

## Fango Flashback: “SHOCK WAVES”

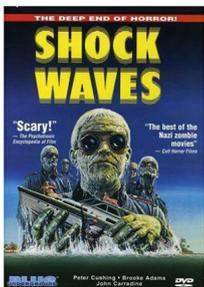
Written by John Payne

Saturday, 23 October 2010 07:45

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In the throes of the Second World War, according to Ken Wiederhorn’s 1977 cult favorite SHOCK WAVES, Nazi Germany began a project to create the ultimate soldier: a warrior who could subsist in any environment and have the strength of a dozen men. The monstrosity they concocted was known as the Death Corps (or Toten Corps).



For each campaign of battle, the SS created a special squad of undead creatures; in particular, the aquatic division (led by a commander played by the venerable Peter Cushing) was meant to pilot U-boats for months at a time without ever needing to resurface. However, when their ship inexplicably sank, the supersoldiers were lost to the murky waters, and their leader took up residence on a nearby tropical island. When a boat (piloted by the great John Carradine) clips the wreckage of the SS craft and the passengers/crew become stranded on the island, all hell breaks loose and the shriveled ghouls rise from their watery graves.

Unlike George A. Romero’s cannibalistic walking corpses, these prefer to brutally strangle and drown their hapless victims. But whatever shock value is lost via the lack of gut-munching is made up for by the sheer tenacity of the monsters—who, in pursuit of their targets, smash through anything in their way with their superstrength. It’s a different approach to the zombie genre, but the idea of their rotting grey hands dragging you under the muddy waters can be just as creepy as flesheating.

Beyond their technique, the look of SHOCK WAVES’ zombies is just plain unnerving. Their pale, wrinkled skin, ominous black goggles, wet blond hair matted on their skulls, soaked grey SS uniforms... All this as they slowly but surely creep up from beneath the ocean’s surface.

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The look of the film itself is effective as well. Having been shot in the late '70s, the film stock is a little rough and some of the colors aren't quite as crisp as they could be, but this just adds to the atmosphere. In terms of acting, most viewers will check the movie out to see horror vets Cushing and Carradine, who do quite well in their roles. Unfortunately, Carradine was getting quite old at the time, and if you watch closely, you can see how bad his arthritis was affecting him, especially during a dinner scene early on in the film. That said, he handles himself surprisingly well, especially given that the production shot on a moving boat and other difficult locations. It was bold of him to go for such a film in his state, and his presence brings a lot to the table.



Cushing, as the slightly mad and scar-faced commander, holds his own as well, and is very convincing. I'd like to think that if I ever stumbled upon a derelict hotel complex and it was inhabited by someone, that man would be Cushing. As for the rest of the acting, it's about what you would expect. Some of it is acceptable, but sometimes you can't help but cringe at the delivery of lines during points in the story that would normally be scary or tense. I was more impressed by co-star Luke Halpin's mustache than anything regarding his performance.

But the quality of the acting is not why people see movies such as SHOCK WAVES. If you're looking for shock value and scares, you can't go wrong with this one. It doesn't get as much credit as Romero's movies, but is just as strong a zombie film. It's available on DVD from Blue Underground, featuring commentary by Wiederhorn and others and more special features.



{comments on}

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