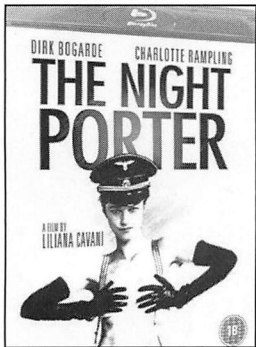


## THE NIGHT PORTER

Anchor Bay Entertainment Blu-ray  
(region B import)  
(1974) Director: Liliana Cavani

While U.S. -lensed "Nazisploitation" flicks tended to emphasize the seedier aspects of Third Reich decadence (see: *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*), European filmmakers tended to approach the subject with a more artistic flair. Case in point: Liliana Cavani's controversial *The Night Porter*.



Set in 1950s Vienna, the film focuses on Max (Dirk Bogarde), the night porter at a fancy hotel. The fussy and meticulous Max is also a former SS officer who, during the war, helped oversee a concentration camp.

Max is about to undergo a review by an enclave of former Nazi officers tasked with examining the documentary evidence of his crimes, locating living witnesses, and then "filing them away," in what the viewer assumes must be an

unpleasant manner.

Max's secretive life is turned upside down with arrival of Lucia (Charlotte Rampling) a survivor from the camp who also served as Max's muse, lover, and partner in a sadomasochistic relationship that likely helped save her life. Through flashbacks, we see the horrors of the camp and the development of the decidedly twisted and desperate courtship between the two.

At first equally unsettled, Max and Lucia violently (and joyously) rekindle their disturbing romance. Since Lucia's presence threatens Max's anonymity and safety, he's face with a horrible choice. But rather than eliminate her or ask her to flee, Max instead locks Lucia in his apartment where they continue their sadomasochistic relationship from the camp, although with a slightly different dynamic (note Rampling's smile when Max mentions that she could go the police; she deliberately chooses not to, which seems to indicate a significant shift in the balance of power).

With Max's SS cronies determined to eliminate both of them in an effort to hide their own crimes, Max and Lucia barricade themselves in the apartment until a lack of food and electricity send them stumbling toward a tragic denouement.

While this film certainly includes some shocking imagery, it is ultimately a far more gentle film than almost anything else in the loosely connected genre of erotic Nazi-themed films. Visually, the highlight is certainly Rampling's song and dance number in the camp, topless and decked out in trousers, suspenders, and an SS officer's cap (an image frequently copied in other films, fetish magazines, and fashion photography). But the real focus is on the ragged emotions of the two main characters, and Rampling and Bogarde have an undeniable chemistry (they previously appeared together in the similarly themed *The Damned*, 1969).

Anchor Bay presents the high-def transfer at 1.85:1 (and taken from the same source as Wild Side Video's earlier release). The image is sharp, with very little noise. Detail is clear, despite the low light and muted cinematography in many scenes. There are two audio options (an English LPCM 2.0 track, and an English DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 track) and both sound fine. The downside: no special features at all.

If all you know of *The Night Porter* is the image of Rampling in suspenders and hat, then you should definitely watch this unsettling, surprising, and tragic film. "This is not a romantic story," Max tells the aging, powdered countess at the hotel as he confesses his love for Lucia. But in the end it is, and one that is exceptionally well told.

Editor's note: *The Night Porter* can be found as a domestic DVD only release from *The Criterion Collection*.

Brian Albright

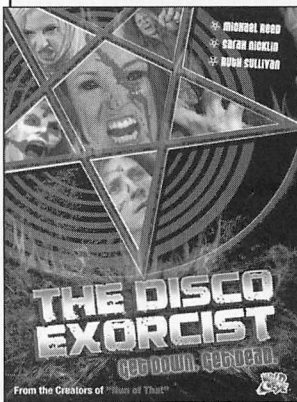
## ATOMIC BRAIN INVASION (2010) (Camp Motion Pictures)

## THE DISCO EXORCIST (2011) (Wild Eye Releasing)

Both films directed by Richard Griffin (DVD)

Always one to support new and upcoming talent, I was once approached by a young filmmaker to write about his debut feature, which he said was a heartfelt tribute to the grindhouse features of yore. Popping the film into my DVD player, my hopes of discovering raw, but emerging talent were dashed. The shot-on-video feature was over two hours long, was apparently shot at the bottom of a well and just wasn't any good. Ostensibly a zombie film, the zombies didn't show up until the last 15 minutes, only to end abruptly with a "to be continued" tagline. I contacted the filmmaker via email to regretfully say that his feature was just too technically crude to be seriously considered. His response tipped his hand all too surely—"It's a tribute to grindhouse features of the seventies! It's supposed to be poorly done!"

