

The Clan of the Cave Bear

US : 1985/86 : dir. Michael Chapman :
 Warner / PSO / Guber-Peters / Jozak-Decade / Jonesfilm : 98 min
 prod: Gerald I. Isenberg : scr: John Sayles : dir.ph.: Jan De Bont
[Emma Floria](#); [Joey Cramer](#)
 Daryl Hannah; Pamela Reed; James Remar; Thomas G Waites; John Doolittle;
 Curtis Armstrong

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5619	3½	10	1	1,973	7	7	7	7	7	No	Dec 2001



Just your average self-willed cave wench Source: *Rating the Movies*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"World's first feminist caveman movie, minus the anthropological detail of Jean Auel's popular book. Hannah is perfectly cast as outsider who joins band of nomadic Neanderthals, but the story (such as it is) is alternately boring and unintentionally funny. Subtitles translate cave people's primitive tongue. Screenplay by John Sayles. Shot in Technovision. *½ "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"In prehistory a girl is adopted by a family of bears¹. Unremarkable, acceptable adaptation of Jean M Auel's novel, worth seeing for attractive Daryl Hannah, who plays the lead. *½ "

¹ Reviewed apparently by someone who's neither seen the film nor read the book.

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"In Neanderthal days, a blonde outcast girl is adopted by a swarthy tribe who think her ugly. Comic-strip prehistory: better revive **"ONE MILLION YEARS B.C."** or even the 1912 Griffith epic **"MAN'S GENESIS"**. Academy Award nomination: Michael G Westmore & Michele Burke, Best Make-up"

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Ooga! Ugh! Growl! That's just some of the dialogue you'll be hearing in this lavish production of the popular best-seller [sic]. Fans of the book may be perturbed by this filmisation of their favourite prehistoric escapades; but others in the mood to watch a Cro-Magnon orphanette become the first feminist warrior in prehistory may want to join this clan. Not as terrible as you might think. **"

Rating the Movies review:

"Tedious caveman movie based on Jean M Auel's best-selling novel. The film does no justice to the book as events unfold haphazardly at a plodding pace. Blonde, blue-eyed Hannah is unconvincing as a prehistoric feminist who learns to wield a deadly slingshot, thereby arousing the hostility of some tribesmen. Apparently, even Neanderthals suffered from neurosis.² Dialogue amounts to grunts and gibberish, which are translated into English subtitles. Academy Award nomination - Michael G Westmore and Michael Burke, best makeup. *"

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Adopted by the Neanderthal **"CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR"**, Cro-Magnon Hannah (taking a giant evolutionary leap forward from her previous incarnation in **"SPLASH"**) is maligned for her ability to count beyond ten³, dexterity with weapons, and disdain for the males' primitive seduction rites (a fist thumped in the palm of the hand as prelude to some vigorous

² *What neurosis? She violated one of the shibboleths of her tribe. Try violating a shibboleth of modern life and see what happens to you!*

³ *No she isn't*

rutting). In the end this primeval feminist rejects miscegenation with nasty, brutish Stone Age bozos, stalking off into the sunset in search of an appropriately Aryan mate. Devotees of John Sayles' witty, literate screenplays will be disappointed by the repartee of subtitled grunts, while beneath the film's apparent plea for tolerance lies the offensive (if quite possibly true) assumption that tall, tanned Californian blondes represent the highest form of human life. Based on a fat novel by Jean Auel (who subsequently sued the producers), this is *Readers' Digest* prehistory, though at least director Chapman (cameraman on **"RAGING BULL"**) makes sure the murky caves look nice."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"A hefty blow for cavegirls' lib is struck by this film of Jean M Auel's monster bestseller. And, even as you giggle at some of the subtitles imposed on the Neanderthal dialogue, you'll be rooting for Daryl Hannah to come through in the end. She's one of the "Others", a blonde Cro-Magnon orphan adopted by the regressive Neanderthals, and a pretty wimpish six-year old [sic] who grows up rather unbelievably to be tall and leggy Daryl.

Forced to submit by the tribe's embryo leader Brond, who likes nothing if not his own way, Daryl bears his child but at the same time secretly learns the hunting arts forbidden to women - which gets her expelled even after her slingshot saves a child from the jaws of a wolf. Resourcefully surviving the winter to the astonishment of the tribe, she is granted the title "Woman Who Hunts". This, as you can imagine, goes down like a lead balloon with Brond, and you know that a day of reckoning will have to come.

