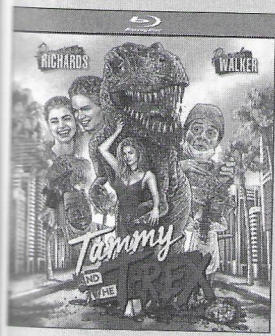


## TAMMY AND THE T-REX

Directed by Stewart Raffill  
(1994) Vinegar Syndrome  
4K/ Blu-Ray/DVD combo



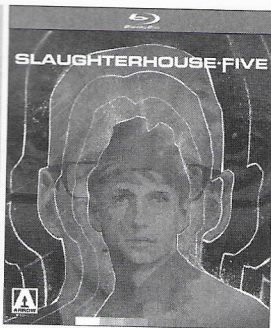
Stewart Raffill gained critical favor for such cult sleepers as 1981's *High Risk* and 1984's *The Ice Pirates*; though not so much for 1988's notorious *Mac and Me* or 1991's *Mannequin 2: On the Move*. Never one to settle comfortably into the mainstream, Raffill carried on with various odd adventures—including one that proved impossible to see in its original form for some twenty-five years after the fact. Providing the first feature lead roles for two young up-and-comers as it did, the film best known as *Tammy and the T-Rex* stayed on the radar (and played steadily on cable), often to the chagrin of parents who thought they'd entertain their youngsters with a cute "girl and her dinosaur" romp as suggested by the title . . .

Now, about that title. The onscreen moniker (of the restored uncut version) actually reads as *Tanny & the Teenage T-Rex*, and perhaps that's only a sloppy typo, as the high-schooler played by Denise Richards certainly goes by "Tammy." In any event, TAMMY makes the mistake of having a pleasant conversation with her attractive classmate Michael (Paul Walker) on campus, earning the would-be-happy couple the violent wrath of Tammy's presumptive boyfriend Billy (George Pilgrim) and his goon squad. But an old-fashioned stomping isn't enough when Billy and the gang later catch Michael in Tammy's bedroom... long story short, a battered Michael finds himself stranded in a safari park and left to the mercy of the big cats! Hospitalized and at death's door, Michael's problems are far from over, as the mad, chain-smoking Dr. Wachenstein (Terry Kiser, the dead "Bernie" of a certain movie weekend himself) abruptly appoints himself Michael's personal physician and finishes him off, the better to implant his brain into an animatronic dinosaur he just happens to be experimenting with. The newly-minted monster quickly escapes and starts on the vengeance trail, while Tammy and her pals attempt to find a new (human) body for Michael's gray matter.

There's scarcely any point in seeking good taste or "family entertainment" in such a deliberately demented scenario, but certain studio powers that be tried to attract that audience all the same and tame *Tammy* with a PG-13 rating, and that's the version we've always had until now. What was missing? Buckets and buckets of bloody practical effects courtesy of the late, great John Carl Buechler! Only a few lucky preview attendees in 1994 ever saw the legendary "gore" version, which was eventually given up for lost, but which has now been unearthed and fully restored in 4K by Vinegar Syndrome. This in itself ranks as a cause to celebrate for some; though how much it benefits the movie will remain up to the individual viewer. While the added grue certainly spices up the proceedings; *Tammy* still peters out well before the requisite running time is reached: the over-the-top mugging of the cast grows thin quickly, and the T-Rex catches up with its main nemesis far too soon, leaving the film to lumber along as it tries to figure out what to do for another half hour or so. And while the filmmakers could never have anticipated this, the shots of the dead Paul Walker character on his slab add a new element of discomfort for viewers mindful of the *Fast and Furious* actor's death via automobile accident at age 40.

If it's strictly the opportunity to see the restored footage that appeals to one, be aware that the version currently streaming on Showtime, while listed with a PG-13 rating, is actually the fully uncut edition. Vinegar Syndrome, however, has gone all out with the extras on *Tammy*, giving us a feature commentary with writer/director Raffill and producer Diane Kirman, new interview segments with Raffill, Denise Richards, George Pilgrim and Sean "Weasel" Whalen, and a VHS-derived print of the PG-13 version for comparison, making this quite worthwhile for completists. This is also the first title from Vinegar Syndrome available in the 4K format.

Shane M. Dallmann



## SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

Directed by George Roy Hill  
(1972) Arrow Video Blu-ray

Billy Pilgrim (Michael Sacks) has become "unstuck in time" and is being transported back and forth between random moments in his life, re-experiencing traumas great and small: his harrowing experiences as a Nazi POW camp; becoming resigned to a passionless marriage after the war; surviving a plane crash; being abducted by invisible aliens and taken to the distant planet Tralfamadore; and even his own death. That's the premise of Kurt Vonnegut's classic novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, adapted for the screen in 1972 by director George Roy Hill.

