

## “HUMANOIDS FROM THE DEEP” and “GALAXY OF TERROR” (DVD/Blu-ray Reviews)

Written by Michael Gingold

Tuesday, 16 November 2010 13:00

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Back when Alexandre Aja’s 3-D PIRANHA was released, the director told anyone who asked that his movie was *not* a remake of the 1978 Joe Dante/Roger Corman favorite of the same title. And as it turned out, he was absolutely right; his flick was more a redux of HUMANOIDS FROM THE DEEP, another Corman-produced aquatic-terror opus that Shout! Factory released alongside PIRANHA on disc while Aja’s film was heading for theaters.

The new PIRANHA only briefly seemed to aim for the combo of thrills and satire seen in Dante’s version, but wholeheartedly embraced HUMANOIDS’ aesthetic of spilled blood and exposed boobs. It’s one of two Corman features showcasing rapist monsters to arrive on DVD and Blu-ray under Shout!’s Roger Corman Cult Classics banner this year; the other was GALAXY OF TERROR (pictured above), a Holy Grail for ’80s-horror collectors thanks to its non-presence on any watchable form of U.S. video up till now. And wouldn’t you know it—in both cases, according to the filmmakers interviewed on the respective discs, the sexually assaultive beasts were Corman’s idea.



In the case of HUMANOIDS, all involved with the project thought they were making a straightforward creature feature called BENEATH THE DARKNESS, and were shocked—particularly director Barbara Peeters and star Ann Turkel—when the film came out as HUMANOIDS containing added explicit scenes (ordered by Corman and shot by 2nd-unit helmer James Sbardellati) of the breeder creatures pouncing on and mounting screaming naked victims. The film’s boundary-pushing premise was bluntly stated in the ads (“They hunt human women. Not for Killing. For mating”), and Shout!’s promise of an uncut edition suggested a lot more of this unsavory material would be on view. Yet this cut (an international version bearing the title MONSTER) is only 15 seconds longer than the one previously seen on New Horizons’ previous fullscreen DVD, and the extra material amounts solely to added gore in a decapitation scene. More notable is the quality of the presentation: The first-time-widescreen-in-the-U.S. transfer boasts rich colors and a very crisp image.

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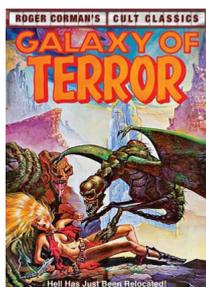
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There are a few deleted scenes—some lacking sound, and featuring additional nudity—included among the extras, which unfortunately do not include the type of historical commentary that has highlighted other Shout!/Corman titles (though under the circumstances, it's not surprising that Peeters and Turkel aren't on hand to speak about it). Compensating pretty well is a 22-minute making-of featurette in which a few of the cast and a number of behind-the-scenes personnel, including Sbardellati, editor Mark Goldblatt, then-fledgling composer James Horner and a few FX folks, along with Corman himself, reminisce about the piecemeal production. The reshoot process is a key subject, with actress Cynthia Weintraub noting that it turned HUMANOIDS into a “different film” (she herself had a body double for her shower scene), while Corman states—rather ironically in this context—his desire to showcase strong female characters in his films. There's also interesting discussion about how they all strove to make this project look and sound as good as possible on a budget that, we learn, only allowed for the creation of three humanoid suits and led Horner to record his score at night so union musicians could be paid non-union wages.

A brief Leonard Maltin interview with Corman has been ported over from the New Horizons disc, with the producer recalling the “powerful” audience reaction to HUMANOIDS and discussing the addition of humor to horror (again, seeming a little off-topic in this case). The discs are rounded out with trailers and poster/promo images from different countries, plus radio and TV spots and laudatory liner notes by Red Shirt Pictures' Michael Felsher.



Felsher deserves high praise himself for his work on the supplemental package accompanying GALAXY OF TERROR, which is remarkably dense, with practically everyone involved in the film represented somewhere or other. The one person whose absence is conspicuous but, again, not altogether surprising is James Cameron, whose early production design and FX contributions to GALAXY helped it stand out from the other ALIEN derivatives of the era. The story—astronauts on a mission to a strange planet where their deepest fears are turned violently against them—is boilerplate stuff and Bruce D. Clark's pacing is pokey, but there are plenty of striking and grisly visuals to hold the attention, plus a pretty amazing and eccentric cast, led by '80s he-man Edward Albert and HAPPY DAYS/JOANIE LOVES CHACHI star Erin Moran and also including genre faves Robert Englund and Sid Haig, future softcore honcho Zalman King and veterans Grace Zabriskie and Ray Walston.

Previously available Stateside only on a murky fullscreen VHS, *GALAXY* has been restored for Shout!'s disc in a very good-looking 1.78:1 transfer that pushes the low-budget visuals as far as they can go. While none of the major players took part in the audio commentary for this one, it's still a rollicking recollection by actress Taaffe O'Connell (the victim of the notorious giant sex-crazed maggot creature who still has a pretty funny attitude about shooting that encounter), FX artists Alec Gillis (who followed Cameron to *ALIENS*) and Allan Apone (who had the sergeant character in Cameron's sequel named after him) and filmmaker David DeCoteau, who started his career and wore many hats on the *GALAXY* shoot and is full of anecdotes; his revelation of how Albert wound up cast in the lead is priceless.

Here, as elsewhere on the disc, it's made clear that *GALAXY* was really Cameron's show, with Corman going straight to him when the producer would visit the set; apparently, Cameron's well-known volatile side was evident even back then (which may be the reason one creature was modeled after him!). These are among the many, many "Tales from the Lumber Yard" told in the six-part documentary—named after the location of Corman's studio—that collects interviews with the entire *GALAXY* of stars and filmmakers and festoons them with behind-the-scenes images. Like *HUMANOIDS*, this movie was cast and shot under a more benign title (*QUEST*, after its central spacecraft), and though money was once again tight and the sets were ramshackle, the actors all recall that it was marked by great camaraderie and retain fond memories of each other. Englund even recalls Zabriskie as a "cougar"! That nasty maggot was one of the few major bones of contention; Clark and his co-scripter Marc Siegel nearly walked off the project when Corman added it to the film's bestiary, and co-editor R.J. Kizer reveals that both the "intensity of the sound effects" and O'Connell's moments of "erotic rhapsody" initially landed *GALAXY* an X rating.

Elsewhere, there's an amazing assortment of on-set snapshots, production and concept art by Cameron and others, foreign lobby cards and other promotional art, including black-and-white films bearing both of the movie's alternate release titles (*PLANET OF HORRORS* and *MINDWARP: AN INFINITY OF TERROR*). Former *Rue Morgue* editor Jovanka Vuckovic sings *GALAXY*'s praises in the liner notes, and the original screenplay can be downloaded as a DVD-ROM feature. Finally, we get some trailers and TV spots that add a little extra visual excitement—as if more was needed—from footage lifted out of Corman's previous space opera *BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS*.

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