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SCHLOCK

CAST

John Landis as the *Schlockthropus*

Saul Kahan as *Detective Sgt. Wino*

Joseph Piantadosi as *Ivan*

Eliza Garrett (Eliza Roberts) as *Mindy Binerman*

Enrica Blankey (Harriet Medi) as *Mrs. Blinerman*

Eric Allison as *Joe Putzman*

E.G. Harty (Emile Hamaty) as *Professor Shlibovitz*

Charles Villiers as *Cal*

Richard Gillis as *Officer Gillis*

Tom Alvich as *Torn Cop*

John Chambers as *the Captain*

CREW

Written and Directed by *John Landis*

Produced by *James C. O'Rourke*

Executive Producer/Film Editor *George Folsiey Jr.*

Director of Photography *Bob Collins*

Original Music Composed and Conducted by *David Gibson*

Sound *Bruce Bisenz*

Special Make-up Design and Realisation *Rick Baker*





“I KNOW, IT’S HORRIBLE”: THE ENDURING APPEAL OF *SCHLOCK*

by Joe Bob Briggs

Normally your student film, or the film you make with your family’s money, or the film you scratch together over a two-year period using amateur actors and pickup crews and borrowed equipment, or the film you write yourself even though you’re not much of a writer, or the film where you end up playing the lead in a gorilla suit... normally that film would be expected to disappear. And normally you *want* that film to disappear because it’s probably dreck.

But what if you name your first film *Schlock*? *Schlock* can get away with being dreck because you’re telling people in advance, “Okay, yeah, I know, it’s horrible.”

And so John Landis embarked on his storied career, proudly foisting onto the public a slapstick comedy – filmed in 1971, not released until 1973 – that is so amateurishly acted, fuzzily photographed, woodenly written and scratchily edited that it can only be called mind-numbing in its unalloyed awfulness.

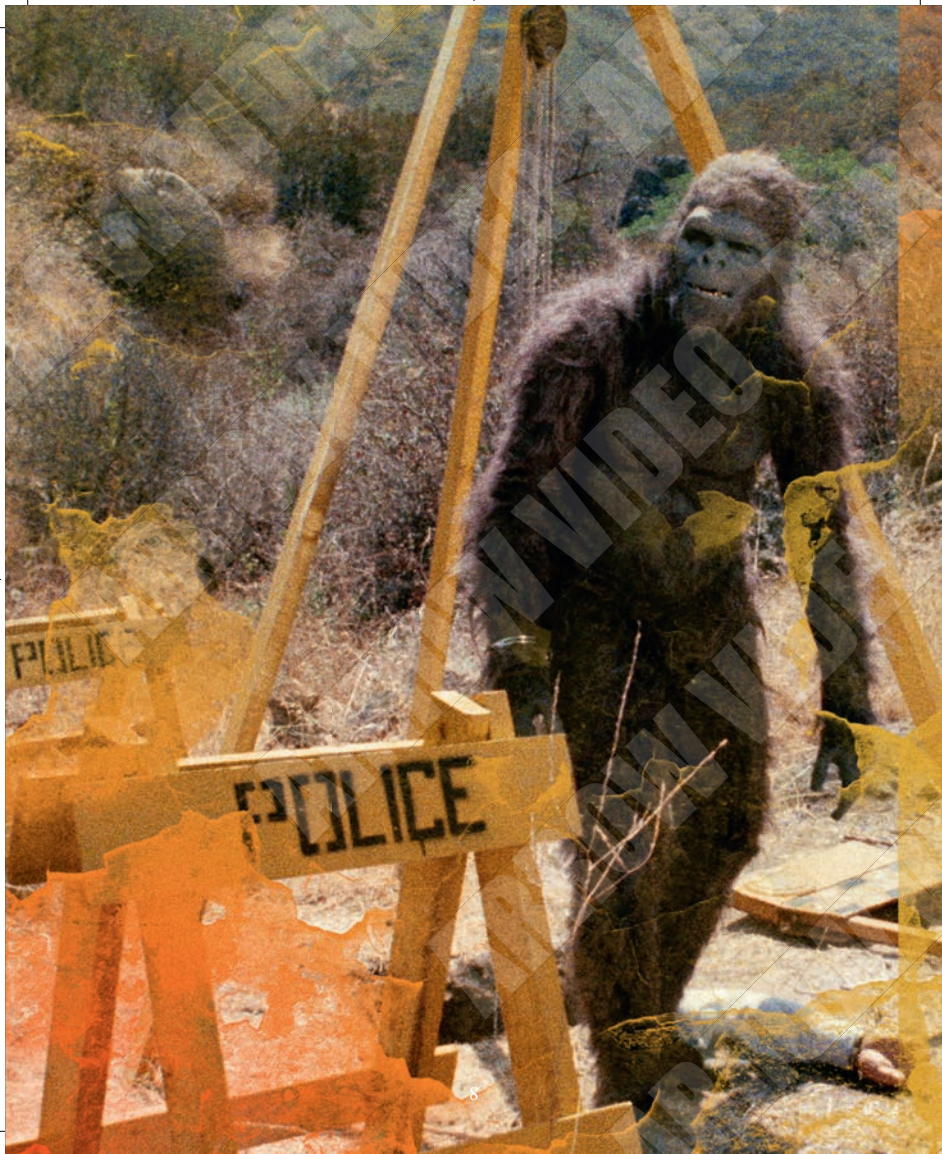
And yet people love this film.

