

Her performance is thoroughly satisfying and she does a fantastic job in carrying the series. That said, her efforts are equally matched by Dustin Clare's performance as Sullivan Hill, a police investigator who takes more than a professional interest in her case. Over the course of the six episodes, the two form a tight bond and they join forces to take down the infamous Mick Taylor who, unknown to them, is already hot on their trail. Speaking of which, and outshining everyone, John Jarratt returns to reprise his role from the films. Unsurprisingly Jarratt is perfect in the role and steals the spotlight from everyone he shares the screen with.

As a whole, I really enjoyed watching the series. It took more than a while to get going but when it did, I couldn't stop watching it. In fact, I binged watched the entire six-episode run in one sitting, not realising the time that had passed. Not only is this a testament to the job done by Maclean and his team but it shows how engrossing the mini-series is. Fans of the first two films will have plenty here to chew on, as will any horror fan out there. Simply put, *Wolf Creek* is one cracker of a series!

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

SPECIAL FEATURES: The DVD comes with a number of featurettes each giving insight into the production through cast and crew interviews along with behind the scenes footage. 'Cinema to Series' and 'Making a TV Series' featurettes explains how Greg Maclean and his team developed the show. 'The Stars and Cast' featurettes introduce not only the list of characters but they also introduce us to the three main stars. Rounding up the extras are 'Locations and Visual Effect' featurettes. These talk about the efforts gone into the production design, from costuming to the amount of gore used. Although far too short in running time each one offers sufficient but repeated information, which as a fan left me a little bit disappointed.

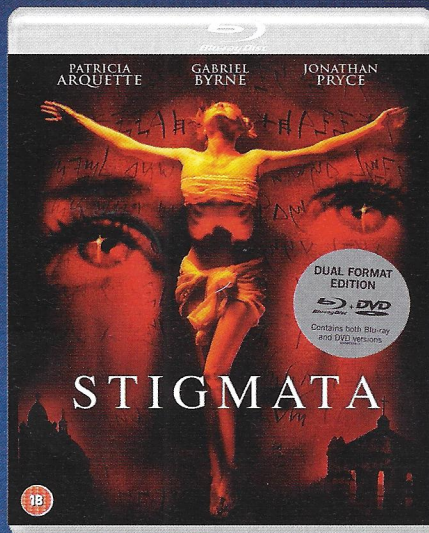
Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

WOLF CREEK (The Complete First Series) is out now on UK Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Eureka Entertainment.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON

STIGMATA

THE FILM: Where would horror cinema be without religion or, more specifically, the Roman Catholic religion? Over the years countless films have used Roman Catholicism to startling effect, as the basis for any number of diabolical masterpieces - such as 1973's *The Exorcist*, or 1976's *The Omen* to name the obvious. Unfortunately director Rupert Wainwright's attempt to combine devilry and the Church of Rome does not fall into this bracket.



The director's 1999 film features Patricia Arquette as Frankie Paige, a young woman from Pittsburgh who inexplicably becomes the bearer of a frightening manifestation of holy stigmata, and Gabriel Byrne as Father Andrew Kiernan, the priest sent by the Vatican to determine the authenticity of her affliction. And so the scene is set - one would think - for a potentially horrific showdown between the church's ancient beliefs and those of contemporary, atheistic metropolitanism. Unfortunately, however, what you get - like much of the high church rigmarole which litters the film's storyline - is a lot of glitzy showmanship, without any real content.

There is a reason that over the years films, and particularly those from the horror stable, have focused on the Roman Catholic church, when wanting to represent the Christian religion on the screen - namely visuality. Other branches of Christianity - such as the Protestant low church - are not nearly as showy about their beliefs, and hence, on purely superficial terms, would appear somewhat boring as a basis for entertainment. However, much like the film *Stigmata*, if you dress something up to appear visually arresting on the outside, but give it little or no heart beneath, the feeling you're left with is of something empty and shallow. One could of course argue that you're not watching a horror film to get something deep and meaningful from it. Equally well film fans - even those of horror cinema - want more than the moody minimalist American loft apartments and shots of Vatican City, which seem to form most of the backdrop for this film.

