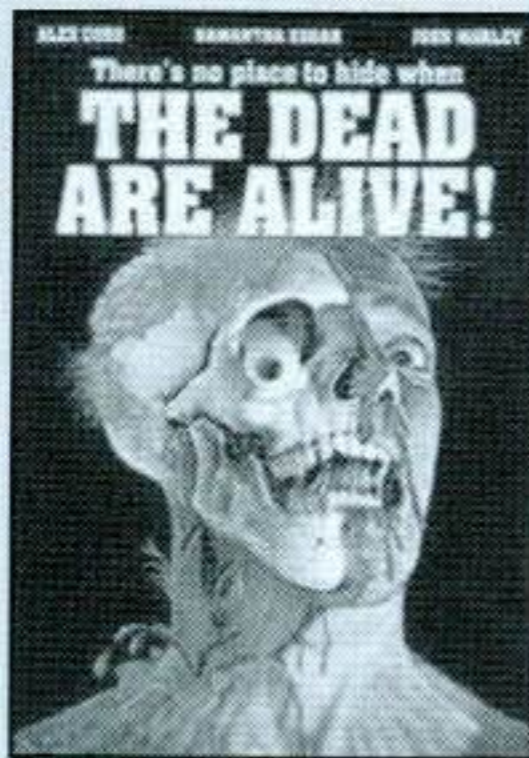


THE DEAD ARE ALIVE

(aka *L'etrusco uccide ancora*,
The Etruscan Kills Again)
Directed by Armando Crispino
(1972) Code Red DVD



Armed with an ad campaign and title that made it look like a zombie film, *The Dead Are Alive!* was dumped on the American Drive-in circuit. Once audiences discovered they were suckered in to viewing a giallo, they quickly revved up their engines and headed towards the exit. Those who did decide to stay were treated to a film that delivered cheap thrills amidst plenty of picturesque scenery.

The Dead Are Alive's hazy, byzantine plot concerns American archaeologists Jason (trash film perennial Alex Cord), arriving at Etruscan tombs in the Italian countryside where he runs into his ex-wife, Myra (Samantha Eggar, *The Brood*), currently the arm candy of a considerably older orchestra conductor Nikos (John Marley, of *Deathdream*, *The Godfather*).

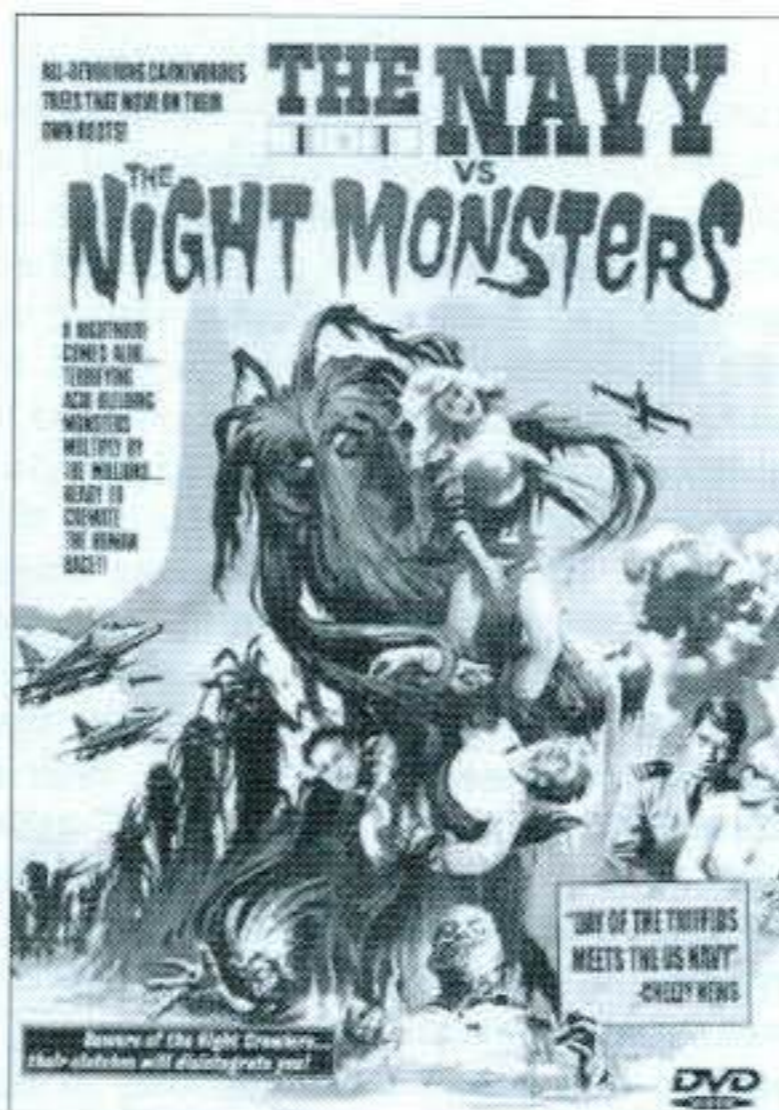
Two horny teenagers are brutally and graphically murdered at the archaeological dig. The victims are arranged atop coffins suggesting the ancient sacrificial rites of Tuchulcha, an Etruscan god whose face adorns the tomb's walls. More murders follow, with the face of Tuchulcha flashing subliminally before each killing. A supernatural force stalking the cast is quickly ruled out, as the killer appears to have a fixation on ladies' shoes (!). There is a busload of red herrings and sexually ambiguous characters, ending with a haunting finale that attempts to create sympathy for the confused killer.

