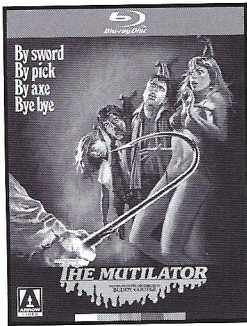


DVDementia

I'm continually amazed whenever some low-rent horror film that *nobody* ever rented from their neighborhood video store twenty-five years ago suddenly receives the extra-stuffed Blu-ray treatment. A recent example is the 1984 slasher outing **THE MUTILATOR** (Arrow) from first-and-last-time writer-director Buddy Cooper, in which yet another group of insipid students go on vacation and get slaughtered by a madman. Thankfully, this North Carolina-lensed cheapie (originally entitled **FALL BREAK**) arrives in an unrated cut, unlike its original, MPAA-butchered theatrical release. When college student Ed, Jr. (Matt Mitler) is asked to close up his alcoholic father's beach condo for the winter, he and some bored friends pile into his convertible and set out on an impromptu road trip. But while these kids swill beer, make out, skinny-dip,



and play inane games, they're unaware (until the last 15 minutes, that is) that Ed's crazy-eyed psycho dad is lurking about, eavesdropping on the group and hallucinating about murdering his son back when he was a child (since Junior accidentally killed his own mom using his

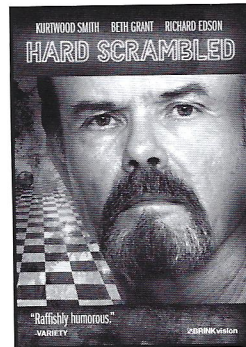
dad's rifle in the opening sequence)... Our roster of potential victims includes a yuppie (Bill Hitchcock), a couple hotties (Connie Rogers and **BREEDER**'s Frances Raines), plus Ed's virgin-girlfriend Pam (Ruth Martinez), and there are several amusingly gory moments once the carnage commences, utilizing various workshop weapons — machete, outboard motor, pitchfork, ornate battle axe, and even a handy fisherman's gaff. Unlike most dead-teen flicks of that era, the clichéd characters aren't excessively annoying and the cast is personable, with Mitler (who would later direct, write and star in the scathing black-comedy **CRACKING UP**) as the film's acting MVP. Still, at its core this is schlocky, no-budget nonsense awash in predictable demises (the first chick to bare her breasts is also the first to die), general stupidity (stab the killer once, drop your weapon and turn your back on the 'corpse') and hilarious 1980s trappings. In addition to the unrated feature, restored from its original negative, the DVD/Blu-ray set includes an in-depth new 75-minute making-of documentary (though boasting about how the movie has become a "phenomenon" is an overreach), two commentaries with the cast and crew, rough behind-the-scenes footage, and screen tests.

Fueled by a knockout performance from the always-dependable Kurtwood Smith, writer-director David Scott Hay's **HARD SCRAMBLED** (Brinkvision) is a tough-talking 2006 micro-budgeter centered around a diner and its assortment of low-life scumbags and daydreaming losers. Owner Alice (Beth Grant) is struggling to make ends meet, bus boy Scotty (Eyal Podell) steals from customers' parked cars, waitress Crysta (Alanna Ubach) gets laid off, while short-order cook Benno (Smith) considers this greasy spoon his home, lives by a skewed moral code and has (at least temporarily) put his criminal past and violent behavior behind him. But everything

changes when Alice is hospitalized after her hand takes a dunk into the deep fryer and Benno's old friend Joe (**STRANGER THAN PARADISE**'s Richard Edson) decides to ditch his lousy day job and purchase the diner. Depressed and angry, dumb decisions are made as things quickly go from bad to worse — in addition to competing businesses, a failed marriage and missing cash — and once convinced that he's been screwed by a trusted colleague, it's the return of "Bruisin' Benno"!

Sticking primarily to this one location and its handful of desperate characters, their drama is a little unfocused at times, but Smith brings a no-bullshit presence to his ex-con lead role and nails dialogue such as "When you fuck with a man's livelihood, you might as well fuck him in the ass," while Edson makes an amiable foil with idiotic notions about how to keep the diner afloat. The entire cast shares an excellent rapport, amidst deeper conversations about loyalty and the debts owed to others, with the tension building and some hot oil eventually used as a grim incentive. Steeped in seedy ambiance, this is a terrific showcase for Kurtwood's acting skills and natural gravitas. The DVD includes a 40-minute making-of featurette that takes us through the film's *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* contest winner origins, rehearsals, shooting, and editing, along with cast and crew interviews.

