

Herpetological Horrors No. 8

By Russ Case

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Lake Placid Movie Poster. "Placid" means "calm," so imagine the creative glee experienced by the people who titled this movie about a monstrous crocodile roaming a New England lake: "Lake Placid, get it? It's far from placid, what with a giant people-eating croc popping up everywhere! Can't you just feel the irony?"

Actually, Lake Placid is a real place, a resort area located in the Adirondacks in northeastern New York. There's also a Lake Placid in Florida. I don't know if either region has been plagued by a gigantic, voracious crocodile.

The plot of Lake Placid (1999 – geez, has it been 10 years already?) is typical: giant croc starts killing people, prompting an investigation by assorted characters (in this case a sheriff, paleontologist and a millionaire with a fascination for crocodiles) who are eventually confronted face-to-face by their elusive quarry. In between scenes of the investigation croc attacks occur, followed by the appearance of various body parts.

This is another reptile horror movie that doesn't take itself too seriously. With movies of this type, that's usually the best approach. Humor goes a long way toward making movies in this genre more fun. It can't always turn a killer reptile movie into a classic, however (from what I remember, I think Alligator comes the closest). For me, Lake Placid falls into the saw-it-once-and-that's-enough category. Others may disagree, for the movie appears to have done well enough to convince some studio suits to crank out a sequel, the TV movie Lake Placid 2. Thank goodness for the Sci Fi Channel, in giving all kinds of mediocre horror movies an outlet for equally mediocre (and worse) direct-to-TV sequels.

There is a bit of funny casting in Lake Placid, that of Betty White as a local who is sympathetic to the giant croc that's begun munching of townsfolk. Betty White is an outspoken animal-rights activist (I'm sure she supports HR 669...bah), and here she is championing the survival of a monster crocodile over her human neighbors. That's kind of funny.

Despite a certain level of mediocrity, Lake Placid is sort of fun and I suppose there are worse ways to spend an hour and a half (such as watching the previously discussed The Giant Gila Monster).

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