This is clearly not the attitude that the people who champion independent, exploitation or unusual cinema should take. The next-to-no-budget pictures of yore often featured many up-and-coming talents, and contrary to what this young upstart insisted, were not poorly done. The exploitation and obscure films of yesteryear may have showed their seams all too often, but were very effective in setting out what they intended to do. People would not still be interested in the original *I Spit On Your Grave*, *The Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*—note that all three of these films were remade, their big-budget Hollywood sequels quickly forgotten—if they weren't genuinely frightening films, reaching beyond what mainstream filmmakers at that time were too reluctant to do. Sadly, independent filmmakers in trying to evoke old drive-in features movies come up with ironic, satirical films that are neither entertaining nor funny.



the command of the town drunk (Rich Trethewey) be able to save the day?

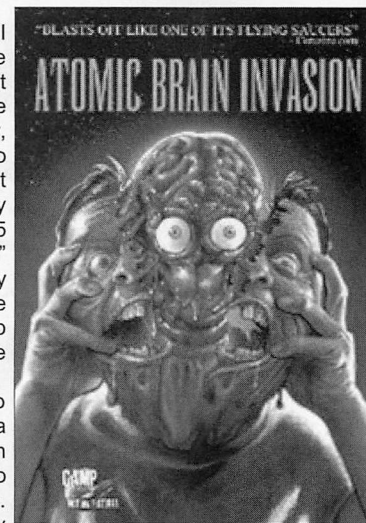
As good as it sounds, *Atomic Brain Invasion's* best asset is its vibrant color photography—a sure indication that the filmmakers totally missed the boat. Remember, the cheap sci-fi films of this era were photographed in the shadowy, film noir shades of black-and-white. Desperately short on laughs, the kindest assessment of *Atomic Brain Invasion* is that it has an amicable, harmless nature to it.

This can't be said of *The Disco Exorcist*, which offers a plethora of raunchy scenes. Disco smoothie Rex Romanski (Michael Reed) puts the make on all the local ladies at the local discothèque, but spurns the wrong woman with his bed escapades. Hell-bent on revenge, Rita Marie (Ruth Sullivan) uses her powers to demonically possess everyone who stands in her way, and lots of bad gore effects ensue.

Adapting a worn, washed-out look added in post to recapture the rustic grindhouse look, *Disco Exorcist* fails abjectly in recreating the Jimmy Carter era. In particular, lead actor Reed sports a horrible gag store hippie wig, a hairstyle that was long out of favor in the late Seventies. Characters wear T-shirts and non-era specific clothes, an odd choice as the polyester castoffs from this time are there for the taking in any nearby landfill. All the "humor" revolves around a junior high school student's concept of human sexuality.

In short, low-budget films that point out all the shortcomings of earlier low-budget films today just don't cut it in an age when many newcomers are picking up camcorders and arriving at some amazing, cutting-edge stuff. Love them or leave them, the *Paranormal Activity* series continues to pack patrons into theaters on budgets far lower than these two.

We now return to the aspiring director of the "quasi-zombie" film at the beginning of this review. I offered to do a brief Q & A with him in order to better explain his feature. He haughtily replied that I had a negative attitude towards his work and that he would now just pick up his trust-funded toy and go elsewhere. It all just goes to show that the real challenge to the independent filmmakers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century remains in crafting a genuinely good, honest film, in lieu of one that merely ridicules previous ones.



Witness these two feature films from director Richard Griffin. *Atomic Brain Invasion*, which satirizes 1950s science-fiction films and *The Disco Exorcist*, which lampoons 1970s exploitation fare. As expected, these minimally budgeted projects (*Atomic Brain Invasion* reportedly only cost \$20,000 to produce) try to poke fun at stale, retro genres and the prevailing attitudes at the time these films were popular.

*Atomic Brain Invasion* is set in a small New England town during the Cold War era. The town's white-gloved ladies fear the arrival of rock and roll singing sensation Elvis Presley (Brandon Luis Aponte), while everyone turns a blind eye to the above-ground atom bomb detonations conducted by the U.S. military a few miles away. Alien spacecrafts begin to land to disrupt the fragile tranquility. One saucer contains blob-like creatures that render the town's teenagers into goo-covered zombies. Another cardboard craft is discovered contains humanoid aliens who say "Take me to your king!" Will a group of high school students under

Greg Goodsell