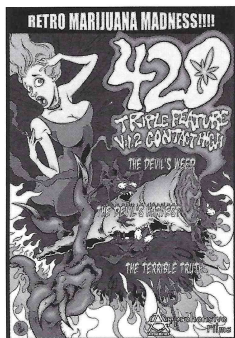
Packed with simplistic, anti-drug claptrap, **420 TRIPLE FEATURE: Vol. 2 CONTACT HIGH (Apprehensive)** contains three early, marijuana-demonizing films, but comes up short in terms of the high camp laughs that baked viewers require. It begins with 1951's **THE TERRIBLE TRUTH**, a 10-minute portrait of a teenager's road to ruin. After reading fake newspaper headlines about teen drug addiction, L.A. Juvenile Court Judge William B. McKesson visits the Howard Family, whose daughter Phyllis — once a happy, ugly-permed high school senior — is newly released from a narcotics ward. Grilled by McKesson, we learn how her friends smoked pot ("that's jive talk for marijuana") and she succumbed to peer pressure (since grass makes "everything speed up to 100 miles per hour"). Only minutes after meeting drug "peddler" Chuck (who wears a suit and tie while dealing to kids on busy street corners), weak-willed Phyllis was shooting up heroin and quickly became a straggly-haired, desperate-for-a-fix junkie. Hilariously idiotic, it's shot in color but lacks sync-sound, with narration provided by "Phyllis" and (future Los Angeles County District Attorney) McKesson. Best of all, it ultimately blames the godforsaken Commies(!) for promoting drugs in America, in order to undermine our national morale!... Next up, a high schooler goes undercover in director Ray Test's 1942, poverty-row **DEVIL'S HARVEST**. It begins well, with an innocent-looking hot dog stand across from a school selling joints hidden inside their buns, but it's all downhill from there. Good girl Kay O'Farrell

(June Doyle) is invited to dance at a ritzy shindig, but when marijuana leads to a female partygoer's death, the police ask Kay to help take down the town's weed-pushing mobsters by getting a show-girl job at the crooks' nightclub. This kid has moxie to spare, but the film devolves into a dull, sub-standard crime tale. No surprise, it was the first and only acting gig for the entire cast. Originally clocking in at 52 minutes, this particular print was crudely hacked to a half-hour — trimming tedious gangster subplots and Kay's parents — but it's all so lousy that the shorter, the better... Finally, 1949's **THE DEVIL'S WEED** bounced around the exploitation circuit for a decade under such alternate titles as **WILD WEED** and **SHE SHOULD SAID NO**, but boasts decent production values, legit actors and lots of overwrought drama. Naive Anne Lester (Lila Leeds, who was arrested for marijuana possession a year earlier with Robert Mitchum) is seduced into blazing up a joint by a maryjane-pushing romeo. One puff can't hurt, right? But 30 seconds later, she's glassy-eyed and addicted! Amidst the usual weed freak-out scenes — from physical violence to a silly Hollywood Bowl fantasy — Anne helps her beau sell grass at private gatherings (imagine a stoner's version of a Tupperware party), until she's hauled in by the head of the LAPD's Narcotic Division (Lyle Talbot), with his scare tactics convincing her to turn rat. Directed by B-movie legend Sam Newfield, it's sprinkled with unintentional laughs, along with 28-year-old Jack Elam as a henchman.

Kenji Misumi directed **THE TALE OF ZATOICHI** and the first four **LONE WOLF AND CUB** outings, but he's never gotten the respect he deserved. His final feature, 1974's chambera epic **THE LAST SAMURAI [Okami Yo Rakujitsu O Kire]** (Neptune Media), might not be his finest work, but it often feels like one of his most personal. Spanning 14 years of tumultuous civil warfare during the 19th-century, the script weaves intimate drama, bursts of action and an impressive scope, but at 158 minutes, also gets quite long-winded. Takahashi Hideki stars as Sugi Toranosuke, a contemplative samurai torn between two battling factions — the Tokugawa Shogunate, who's ruled for over 200 years, and Loyalists to the Emperor. Returning

