

REMEMBERING RAY

RAY HARRYHAUSEN: SPECIAL EFFECTS TITAN (2011) Blu-ray

Written and directed by Gilles Penso
Arrow Films

Much like the films worked on by its subject, *Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan* is a labour of love. French filmmaker Gilles Penso spent eight years putting together this 97-minute tribute to the late master of stop-motion animation. And if his adoration leaves little room for objectivity, well, when it comes to Harryhausen, the man behind some of the most special special effects in cinema, the adoration is welcome.

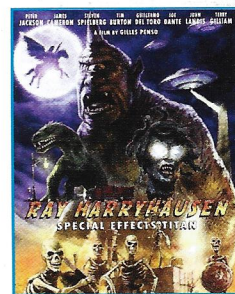
Penso tells Harryhausen's story mostly chronologically, starting with his apprenticeship with *King Kong* animator Willis O'Brien and friendship with author Ray Bradbury through the productions of such classics of science fiction and fantasy as *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and his last film, *Clash of the Titans* (1981). Along the way he allows the man's many admirers – among them Guillermo del Toro, Peter Jackson, James Cameron and Steven Spielberg – to make the case for Harryhausen's rightful status as one of cinema's greatest technicians.

But above and beyond Harryhausen's technical prowess was his ability to imbue his characters – among them the Ymir (from 1957's *20 Million Miles to Earth*), Medusa (from *Titans*) and Talos (from *Jason*) – with enough soul to make them both frightening and awe-inspiring. It's an ability testified to by both Penso's many interviewees as well as extensive clips from Harryhausen's filmography.

Indeed, Penso gives us access to previously unseen parts of Harryhausen's professional life, from stop-motion tests he made as a monster-crazy teen to newly-shot footage of the original maquettes created decades ago by him and his father Fred. It's powerful, beautiful stuff.

Notable Blu-ray extras include additional interviews with director Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead*) and special effects master Rick Baker (*An American Werewolf in London*). There's also an informative filmmaker commentary that details their struggles to get the movie made.

While CGI has largely supplanted stop motion, Ray Harryhausen remains a god among movie fans of a certain age. Hopefully Penso's film will encourage modern monster kids who worship his disciples' work to check out the master's oeuvre. Then the Harryhausen legend will truly live on forever.



Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan

grandfather, Nicol Williamson as a weary police officer and Michael Gough as a snake expert.

Sadly, all of the aforementioned craziness is carried out in *Venom*'s first act before it settles into an almost conventional hostage drama. The film briefly springs to life for not one, but two scenes in which someone is simultaneously bitten by a snake and shot to death.

That said, the wildest aspect of *Venom* was its behind-the-scenes drama, resulting in original director Tobe Hooper being replaced by Piers Haggard ten days into shooting. For the curious, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* director discarded Hooper's footage since it featured Kinski in "Nazi garb" and clashed with Haggard's new material.

Blue Underground's Blu-ray/DVD details these production woes care of Haggard's commentary and a booklet by former *Fangoria* editor Michael Gingold. *Venom* never lives up to its deliriously entertaining first act, but the extras and a beautiful 2K transfer make it a worthy addition to any schlock fan's collection.

R.I.P. Oliver Reed's dong. Rest in penis.

ADAM CLARKE

SPELLING IT OUT

SORCERESS (1995) Blu-ray

Starring Linda Blair, Edward Albert and Julie Strain
Directed by Jim Wynorski
Written by Mark Thomas McGee
Synopsis

Sorceress will forever stand as a testament to what you can do with a script fished out of a bin behind the *Passions* set and reworked into

pre-Internet softcore porn for the late-night telly market. In it, lawyer Larry Barnes (Larry Poindexter) is married to Erica (Scream Queen Julie Strain), a witch who cast a spell on him to make him fall in love with her and leave his then-girlfriend Carol (Rochelle Swanson). Much of Erica and Larry's marriage – told in the venerable form of the flashback – consists of shagging all over the house and Erica reminding Larry that he'll

never be rid of her. However, things come to a head one night when he comes home from a hard day's lawyering to discover her naked in front of a candle-and-blood-covered altar, putting some bad juju on the chap ahead of Larry in the promotion queue at work. They fight and Erica falls off a balcony and dies. For those concerned about spoilers, I should note that, A, all of this happens within the first five

minutes of the movie, and, B, around three of those minutes consist of Erica massaging her boobs with oil.

The plot then writhes its somewhat less lubricated way around the law firm's office politics and more boobs, until Carol ends up possessed by Linda Blair's character, Amelia, for reasons that are unclear, but which the director decided probably didn't matter on the grounds that Linda Blair is doing the possessing and she clearly knows a thing or two about that sort of thing.

Spoiler alert: turns out it was all a dream. Yup, *Sorceress* wears its debt to 1980s US soaps on its sleeves – or rather, it would, if its cast could remember where they'd put their pesky shirts. One to play at your next coven meet, if you need a cackle.

CLAIRE HORSNELL

