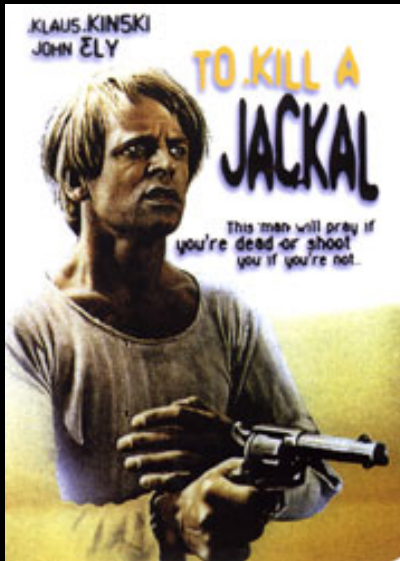


the B-Movie Buffet



To Kill A Jackal [WHAM! USA]

1970; color

Directed by Joseph Warren

Starring: Klaus Kinski, John Ely, Victoria Zinny, Paul Sullivan, Dean Stratford, Anthony Rock, Dan May, Anna Zinneman, Ares Kucky & Adriana Giuffre

Originally released in the US as Shoot The Living And Pray For The Dead, this recently retitled 1971 spaghetti western is an Italian vehicle that's completely dubbed into English (and rather poorly at that). Be that as it may, To Kill a Jackal is above average for the genre and Kinski (who made a decent amount of westerns) is at an over-the-top level of insanity here. He isn't the hero or the anti-hero, he's Dan Hogan—a mean and crazy bank robber with a desperate need to get across the Mexican border before the Texas Rangers catch him. But, as you might expect, there's a catch—actually a few catches—that prevent 'ol Klaus' plans from going smoothly. It seems he not only needs a guide to get to the border, he's gotta wait for his ex to get to him with the gold (she's got to get him the gold safely or she won't get to find out where he's stashed their son). The rendezvous point for all the action is Jackal's Ranch, where Hogan's guide, Ben (who could have been one of Sergio Leone's "Man With No Name" characters had this been made a few years earlier), calmly waits. Ben's quiet, almost too quiet, but his nerves of steel mask his hidden agenda. Bit by bit things begin to spiral out of control around Hogan and his gang and, as the nerves get frayed, the body count begins to rise. Hogan is a cold-hearted sonofabitch who shoots his cohorts (or anyone else who he perceives crosses him) at

the drop of a hat - and there's plenty of metaphorical hat-dropping here as he doesn't care who makes it to the border with him as long as the gold is his primary companion. Any attempt to detour that plan is pretty much guaranteed to result in said bullet in the back, front or side. Once the gold arrives, the pace begins to pick up and a lot more backstory is revealed. It seems Ben knows the lay of the land because it's where he hid out after the war (the Civil War) to avoid Yankee troops; that's his story and he's sticking to it... for now. The long arm of the law is already hot on Hogan's tail, but thanks to Ben he manages to stay one step ahead. Or so it would seem. As the trek to the border wears on, Hogan's nerves begin to fray and, accordingly, death comes a-knockin' - eventually resulting in a final showdown between the now-gangless (and seemingly more psychopathic than ever) Hogan and Ben who's out for some revenging of his own. (At this point it's revealed that Ben is the sole living member of a family Hogan wiped out at the end of the war in some KKK-related revenge thing; Ben's father was actually a Yankee judge who apparently caused lots of Confederate grief.) There's also lots of little touches throughout Jackal that really add to the film's overall impact. Most notably for me is the way the endless parade of tight facial close-ups on the characters—often so far off to the side of the frame that they're practically offscreen. While this one might be a little more off the beaten path as far as westerns and Kinski flicks go, it's definitely worth seeking out.

—the Kommandant

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