

SWAMP THING

THE FILM: Based on what is now one of the lesser known DC Comics characters, Swamp Thing represents a purposeful departure for its director Wes Craven, who was fresh off directing *Deadly Blessing* but perhaps at the time best known for his brutal films *The Last House on the Left* and *The Hills Have Eyes*.

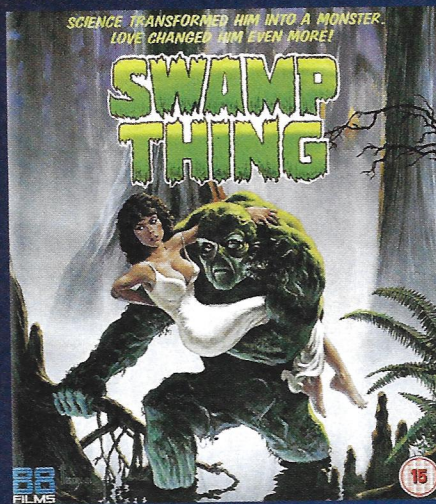
Taking this opportunity to have a little fun but not stray too far from his milieu, Craven effortlessly works in the comic book style that these types of film demand and generates the sort of acting performance, with Adrienne Barbeau beautifully channelling the spirit of Ripley, that perfectly capture and endear the tone of the story while a beautiful production design sells the genuine locale making you feel as if you are in the swamp yourself.

It is because of these elements working so well that it is disappointing to say that the script lets the whole thing down. Viewers will need to be patient for the first twenty minutes which dawdle along in a bid to display character but ultimately could have been wrapped up in a few minutes. Although a rare moment of fun for genre fans is the introduction of David Hess who pulls a snake from his trousers, quite literally, and comes across almost as an almost likeable goon as opposed to the reprehensible thug we so often associate him with.

This slow start is forgiven however once the origin story has been established and *Swamp Thing* actually becomes a thing. In a bid to rescue the woman he loves and to stop evil from prevailing he smashes and throws everything in his path channelling his inner strength to endure. But this is no simple woman in peril story, Barbeau can certainly hold her own, but rather about inner strength and good vs evil. In fact this would make a terrific family film and entry point for younger viewers...or at least it would were it not for the inconsistent tone that comes across at several points throughout the film's runtime.

Unfortunately *Swamp Thing* does not commit to being for one audience or another and therefore mixes the sometime staid or family friendly action and tone with sporadic moments of nudity and more graphic violence which would not be suitable. This, coupled with a slow script and a lack of genuine excitement means that modern audiences are most likely to get bored of the film long before it ends leaving just those looking for a nostalgic kick to remain.

Sure it has heart but unfortunately for many this beautifully packaged release



belongs to a film that has struggled to stand the test of time for all but the most committed.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

SPECIAL FEATURES: This Blu-ray/DVD combo release from 88 Films is beautifully packaged and contains a reasonably good commentary track with Wes Craven, as well as a very interesting twenty minute interview with production designer Robb Wilson Kind in which he discusses the film's origin, influences and wider film production.

In addition to this an additional feature comes in the form of a seventeen minute video essay by the legendary Kim Newman who discusses further the context of the film, its cast and crew and source material. While the initial release comes with a slipcase, a pull out poster and photo booklet. Both the Blu-ray and DVD feature English subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing which is a nice touch and one in which 88 Films have done well to listen to fan feedback to include.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

SWAMP THING is out now on dual format **UK DVD** and **Blu-ray** courtesy of 88 Films.

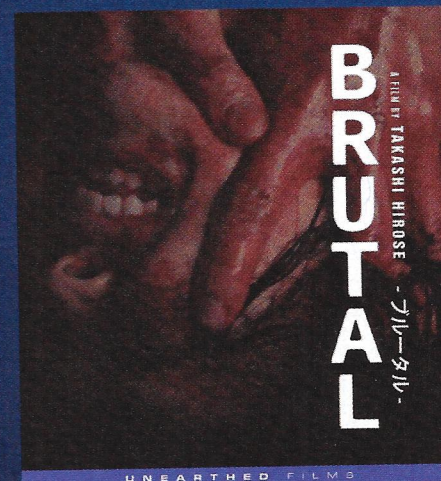
REVIEWED BY MAREK TURNER

BRUTAL

THE FILM: Takashi Hirose scares me. With *Brutal* he has crafted a sick love story which is savagely told through a wave after wave of wince-inspiring violence. In it, he tells the story of two murderers on the prowl in Japan. One male and one female. Both spend their time slashing their way through their victims using different MO's but both are looking for someone to share a deep-rooted emotional connection. However, this is not your average romantic comedy. Not by any means. In fact, it is an experience of brutality that will test the strongest of stomachs.