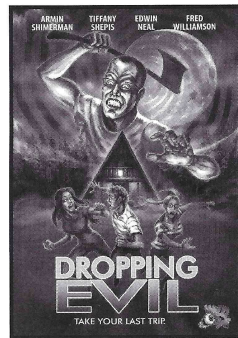


to his old home, Sugi saves one woman from being beaten for gambling debts and another after her traveling companion is murdered (using his katana skills to slaughter a dozen soldiers!), but also has some major decisions to make about his own future. Meanwhile, Ogata Ken is Nakamura Hanjiro, a feisty bad-ass who kills any man in his way, takes any woman he desires, crosses paths with Sugi, and supports restoring Imperial rule to Japan. In the film's second half, these men take very different paths, with Sugi retiring and marrying, while Nakamura rises within the Emperor's ranks. But when Sugi's wife is attacked by



Imperials, you can imagine just how dangerous a pissed-off, vengeful ex-samurai can be (especially if you're the guy who's getting his head chopping clean in half). Don't expect non-stop swordplay though, because the sweeping story is primarily about two men adjusting to this new world, with its final showdown over a sensei's murder far more thoughtful than cathartic. The real stand-out here is Ogata, whose compelling character outshines our unsunbtle protagonist, and it's no surprise Ogata soon went onto acclaimed fare like Shohei Imamura's **VENGEANCE IS MINE** and Paul Schrader's **MISHIMA**. Bonus materials include a trailer, stills and an essay by Tom Mes.

It may begin like just another home-made, dead-teen slasher romp, but **DROPPING EVIL (Wild Eye)** is far from typical — eventually morphing into some kind of disjointed, quasi-religious sci-fi conspiracy. And while director Adam Protector gets points for tackling heady, overly-elaborate ideas on a micro-budget, he also misses by a mile! When Mike and Samantha embark on a camping weekend, they invite lonely "loser" Becky, in hopes of setting her up with a wimpy, annoyingly-religious guy named Nancy (Zachary Lint). A fairly standard horror set-up, right? That is, until we learn that a high-tech corporation has secretly installed cameras inside Becky's eyeballs and are surveilling this roadtrip, amidst talk about potential warfare and demi-gods. Wha?! Meanwhile, in hopes of shutting up Nancy's incessant prattling about the evils of pre-marital sex, beer and rock music, they dose this Jesus freak with L.S.D.! Bad move, because Nancy is soon tripping his ass off, murdering everyone and referring to himself as "the arm of god." Confused? It gets weirder, kids, because assassins are soon dispatched, we get an axe-throwing showdown, a gun grows from a guy's forehead, and there's cryptic talk about "divine" children with extraordinary powers. As for its top-billed "stars":



Armin Shimerman (STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE) is the boss of this mysterious corporation, ValYouCorp; Tiffany Shepis shows up briefly as sultry goddess Dionysia; plus TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE's Edwin Neal is spotted on TV as the President. And what about Fred Williamson's Commander Death Blood? "The Hammer" only appears for *one lousy minute* in a coming attraction at the film's end, offering a few guys in silly costumes! Only 75 minutes long yet excruciatingly over-padded, the flick is a technical nightmare, the acting is amateurish, the script is unfathomable, and your first reaction will be "What the fuck was that?" The disc includes a ValYouCorp commercial, deleted scenes, plus a trio of "sequel" featurettes that include additional footage of Shepis, Williamson and Shimerman. In the 16-minute **DADDY-O DIED SO LOVE COULD LIVE**, God has gone missing, death is no more, and a living-dead chick must choose between her lesbian lover or Death Blood's zombie army... **THE RISE OF GUNHEAD** spends 20 minutes on Nancy's conspiracy-nut brother Zachariah, relationship problems between Mike and Sam's decapitated head, and Mike developing his organic-weaponry skills... Finally, in the 19-minute **BECKY'S THE BOSS**, Becky reawakens in captivity, discovers her own powers and rises to ValYouCorp's executive heights, along with a surreal musical interlude.