Typical of the period in which it was made, *Stigmata* looks like a cross between Madonna's controversial video for *Like a Prayer*, and the leftover street sets from a Tim Burton *Batman* film - permanently raining and full of smoke shrouded, dead-end alleyways. Dress this up with the occasional rosary, overflowing bathtubs which wouldn't look out of place in a 1980's Cadbury's Flake advert, and copious amounts of blood sporadically

spouting from the hitherto unseen wounds which cover the body of Arquette's Frankie, and what you have is a film that permanently feels like its failed to push it as far as it wanted, for fear of upsetting a higher power.

If you are going to use the Church as the basis for a horror film, you really have to have the courage of your convictions and go for it. By its very nature you are going to offend some branch of the establishment somewhere, so you may as well say to hell with it and go the whole hog. Something which, unfortunately, *Stigmata* fails to do.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

SPECIAL FEATURES: Though limited in their breadth, the extras included with Eureka Entertainment's Blu-Ray release of the controversial 90s shocker *Stigmata*, are none-the-less suitably impressive. As well as the theatrical trailer, ubiquitous audio commentary - in this case by director Rupert Wainwright - deleted scenes and optional English subtitles, it is the inclusion of a documentary *Divine Rights: The Story of Stigmata*, as well as the music video for Natalie Imbruglia's hit 'Identify' from the film's soundtrack which are of most interest. Interspersing a potted history of the stigmata phenomena with scenes from the film and interviews with religious experts, the documentary makes for an interesting addition which brings colour and added depth when watched in the light of the main film.

Imbruglia's music video on-the-other-hand looks and sounds more like something designed to accompany the latest James Bond release, but is none-the-worse for that, bringing some sense of relief to what is otherwise a bizarre addition to the horror film pantheon.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

Stigmata is out now on UK Dual Format Blu-ray/DVD courtesy of Eureka Entertainment.

REVIEWED BY CLEAVER PATTERSON

SLUGS

THE FILM: In an interview British author Shaun Hutson admitted that his second novel *Slugs*, wasn't going to win any literary awards. His editor wanted something similar to that other pulp horror hit *The Rats* by James Herbert. In 1982 that's just what Hutson gave him, churning out the result, which became an instant bestseller, in a matter of weeks.

When Hutson went to see the inevitable movie version of his shlock masterpiece, which was released six years later, he claims to have been embarrassed by the result. Watching the film, rereleased by Arrow Video, one can understand his reservations: this is the epitome of those gross out, skid row horror flicks which saturated the home entertainment market in the wake of the video boom of the early 80s. Made by a mainly

Spanish team of filmmakers and actors, the book's story was transposed from London to upstate New York - most likely to give it wider appeal. Other than that, a lot of the grisly action and set pieces remain intact, and it is these which save it from disappearing in a sea of ineptitude. For, despite dire acting, dodgy indoor sets and a threadbare plot-line which begins to feel overstretched - as well as confusing - by the end of its ninety minute running time, the result is strangely hypnotic, to the extent you can't help watching it even though you see the climax coming a mile off.

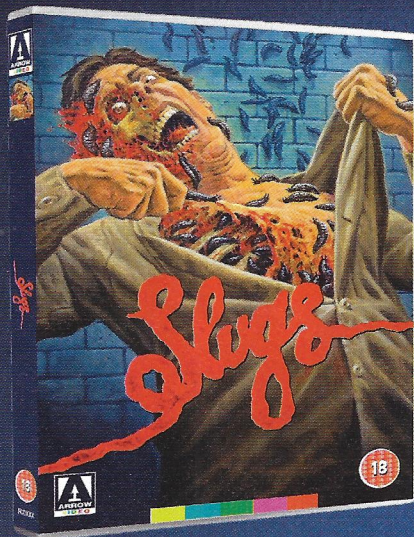
Concerning a small rural town which is attacked by a plague of flesh eating, mutant slugs - conveniently affected by the dumping of a load of toxic waste in the vicinity years before - all the prerequisite characters for this kind of fodder are present: local auxiliary workers who discover the problem, but who's fears go largely unheeded by everyone else; town officials who won't act on the warnings about the impending doom which threatens to engulf the area; loads of sex mad high school kids who come to (quite literally in this case) sticky ends, whilst indulging in activities definitely not on the education syllabus; and several hapless misfits cut down in their prime, just added to bolster the kill count.