Vonnegut himself was pleased with the film version, which streamlines certain elements but remains remarkably faithful to the novel. "I love George Roy Hill and Universal Pictures, who made a flawless translation of my novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* to the silver screen," Vonnegut wrote. "I drool and cackle every time I watch that film, because it is so harmonious with what I felt when I wrote the book." Yet the novel proved to be a much bigger success than the movie, which nearly 40 years later has fallen into undeserved obscurity.

*Slaughterhouse-Five* is the kind of picture that could only have been made when it was made and only by the director who made it. It's essentially a mid-budget major studio art film—something unheard of today but still possible during the New Hollywood era in the early 1970s. Even then, it took a special set of circumstances for the project to come together. Universal Pictures gave Hill, fresh from the blockbuster success of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *carte blanche* with his next project in return for his signature on a three-picture deal with the studio. Executives must have been taken aback when Hill promptly selected Vonnegut's much-talked-about but seemingly un-filmable and non-commercial novel as his next movie, and then hired the unknown Sacks (rather than, say, Robert Redford or Paul Newman) to star. Nevertheless, the studio allotted Hill a relatively generous \$3.2 million budget, which covered shooting in Czechoslovakia, Minnesota, and California. Hill fleshed out his cast with character actors such as Ron Lieberman, Eugene Roche, and Sharon Gans better known for theater or television work that big-budget Hollywood movies. Only model-turned-actress Valerie Perrine (hardly a big name) had the kind of face major studios put on movie posters.

Novelist Stephen Geller's brilliant screenplay captures not only the structure of Vonnegut's novel but, more impressively, its delicately shifting tone—wistful, at points melancholy, yet also biting satirical and sometimes hilarious. Hill understood what Geller (and Vonnegut) wanted to achieve and possessed the craftsmanship to pull it off. The director had a chameleonic way of vanishing into the stories he told, in the same way a skilled character actor disappears into his roles. Hill wasn't concerned with personal style or directorial signatures, only with telling a good story. As a result, *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not look or feel like a movie from the guy who did *Butch Cassidy*, *The Sting* (1973) and *Slap Shot* (1977), even though it is. Among his works only Hill's *The World According to Garp* (1982) operates on anything similar to the wavelength of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which stands as the director's most sophisticated and arguably finest work.

The movie, which also boasts first-rate productions design and cinematography, as well as an excellent score by pianist Glenn Gould, won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and later snagged Hugo and Saturn Awards. But *Slaughterhouse-Five* was not a box office success.

In many respects, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a challenging film to watch. Its radical structure, featuring a disorienting series of flashbacks and flashforwards, demands the viewer's full attention. Even then, the meaning of certain scenes remains uncertain until the end of the film—or even until a second viewing. Also, Billy Pilgrim is not a traditional, driving Hollywood protagonist. He seems adrift in his own life; things happen *to* Billy, not *because* of him. This necessitated a flat, affectless performance by Sacks. His work here is excellent (it earned him a Golden Globe nomination), and he manages to suggest that Billy enjoys an active inner life even though his outward actions remain entirely passive. Still, this was neither the kind of narrative nor the sort of "hero" viewers were used to seeing or could readily identify with. The supporting performances are vivid, but most of the roles are simple caricatures, especially the two women in Billy's wife—his clinging, overweight wife (Gans) and a Hollywood pin-up girl (Perrine) transported with him to Tralfamadore. The film's most memorable supporting performances come from Roach as his wartime friend Edgar Derby and Lieberman as his longstanding nemesis, Lazzaro. But all the things that make *Slaughterhouse-Five* difficult also make it wonderful, at least for viewers willing to step outside their comfort zone.

Arrow Video offers the film in a spanking new 4K restoration from the original 35 mm negative, presented in 1080p, 1.85:1. Picture quality is breathtaking, with crisp image definition (with just enough grain to seem genuinely filmic) and natural-looking color. The lossless mono sound also delivers the goods. Optional closed captions are included as well.

As is the rule for Arrow, this release also includes a boatload of bonus features. These are headlined by an audio commentary from Troy Howarth. The subject would seem to be outside of Howarth's wheelhouse, since he's best known as an expert on European exploitation films, but *Slaughterhouse-Five* turns out to be one of his best commentaries, packed with information and insight. The disc also includes five interviews: Genre scholar Kim Newman provides an excellent 20-minute appreciation of the film; actor Perry King, who plays Billy's son in the film, recounts his experiences in connection with the movie; Rocky Lang, the son of producer Jennings Lang, provides an inside look at how the project came together; Robert Crawford Jr., who was hired by Hill to shoot a (sadly unfinished) documentary about the making of the film, also discusses its production; and music historian Daniel Schweiger discusses Gould's work. Finally, the package includes the film's not-very-effective theatrical trailer, which may also explain the picture's underwhelming box office performance.

Mark Clark