The reasons are obscure – and complicated.

The first reason, if I had to guess, would be because almost anyone could have written, directed or acted in it. John Landis fans cite it as an early sketchpad

for the zany chaos of *Animal House*, the comedic fascination with retro music in *The Blues Brothers*, the takedown of American institutions in *Trading Places*, or the inspired genre-mixing of *An American Werewolf in London*. But all these later Landis films had (a) a budget, (b) a professional writing team, and (c) actual actors. *Schlock*, on the other hand, has a children's clubhouse feel, as though the class clown got a home movie camera for Christmas and asked all his cousins to make up jokes so he could practice with it. So it's an insight into the mind of John Landis *before* he became a filmmaker. In fact, he readily admits that it wasn't until he got into the post-production editing suite that he realized how much he *didn't* know as he asked himself, "Why don't I have this shot? Why didn't we cover that?"

Landis was, in fact, a brash 21-year old high school dropout (at the time of production) who had grown up in Los Angeles but whose experience consisted of working in the 20th Century Fox mail room and then knocking around Europe as a production assistant and stunt double on spaghetti westerns. His first official credit had been Assistant Director on the World War II caper film *Kelly's Heroes*, filmed in Yugoslavia with a star cast (Clint Eastwood, Telly Savalas, Donald Sutherland) backed by MGM's deep pockets. Back in Los Angeles, he wanted to make his own films, and he became inspired after seeing the science-fiction horror film *Trog* – perhaps the first, last and only person to be inspired to do anything after watching that abysmal Joan Crawford programmer about an Ice Age troglodyte found alive in a British cave. Because the special effects on *Trog* were so cheap and ineffective – and because the troglodyte looked like a stunt man in a cheap gorilla suit – Landis thought the movie was ripe for parody. But all he had to work with was \$60,000, most of it taken out of his own cookie jar, and he quickly discovered after meeting with John Chambers, the makeup artist on *Planet of the Apes*, that even a low-budget gorilla suit was priced by Hollywood at about \$200,000.





Fortunately, a chance meeting led him to a shy kid living with his parents in suburban Encino — a teenager who had all kinds of brilliant hand-crafted monster heads in his room. That kid had a business card inscribed “Rick Baker, Monster Maker,” and Landis hired him on the spot.

Thinking he would save money, Landis imagined he could get away with using amateurs in acting roles, so most of the parts were taken by people he knew who were inside the Hollywood studio system but who had never delivered a line in front of a camera. The off-center non-acting, which Landis thought wouldn't matter in an over-the-top comedy, is painful to behold, proving for the umpteenth time that all acting is hard, but comic acting is the hardest. (The sole exception to amateurism was Harriet Medin, the actress who had worked for Roberto Rossellini and appeared in the famous Trevi Fountain scene in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. Landis met her while working in Europe, which explains how she ended up playing the mother of the blind girl in *La Dolce Gorilla*.) Landis decided to play the lead character, the “Schlocktropolis,” himself, not realizing that it would take three hours a day to get into the makeup and two hours to get out of it. The result was that he had to direct the entire movie in a gorilla suit, baking his flesh during a Southern California summer when temperatures hit 110 degrees and never went below 103.

