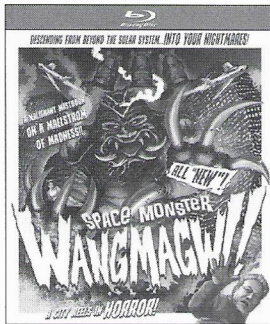


## SPACE MONSTER WANGMAGWI

Directed by Hyeok-jinn Gwon  
(1967) SRS Cinema Blu-ray



When is a "lost" film not a lost film? When a film which is known to exist but isn't available for screening, it technically isn't "lost," just "unavailable." This was the case for the South Korean *kaiju* movie *Space Monster Wangmagwi*, held by the Korean Film Archive—and screened publicly on occasion—but which was not commercially available until recently.

Unearthing any long-unseen film is a reason for celebration, but *Space Monster Wangmagwi* (the audio commentary informs us that "Wangmagwi" means roughly "Big Devil" in Korean) is by no means a classic of the genre. The effects are surprisingly effective and inventive, particularly when compared to the other, more accessible 1960's Korean *kaiju*, *Yongary*, but the

footage that surrounds these scenes is mostly clumsy, and tedious.

Aliens from the planet Gamma want to colonize Earth, but don't have a neutron bomb to eliminate the pesky inhabitants while preserving the environment, so they air-drop giant monster Wangmagwi to wipe us out: "the Earthlings will serve as food for our monster." Oddly enough, Wangmagwi doesn't actually eat any humans in his brief sojourn on Earth: he occasionally smashes buildings, but also does a lot of just standing around. Our protagonists are air force Major Mo, his fiancée Honey, and street urchin Squirrel. Mo is a non-entity, Squirrel is a mildly amusing, anarchistic kid who has no qualms about taking on the 100-foot-tall Wangmagwi with a kitchen knife, and Honey . . . is the worst. Typhoon coming! Giant monster attacking! Honey: "Waah, it's ruining my wedding day!" Lots of footage is also expended on hordes (alright, dozens) of people rushing through Seoul's streets, and what feels like 82 hours of the 82-minute running time is spent on two buffoonish comedians.

Honey is snatched up by Wangmagwi early in the movie and remains clutched in one of his paws for the rest of the film, except when the filmmakers forgot and showed the monster with empty hands. Adolescent Squirrel, apparently raised on cartoons like "Jack-Wabbit and the Beanstalk," climbs up Wangmagwi's body and goes inside his head via the ear canal, harassing the creature by slicing its ear-drum and urinating there! [More toilet-humor occurs in a bizarre bomb-shelter sequence in which a man defecates on a newspaper while surrounded by scores of people.] Squirrel also disables the radio receiver on the monster's back. The Korean armed forces do literally nothing (appearing via some terrible-quality aerial stock footage), although Major Mo does rescue Honey and Squirrel (in an extremely unbelievable bit) before Wangmagwi—who has previously shrugged off artillery, bullets, and high-voltage—is killed when a single jet aircraft crashes into his shoulder and inexplicably sets him on fire.

*Space Monster Wangmagwi* name-checks King Kong several times, and the monster itself is humanoid in shape—unlike Godzilla, Gamera, etc.—which allows for some Kong-like activities. Wangmagwi, as noted above, picks up Honey and carries her around, at one point leering at Honey's exposed cleavage. You won't catch Godzilla acting like that. When first seen on the Gamma spaceship, Wangmagwi is human-sized and resembles a man in an ape-suit, but he expands (off-screen) to monster-size and undergoes a significant metamorphosis as well. Now he has asphalt-like skin, big ears, fangs, a permanently-lolling tongue, and beady little human eyes. Aside from just punching buildings, he also has the ability to spray some sort of flammable acid from an opening on his head.

The special effects are not bad at all, although Wangmagwi spends most of his time on what appears to be a single street in Seoul, and at first seems reluctant to damage any of the model buildings (he later does some wrecking). A full-scale giant hand and foot were built, in addition to the sets representing the inside of the monster's ear canal and nasal passages. Some of the shots utilizing these large mock-ups are quite nice, as they were filmed "live" with high-angle views of Seoul in the background (versus process shots).

The audio-visual quality of *Space Monster Wangmagwi* is very fine, with clear images (except for those terrible aerial stock shots) and little if any noticeable print damage. The production values are satisfactory, but the film is short on spectacle, and the disjointed nature of the narrative and lack of any real suspense or excitement make the non-Wangmagwi scenes seem slow and pointless.

The extras on this disc include an audio commentary by Sueng-Hoon Jeong, Assistant Professor of Film and Electronic Arts at California State University Long Beach, & *kaiju* historian John Goodrich. Prof. Jeong provides good context on Korean society and Korean cinema, complemented by Goodrich's *kaiju* film knowledge. The commentary starts a bit slow but picks up the pace quickly and is quite informative and entertaining. "Acquiring the Monster" is an 11-screen text piece by SRS Cinema head Ron Bonk, who explains the rather difficult process of obtaining the rights to a film made more than 50 years ago in another country.

