

Herpetological Horrors No. 11

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The Primeval Movie Poster. Make sure to check out the slideshow at the end of this blog too! When I decided to blog about Herpetological Horrors of the Silver Screen, I set out to focus primarily on only those movies that I have personally seen. In closing, I thought I'd wrap things up by throwing out – or would that be up? – a bunch of other reptile horror movies I was able to track down. I've seen some of these, but not all of them. For instance, though I did see *Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid*, I never roused myself to bother watching the third and fourth movies in the "classic" Anaconda series.

Movies featuring gigantic crocodilians and gigantic snakes are the undisputed leaders of the pack in regard to horror films that feature reptile antagonists. I suppose that's hardly surprising, since these creatures are considered by the general public as the most fearsome (though to that I would add venomous snakes, the third runner-up in regard to the overall number of horror movies that have featured them). If the animals in question have been genetically mutated, resulting in extra big, venomous and otherwise deadly creatures, so much the better.

In addition to *Alligator* (discussed in my May 23 blog) and *Lake Placid* (May 27 blog), other crocodilian terrors include *Killer Crocodile* (1989, also known as *Murder Alligator*), *Lake Placid 2* (a 2007 made-for-TV sequel), *Crocodile* (2000; interestingly, directed by Tobe Hooper, the director of the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), *Blood Surf* (2001; also known as *Krocodylus*; check out the wacky poster art in the slideshow below) and *Primeval* (2007).

Primeval takes its inspiration from *Gustave*, a real-life killer croc said to be marauding around in Africa for years, having reportedly killed hundreds of people. *Gustave* haunts Lake Tanganyika (a lake also populated by many of the most popular freshwater African cichlids), and he has achieved mythic proportions. He's like an African Loch Ness monster, but a monster that eats lots of people.

ReptileChannel member Brian mentioned *Frog-g-g* (2004). I'm curious how the filmmakers want this pronounced; would it be, "Frog, ugh, ugh?" Is it meant to sound like a ribbit? I'm not sure, but it looks funny in print. And speaking of funny in print, check out the *Frog-g-g* poster – it's a wacky one, but my favorite anthropomorphic herp humanoid has still got to be the guy-gator of *The Alligator People* (see May 28 blog for a photo).

Snakewise, there are the Anaconda sequels -- three so far! -- *Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid* (2004), *Anaconda 3* (made for TV in 2008) and *Anaconda 4: Trail of Blood* (2009, also made for TV). Four Anaconda movies in all... geez. It looks like this franchise is the most popular in the herp horror world by far.

In addition to the four Anaconda movies, other snake flicks include *Snakes* (1974), *King Cobra* (1999), *She sha shou* (1975; Chinese; also known as *The Killer Snakes*), *Python* (2000) and *Python 2* (2002).

In the world of reptile horror films, turtles and tortoises are severely underrepresented. I suppose filmmakers think there's just no way to make a gentle chelonian threatening. About the only thing you could do is have the turtle be a giant monster that is capable of flying by spinning, accomplishing this by pulling in its rear legs and shooting out jets of fire. Then send it to attack Tokyo. That's exactly what the Japanese did when they made *Gamera the Invincible* (1965). *Gamera* started out all mean and intent on stomping buildings. In later films he was one of the "good guy" monsters that would save Earth from evil monsters. This might be a good time for me to mention that my brother once owned a mata-mata, which I took it upon myself to name *Gamera* (oh yeah, I loved Japanese monster movies – my all-time favorite was *Destroy All Monsters*).

The only other monster turtle I've ever seen was a huge prehistoric one – an *Archelon* species, which is an actual prehistoric genus of extinct sea turtle -- that menaced Raquel Welch in *One Million Years B.C.* (1966). Here I have to give a shout-out to Ray Harryhausen, monster-maker extraordinaire. Back before computer effects, Harryhausen provided stop-motion animation of an amazing arsenal of creatures over the course of a series of great films, including *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, *Jason and the Argonauts*, *20,000,000 Miles to Earth* and many other classic fantasy films. I've met him a few times and he's a true gentleman, but I will admit the giant turtle from *One Million Years B.C.* was not one of

his most impressive creations.

On the subject of prehistoric creatures, of course it was common practice to glue fins and spikes onto real lizards, such as tegus, and use them in dinosaur movies of the 1960s. Some movies that fit this mold are One Million BC (1940, not to be confused with One Million Years B.C. and its far superior dinosaurs) and The Lost World (1960). Personally, back then I liked my dinosaurs model-animated, like those in One Million Years B.C., King Kong (1933) and The Valley of Gwangi (1969; Harryhausen again). I always thought attaching junk to lizards looked really stupid. Of course, Jurassic Park eventually came along in 1993 and blew every other dinosaur movie ever made out of the water.

As for anurans, frogs and toads, too, don't figure in many horror films. Frogs, the 1972 movie that kicked off this blog series (see May 20 blog), is pretty much the only one that casts hoppers in their actual form (as opposed to the mutant Frog-g-g, mentioned earlier). The only other horror film that I can think of that featured an actual anuran in any form is The Maze (1953), in which one of the characters turns into a giant toad. It was a really boring movie that originally was presented in theaters in 3-D.

In a league of her own among reptile scarefests is Jacqueline Pearce in The Reptile (1966). This movie came from Hammer Studios, an English outfit that made a name for itself in the 1950s when it began cranking out extravagant, colorful and much more violent versions of old classic horror chestnuts featuring Dracula and Frankenstein (the 1958 Hammer version of Dracula, called The Horror of Dracula, remains my favorite Dracula movie). In The Reptile, Pearce plays a woman who is cursed by a tribe of snake worshippers, and ever after turns into a snake creature complete with bulging eyes and fangs. She sheds her skin, and people she bites turn black and die. From what I remember it was an atmospheric little chiller, and the makeup was pretty startling for its time. It's still somewhat creepy; check out the slideshow below for a photo and decide for yourself.

With The Reptile my Herpetological Horrors of the Silver Screen blog series comes to an end. I've loaded you up with lots of great ideas for future DVD viewing, as long as you don't mind entertainment of the cheesiest variety. Remember, some of these movies are halfway decent and fairly entertaining (in my opinion, Alligator is probably the best; Anaconda is pretty fun, too). I wouldn't say any deserve an Academy Award, but what the heck, they all feature reptiles and as such, deserve a special place in any herper's heart.

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