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The Deadly Spawn (1983)

Elite Entertainment/Music Video Distributors
Blu-ray Disc Released: 2/7/2012

All Ratings out of 

Movie: 

Video: 

Audio: 

Extras: 

Review by Mike Long, Posted on 2/15/2012

One of the best things about having children is telling them about the things which they've missed from the past. They don't really listen, but it's still fun. One thing which my kids only experience a few times was wandering the video store looking for the perfect rental...and even then they had a pretty good idea of what they wanted. I've told them about the good old days of going to the local "mom 'n pop" video store and looking at all of the interesting boxes and trying to decide just what to get. I really miss the early days of home video when the shelves were loaded with crazy horror movies, some of which came in oversized boxes. 1983's **The Deadly Spawn** definitely takes me back to that time, even as the movie goes modern on Blu-ray Disc.

The Deadly Spawn opens with a meteor falling to Earth. The scene then shifts to a rather sedate house. Sam (James Brewster) and Barb (Elissa Neil) wake up and go downstairs, where both are attacked by a toothy monster in the basement. Young Charles (Charles George Hildebrandt) also awakens and encounters the hideous beast. Pete (Tom DeFranco), who has an interest in science, is visited by his friends, Frankie (Richard Lee Porter) and Ellen (Jean Tafler), who have found a small version of the monster from the basement. As they are attempting to figure out what it is, Charles is making discoveries about the nature of these beasts. At the same time, a nearby lady's luncheon is overwhelmed by the creatures. When Pete and his friends are attacked, they will need their science smarts and Charles' interest in special effects to survive.

Speaking of things which kids today don't know about (Yes, I know how old I'm sounding in this review), how about low-budget, home-grown horror films. Now, do those still exist today? Of course they do. But, with advances in HD video technology and the availability of computer-based editing programs, even the cheapest backyard production can have a professional look. And with outlets like Youtube, amateur filmmakers can get their projects seen by viewers the world over. **The Deadly Spawn** harkens back to the days when movies were shot on film, there was no CG to cover up the blemishes and the distributors had to work to get the movies into theaters and video stores. The movie is far from perfect, but it's the perfect slice of 80s nostalgia.

When compared to the average film, **The Deadly Spawn** is a failure which seems to fail on every level. First of all, it's an ugly movie. Shot on 16mm and blown up to 35mm, the movie is dark, grainy, and sometimes blurry. The editing is awkward, both in the sense that shots are cut together in a strange way, and there's often too much space left on the front and end of shots. The acting is questionable, and it's clear that a mixture of local actors and family & friends fill the cast. (One thing which could work in the movie's favor is that if the filmmakers were going for an authentic look, it worked, as no one here looks like a movie star.)

The movie has very little in the way of story. The monster arrive and start eating people...and that's about it. Although, I must say that there are some surprising deaths.

So, why is this movie considered a cult classic and one which I would put just below **The Evil Dead** and **Bad Taste** in the hierarchy of important gore movies of the 80s? It all comes down to the monsters and the special effects. While everything else in this movie looks as if it was picked up at the dollar store, the monsters look fantastic. First of all, the simplistic design of the creatures is genius. Their purpose in the film is to eat people, therefore, they are all teeth. The monsters vary in size, but they all boast huge mouths which are filled with dozens of teeth. Then we have the monster effects themselves. The makers of **The Deadly Spawn** didn't skimp on these effects, as the main monster is at least 6 feet tall. Those who miss the days of latex effects as opposed to CG creatures will relish in the amount of aliens in the movie, and the obvious care which went into creating them. Combined with the ambitious gore effects in the film, you've got a movie which shows that low-budget didn't always mean low-tech.

For various reasons, **The Deadly Spawn** often got lost in the shuffle of early 80s gore films, despite the fact that I can remember often seeing it in the video store. One reason could have been that the movie was released as both **The Deadly Spawn** and **Return of the Aliens: The Deadly Spawn**, the latter of which sounds like a sequel. I honestly remember seeing that second title advertised and thinking, "Did I see the first one?" However, this Blu-ray Disc release should allow many to discover the film. Is it great cinema? By no means, but it's undeniably fun and you will just eat up the monsters...or vice-versa.

The Deadly Spawn contains a miniature set which looks like it was stolen from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* on Blu-ray Disc courtesy of Elite Entertainment and Music Video Distributors. The film is presented in its original 1.33:1 aspect ratio and the Disc contains an AVC 1080p HD transfer which runs at an average of 15 Mbps. The image is probably the best which it can be given the low-budget nature of the movie. The image is sharp and as clear as it can be, but there are multiple issues from the source material, such as grain, scratches and light-leakage. The image is a bit dark, but as we often get with 16mm movies, the colors look good, most notably the reds. The Disc carries a Linear PCM 2-channel audio track which runs at 48 kHz and an average of 1.5 Mbps. The track provides clear dialogue and sound effects. Being a 2-channel track, we aren't treated to any surround or subwoofer effects here, but the growls from the monsters come through loud and clear, and the dialogue is always audible, so the track does what it needs to do.

The Deadly Spawn Blu-ray Disc contains several extras. We begin with an AUDIO COMMENTARY from Producer/Co-writer Ted A. Bohus and Editor Marc Harwood. The "Alternate Opening" (4 minutes) is simply a longer version of the opening of the finished film. "Casting and Gags" (36 minutes) is simply a long reel of audition footage which was shot on black & white (?) video. (We see different actors do the same scenes over and over.) "Bloopers and Outtakes" (5 minutes) is an odd name for this segment, as it actually takes us on-set too see some key scenes either being shot or prepared. We see a lot of make-up effects being pulled off here. "Local News Segments" (41 minutes) shows an archive interview with Bohus and Tim Hildebrandt (where they discuss the film at length), a feature segment which has an interview with Bohus and "Creature Creator" Ralph Cordero, a later interview with Bohus about **Metamorphosis: The Alien Factor**, and finally a long segment from *New Jersey Tonight* in which Ted Bohus takes calls from viewers. "Take One" (25 minutes) is another local show which has an interview with Harwood. "Visit with The Deadly Spawn" (9 minutes) is a video oddity which has two guys talking about monsters and drawings until they at last go into a basement to see the alien monsters from the film, including one of the big hero puppets. We get a TV SPOT and a THEATRICAL TRAILER, both of which bear the title "Return of the Aliens: The Deadly Spawn". "Slideshow" (16 minutes) is a still gallery of behind-the-scenes and on-set photos. Finally, we have a few sample pages from a *Deadly Spawn* comic book. (Was this ever released?)

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