

Indie Horror Films

All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

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DVD Reviews: The Bloody Ape; Blitzkrieg: Escape From Stalag 69

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Images from the Internet

These two films were both directed by Kevin J. Crocker.



The Bloody Ape
(aka *Son of Sweetback vs. Kong*)
Directed by Keith J. Crocker
Wild Eye Releasing
77 minutes, 1998 / 2009
www.WildEyeReleasing.com
www.MVDvisual.com

The director, Keith J. Crocker, is well known around the exploitation film scene. In his younger days, he used to publish the fanzine *Exploitation Journal*, and I still have a couple of copies. He knew his stuff, so it only makes sense for him to direct a film. You might say it was inevitable.

Despite being shot in the early '90s, he used grainy, past-expiration-date stock Super 8 film to give it that appropriate '70s stock look, which works like a charm. Gathering friends and family together, he made this movie. On the surface, this is a bit of a skidmark; however, apparently my opinion on this has changed dramatically. But let me continue.

Picking up where Roger Corman kinda-sorta left off with his Poe films, this is an – er – adaption of Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where a sideshow barker releases an ape named Gorto to enact revenge on those who have mistreated him. But rather than being attracted by the chimes of a charm bracelet, this bloody ape is after supposedly exotic banana (or, in some cases, banana scented soap!), given by said Sideshow Bob, or in this case Lampini (Paul Richici).

This *shmendrick the-not-so-magnificent* is fed up. He's been cheated by car repair shops, ripped off by a rabbi, and rejected by his girlfriend (Arlene Hanson, looking like she just stepped out of *The Sopranos*). His boiling point reached, his answer is a guy in a – well, decent gorilla suit for the almost nil budget.

Shot in parts of Long Island near Hempstead, the local accent is thick and heavy, making Joe Dellesandro sound cultured. When fellow LohnGylndeh (Commack) Rosie O'Donnell was still doing stand-up, she once said that no one would have taken Albert Einstein seriously if he had a New York

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accent. Well, these characters are no Einstein, but her point is made valid here. As a Bensonhurst boy, I can relate.

With one exception, there is no character here that is likeable, such as: the garage mechanic, (Larry Koster, who actually worked in the station in his scene) is a racist who hates everyone and bullies his way through his job (Latinos, American-Americans, Jews, you name it); the Rabbi tries to sell glass for diamonds – note that this is the second film I have seen recently where the *payas* was connected by a band over the head like rabbit ears – in a painfully stereotypical anti-Semitic manner with a terribly fake Hassidic accent; and the bigoted police officer, LoBianco (George Reis – who also plays Gorto most of the time – wearing incredibly fake costume store facial hair), the lead officer in charge of investigating the murders. convinced that when people are seeing an ape, that it's actually a black guy.

The film borrows from a lot of other exploitation classics, such as 1968's *Night of the Living Dead* (for example, the black hero's character is named Duane Jones), 1969's *Night of the Bloody Apes*, and 1980's *Night of the Demon* (thanks to *Horropedia* for that last lead), showing that Crocker knows his stuff. He's sort of like Tarantino without the filmmaking gene.

The gorilla rampage is a bit silly, actually, murdering women by slashing with a knife, disemboweling, while naked in the shower, or doin' 'em doggy style (most of those topless who are killed – i.e., nearly every female – were local strippers). There are a few men ripped apart, too. The gore is appropriately fake for the style they were going for, so it's effective, I guess. And did I mention the ape drives a car (taking it from Crocker's real-life then-fiancee) down a busy street without anyone noticing?

Yeah, this is a terrible film, and yet so earnest. The dialog is dreadful, the acting mostly non-existent, and the direction apeshit, but it is still amazing to watch in its dreadfulness. I'm not sure if the nearly first half which is mostly talking and no ape presence is more interesting for the WTF moments, or the second half that has lots of ape and more WTF moments.

I was a bit disturbed by the xenophobic anger by many of the characters and was turned off by that for a while, but during the lengthy featurette of 2008 interviews with the (male) cast and crew, and during the commentary, Crocker explains that the point of the nasty characters is that everyone in the film is miscommunicating and lacks the skill to relate. This actually makes sense to me, though he could be bullshittin' about it.

There are plenty of extras thrown in, such as a commentary by the three main hubs of the film (Crocker, Reis and Richichi), the aforementioned featurette, a short and moody film by Crocker, lots of artwork and stills, and a couple of Crocker trailers (including this one).

Worth watching? That's a tough one. If you have the tolerance to sit through the first 15 minutes and it keeps your interest, well, yeah. But if you're used to mainstream cinema with no patience for *Outsider* status, just keep walkin'.



Blitzkrieg: Escape from Stalag 69 – Special SS Edition

Produced, written and directed by Keith J. Crocker

Wild Eye Releasing

135 minutes, 2008 / 2009

www.Blitzkriegthemovie.com

www.WildEyeDVD.com

www.MVDvisual.com

The death camp torture sub-genre has been around since at least the '60s, be it taking place in South America, Soviet Russia, or Nazi Germany. Some examples include *SS Experiment Love Camp* (1969), *The Big Doll House* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), and *Terminal Island* (1973). Even the majors got a bit involved with *The Night Porter* (1974), and to some extent, *Paradise Road* (1997). However, the 800 lb. gorilla of this genre is the *Ilsa* series (*Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* in 1975, *Ilsa: Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* in 1976, *Ilsa: The Wicked Warden* [aka *Greta the Mad Butcher*] in 1977, and *Ilsa: The Tigress of Siberia*, also in '77, all starring the lovely and bodacious Dyanne Thorne as the titular character).

