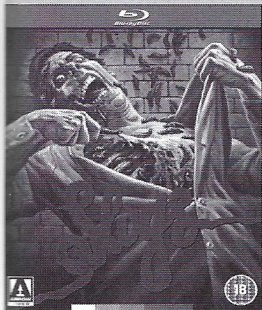


SLUGS

Directed by Juan Piquer (J.P.) Simon
(1988) Arrow Blu-ray



Spanish producer/director Juan Piquer Simon made a number of wild, low-budget pictures during the 1980s and 1990s, but will undoubtedly always be remembered as the man who gave us *Pieces* (1982), an off-kilter slasher film shot in Massachusetts and Madrid.

He also made *Slugs: The Movie* (1988) for New World, a late-in-the-game revolt of nature flick that has a lot in common with Concorde Pictures' *The Nest* (also 1988), which was about killer mutant cockroaches decimating a sleepy small town on a remote island.

Slugs, on the other hand, is about killer mutant slugs decimating a sleepy small town in upstate New York. But because this was shot by J.P. Simon with an international cast and only a passing nod to logic and coherence, it is substantially more cockeyed than most of its icky contemporaries in the killer bug genre.

Health inspector Mike Brady (Michael Garfield) and sanitation department manager Don Palmer (*One Life to Live* regular Philip MacHale) find themselves investigating a rash of gruesome deaths in which the victims' flesh is eaten from their bodies. The culprits turn out to be a horde of giant, carnivorous slugs that are breeding in the sewer system and are poised to contaminate the entire local water supply.

As is typical of these films, Brady's theory about the slugs is brushed off by the mayor, the sheriff (John Battaglia), and the sanitation department head (Frank Brana), in part because they don't want to spook a group of shopping mall developers that plan to start building atop the slugs' breeding ground.

These U.S./European co-productions always tended to be arch, exaggerated, and a surreal, and *Slugs* is no exception—you can tell the film was made in the U.S., but one that exists in some strange, alternate reality. The health inspector and the sheriff communicate exclusively in shouts and insults; the over-age teenagers are an obnoxious amalgam of every bad thing a European must have ever thought about an American teenager; the deaths are extremely bloody; and the dubbing of the ridiculous dialogue seems off just enough to leave the viewer wondering just why *that* voice is coming out of *that* person and saying such silly things.

And then there's the music. Composer Tim Souster evidently had the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at his disposal, and takes advantage of their big, brassy sound to provide a wildly inappropriate score that in some scenes would be better suited to a spaghetti western.

Oddly enough, the dissonance between the spirit of the music and what we see on screen is matched pretty well by tonal shifts in the film itself. The kill scenes are over the top. Two copulating teenagers find themselves awash in a room full of biting slugs, with actress Kari Rose literally slathered in blood and writhing naked in a pile of the things. Real estate developer Emilio Linder (also in Simon's *Pieces* and *The Rift*), having accidentally eaten a chopped up slug in a salad prepared by his alcoholic girlfriend (Alicia Moro) has the worst dinner meeting ever when the parasitic worms in the slug cause his head to explode before dessert arrives.

The death of an elderly couple in a greenhouse, on the other hand, comes off more like a Three Stooges routine that ends in the old man chopping his own hand off before a chemical fire causes the building to explode. Kudos Emilio Ruiz del Rio (*Dune*, *Pan's Labyrinth*) for the excellent miniatures used in the film, by the way.

Arrow has upgraded the film from its old Anchor Bay and Image DVD releases with a 1080p24 MPEG-4 AVC 1.85:1 transfer. There are two audio commentaries, one from author Shaun Hutson moderated by Michael Felsher of Red Shirt Pictures, and the other from former *Fangoria* editor Chris Alexander.

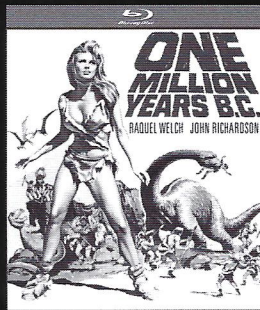
Actor Emilio Linder is interviewed for "Here's Slugs in Your Eye," a short video piece. Special effects artist Carlo de Marchis is on hand for another video short describing the effects, while art director Gonzalo Gonzalo provides additional insight into some of the effects and his other work with Simon.

Production manager Larry Ann Evans is the subject of a 21-minute featurette that also includes a locations tour in Lyons, New York. The theatrical trailer is included, along with a booklet written by genre expert (and longtime *Fangoria* managing editor) Michael Gingold.

Brian Albright

ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.