Here, Hirose deserves a round of applause for his efforts. *Brutal* is a raw slice of visual filmmaking that harnesses everything associated with extreme violence and frames the film with a Grindhouse aesthetic. The film itself is split into three chapters. In the first chapter, audiences witness the man's murderous exploits whilst he tortures and murders several women after none of them is able to share his emotional needs. The second act follows the woman as she refuses to be anyone's victim. It's after this in the third and final act where both murderers meet and this sparks off one hell of a jaw-dropping climax.

Although its visual effects are achieved in-camera, Hirose's execution is a bit messy. Thankfully the cast makes up for this. They make every stab, slice, cut and choke feel wholly authentic and I am here for it. Speaking of which the cast is led by Ayano and Butch. Ayano plays the Woman and Butch plays the Man. Although their previous works and surnames are a complete mystery to me, I was thoroughly impressed with the raw intensity that both actors bring to their work. Butch's character is deeply haunted and unhinged whereas Ayano's character is quiet but deadly. When their worlds collide, it's the audience who are in for one hell of a treat.



As a whole, I was completely blindsided and ultimately left revolted by this film. I'm not so sure that it's grindhouse treatment was needed in the end. However, there's plenty of other stuff to be experienced here but if you are of a nervous disposition, maybe this film for you. But, if watching one violent scene after another is your jam, *Brutal* is exactly what you need.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

SPECIAL FEATURES: On this disc from Uearthed Films, *Brutal* comes with a handful of extras aside from the usual

collection of Trailers for other Unerthed Films titles (including a very brief trailer for Brutal). Meanwhile, the features of the disc include a very brief behind the scene featurette. It is brief at best but it gives a peek behind the camera to show the cast and crew who clearly had a lot of fun making this film. However, this is completely assumed as there are no cast and crew interviews to back this up. Rounding up the extras on this disc, we have three music videos for "Nakigoto", "Brutal" and "Blood". None of them play to my personal taste but if you're a fan of k-pop or rap then you should find yourself suitably entertained.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

BRUTAL is out now on **US DVD** and **Blu-ray** courtesy of Unerthed Films.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON

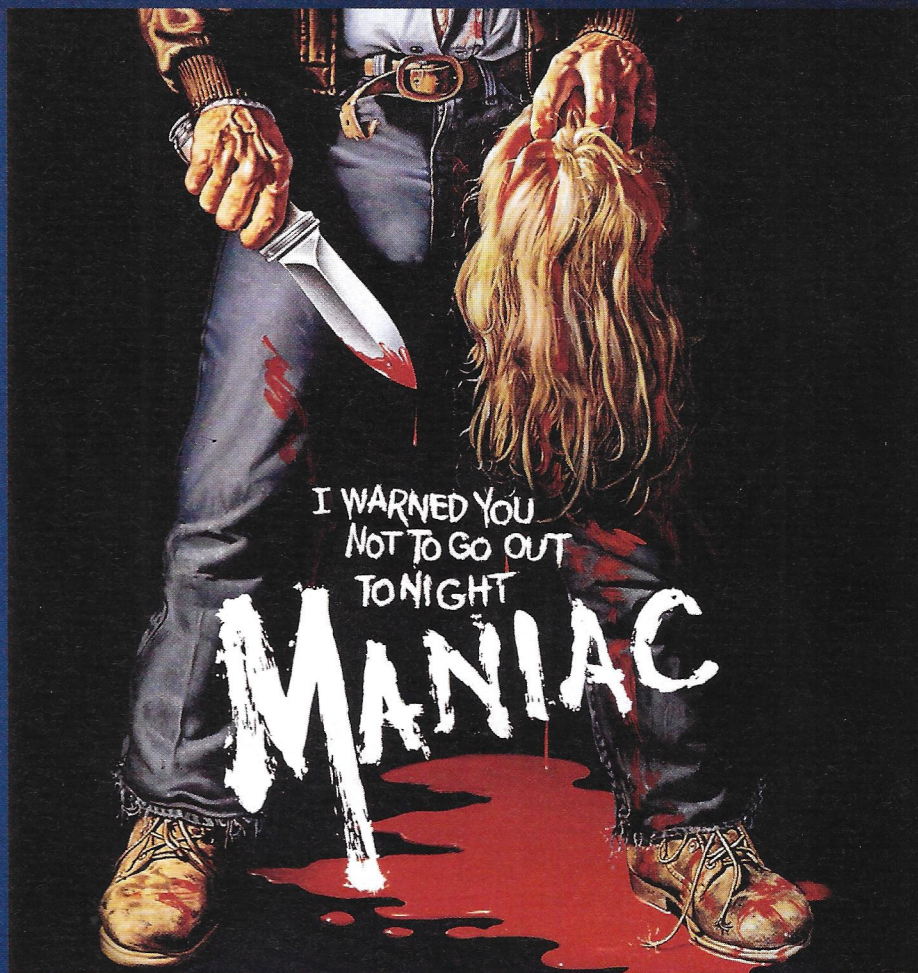
MANIAC

THE FILM: William Lustig's iconic horror Maniac is infamous for its violence and the hysteria that was whipped up by the media shortly after its release. Maniac is the story of a psychotic man called Frank as he stalks the streets of New York at night killing young women and keeping their scalps as trophies. However, after a chance meeting with a young female photographer, Frank continues his struggle to keep his murderous intentions at bay.

Dark, savage and unnerving, Maniac is not by any means an easy watch. With it, Lustig has delivered one of the most disturbing films to ever come out of the 80s. As a whole, it is a very nasty viewing experience that most modern filmmakers wouldn't dare replicate. That said, there is something special at work here. Lustig's depicts every violent act in the most responsible approach possible. Every bit of its violence is ugly and despite Tom Savini's exploding head, it can be argued that there's nothing exploitative with the way it handles its violence.

Elsewhere in the film, the cast are just as effective. Jo Spinelli plays Frank, the film's titular Maniac. He is fantastic and his depiction of the character is both disturbing and unpredictable. Joining him on screen is Caroline Munro as Anna, the photographer who starts a relationship with Spinelli's Frank. During their time together the film takes an unexpected tonal shift that serves as a stark contrast to the film's darker scenes. It is during this constant contrast where the film continues to keep audiences on the edge of their seats throughout.

Overall, I am not surprised that so many people have continued to have



issues with this film. Again, it's nasty and Lustig is hardly a tactful filmmaker. Some call it misogynistic. Some call it tasteless. However, I think Maniac is a powerful film thanks to the incredible performance by the cast and stunning effects work by Tom Savini. So, if you can look beyond its controversy, you'd be doing yourself a favour by checking it out in this glorious 4k restoration.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: Blue Underground has killed it with this amazing presentation. Offering fans a stunning range of extras to consume. There's plenty of content to be enjoyed and it begins with two fantastic audio commentaries with Lustig and other members of cast and crew. Also included with the disc are several trailers for the film including a large volume of radio and TV spots. Although the trailers are somewhat repetitive it's interesting to see how Lustig attempted to market the film to mass audiences.

On the second disc, fans can look forward to a bevy of featurettes lasting over 2 hours. First, there is a blooper reel that was recovered from previously unseen 16mm footage. Beyond that, you can look forward to in-depth interviews with Caroline Munro, Tom Savini and Composer Jay Chattaway. Each interview

provides a deeper understanding of what it took to bring the film to life and the effect it had on their lives after it was released.

However, a personal highlight of the second disc is the Maniac Men featurette. In it, William Lustig meets up with Songwriters Michael Sembello and Dennis Matkosky. Their hit Maniac might have been written for Flashdance but for many years it has been rumoured that Matkosky and Sembello actually wrote Maniac for Lustig's movie. What happens next is truly superb.

Rounding up the extras, Blue Underground has also included a bevy of publicity appearances and news clips of the media hysteria that rocked the world upon the release of the film. These additions may be brief but they go to great lengths to show the determination of Lustig to make the film a success and the condemnation of it by the media. It's really fascinating to watch.

Throw in the CD soundtrack and a collectable booklet featuring a new essay by Michael Gingold, this is a must own Blu-ray for every Maniac fan out there.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

MANIAC is out now on **US Blu-ray** courtesy of Blue Underground.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON