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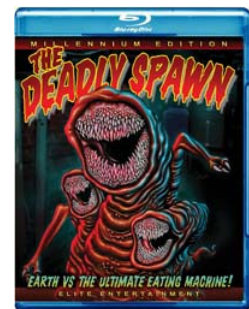
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THE DEADLY SPAWN

Blu-Ray. Elite.

Shot in 1982, **The Deadly Spawn** emerged at the peak of the horror video boom, when pretty much anything and everything was emerging through small indie labels and zero-budget efforts like this could share shelf space with Hollywood blockbusters. Having a brief brush as a video nasty in the UK, the film would eventually slide in to an undeserved obscurity, failing to secure the long-term popularity of those other 16mm cult classics of the same era, **The Evil Dead** and **Basket Case**. And while the film isn't quite up to the quality of either of those movies, it remains a lot of gory, chaotic and frenetic fun.

The plot is pretty minimal – a meteor landing in small-town America unleashes a strange alien presence that somehow or other winds up in the basement of a local house, where the amazing looking monster immediately begins spawning toothy tadpoles while rapidly munching its way through the local inhabitants. As a group of teens hide out in their home from the three-headed, toothsome creature and its assorted offspring attack a group of pensioners during a tea party, only a horror movie fixated kid seems to know how to defeat it, McGuyvering up a weapon made from flash powder, plasticine and a monster mask.

Very much a fan production, **The Deadly Spawn** won't win any prizes for story or acting, but certainly deserves an award for its incredible monsters. These are some of the wildest alien beasts you'll see – all slime, teeth and tentacles, with the mini versions being equally impressive. It's surprising just how well the effects hold up – much better than many big budget monster movies of the time, I'd say. The gore isn't skimped on either, as the alien tears off faces and bites off heads and limbs, and while some of these gore effects do betray their low budget, on the whole they are just as impressive as anything else from the time.

The film is let down a little by the pacing – there's a bit too much talk from poor actors in the first half – and a few scenes betray the home movie nature of the film – one scene is shot out of focus, and like **The Evil Dead**, the film suffers from an actor obviously getting a haircut midway through the shoot. But on the whole, this is a lively, wildly entertaining and old-fashioned monster mash that still packs quite a punch.

This new Blu-ray from Elite looks amazing – probably better than it looked in theatres, with the 16mm transferring to disc beautifully. I hadn't expected much from this visually, but it's really nice, all things considered. The sound, of course, remains pretty poor. In the interests of fairness, I should point out that some critics have been whining about digital enhancement removing the grain found in the previous Synapse DVD - I haven't seen that version so I can't compare them, but if you are more fixated on technical issues than the film itself, this might be a big deal for you. And there *is* an inexplicable visual drop-out of one second during the film, which is an annoying glitch, but hardly a deal-breaker.



Copious extras include a new (or rather, effects enhanced) opening sequence, a commentary, vintage local TV interviews and archive VHS footage, outtakes, auditions and pages from the **Deadly Spawn** comic book. A nice packaging of a shamefully overlooked movie.

DAVID FLINT

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