Directed by Don Chaffey
(1966) Kino/Lorber Blu-ray



Of the Dynamation-era spectacles featuring the best work of stop-motion maestro Ray Harryhausen, one of the most (if not *the* most) acclaimed was 1963's *Jason and the Argonauts*, directed by Don Chaffey as he was embarking on a lengthy run of British television dramas. In 1966, Hammer Films, in association with Seven Arts and RKO, mounted a lavish full-color remake of the latter studio's 1940 prehistoric epic *One Million B.C.* (starring Victor Mature and Lon Chaney, Jr.) and recruited both Chaffey and Harryhausen to work their magic on it. The result was the most expensive Hammer film to date—and Hammer's most successful release ever.

While the modern-day "museum" framing device was jettisoned, the adapted screenplay (by producer Michael Carreras and Mickell Novak) remains a fair approximation of the RKO film. In an imaginary past in which humans and dinosaurs walk the earth together, we meet the Rock Tribe; a savage, male-dominated hunter/gatherer clan under the leadership of Akhoba (Robert Brown); who enjoys pitting his sons Tumak (John Richardson) and Sakana (Percy Herbert) against each other in status/power games. After a number of contentious incidents, Tumak asserts himself against his father just a bit too much and finds himself violently outcast from the tribe and left to struggle on his own against the harsh elements and an array of huge, hungry animals. On the point of death, Tumak is rescued by the Shell Tribe; a far more agreeable collective with advanced (for the time) notions of education and personal hygiene. . . . and finds himself all but "claimed" by the beautiful Loana (Raquel Welch). But Tumak's attitude gets him into trouble even here, and he's eventually kicked out by the Shell Tribe as well; the difference being that Loana insists on sharing his exile with him. Inevitably, of course, the Rock and Shell factions are going to have to come to some sort of peaceful co-existence if they're to withstand not only an assortment of deadly creatures but the ominous activities of a volcano in their mutual vicinity.

As he previously did with *Jason*, Chaffey succeeds in creating a narrative that compels attention even when the monsters aren't on the screen, but this time he does so with virtually no dialogue at all: the detailed power struggles and survival ordeals of both tribes speak plainly for themselves; while the casting could scarcely have been more appropriate. Richardson was an effortless choice as the tough-but-sensitive he-man/dreamboat Tumak, having just played the romantic adventurer in Hammer's previous RKO remake *She* (1965). That particular "she," however, was not on board; as Ursula Andress turned down "the dinosaur picture" she was offered. Raquel Welch herself wasn't particularly keen on the role and accepted it only to fulfill her contractual obligations. And we all know how that worked out: the actress, decked out in a fetching skin bikini, was catapulted to international stardom via not only the film but by one of the most popular and iconic publicity photographs of all time.

But yes, there *are* monsters to be had. While the full Harryhausen effect to which fans drawn by the name were accustomed is unusually delayed (the artist here marks time with an "old-school" macro-photographed iguana and a completely out-of-place giant spider), some of his best and most personality-infused stop-motion creatures (the trademarked name "Dynamation" could not be shared in this case but you know what you're getting all the same) soon start making regular and ever more threatening appearances. There's a giant sea turtle; an allosaurus (all the more terrifying for standing eye-to-eye with its human prey); a dueling triceratops and, of course, the pteranodon that attempts to make off with Loana and feed her to her hatchlings; and they all look amazing in this stunning new Blu-ray from Kino Lorber.

One Million Years B.C. held plenty of appeal for adults, as previously noted. Nevertheless, the U.S. release version was keyed primarily to young viewers and was reduced by approximately 8m: in some instances for time and pacing (believe it or not, even Harryhausen's creature highlights were abbreviated in most cases); but also to lower the intensity of certain scenes. Some grisly moments involving hunting rituals and the aftermath of the battle of the ape-like, cave-dwelling troglodytes (yes, Stanley Kubrick *did* see this film) were cut in their entirety; while U.S. viewers saw significantly less of the aggressive mating dance performed by two-time 007 femme fatale (and experienced cat-fighter) Martine Beswick, here making her Hammer debut as the jealous Nupondi (who is not at all happy to see Tumak ejected from the Rock Tribe in the early going).

Kino, of course, goes the extra distance by providing *both* versions of the film on separate platters. But only on the uncut international version will you find the thorough feature audio commentary by *Video Watchdog* historian Tim Lucas (who fairly credits previous researchers with their findings but does his own exhaustive assessment of the feature at hand, its history, the other accomplishments of its cast and crew, and (of course) the complete, shot-for-shot breakdown of the differences between the two versions. The familiar U.S. version is preserved for posterity as well, and here's where you'll get the 2002 interview segments with Welch, Harryhausen and Beswick and the American theatrical trailer as ported over from a previous Blue Underground release. "Definitive" would stand as a most appropriate description of this outstanding Kino presentation.

Shane M. Dallmann