

REISSUES



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

HELLRAISER: THE SCARLET BOX
(1987 – 1992) Blu-ray

Starring Doug Bradley, Ashley Laurence, Claire Higgins, et al.

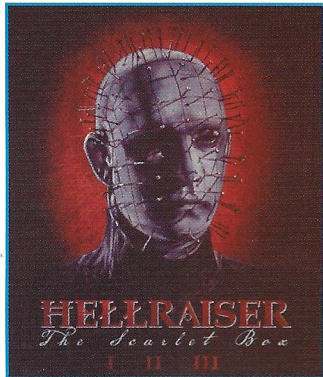
Directed by Clive Barker, Tony Randel and Anthony Hickox

Written by Clive Barker, Peter Atkins and Tony Randel

Arrow Films

Few horror franchises have been more hard done by than the one created by Clive Barker.

Based on his 1986 novella *The Hellbound Heart*, *Hellraiser*, written and directed by Barker, introduced the world to Pinhead and his Cenobites, and a mysterious puzzle box that opened a doorway to Hell. Steeped in gore and S&M, the film was a hit, leading to a series that devolved from theatrical releases to straight-to-DVD and VOD. While Pinhead may be part of the pop culture vernacular, the films that bear his visage have not been nearly as successful as those of fellow movie monsters Freddy, Jason, Michael and Leatherface.



Hellraiser: The Scarlet Box goes a long way to giving the most successful films in the series significant love. Originally released by Arrow Films in 2015 in the UK and now available domestically in North America, this multi-disc Blu-ray set compiles *Hellraiser* (1987), *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (1989) and *Hellraiser III: Hell on Earth* (1992) in brand new 2K transfers, along with a plethora of extras.

First, the bad news: based on the limitations of the original masters, the films simply don't look all that good. There's significant graininess to all of them that, while not distracting, is disappointing. Arrow isn't trying to hide anything, mind you – the 2K aspect of the set is front and centre.

Now, for the good news: for anyone interested in process and ephemera, *The Scarlet Box* is essential. Each film comes with extended documentaries, old EPKs, deleted scenes (including the long-sought-after doctor scene from part two), director commentaries and so much more. The fourth disc

set compiles a series of Clive Barker short films (previously released as a standalone DVD set), more documentaries and even a 30-minute low-budget film that served as a (failed) pitch for

a *Hellraiser* anthology television series.

Equally, if not more impressive is what comes in the gorgeous box set. Along with a variety of postcard-sized images from the mythology, *The Scarlet Box* contains *Damnation Games*, a 200-page hardcover book written by Barker aficionados Phil and Sarah Stokes that complements the various features.

While *The Scarlet Box* may not change your opinions on the three films included in the set, it will give you a greater appreciation for what went into them. And, like the fabled puzzle box that opened the door to Hell some 30 years ago, it will look enticing sitting on your shelf.

ANDY BURNS

RUSSELL'S REPTILE

LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM (1988) Blu-ray

Starring Amanda Donohoe, Hugh Grant and Peter Capaldi

Written and directed by Ken Russell

Vestron Video

If you've ever wanted to see Ken Russell's giant snake in hi-def, you're in luck. Vestron's revamped imprint has now unearthed and restored the director's kinky horror-comedy *Lair of the White Worm*. Loosely adapted from Bram Stoker's final novel, it concerns archaeologist Angus Flint (future *Dr. Who* star Peter Capaldi) excavating a massive reptilian skull, convinced he's found evidence proving that a local legend about a giant worm is real. Aristocrat James D'Ampton (Hugh Grant), a descendant of the lord who reputedly slayed said worm, joins forces with Flint to solve the mystery. Their quest takes them to the manor of Sylvia Marsh (Amanda Donohoe), who has a habit of sprouting massive fangs and spitting gobs of venom. All three leads put in terrific performances, especially Donohoe, who brings a physicality to her sexual, serpentine villain that's worth the price of this Blu-ray reissue.

Lair primarily uses Stoker's narrative as a means to string along some truly bizarre sequences that could only have come from Russell's idiosyncratic impulses, and is all the better for it. Full of the director's stylistic flourishes and excesses (and phalluses), the movie is at times a delirious mishmash of elegant costumes, makeup, sets and crazy effects – sure, it's a bit of a mess, but the shifting tones and visual approach give it a jittery energy that belies the small budget. Extras include a highly entertaining commentary track with the late Russell, who speaks fondly of the snaky camera movements and lens choices, as well as the overblown dream sequences. Also featured is a second commen-

