

SCREECHER FEATURE

KILLER CROCODILE (1989) Blu-ray

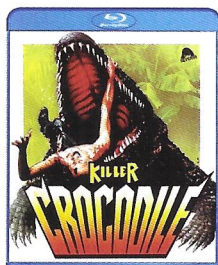
Starring Anthony Crenna, Ann Douglas and Thomas Moore
Directed by Larry Ludman (Fabrizio De Angelis)
Written by David Parker Jr. (Dardano Sacchetti)
and Larry Ludman
Severin Films

There's a wonderfully dumb sequence in the first half of *Killer Crocodile* where the giant reptile collapses part of a dock, a little girl hangs onto the edge for dear life, and one adult after another jumps into the water to help her instead of simply pulling her up from above. If you can appreciate the camp value of scenes like that (and grew up as a reptile-crazy kid like me), you'll find some enjoyment in Severin Films' lovingly remastered Italian *Jaws* rip-off.

Producer Fabrizio De Angelis, who backed a number of Lucio Fulci classics, directed and co-wrote this saga of environmentalists investigating toxic waste dumping in Santo Domingo who lose one of their friends to the big croc. While more supporting characters are munched to the strains of Riz Ortolani's ersatz-John Williams score, irascible local hunter Joe (Thomas Moore filling the Robert Shaw role) is drawn into the attempts to kill

the critter. As the opening credits inform, "The crocodile was created and built by Giannetto De Rossi" (he and Ortolani are the only members of the production team to avoid Anglicization there), and it's a little more effective than the faux aquatic beasts seen in *Great White* et al. — though the same can't be said for the typically awkward post-dubbed dialogue.

On the Blu-ray, interviews by the Freak-O-Rama team with De Rossi, cinematographer Federico Del Zoppo and actors Anthony Crenna (yes, Richard's son) and Pietro Genuardi shed entertaining light on the film's production, creators and cast. A limited edition (4000 units) comes with a Blu-ray of *Killer Crocodile 2* (1990), helmed by De Rossi himself; executive-produced by "Roger Hack" (!), and just as cheesy, if not



Killer Crocodile

quite as directly *Jaws*-indebted, as its predecessor. This disc contains the real treat of the whole set: *The Prince of Plasma*, a feature-length documentary by Naomi Holwill on De Rossi's lengthy career, featuring interviews with many of his collaborators and admirers, that's a must-watch for Italo-horror buffs.

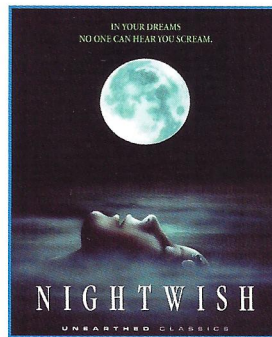
MICHAEL GINGOLD

BAD TRIP

NIGHTWISH (1989) Blu-ray

Starring Brian Thompson, Clayton Rohner and Elizabeth Kaitan
Written and directed by Bruce R. Cook
MVD Visual/Unearthed Films

A holdover from the late '80s era of video store fodder, *Nightwish* sees a group of parapsychology students taking a road trip to a derelict desert house to document evidence of the paranormal. Naturally, things don't go as planned in Bruce Cook's riff on *Altered States*, *Poltergeist*, and several other genre tropes (Aliens! Seances! Mad Scientists!). The film's strangely meandering tone never coalesces into a solid story, but the interest level is kept up through sheer weirdness and oozing practical effects from Greg Nicotero and company, especially as the plot derails toward an ending pilfered from *The Wizard of Oz*.



The film isn't as psychedelically trippy as it's likely aiming to be; the disorienting dream vs. reality doesn't come off here as well as it does in, say, *Videodrome*. But it's well-photographed by Bruce Cook and Director of Photography Sean McLin, who pull out the expected stops: canted angles, a green/red *giallo* colour scheme, and both wide angle and split diopter lenses (as well as making use of star Elizabeth Kaitan in a wet T-shirt, something the Blu-ray exploits fully in the accompanying 24-page booklet). There are some entertainingly weird dream sequences (such as when Alisha Das is aroused by an alien fog), while the best bit of casting comes from the extended cameo from Brian Thompson as muscle-bound lughead Dean. Ultimately, *Night-*

wish is best experienced as a collection of intriguing parts rather than a satisfying whole, and that's probably being too kind.

Still, kudos to MVD Visual and Uearthed Films, who have gone the extra mile to restore a film that most people only experienced in 525-line 480p (or as an eye-catching VHS box), with a Blu-ray nicely mastered

from a 4K transfer (!), though extra features here only amount to trailers and the commentary track with exec producer Paul White.

JEFF SZPIRGLAS

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