Schlock was filmed almost entirely within a particularly barren part of the San Fernando Valley where Paramount Pictures shot B-westerns in Hollywood's golden age and where dusty sage, sedge and skinny rushes dot a broken landscape that seems to have been chosen for its singular hideousness. The shooting schedule was 11 days — insanely brief in the days of 35-millimeter film — and the result is variously described as a parody of *King Kong*, a spoof of cave man movies, a satire based on *Godzilla*, a comic knockoff of *Beauty and the Beast*, and a sendup of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (this latter distinction caused by the use of Richard Strauss' “Also sprach Zarathustra”), but it

would be more accurate to say that it's a shaggy-dog story that uses all of the above for occasional goofy reference points.

If I had to pinpoint a genre for this film, I would put it in the “Don't Trust Anyone Over 30” period of hippie flicks – a time when America's youth culture was stoned, rebellious, arrogant, and dismissive of old-fashioned academic concepts like story structure, characterization and plot. It was a revolution-minded “Screw You” generation that made great music and bad films, the one exception being an unstructured narrative saved by the “Born to Be Wild” music of Steppenwolf – *Easy Rider*. A similar trend in the *zeitgeist* of the late sixties and early seventies would be the deconstruction of genres, but there was only one master at work in that field – Woody Allen, in the form of rule-bending experiments like *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* and *Take the Money and Run*. But Landis was no Woody Allen – certainly not at the age of 21 – and so his freshman effort was so unsophisticated that comparing him to Allen's comedies is like comparing “Achy Breaky Heart” to *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Schlock begins with a premise no doubt considered outrageous at the time but hackneyed now – that the Missing Link is rampaging through the countryside, leaving bodies everywhere, while the clueless media exploit the story and dimwitted establishment figures (police, educators, professors, suburban squares) fail to notice the serial killing or the fact that a giant ape is roaming among them. Landis, as the Banana Killer, was able to form semi-human gestures that passed for humorous at the time and would still be showing up a decade later in the Amtrak scene of *Trading Places*. If you fail to get the message (young people good, old people baaaaaaaaaad), Landis inserts unfunny scenes of the ape befriending children not yet corrupted by the American system.

Of course, I'm discussing the film's theme as though it *has* a theme, when in fact it seems to be an assemblage of unrelated set pieces, including frequent inserts of police cars careening wildly through the streets, Keystone Kops-style, for no apparent reason. Fans of the film note that it's historic as the first effort of Rick Baker, who would become legendary as he worked on dozens of films for Landis and others, including *The Howling*, *Videodrome*, and Michael Jackson's "Thriller" video, but it's hard to see exactly what Baker did for the movie except create the gorilla suit itself, since the kill scenes mostly consist of Ape Landis grabbing actors by the shoulders and hurling their bodies against walls and into ditches.

Cult film fans are also amused by the sequence in which the Ape enters a movie theater where *The Blob* is playing – a nod to producer Jack H. Harris, the vaudevillian who made *The Blob* in the fifties and took a chance on this film years later. Harris apparently thought *Schlock* would be just as zany and cultish as *The Blob* while doing for the career of John Landis what the earlier film did for Steve McQueen. He was wrong about that. It would be *Kentucky Fried Movie*, four years later, that eventually allowed Landis to *overcome* the reputation of *Schlock* and emerge as one of our iconic comedy directors. That happened because one of *Schlock's* early fans was Johnny Carson, host of *The Tonight Show*, who brought Landis on as a guest and showed clips from the movie. It was that interview that led to Landis being recognized by the creators of Kentucky Fried Theater, who had recently moved their live sketch comedy show from Madison, Wisconsin, to Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles. *Kentucky Fried Movie*, the minor counter-culture hit that resulted from their collaboration, proved that Landis didn't need the cheap gorilla suit, or his parents' money, after all.

Meanwhile, *Schlock* endures as an inspiration to young filmmakers everywhere because, if the guy who made *this* became famous, then, yes, there's hope for all of us.

Joe Bob Briggs is America's drive-in movie critic.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Schlock is presented in its original 1.85:1 aspect ratio with 1.0 mono sound. The newly restored 4K master was provided by Turbine Media Group.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Michael Mackenzie
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering/Subtitling The Engine House Media Services
Artist Graham Humphreys
Design Oink Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Joe Bob Briggs, Brett Clark, Joe Corey,
David James, Marc Morris, Kim Newman



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