

performances that much better as well.

Both films are amazing artifacts from a turbulent time period in American history. They can now be seen and cherished by an entirely new generation on DVD thanks to Vinegar Syndrome. One of their best double features from 2015 (and that's saying *a lot*).

A PLAGUE SO PLEASANT

Two guys are sitting at a kitchen table having breakfast. The conversation is about the desire to ask one guy's sister out on a date. The problem is she already has a boyfriend...a zombie.

That sketchy premise delves into the story proper as we learn that a 12 hour (!) zombie apocalypse resulted in mass carnage. However instead of complete chaos the zombies are seen as docile...so long as they aren't provoked...especially by firearms. It seems they can be placated by oats (!?!?!?) Several laws were passed, including shooting a zombie considered a criminal offense. The graveyards don't have tombstones, merely the living dead walking over consecrated ground.

When our lead character surmises that his sister isn't about to lose her love for her dead beau he shoots him in the head. Of course this makes the zombies mad (and it also makes them run real fast). The 2nd half of the film contains almost no dialog....just one long chase scene right up to the predictable end.

While the blurb on the DVD case states "A new cinematic spin on the zombie genre" that can be taken with a grain of salt. Some of the 'laws' passed towards zombies are interesting but that's about as far as things go. Perhaps the lone striking element the film possesses is stark black and white photography that goes to color once a zombie is shot. Aside from that, this micro budget feature is dullsville. The zombie make-up (relegated to the face) is generic...on par with any '80s shot-on-video slop. The acting ranges from poor to slightly passable. The narration (and some dialog renderings) is filled with robotic delivery or mumbled-near-incoherence...in short it's hard to tell who is more convincing: the living or the dead. An acoustic interlude (heard twice) is also wildly out of place. I could go on and on...suffice it to say this is completely unremarkable and decidedly uninteresting. Available on DVD from Wild Eye Releasing.

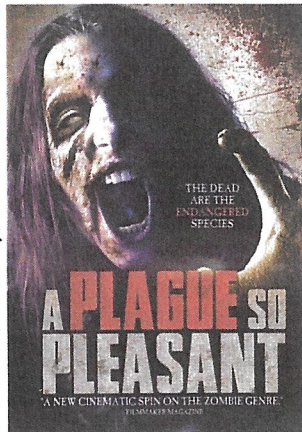
PRAY FOR DEATH

This film is considered the third (and last) of actor Sho Kusugi's 'ninja' phase in America. It's also arguably the best.

Sho stars as Akira Saito, a reluctant Japanese transplant to America after getting an opportunity to open his own business. However the building is located in a seedy part of the city. To add insult to injury some stolen jewels are sequestered away in a remote part of Akira's shop. When a dirty cop 'steals' the jewels the crooks (led by James Booth) are out for blood. Of course Akira (and his family) gets mixed up in all of this activity.

Akira's two sons are either beaten or kidnapped while his wife suffers a horrendous fate. With the cops unwilling to do the dirty work, Akira suits up his 'retired' black ninja garb and sets to right the wrongs.

Director Gordon Hessler (who helmed the legendary **KISS MEETS**



THE PHANTOM OF THE PARK!) doesn't waste time getting down to the action. Nary five minutes go by without something exciting happening on the screen. Sho Kusugi pulls out all the stops with violent fight scenes (usually involving Shuriken tossing). The many high flying stunts are performed by someone else however. Sho's real life sons, Kane and Shane, also get plenty of screen time to show off their moves (and weapon equipped BMX bike). Perhaps the real star is James Booth as 'Limehouse Willy.' He's one of the slimiest (and resourceful) villains you'll ever see. In fact he's the only one to stand toe-to-toe with the ninja and meets a suitably nasty fate. I should mention that their final encounter takes place in a warehouse full of mannequins. It's a decided take on Bruce Lee's climatic fight at the end of **ENTER THE DRAGON** and works just as well.

The extremely entertaining feature is presented on Blu-ray for the first time in America in two distinct versions...uncut and R rated. I gather that not many have seen the full strength version before (I raise my hand). While the 'uncut' scenes are noticeably darker, it's still nice to see how much gore and sexual violence was cut out. In fact one scene in particular (set in a hospital) really pushes the envelope...I'll give you one word to describe it...necrophilia! I can't imagine why anyone would want to watch the R rated cut again after seeing how much was left on the cutting room floor.

Arrow Video has put together a few choice extras. A stellar 19 minute interview with 67 year old Kusugi was conducted in Japan (in 2015 by Norman England) where he talks about his early years growing up. He originally wanted to be a baseball player but fate had other ideas for him. Once he broke out of appearing as an extra he finally got his break with **ENTER THE NINJA**. When he approached Cannon Films about using his sons in a feature they originally told him 'no' because they only wanted one Oriental in the cast! This racist ideology should come as no surprise to anyone. This interview is part one with part two to be conducted on the **RAGE OF HONOR** disc.

A New York cable access TV show **THE MARTIAL ARTS FORMS** is also included. This great time capsule (1985) interview with Sho discusses his many techniques of fighting (with and without weapons). He also talks about how different martial arts are on the screen versus practicing in real life. The show ends with a neat Ninjitsu demonstration at the **PRAY FOR DEATH NY** premier.

To round things out, original trailers for **ENTER THE NINJA**, **REVENGE OF THE NINJA**, **PRAY FOR DEATH** and **RAGE OF HONOR** are on hand.

This is a terrific package that fans of violent cinema won't want to miss. Sho Kusugi isn't given nearly enough ink these days, so it's my duty to point you in the right direction. Arrow has performed another near miracle here...give it a shot...you won't be disappointed.

PULSATING FLESH/ SUPER SEX

Ah yes another Carlos Tobalina (moonlighting as Troy Benny) double feature from Vinegar Syndrome!

First up (on the DVD menu) is **SUPER SEX**. Dr. Rosenberg (Sasha Gabor) has some patients who suffer from sexual hang-ups. One girl dreams that her parents (mom played by tragic sex goddess Trinity Loren)

are twenty years younger and having sex with her! Another woman dreams of an erotic shower climaxed by the appearance of Shone Taylor. Another gal (radiant hot Vanessa D 'Oro) dreams about leaving her body to inhabit her friends (Nina Hartley) in order to screw her husband (Francois).