But what makes *Slugs* stand out - placing it above your average cheap and nasty gore flick - are the real stars of the show, the shell-less, gastropod molluscs themselves. Where it may have proven hard to use the real thing had anything else been the featured creature, here the slugs come into their own. Though, as the filmmakers admit, they occasionally had to swap fake for real during some of the more intricate shots, what you see during many of the gruesome and sickening close-ups, are authentic, oozing, heaving seas of black, slime excreting slugs.

That other slithering horror hit from the same period - 1976's *Squirm* - may have brought more depth to the characterisation of its human victims. However, though as pointed out, many aspects of *Slugs* are well below par - it's recreation of a small American town under siege from nature gone mad, makes it one of the best examples of sheer nauseating and cringe inducing ickiness ever seen on screen.

Rating: 🐛🐛🐛🐛🐛

SPECIAL FEATURES: Being an Arrow Video Blu-ray release you wouldn't expect anything less than a premiere selection high-end extras to compliment the main feature, which is just what you get with their edition of *Slugs*. With a high definition presentation of the film, comes an array of goodies including audio commentaries by the man who spawned the creatures himself, Shaun Hutson, as well as writer and filmmaker Chris Alexander. There are also interviews with the



film's art/set director Gonzalo Gonzalo and its special effects master Carlo De Marchis.

As usual however there is one stand out extra, which in this case is an extended interview and location tour by *Slugs'* production manager Larry Ann Evans. Even after thirty years Evan's obvious delight at being involved with the production is still evident, whilst her behind the scenes anecdotes and reminiscences bring an added dimension to viewing this 80's schlock classic.

Rating: 🐛🐛🐛🐛🐛

SLUGS is out now on UK Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY CLEAVER PATTERSON

ON THE BRAIN DVD

THE FILM: Like a plague is to humanity, the infected subgenre is an unwelcome epidemic in the horror community these days. The bombardment of zombie movies throughout the years has resulted in a staleness and much needed refreshment. Therefore, it takes something special to spark the interest of audiences who have witnessed the undead rise from their graves too many times, or a bewildering disease turn seemingly ordinary people into bloodthirsty maniacs. Kevin Van Stevenson's first full-length feature, *On the Brain*, falls into the latter category, and it epitomises the dime-a-dozen uninspired and wholly generic fare many of us have come to expect from films of this nature.

Set in the small desolate and drought-burdened town of Golden Torch, an unidentifiable disease is turning the men into murdering lunatics. With the disease spreading and the violence escalating, it's up to the new sheriff Kelly (Danny Hansen) to put an end to the infected before it goes even further, even if it means risking his own life. The plot is fairly threadbare, but it does present the film with opportunity to unleash some unhinged havoc, and there are moments where it comes close to accomplishing that. Unfortunately, the horrifying concepts are applied too mildly

to leave much of an impression on seasoned horror aficionados. There are some twisted ideas at play in *On the Brain*, but the flaccid execution fails to accomplish any desired disturbing effect. It's clear that writer Brandon Trask has some deviancy in his imagination, but not enough to write home about on this occasion. The infected are more laughable than menacing, and while the film is imbued with a welcome ghoulish sense of humour, the half-baked antagonists fail to rouse anything more than the occasional forced smirk.

That said, *On the Brain* is a competently directed film, only mired by the budgetary constraints which are commonplace in micro-budget horror movies. While other filmmakers in a similar position have shown that invention and heart can elevate films with shoestring budgets to levels of greatness, Van Stevenson doesn't do anything to stand out from the herd. That isn't a knock on his talent by any means; there's just nothing about *On the Brain* that's going to leave an impression on audiences.

However, it does boast some impressive cinematography courtesy of Michael A. Perry, and the small town setting and desolate open plain backdrop is quite nice to look at if you're a fan of isolation and scenery. The cast do a serviceable job as well, and there is some enjoyment to be had in knowing that they were all clearly having a good time making the movie.

If you're a fan of movies about zombies and the infected on the rampage, then you might have some fun with *On the Brain*. It's not going to make you worry about any potential plagues in the near future, but it's a passable time waster all the same. Overall, it's just another run-of-the-mill zombie flick, and you're probably more than aware of what those are like by now.

Rating: 🐛🐛🐛🐛🐛

SPECIAL FEATURES: None

ON THE BRAIN is out now on US DVD courtesy of Brain Damage Films.

REVIEWED BY KIERAN FISHER