So for his second (and so far last) full length feature, Keith Crocker bravely tackled this torture porn style. It was a brave choice, no matter what the outcome. And how did he fare? Well, this is no Spielberg, but then again, it's not even early Romero. However, it is far more advanced than his previous effort of a decade earlier, *The Bloody Ape*. Thankfully he uses a better camera and in most cases, a better cast. Oh, and much more attractive women than the literal Long Island strippers from the last film.

The basic premise of this sub-genre, in a grossly generalized way, is that the (pick a nationality) in charge inflict cruelty on prisoners, mostly women but not only, and at some point they revolt and kill most of their abusers in escaping. Feel free to let me know if I've missed anything there.

We meet Helmut Shultz (Charles Esser) hiding in Argentina in 1955. After escaping from the Mossad, he goes to a catholic church and confesses the sins of the past to a priest, played by *The Bloody Ape's* lead, Paul Richici, unintentionally funny due to a thick New York inflection. Actually, Esser's German accent is pretty amusing as well, as with most of the cast, to be fair).

In flashbacks we see that he was kommandant of the titled Stalag, helped by his corpulent sidekick Wolfgang (Steve Montague, who has appeared in other auteur films such as *Bloody Christmas* [reviewed [HERE](#)] and *I Spill Your Guts*, also filmed on Long Island [reviewed [HERE](#)], both in 2012), and co-run with Helmut's lustful redheaded sister (in an equally emotionally immature *Ilsa* mode), Gordana Jenell, who strangely has a mild Eastern European accent (for the story; in real life, Jenell was born in Montenegro). Perhaps Crocker was figuring his audience would assume an accent is an accent? I rib rather than rub in.

Meanwhile, Helmut, an emotional man-child mad doctor-wannabe, has been doing experiments and has created a hybrid human/ape man – wait, didn't the Nazis want to promote a superior race rather than a lower, base one? – that we never see (except in the deleted clips). For the time being, his co-ed camp gives lots of reasons for abuse of both genders.

The main hero of the story is Natasha, played by the extremely lovely and often full monty'd Tatyana Kot (the actor was born in Siberia!). She is a Russian freedom fighter who was captured after shooting Nazis in the woods with a machine gun, while wearing only boots, and is consequently tortured by those running the camp – and a visiting Japanese soldier – before leading the required revolt.



Tatyana Kot

During both the worthwhile commentary and *making of* documentary/interviews, Crocker clearly states that this film is not torture porn, but rather he is trying to make the audience feel the visceral pain of the characters, be it the rack, bamboo under fingernails, castration (two of them!), and the application of what looks like a taser. I believe him and admire his conviction, but let's face the reality here. The audience that is going to be watching this kind of film is not the *Drop Dead Diva* type, or even *Grey's Anatomy*. Rather, they are out for a body count and not trying to save the whales, as it were. Mind you, I remember Sam Peckinpah (d. 1984) saying the same thing about his films, but what do you think of when you watch *The Wild Bunch* (1969)? Exactly. I am certainly not denigrating Crocker or his creed in any kind of way, as I truly feel what he believes, but I also know the demographics.

Another thing Crocker states, which I admire, is that he actually does manage to use these horrific actions as a platform to showcase the abuses of both the Nazi and Stalinist eras as a reminder of those regimes. There are lots of anachronistic moments that one needs to get through, some of which addressed in the commentary, which I thought was brave, but the point about the those time periods is presented with just a shade of lecturing, similarly to the way Romero did about consumerism in *Dawn of the Dead* (1979).

As with Crocker's previous release, this one was filmed on Long Island, in both the counties of Suffolk and the western Nassau locale of Smithtown. Thanks to the area's war reenactment groups, the cast is flushed out with soldiers in real uniforms, and there are lots of authentic WWII memorabilia floating around (though I wonder about some of the reversed swastikas). Shooting the film guerilla-style on the grounds of a closed asylum helps give the right feel of desolation needed for the story.

Again, there are a lot of extras included here, including commentary with Crocker, Kot, and others, a *making of* cleverly titled "Nazis Over Nassau," the original short that Crocker made that inspired this full-length release titled "Schindler's Lust," stills, outtakes, trailers, and more.

If I had one real complaint about this film is that it is too long, at over two hours. From what I understand, it is already significantly cut from its pre-edit stage, but there is definitely more that could have gone, including the rest of the mostly-excised ape-man subplot, the whole bit with the mustached, hippie-like guard that wants to send a complaint to the higher-ups about the abuses, and quite a few Tarantino-esque dialogs that went on way too long.

I've seen quite a bit of these type genre films (such as those listed at the beginning), and truthfully, it's not one of my favorite styles – I'm more into straight horror than the *human monster* – but all things considered, this one is effective and gets the job done with a touch of humor, empathy and better cast and effects. If you like this stuff, I would happily offer this up and a choice.

The trailer from The Bloody Ape was taken down from YouTube; you can find it [HERE](#).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YrjIC32sQg>

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at 12:01 AM

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