

# CULT HORROR

**CREATURE FROM BLACK LAKE LIMITED EDITION** (1976) ⚡⚡⚡⚡  
D: Joy Houck Jr. Jack Elam, Dub Taylor, Dennis Fimple, John David Carson, Bill Thurman, Jim McCullough Jr. 95 mins. (Synapse Films) 8/22

Cryptozoologist students Rives (Carson) and Pahoo (Fimple) talk their teacher (Houck Jr. in a cameo role) into loaning them a van to head down to Louisiana and investigate reports of a beastly creature in the swamps around Oil City. Trapper Joe Canton (Elam) recently reported his partner being snatched from their boat and killed by the creature, but no one will listen to him. The boys hit Oil City and rather than find anyone willing to talk to them, they run into local sheriff Billy Carter (Thurman), who suggests it would be better if the boys just left town and didn't stir up any unpleasant history. They finally meet young Orville Bridges (McCullough Jr.) who shares that he had an encounter with the creature when he was young. Orville takes them home to meet his grampa (Taylor), who reluctantly tells them the whole story. Undeterred, the boys follow leads that take them into the creature's lair. From this point on, the film is a "Who will survive and what will be left of them?" picture. Synapse, after years, has finally released the best copy of this film ever made available. Previously, Sinister Cinema offered a wonderful widescreen DVD-R, and it appeared on a budget label DVD in full screen. Without question, for me, **Creature from Black Lake** is the best Sasquatch movie ever made. Yes, **The Legend of Boggy Creek** was terrifying when I saw it as a kid, but **Creature from Black Lake** managed to be just as terrifying when I first saw it as an adult. The film benefits from the instantly likeable cast, starting with our two leads who are in no way obnoxious boneheads we want to see the creature gnaw on. McCullough Jr. also plays a wonderfully sympathetic character. For the veteran cast, this flick gives them more to chew on than most of the films they ever appeared in. Elam and Taylor are excellent, but I would say this is easily the best role Thurman ever played. He's tough but rational and always there to help, not the typical "hick sheriff" of the time. Everything about this film is drive-in perfect. Because the focus is on the human element of the story, the monster's appearance is truly terrifying. Extras include a commentary by Michael Gingold and Chris Poggiali, a featurette interview with

Director of Photography Dean Cundey, original trailer and radio spots, as well as new English subtitles. If you enjoy '70's drive-in exploitation movies, **Creature from Black Lake** is the genuine article, one of the last of its ilk produced between 1975's **Jaws** and 1977's **Star Wars**, before the studios started pouring millions of dollars into "low-budget drive-in exploitation films" for the mainstream.



**DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS** (1984)  
⚡⚡⚡  
D: Edmund Purdom. Edmund Purdom, Alan Lake, Belinda Mayne, Mark Jones, Gerry Sundquist, Kelly Baker, Caroline Munro. 87 mins. (Vinegar Syndrome) 11/22

Christmas is closing in quickly, and a lunatic is stalking the scummy streets of London, brutally murdering anyone dressed as Santa Claus. When Kate's (Mayne) father is murdered in front of a roomful of witnesses at a party, New Scotland Yard detective Inspector Harris (Purdom) pins her boyfriend Cliff Boyd (Sundquist) as the number one suspect: Kate's father was wealthy and she stands to inherit a fortune. Meanwhile, determined journalist Giles (Lake) is trying to relay information to both Kate and Detective Powell (Jones) concerning Harris. Harris takes a liking to Kate, and she learns he has a connection to the local psychiatric facility. While Santas are slaughtered all over the seedier parts of London, a young stripper (Baker) is abducted and learns she may not live to see Christmas morning. For such a troubled production (original director Purdom walked off the film after getting bored with it and was replaced with two others), it is amazing that this Dick Randall production manages to tell a mostly coherent story. In fact, it

is more enjoyable than the regular run-of-the-mill slashers of the era simply because it has a believable dirty, gritty, anything can happen to anyone at any time vibe. Except for the fetching Mayne as Kate, most of the characters seem to belong in an asylum, although Sundquist does well as a sleazy but, ultimately, well-meaning boyfriend. Munro makes an appearance as herself, on stage performing a rock song, where one of the slaughtered Santas is found. The scene that sickens most people is the lunch-chucking, straight razor assault of a department store Santa in the head. Gratuitous Santa Slaughter also includes various slashings and stabbings, face splitting, chestnut roasting face flambeau, massive electrocution, and a point-blank cranial cleaning. The structure is mixed up, with flashbacks coming at the end of the film to tie up the story; it finishes with a weird closing scene you will talk about well after the last present is opened. Extras include a new interview with writer and additional scenes director Alan Birkinshaw, a new interview with actress Munro, an interview with Lilan Purdom, the director's daughter, a making of featurette plus an archival documentary, a visit to the locations, commentary by film historian Amanda Reyes and special features producer Ewan Cant, deleted and extended scenes (one which adds a new layer to that odd ending), stills, trailers and more. **Don't Open Till Christmas** is the real deal, an authentic slasher film made at the end of the first slasher cycle. It is quite a treat for fans of Christmas horror and mayhem movies.

4K UHD + BLU-RAY  
**RETURN OF SWAMP THING** (1989)  
⚡⚡1/2  
D: Jim Wynorski. Louis Jordan, Heather Locklear, Sarah Douglas, Dick Durock, Ace Mask, Monique Gabrielle, RonReaco Lee. 88 mins. (MVD) 2/23

Dr. Arcane (Jordan) is back and, with the help of Dr. Zurrell (Douglas), he is using organic materials from the Florida swamps to create an anti-aging serum. His experiments have mostly resulted in the formation of an army of mutated monstrosities. His stepdaughter Abby (Locklear) arrives to ask questions about her mother's sudden death. When all seems lost, a glob of swamp weeds and sludge takes form and Swamp Thing (Durock) is soon busting heads and saving the day. Wynorski sets just the perfect mood beginning with Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Born in the Bayou" blasting over the opening credits and copious *Swamp Thing* comic covers. It's also the best *Swamp Thing* suit ever. Extras include commentaries, interviews, trailers, PSAs, TV clips and more. ⚡

—Rob Freese