"The Fans Speak" encompasses a number of features: mostly short-ish videos of *kaiju* fans expressing their excitement at the release of *Space Monster Wangmagwi*, with a few text and/or art pieces. Not particularly useful but the *kaiju* community might appreciate it more than the casual fan.

David Wilt

## ACCION MUTANTE

Directed by Alex de la Iglesia  
(1993) Severin Films 4k/Blu-ray



Alex de la Iglesia established himself as one of the most important new voices in Spanish Cinema with a one-two-three punch of 1993's *Accion Mutante*, followed by 1995 breakout Satanic comedy *El Día de la Bestia* aka *The Day of the Beast* and 1997's *Perdita Durango* aka *Dance with the Devil*, starring Rosie Perez, Javier Bardem and James Gandolfini. His darkly comedic vision and fascination with grotesque scenarios and characters earned him raves and the expected comparisons to fellow countryman Pedro Almodovar (who, in fact, produced this film) and Cult Icon John

Waters.

In a post-apocalyptic dystopian future (there's another kind?) ruled by the beautiful elites where non-beauty is not tolerated, a ragtag band of bumbling misfits comprised of "disabled" outcasts have formed a rebel group named "Accion Mutante" ("Mutant Action"), wearing the term "Mutant" as a badge of honor. They vow to rid the world of "beautiful people" and spend their time driving around in an old ice cream truck and planning violent raids on the ruling class. Tagged a terrorist group by the media, our introduction to them comes through televised news reports condemning their bloody political actions. Their latest mission is to infiltrate a billionaire's daughter's wedding and kidnap the bride. In spite of a darkly hilarious failed attempt having a Mutant pop out of the wedding cake to begin the carnage, they pull off the kidnapping and escape by hopping aboard their spaceship with their kidnapped prize. They opt to keep the bride quiet by stapling her mouth shut (probably an overreaction) as they wait to collect their ransom. A double-crossing aboard the spaceship leads to a mutiny which leads to an unlikely alliance which eventually ends up in all-out mayhem.

The special FX makeup is top-notch, created by the effects team behind Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Delicatessen* (1991) and *City of Lost Children* (1995). Like a Troma film with a respectable budget, the film is chock-full of beautifully-realized human oddities, including a set of conjoined twins who need to adapt (through a bit of DIY amateur taxidermy) when one half suddenly becomes just so much dead weight. The acting standouts are Antonio Resines as the battle-scarred leader of the Mutants who wears a metal plate over half of his face and looks more than a bit like Jason Statham, at least the part of his face that isn't a metal plate; the lovely Frederique Feder as the feisty bride who develops Stockholm Syndrome and goes complete Patty-Hearst-machine-gun-toting-badass; and Alex Angulo as the hapless surviving half of the twins, who spends half the film running around strapped to another actor and the other half strapped to a life-sized rag doll.

Severin Films presents *Accion Mutante* in a beautiful new widescreen (2.35:1) transfer sourced in 4k from the original camera negative. Despite the somewhat low-budget limitations of the film the transfer looks impeccable, with true blacks and colors that pop. Three audio options are provided: Spanish atmos, Spanish 5.1 and Spanish 2.0. Optional English subtitles are provided.

The disc is absolutely packed with brand new and archival special features including an audio commentary with Director Alex de la Iglesia; writer Jorge Guerricachevarria, producer Esther Garcia and production designers Jose Luis Arrizabalaga and Biafra (in Spanish with optional English subtitles); Well Done Baloney," Interview with director de la Iglesia (18 min.); "Bad Blood Costumbrism", interview with writer Guerricachevarria (18 min.); "The F\*cking Boss," interview with actor Antonio Resines (15 min.); "Some Crazy Sh\*t," interview with production designers Arrizabalaga and Biafra (17 min.); "Liters of Blood . . . Wonderful!" interview with special effects artist Raul Romanillos (11 min.); archival making of featurette (28 min.); behind the scenes footage (34 min.); music video (3 min.); storyboards, and a theatrical trailer.

Imagine what it might look like if John Waters tackled a *Mad Max* sequel, or if Lucio Fulci helmed one of the *Robocop* movies, you're already in the right frame of mind to enjoy *Accion Mutante*. Its madcap energy, jet black humor and razor-sharp political and media commentary put it a step above the typical post-apocalyptic dystopian future flick fare. The Severin Films Blu-ray is highly recommended, and should be in the collection of anyone who enjoys Action or Horror films that are a few miles off the beaten path.

Lee Peterson