Twenty-four years after its impressively incompetent predecessor, **SAMURAI COP 2: DEADLY VENGEANCE** (Cinema Epoch) continues the ridiculous, action-packed antics of stringy-haired, martial-arts-master/rogue-LA-cop Joe Marshall, with Mathew Karedas (billed as 'Mark Hannon' in the first outing) and Mark Frazer returning as its stars, director Gregory Hatanaka taking over the reins from the late Amir Shervan, and a cast stuffed with familiar B-movie faces and porn starlets. When the infamous Katana clan reassembles and begins exterminating their enemies, veteran cop Frank Washington (Frazer, recycling all of his hokey facial expressions) tracks down his long-MIA ex-partner Joe Marshall, who relinquished violence following his wife's murder (during the pre-credits prologue) but now finds himself targeted by half-assed assassins. No surprise, the film doesn't make a lick of sense. The Katana clan uses a high-tech floating globe to disintegrate adversaries? Marshall encounters a brunette dopelganger of his dead wife? After finally slips into his familiar black tank-top, grabs a samurai sword (complete with slo-mo training montage) and lays



siege to the Katana complex. Laced with dopey plot twists, lame digital effects and an intentionally hackneyed soundtrack, this is aimed at exploitation addicts who adored the first **SAMURAI COP**'s unrepentant crappiness. Unfortunately, it lacks the original's sincere ineptitude, with Hatanaka trying a little too hard to craft an instant trash epic. Karedas is an incredibly bad actor, but at least the guy seems to understand the inherent idiocy of this project, unlike Bai Ling (as Katana V.P. Doggè Sakamoto) and **THE ROOM**'s wannabe-auteur Tommy Wiseau (heading up a rival clan), who both stink up the screen with excruciating performances. Contributions from the adult cinema world are more successful, with Kayden Cross playing the dual role of Joe's dead ex and her double, while Lexi Belle and Nicole Bailey are sexy ninja killers. Laurene Landon, Melissa Moore, Kristine DeBell, Joe Estevez, Mel Novak, and Ralph Garman turn up briefly and provide fairly superfluous support. Blu-ray/DVD extras include a director's commentary, another track with Karedas and Frazer, deleted sequences, and behind-the-scenes footage.

In the late-'60s, Richard Lester parlayed his success with **The Beatles' A HARD DAY'S NIGHT** and **HELP!** into a string of eccentric gems, with 1969's **THE BED SITTING ROOM** (Kino Lorber Studio Classics) taking the prize as his most difficult and dazzling work. Starring many of the UK's greatest comic talents, its studio had no idea of how to market this blast of post-apocalyptic absurdity, based on a 1963 play by Spike Milligan and John Antrobus. Bizarre, brilliant and utterly off-putting, it's a gorgeously warped vision of England after a "nuclear misunderstanding" decimated the place and killed 40 million people in two-minutes and 28-seconds. But in typically steadfast British fashion, its handful of survivors stumble about the wreckage and muddy wasteland, blindly upholding old traditions — government, religion, marriage — no matter how misguidedly useless it now seems. One family (father Arthur Lowe, mother Mona Washbourne and "chubby little thing" daughter Rita Tushingham, who's 18-months pregnant) lives on the still-operating Circle Line subway; authority figures Peter Cook and Dudley Moore sternly patrol the region in a makeshift weather balloon, barking orders; a doddering Lord (Ralph Richardson) is mutating into a Bed Sitting Room, while physician Michael Hordern takes advantage of his patient's unique condition to secure himself new housing; with other ragtag characters played by Milligan, Roy Kinnear, ex-Goon Harry Secombe, and Marty Feldman as a predatory nurse. Characters wander about mountains of old shoes or broken china; the country's electricity is provided entirely by one man peddling a bicycle; the last remaining BBC newsman goes door-to-door, personally reading the news; and people routinely transform into furniture or animals. But this is much more than just a string of surreal episodes. It's also a deeply cynical look at humankind's inherent stupidity and

