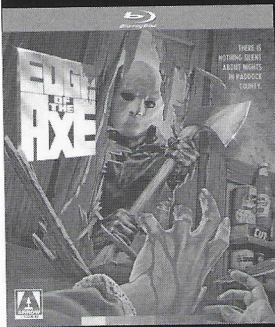


EDGE OF THE AXE

Directed by José Ramón Larraz
(1988) Arrow Video Blu-ray



Director José Ramón Larraz is probably best known to U.S. Horror audiences for his 1974 lesbian vampire film *Vampyres* (a softcore classic about halfway between Hammer Films and Jean Rollin). By the late 80's Larraz's career had stalled a bit, only to rebound when he directed a trio of American-ized slasher films—*Edge of the Axe* (1988), *Rest in Pieces* (1988) and *Deadly Manor* (1990), all under one of his various pseudonyms, Joseph Braunstein.

In small-town Paddock County, California (in establishing shots only, as Madrid does a reasonable job of filling in for the Pacific Northwest) a prostitute turns up hacked to pieces. When more women turn up killed the very same way, even Sheriff Macintosh (Fred Holliday, *Lobster Man from Mars*) will have to admit there's a serial killer at large. Our young protagonists are Gerald (Barton Faulks, *Futurekill*) and Lillian (Christina Marie Lane), two computer game nerd lovebirds who just may be able to unlock the killer's identity using some state-of-the-art 1988 computer skills. Several red herrings and a switcheroo climax will make your head spin, and you probably will not see it coming.

It may not be a bona fide classic of the slasher genre, but it's got some atmosphere and the axe kills are well-staged and gory (courtesy of fx artist Colin Arthur, *Conan the Barbarian*, *The Rift*). The pacing is a bit odd and sometimes it starts to feel like a tv soap opera, but the opening scene is absolutely amazing, with the white-mask-and-trenchcoat-wearing axe murderer doing his thing at a car wash. Arrow Video's Blu-ray is a 1.85:1 widescreen transfer from a 2k scan of the original camera negative and looks incredible.

English and Spanish mono versions are playable via branching, with separate opening and closing credits (the English track is the production track so it is preferred, but the Spanish version gives Larraz's real name in the Spanish credits).

Two audio commentaries are included: one with actor Barton Faulks and podcaster Matt Rosenblatt; a second with podcasters The Hysteria Continues. Faulks sounds genuinely surprised and pleased that the film has a following, and recounts his positive experiences on the shoot. Faulks also appears in an interview featurette "Gerald's Game", which covers some of the same ground. Another interview featurette, "The Actor's Grind", is with actor Page Moseley (who plays Gerald's friend Richard). "The Pain in Spain" is a short interview with makeup artist Colin Arthur, who recounts his work on this film and on *Conan the Barbarian*, which was his introduction to Spain. English and Spanish theatrical trailers and an image gallery are also included.

Lee Peterson



KONGA

Directed by John Lemont
(1961) Kino Lorber Blu-ray / D

By most objective criteria, *Konga* is not a good film, yet of entertainment, both in the "so bad it's good" category, and supercilious performance by Michael Gough.

While the 1950s was a "giant monster" decade in cinema, noticeably absent from the screen. Producer Herman Cohen, dancing in his head, decided to break this anti-primate p insurance policy by paying for the rights to mention *King* campaign—but eschewed stop-motion animation. Col

American producers the King Brothers were almost simultaneously making another g UK, *Gorgo* (which went into production 7 months before *Konga* but was released a 1961), and that film also used the "man in a suit" (aka "suitmation") method, albeit to m

Botanist Dr. Charles Decker returns to England after spending a year lost in the brings with him a young chimpanzee named Konga and samples of exotic carnivorous: long-suffering assistant Margaret that he can provoke extreme growth in animals using his test subject, and soon becomes a full-sized gorilla. Decker hypnotizes Konga and officious college administrator, a rival scientist, and a male student who protests attentions to Sandra, a blonde student who always wears a tight sweater. Irritated at D her in for a younger model, Margaret jealously injects Konga with more grow-juice and

