

REISSUES



SOUL BROTHER

J.D.'S REVENGE (1976) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Glynn Turman, Lou Gossett Jr. and Joan Pringle
 Directed by Arthur Marks
 Written by Jaison Starkes
 Arrow Video

Most of the blaxploitation-horror hybrids of the '70s were riffs on classic characters: *Blacula*, *Blackenstein*, *Dr. Black*, *Mr. Hyde*, etc. A late entry in the cycle, 1976's *J.D.'s Revenge* aims to do something a little different. While it tells a Jekyll-and-Hyde-type story of its own, the film is more concerned with character than simply replaying a formula.

In 1942 New Orleans, gangster J.D. Walker (David McKnight) and his sister Betty Jo (Alice Jubert) are murdered in a slaughterhouse. Thirty-four years later, cabdriver and law student Ike (Glynn Turman) takes part in a hypnotism show at a Bourbon Street nightclub, which allows his psyche to be invaded by J.D.'s angry spirit. Headaches and hallucinations give way to sadistic behaviour toward both strangers and Ike's girlfriend Christella (Joan Pringle), as Ike adopts the dress and manner of J.D. and

targets the preacher (Lou Gossett Jr.) and his brother/business manager (Fred Pinkard) who done J.D. wrong. Turman is in fine form in his "dual role," and really throws himself into the flamboyant nastiness of the J.D. persona.

While incorporating the requisite exploitation elements (topless dancers, etc.) and delivering the thrills, director/producer Arthur Marks and screenwriter Jaison Starkes also elevate *J.D.'s Revenge* into more thoughtful territory. They



discuss that ambition in *The Killing Floor*, a 46-minute documentary (named after the film's original moniker) that's the centerpiece of the Blu-ray/DVD extras supporting Arrow's fine widescreen transfer. The filmmakers, the ebullient Turman (who does a great Sam Arkoff impression) and editor George Foley Jr., shed considerable light on *J.D.'s* development and production process, explaining a few telling details like "blocking the hat" — and revealing how AIP cut the film for what the distributor saw as a less sophisticated audience. Also included are assorted promotional materials and an audio interview with McKnight, who offers more anecdotes about the Big Easy shoot. Blaxploitation and horror fans alike will want to possess this one.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

THE NIGHT ANDY CAME HOME

DEATHDREAM (1974) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring John Marley, Lynn Carlin and Richard Backus
 Directed by Bob Clark
 Written by Alan Ormsby
 Blue Underground

Although *Deathdream* was a cinematic reaction to the then-contemporary Vietnam War, its story of a young soldier who returns home from an overseas (unnamed) conflict with a thirst for blood carries strong resonances to this day. Also drawing inspiration from W.W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw," it's a classic horrific take on being careful what you wish for, as Andy (Richard Backus) seemingly answers his mother's prayers to come back to her, but has been gruesomely and irrevocably altered by his experiences.

The violence that results (which somehow earned only a PG at the time of *Deathdream's* release, though Blue Underground's new Blu-ray/DVD combo pack sports an R rating) is paralleled by the emotional torment going on within Andy's family, as his father (*The Godfather's* John Marley), mother (Lynn Carlin) and sister (Anya Ormsby, then-wife of scripter Alan) struggle with this unusual homecoming. As both a horrific and topical drama, *Deathdream* still has a lot to offer, and Blue Underground provides even more to supplement it in this upgrade of its 2004 DVD. The 1080p widescreen transfer (bearing the alternate title *Dead of Night*) sports improved colour, clarity and atmosphere, backed up by a slew of old and new bonus features.

Among the vintage extras, one audio commentary finds late director Bob Clark delivering only a sporadic discussion of *Deathdream's* creation, with moderator David Gregory helping to keep it moving. On a second track, Ormsby gives a much more thorough recounting of how the movie was put together and the people involved. Actor Backus and special makeup effects legend Tom Savini, who both began their film careers on *Deathdream*, share fond and interesting memories in separate featurettes.

The new stuff includes Ormsby and his former spouse, now Anya Liffey, charmingly reminiscing about their early days and movie work (even Ormsby's promos for the *Orgy of the Living Dead* triple feature). Completing a full picture of how *Deathdream* was put together are segments with composer Carl Zitter and production manager (and future *Kingdom of the Spiders* director) John "Bud" Cardos, who used his private plane

IT WRINGS THE VICTIMS OUT... AND HANGS THEM UP TO DIE!

