

= Attack of the Alligators ! =

" Attack of the Alligators ! " is the 23rd episode of Thunderbirds , a British 1960s Supermarionation television series co -@-@ created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson . One of the final episodes of Series One , it was written by Alan Pattillo and directed by David Lane , and was first broadcast on ATV Midlands on 10 March 1966 . In this episode , set in South America , alligators grow to an enormous size after a swamp is contaminated by a newly invented growth chemical . When the animals proceed to attack a house , International Rescue must save the occupants trapped inside .

Combining science @-@ fiction and haunted house horror themes , with a plot written to be " nightmarish " , the episode was filmed in late 1965 . It is remembered for containing footage of actual crocodiles , doubling as re @-@ sized alligators on scale model sets ? the first appearance of live animals in an Anderson production . However , the animals ' slowness and unpredictability complicated and delayed the filming , which involved the use of electric shocks to induce movement from the crocodiles . Although the AP Films Studios were briefly investigated by the RSPCA , animal abuse allegations were not upheld .

A critic and fan favourite , despite the controversy of its production , " Attack of the Alligators " is commonly ranked as one of the best episodes of Thunderbirds . Since the filming of this episode and a later instalment , " The Cham @-@ Cham " , went over @-@ time and over @-@ budget , the series finale was re @-@ written as a clip show to lower costs and simplify the shooting schedule . Ten years after first airing , " Attack of the Alligators ! " provided the inspiration for an episode of The New Avengers , by ex @-@ Thunderbirds scriptwriter Dennis Spooner .

= = Plot = =

A businessman , Blackmer , visits the reclusive Dr Orchard , a scientist who lives in a remote house on the Ambro River in South America . From the local plant *Sidonicus americanus* , Orchard has developed a food additive called Theramine ; if administered to animals , the chemical causes them to grow beyond their original size . Enlargement of animal stock would offer a simple solution to world famine and present other economic advantages . Blackmer 's boatman , Culp , eavesdrops on the meeting . After a storm forces Blackmer to stay at the house for the night , Culp resolves to steal the Theramine and sell it to the highest bidder . Waiting until the other occupants fall asleep , he steals the keys to Orchard 's laboratory from the housekeeper , Mrs Files . While filling a vial with a quantity of the chemical , Culp accidentally knocks the rest of the supply into a sink , and the Theramine drains into the Ambro River .

Shortly after Blackmer and Culp depart the next morning , their boat is attacked by an alligator , now enlarged because of the contamination . Orchard 's assistant , Hector McGill , manages to rescue Blackmer , but Culp is believed killed . The house is quickly surrounded by three giant alligators , which throw themselves at the building with Orchard , McGill , Blackmer and Mrs Files trapped inside . On the advice of Mrs Files , McGill contacts International Rescue and John (voiced by Ray Barrett) alerts Tracy Island . Jeff (Peter Dyneley) dispatches Thunderbirds 1 and 2 . Arriving at the scene , Scott (Shane Rimmer) briefly dispels the reptiles with his hoverjet cannon and accesses the house through the laboratory window . Eventually the laboratory caves in , forcing Scott and the others to move to the lounge . There , the group is confronted by none other than Culp , who survived the alligator attack and holds them at gunpoint .

Virgil (David Holliday) arrives in Thunderbird 2 and scatters the alligators with aircraft 's vertical landing jets . Alan (Matt Zimmerman) and Gordon (David Graham) subdue two of the animals with heavy @-@ duty tranquiliser guns . When the third returns to the house , Alan exits Thunderbird 2 on a hoverjet to lure the alligator away . He collides with a tree and falls from the hoverjet , but is saved by Gordon , who shoots the oncoming alligator before it can attack Alan . Culp threatens to empty the whole Theramine vial into the Ambro River unless he is granted safe passage upstream . Launching Thunderbird 4 , Gordon encounters a fourth , far larger reptile that ravages Blackmer 's boat and stops Culp . Virgil disposes of the creature with a missile fired from Thunderbird 2 . Although it is feared at first that the vial has been smashed , Gordon retrieves it from the riverbed

intact . Later , on Tracy Island , Jeff announces that Theramine will be subject to international security restrictions , and Culp will be going to jail . Tin @-@ Tin (Christine Finn) has been away on a shopping trip and has bought Alan a present for his upcoming birthday ? a pygmy alligator .

= = Production = =

Inspiration for " Attack of the Alligators ! " was derived partly from H. G. Wells ' 1904 novel The Food of the Gods and How It Came to Earth , in which animal re @-@ sizing is a major theme . Another source was the 1927 film The Cat and the Canary and its 1939 re @-@ make , both of which feature haunted house premises and stalkers . Scriptwriter Alan Pattillo , who according to special effects director Derek Meddings " had tried to come up with the most nightmarish rescue situation he could " , wanted to direct the episode as well ; the position was ultimately given to David Lane . " Attack of the Alligators ! " was filmed in October and November 1965 , overrunning its one @-@ month shooting window and forcing the production staff to work overtime , and sometimes long into the night , to complete the recording . Ian Wingrove , a special effects technician for AP Films , remembers that the episode 's complex technical aspects resulted in the crew " [working] day and night ... through a weekend " .

Although it was series co @-@ creator and producer Gerry Anderson 's original plan to film with actual alligators , AP Films instead acquired a group of juvenile crocodiles from a private zoo in northern England ; these would double as re @-@ sized alligators on scale model sets and water tanks . With the exception of a five @-@ foot (1 @.@ 5 m) specimen , which was too aggressive to be removed from its box , the animals were three feet (0 @.@ 91 m) long . The crew kept the on @-@ set water tanks heated to a suitably warm temperature and used electric shocks to induce movement from the reptiles . They were unpredictable and very difficult to control and film , either bathing in the heat of the studio lights or disappearing into the tanks and remaining submerged for hours . To make the crocodiles more visible to the cameras , the crew fixed them to guiding rods and co @-@ ordinated their movements . The heavy presence of the animals in both puppet and scale model shots resulted in a closer @-@ than @-@ normal degree of collaboration between the puppet and effects crews .