The script for *Konga* contains a number of interesting aspects. Dr. Decker, while an unusual motivation: he is not bent on world conquest or accumulating pers inadvertently causing harm by trying to "save" the world (by conquering hunger, for in personal revenge for prior slights (see Bela Lugosi in *The Devil Bat*, etc.). Instead professional fame, for his scientific theories to be proven and thus earn him acclaim. be sure—those whom he personally dislikes, but he didn't create Konga for this purpose.

The film tries to make this attitude slightly more believable by showing the exagg scientists are regarded in the *Konga*-universe. Decker's disappearance in the African j a year are afforded banner headlines in London newspapers (as is the death of a interviewed by deferential and awestruck reporters as a major celebrity.

The relationship between Decker and his housekeeper-secretary-assistant-mistres more nuanced and adult than one might expect in a film of this sort. All she asks i devotion (and her silence about Decker's murderous use of Konga) is to marry her lon seemingly agrees, but when given proof of his insincerity, Margaret snaps. Simila atypical young lovers, and Bob's death comes as something of a surprise (and unclear: either she was eaten by a plant or not).

Michael Gough's film career began in the 1940s, but he's chiefly remembered to roles and as Alfred Pennyworth in four *Batman* films from 1989-1997. Herman Cohen author in *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959), which led to villainous roles in Cohen Zoo (1965). Gough is quite good in the role of Decker, smarmy and superior, brusque Margaret and his students but blatantly lying with a straight face when the occasion c Margaret turns in a fine performance as well, garnering considerable sympathy i mistress-assistant who puts up with his ambition, personality flaws and murderous a made "a honest woman" in the eyes of the community. The rest of the cast is sat Gordon as Sandra is perversely cast as a sexy college student who "only cares about

The scientific details in *Konga* are, unsurprisingly, ludicrous, although the "insta avoidance of basic physical reality (where did Konga's extra mass come from?) are s pop culture gigantism tales (*The Amazing Colossal Man*, the Hulk, etc.). There's no lo Decker's plant extracts—basically super-fertilizer—and the process of causing grow as valid as "radiation" as a filmic *deus ex machina*.

The script for *Konga* is also cluttered with various time-wasting sequences presentation consisting of African stock-footage, and a mostly pointless field trip by D

Advertising for *Konga* logically played up the "giant gorilla" aspect (i.e., "Not since exploded with such fury and spectacle!") but Konga himself doesn't grow to his giant minutes left in the film's running time. These scenes are alternately frustrating and comes from the shots of Konga—who has a fixed, silly expression on his face— representing Decker (intercut with close-ups of Michael Gough) as Decker repeated frustration comes from the fact that giant Konga does virtually nothing and destroys i inadvertently, Decker's house as he enlarges). After a leisurely stroll, Konga winds u stands there for the rest of the film, obstinately refusing to move even as British soldi him with machine guns.

The *Konga* gorilla suit was reportedly owned by George Barrows (who used the *Monster*) but was worn by a British performer. The face is immobile and thus has a of imbecility. Konga is black but in some shots—notably those showing his g London—his fur is brown (there are almost no full-body shots of Konga in his gi effects are adequate but unimpressive and as noted above, Konga's final "rampage" that's why crowds of people stand around watching the soldiers attack, apparently u will angrily react or, alternatively, fall on them when he dies).

A final note: Charlton comics produced a handful of giant monster comics in "Reptilicus" (later changed to "Reptisaurus"), "Gorgo," and "Konga." The first issue o the summer of 1960, well before the film itself was released in the USA (March 196 the film fairly closely, except that Decker is portrayed as a sympathetic character issue, a new Konga is created, and this different giant gorilla is the central figure of which concluded in 1965.