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October 1992 (Video Movie)

Highway 61 ★★1/2*Comedy, Paramount Home Video, 1992, Color, 99 min., \$89.95 (3-pack for \$179.90), rated: R (language, sexual situations, nudity)*

Stars: Valerie Buhagiar, Don McKellar, Earl Pastko. Inspired, in part, by the Bob Dylan song, Highway 61 is a truly offbeat Canadian/American road movie starring screenwriter Don McKellar as Pokey Jones, a small-town Canadian barber who finds a stiff in his backyard. When Jackie Bangs (Valerie Buhagiar), a heavy-metal roadie who lifted a substantial amount of cocaine from her latest employers, arrives in town, she hits upon the perfect mode of transportation for the dope. Claiming the dead man is her brother, Jackie talks Pokey into driving her to New Orleans with the coffin. Weird? Not hardly. Jackie and Pokey are being chased by a man who calls himself Satan (Earl Pastko) and carries xeroxed contracts which he pays people to sign in blood--for \$20 or a bottle of beer or whatever's available, the buyer sells his soul to Satan, payable upon death. It turns out that the corpse sold his soul, and Satan wants to collect. Highway 61 is usually too quirky for its own good, and only McKellar as Pokey is able to convincingly pull off his role. Although it generally barrels down the road in fits and starts, there are some moments of really wonderful lunacy (our favorite is a scene where Pokey and Jackie drop in on some heavy metal friends in a mansion, and they are handed guns to hunt down supper--domestic chickens let loose in the hallways--while the soundtrack plays Tom Jones' "It's Not Unusual.") Look for a brief cameo with Dead Kennedys lead singer Jello Biafra as an uptight U.S. Customs guard. Audience: People looking for something completely different. With sex in a graveyard, bingo with the devil, and a dead guy hanging upside down on an inverted cross, we think it's safe to say that conservative audiences will probably not be interested in this. (R. Pitman)

[DVD Review—Mar. 6, 2007—VSC, 102 min., not rated, \$14.95—Making its first appearance on DVD, 1991's *Highway 61* sports a solid transfer and Dolby Digital surround sound. DVD extras include audio commentary by co-writer/costar Don McKellar and film critic Geoff Pevere; "The Bruce McDonald Burnout Film Festival," which includes the filmmaker's short films "Midwest of Eden" (7 min.), "The Forrest Gnome" (6 min.), and "The Interview" (4 min.); text cast and crew bios, and trailers. Bottom line: a solid extras package for a so-so film.]

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