Objecting on animal welfare grounds , effects director Brian Johnson was one of several crewmembers who refused to participate in the production . Camera operator Alan Perry has no memory of ill treatment ; series supervising director Desmond Saunders , however , recalls that more than one crocodile died of pneumonia after being left overnight in an un @-@ heated tank . Director David Elliott , though filming a different episode at the time , remembers that another dislocated a limb after receiving an unexpected jolt from a shocker . Puppet operator Christine Glanville admitted that the filming could not have been a pleasant experience for the " guest stars " , since the tanks were " filled with all sorts of dirty paint water , oil and soapy water to make it look swampy . " Saunders comments : " It was scandalous . It was one of the great episodes . Nevertheless there was a price to be paid for it . "

Concerns over the animals ' safety prompted an anonymous telephone call to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) , which dispatched a representative . Initial tests with shocking had yielded disappointing results , necessitating an increase in voltage . According to Anderson , " Meddings explained that his team were laying the crocodiles down and they weren 't doing anything . They were just lying there . The RSPCA man said , well , they would , because of the warmth of the lamps . So Derek said , ' We 've been giving them a touch with an electrode just to make them move . ' The guy asked what voltage they were using and Derek said it was about 20 volts , and the guy said , ' Oh , they 've got terribly thick skins , you know . If you want them to move , you 'll have to pump it up to 60 . ' " Following an initial investigation of AP Films Studios , the allegations of mistreatment were not pursued further ; the RSPCA officer later joined the crocodiles ' handler in assisting with the filming .

Filming involving the reptiles frequently proved to be hazardous . During a promotional shoot with Supermarionation puppets , one of the crocodiles suddenly grabbed the Lady Penelope marionette (which does not appear in the episode) and , to the upset of Glanville , ripped apart one the legs .

During the filming of a scene in which an alligator swims after a boat , Meddings was using a rope to guide the crocodile forwards when it was discovered that the animal had slipped out of its harness ; in his book , 21st ? Century Visions , Meddings wrote of the incident : " My crew never saw me move as fast as I did to get out of the tank when I pulled the rope and realised the creature was free . " Of the largest crocodile , which was wetted with damp strips at the back of the stage while un @-@ used , Wingrove recalls : " You would forget that it was there , then one day someone shouted ' Look out ! ' and we turned round to see this big crocodile walking across the stage ? which cleared of people very quickly ! "

= = Broadcast = =

" Attack of the Alligators ! " achieved ratings of 4 @.@ 78 million viewers for its BBC2 network broadcast on 20 March 1992 . The BBC repeated Thunderbirds in 2001 , a year known for a number of major rail accidents in the UK (notably the Great Heck rail crash ; others occurred in Tisbury , Wiltshire and Hither Green , Lewisham , London) . Consequently , it was decided to delay the transmission of the episodes " The Perils of Penelope " and " Brink of Disaster " (both of which feature disasters involving trains) until the end of the broadcast schedule . " Attack of the Alligators ! " substituted for " Brink of Disaster " , and was the 11th episode to be repeated on BBC Two .

= = Reception = =

" Attack of the Alligators ! " , a popular instalment , is widely considered to be one of the best episodes of Thunderbirds . It is series co @-@ creator Sylvia Anderson 's favourite episode , while commentator Stephen La Rivière judges the plot to be one of the most unusual of the series . Lew Grade , head of distributor ITC , expressed high satisfaction with the filming during a visit to AP Films Studios in 1965 .

In 2004 , " Attack of the Alligators ! " was re @-@ issued on Region 1 DVD as part of A & E Video 's The Best of Thunderbirds : The Favorite Episodes , whose content was selected based on the results of a fan poll hosted on the A & E website . In a review for the website DVD Verdict , David Gutierrez awarded " Attack of the Alligators ! " a perfect score of 100 , judging it the best of the collection and praising its production values : " It 's like a beautifully directed short film " . He elaborated : " ' Attack of the Alligators ! ' serves as a terrific example of how strong Thunderbirds can look . It 's not Howdy Doody sporting a jetpack ? it 's an hour @-@ long programme that feels like a motion picture . "

Susanna Lazarus of Radio Times argues that the episode is memorable specifically for the alligator footage . The techniques used to produce the animal sequences have resulted in the episode being considered " controversial " by some sources . Mark Pickavance of the website Den of Geek is critical from a visual standpoint , suggesting that the use of scale sets and young crocodiles , " shot in super close @-@ up to make them seem huge " , does not produce a convincing illusion of giant , re @-@ sized alligators . Author Dave Thompson relates the giant reptile plot to Swamp Thing , a hybrid superorganism featured in the DC Comics Universe .

Since " Attack of the Alligators ! " and " The Cham @-@ Cham " exceeded their allotted budgets , the scriptwriters re @-@ wrote the Series One finale to be a clip show , " Security Hazard " . A shot of a stormy sky , present at the start of the episode , later introduced the opening titles of the TV series The Prisoner . In 1976 , Thunderbirds writer Dennis Spooner adapted the premise of " Attack of the Alligators ! " for an episode of The New Avengers ; the episode " Gnaws " features a wild rat , which grows to an enormous size after drinking from a water source contaminated by a dangerous chemical .