

zombie genre from the Italian gorefests of the late '70s, restoring intelligence and genuine scares to a subgenre that appeared to be on its last creative legs.

Scream Factory's Blu-ray release is packed so full of extras that the 2K interpositive scan of the film actually starts to feel like supplementary material. In addition to 220 minutes of bonus features recycled from earlier releases, there are new commentaries from author Gary Smart, actors Thom Mathews and John Philbin, and three new 30-minute documentaries: *The FX of the Living Dead*, *Party Time* (covering the now-legendary punk/synth soundtrack) and a tour of the shooting locations. *RotLD* may have aged, but it hasn't decayed; a re-watch quickly demonstrates it's just as relevant in 2016 as it was in 1985.

PRESTON FASSEL

GOO ON YOU

THE STUFF (1985) Blu-ray

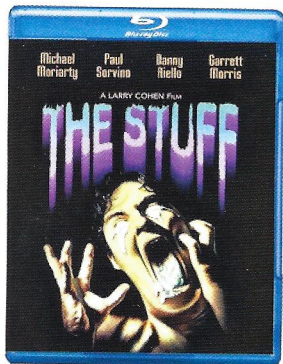
Starring Michael Moriarty, Garrett Morris and Andrea Marcovicci
Written and directed by Larry Cohen
Arrow Video

Larry Cohen fans, rejoice: Arrow Video has unearthed *The Stuff* for an HD assault on America. Chronicling the attack of an edible ooze, this '80s cult favourite mashes up *The Blob* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in a jab at Regan-Era consumerism.

First found bubbling from a hole in the ground, the gelatinous Stuff is instantaneously commercialized and turned into America's most popular dessert. Despite being ubiquitously embraced and marketed, a few individuals suspect it may not be as safe as the FDA claims. Enter ten-year-old Jason (Scott Bloom), who discovers the Stuff "alive" in his fridge late one night. When his entire household is zombified after eating it, he goes on the run and crosses paths with private investigator David "Mo" Rutherford (Michael Moriarty), who is trying to figure out how and why the pale sludge has taken over the country's minds and bodies.

The lurching plot is essentially a string to hang gags and political barbs on. It's full of ideas, but threadbare in terms of character development, and requires a jolt from the motley cast, which includes Paul Sorvino, Danny Aiello and Garrett Morris. Some, like Morris, have a ball with the material, while others fall flat in their roles.

The movie gets a real lift from its creative use of practical effects, showing the Stuff oozing from people's gaping mouths, onto walls, down toilets, etc. It also has a subversive willingness to change genres every few



scenes. Tonally, this means the movie is all over the map – sometimes it's a fun horror flick for kids, other times a corporate satire pitched for an older set. But *The Stuff* does a serviceable job at showing how a dubiously tested product, pushed by effective branding, quickly permeates a society that doesn't question what's on its grocery store shelves.

While not exactly "stuffed" with extras, there's a comprehensive making-of doc that deconstructs the film and the hijinks that a Larry Cohen shoot provided. *The Stuff* is by no means perfect, but the underlying message is as pertinent now as it was in the mid-'80s, or perhaps even more so, given that mass media's stranglehold is tighter than ever.

JEFF SZPIRGAS

SLITHER ME TIMBERS...

SSSSSS (1973) Blu-ray

Starring Strother Martin, Dirk Benedict and Heather Menzies
Directed by Bernard L. Kowalski
Written by Hal Dresner and Daniel C. Striepeke
Shout! Factory

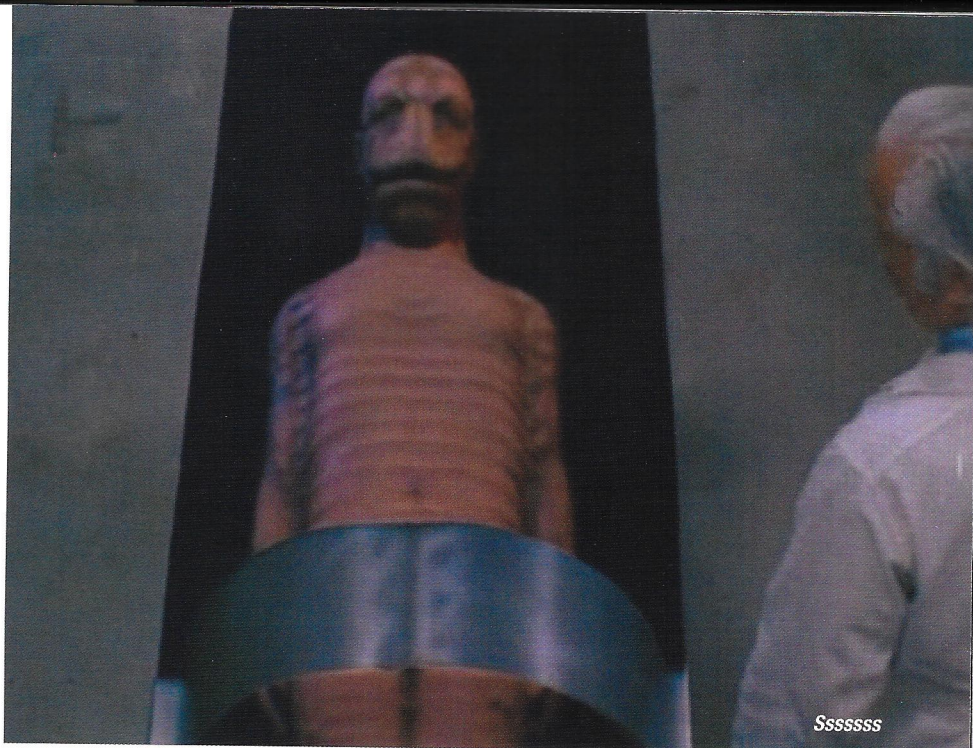
Anyone looking to sink their fangs into some wonderful trash needn't look further than the cobra transformation chiller *Sssssss*, an obvious bit of snake oil from the creature feature resurgence of the 1970s. Sporting the frequent use of real serpents and elaborate snake makeup, this dopey throwback finally makes its Blu-ray debut from Shout! Factory in all its slippery, slithering glory.

Strother Martin plays Dr. Stoner, a devious herpetolo-

gist who is conducting groundbreaking experiments with snakes on the reptile farm he runs with his daughter Kristina (Heather Menzies). At the local college, the doc meets and hires promising student scientist David (Dirk Benedict) to help him with the research. But when Stoner puts his young protégé on a schedule of cobra venom injections – to help him develop immunity to the poison, he claims – David starts to experience an irresistible urge to slither around on his belly looking for field mice. This is troubling to his potential love interest Kristina, especially after she notices that the half-snake half-man at the county fair's sideshow looks a lot like her dad's previous assistant.

Before landing the job on *Sssssss* ("Don't say it, hiss it" commands the film's poster), Kowalski had already lensed atomic-age B-flicks such as *Attack of the Giant Leeches* (1959). A similar 1950s sensibility shows up here, as the movie unspools in a way that's reminiscent of a classic poverty row mad doctor film, only with more notable production values. In particular, the scaly makeup by *Planet of the Apes* veteran Dan Striepeke (who also co-wrote) is a notch above expectations, reminiscent of a similar human-to-reptile makeover in *The Alligator People* (1959), a film to which *Sssssss* owes much.

But don't expect this to be serious – Kowalski and company play up the far-fetched script for maximum camp. In particular, future *Battlestar Galactica* and *The A-Team* star Benedict portrays David as an absurdly naïve test subject



Sssssss