The Dead Are Alive! is a minor giallo with many of that genre's leit-motifs: An ineffectual, damaged hero; jealous ex-spouses; a violent psychopathology rooted in childhood trauma; lovely natural settings and graphic murders. One pivotal sequence in particular seems to have inspired Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*, 1976), right down to the child actor's white knee socks. It can be said that while many copied Argento, the Master wasn't averse to picking up an image of two from other filmmakers.

The Dead Are Alive! has had a very spotty history on both video and disc, and Code Red DVD has risen to the occasion with a beautiful print of the film that is by far the most complete to date. However—it must be noted that the final ten minutes of the film takes a notable turn for the worse. The print becomes off-color and murky in a very noticeable way, and while it doesn't detract too much from the enjoyment of the film at hand, it points out a common problem with many Code Red DVD titles.

Their release of *The Dead Are Alive!* will be welcome news to those who want to add the film to their collections. Be aware that the Code Red DVD inexplicably has no extras whatsoever—not even a menu or chapters—and has a brief trailer for the Mafia thriller *Family Honor* (1973) that plays immediately before the feature film.

Greg Goodsell



THE NAVY VS. THE NIGHT MONSTERS

Directed by Michael Hoey
(1966) Cheezy Flicks

The Navy vs. the Night Monsters has always had a reputation as a boring clunker almost unworthy of its ridiculous title, among critics who appear to have been disappointed either that it wasn't nearly as ludicrously campy as they'd hoped, or conversely, that the film was an impoverished stab at pseudo-serious science fiction.

I'm going on record here as a fan of *Night Monsters*. Clearly modeled on *The Thing From Another World* (1951), and featuring shambling tree monsters that look like poorer third cousins of those grotesque geraniums from *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), *The Navy vs. the Night Monsters* is

a fun little creature feature with a reputation that has suffered, in part, because it looks like a 1950s monster movie that was released in 1966. It must have seemed particularly old-fashioned at the time, but I submit that had the film been released ten years earlier, and had it not suffered from so much post-production meddling (more on that later), it would probably be remembered with the same fondness bestowed on similar turkeys like *The Beginning of the End* (1957) or *The Giant Claw* (1957).

The plot: A Navy encampment on remote Gow Island prepares to welcome a scientific team from Antarctica bearing prehistoric plant specimens rescued from a "hot lake" at the bottom of the world. When the plane crash-lands, however, the scientists and most of the crew are missing; all that remain are a catatonic pilot, a few penguins, and the creepy looking plants in the cargo bay.

Before long, the apparently nocturnal, carnivorous plants are munching on sailors and spawning acid-spewing, insect-like baby trees. It's up to ill-prepared commanding officer Lt. Charlie Brown (Anthony Eisley), sultry nurse Nora (Mamie Van Doren), and a cranky civilian meteorologist (Edward Faulkner) to stop them from overtaking the island.

There's plenty wrong with *Night Monsters*—characters spend an inordinate amount of time reacting to stock footage; it takes 45 minutes for the Navy to actually engage the night monsters; and once they do show up on screen, the invading critters look like fat, limp potted palms.

And then there's Mamie Van Doren, who despite her obvious curves, delivers a performance that's flat as a pancake, stripping all the life out of her love triangle with Eisley and Faulkner.

But there's plenty to like in *Night Monsters*, too, including some nice work by cinematographer Stanley Cortez (better known for his collaborations with Orson Welles), a few splashes of gore, and Bobby Van's wisecracking portrayal of Ensign Chandler. If you bother to look, you can see bits and pieces of a better film peppered throughout *Night Monsters*, which was based on Murray Leinster's 1959 novel *The Monster from Earth's End*.

According to an interview director Michael Hoey did with Tom Weaver several years ago, there was a better movie in there, but producer Jack Broder mucked it up after principal photography had wrapped. According to Hoey, he originally turned in a 78-minute feature that downplayed the crappy looking monsters and focused building suspense by playing up the isolation of the team on the island.

Broder needed a 90-minute feature, so he hired Arthur C. Pierce (who had just helmed the producer's *Women of the Prehistoric Planet*) to shoot additional footage of the monsters, a "comical" bit with a weather balloon, some business at the beginning of the film involving the crew of the plane, and the goofy stock-footage climax. He also added some dull scenes in which the Navy brass sit around an office and discuss what's happening on Gow, which not only bogged down the film, but undermined the entire premise that the base was cut off from the rest of the world.

The Cheezy Flicks DVD was likely sourced from a tape, and as such the image is pretty soft. However, it comes from a relatively clean print of the film (although a few sections show quite a bit of spotting and speckling) and the sound is acceptable.

There is another release of *Night Monsters* available as a burn-on-demand disc from Monsterverse Entertainment. By all accounts that disc looks the same as this one, but it includes an audio commentary with Hoey and Weaver originally recorded for an Image Entertainment release that was ultimately canned because of the lack of acceptable film elements.

Brian Albright