Nicely pitched between the erotic fantasy of **"ONE MILLION YEARS B.C."** and the ultra-realism of **"QUEST FOR FIRE"**, it's thoroughly enjoyable. ***"

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"**"THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR"** is a dull, overly genteel rendition of Jean M Auel's novel. Handsomely produced on rugged Canadian exteriors, this is the story of pre-history's first feminist.

Although set 35,000 years ago, pic could more or less have been set in any time, as it displays little of the anthropological ambition of "QUEST FOR FIRE", and is pitched to appeal to the same sensibilities that responded to "THE BLUE LAGOON".

Little imagination is in evidence here. A primitive language has been invented for these early human to speak (subtitles run throughout), but nothing in their customs, habits or attitudes proves very interesting. Daryl Hannah, at least, is a fetching and sympathetic centre of attention, but emoting of the entire cast is limited to expressive grunting."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"In this dreadfully dumb adaptation of Jean M Auel's bestselling fantasy novel, a Cro-Magnon child is grudgingly adopted by a tribe of Neanderthals, who, with a few exceptions, fear she is a dark spirit intent on destroying them. Rated "R". *Turkey*"

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Films of the Eighties", "The Good Film and Video Guide" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Daryl Hannah plays the prehistoric human taken in by a gang of Neanderthals who makes her own contribution to the evolution of the species. Watching Raquel Welch dodging dinosaurs in "ONE MILLION YEARS B.C." is a lot more entertaining. Contains violence and nudity. ** "

"Fantasy drama starring Daryl Hannah. In prehistoric times, a young Cro-Magnon girl is separated from her mother during an earthquake. She is found and cared for by a tribe of less intelligent Neanderthals. ** "

Four sources quote this as a 1985 film, six as 1986. Comparisons between Daryl Hannah's role and Raquel Welch in the 1966 Hammer film are inevitable. Even though this one is less crass in its period inaccuracies (no pterodactyls) and less clichéd in plot mechanics (no erupting volcanoes when the story wears thin), it is guilty of the same appeal to salaciousness (buggering Daryl Hannah in a fur loincloth) and falls some way short of the 1981 Jean-Jacques Annaud film "QUEST FOR FIRE" as a sobre portrayal of early man. So far from being "ideal casting", Hannah is just way too glamorous to lend her part any credibility and, though her performance can't be faulted, finally she's just another Barbarella of the caves, which is surely not what the author intended. One wonders how that lawsuit turned out?

Better than any of these by a long mammoth's tooth was William Golding's novel "The Inheritors", a sensitive and deeply moving account of the terminal culture clash between Neanderthals and the next stage on the human ladder. Golding's thesis was – the less apeline and the more human, the more violent we became. The thesis of this film (and "ONE MILLION YEARS B.C." for that matter) seems to be – blonde is better.

Opinions will differ on its virtues as a stone age feminist polemic. Ayla is not only brighter and prettier than her foster clan, with access to better cave cosmetics, she instinctively rejects all the gender roles that are central to their culture. She will not kow-tow to the males of the tribe, she will not submit to mounting on demand, she spies on their secret hunting rituals and sniggers at their failings, she teaches herself to use the sling, when she knows it is a killing matter for any woman to lay hands on a weapon. In this way the natural superstitions and pecking order of a simple hunter-gatherer folk are presented as male chauvinist oppression, an analysis scarcely more subtle than pterodactyls and tyrannosaurs.

All the evils of manhood are embodied in Broud, heir apparent to the clan leader, and most of the film details the gathering enmity between them until the day Ayla loses the protection of the clan seer and medicine woman, her adoptive parents. Broud rapes Ayla of course (off camera, of course) but later, as her confidence and powers improve, he is humiliated by "penile dysfunction" before the whole clan when he attempts to do the horn dance with her again. The crude male psyche shrinks on contact with an empowered woman, as we see.

Ayla saves a child of the clan by slaying the wolf that carries it off, and for her pains is outcast, during which period she gives birth to a son (presumably Broud's) called Durk. She is reinstated later, and the feud with Broud continues, but when she meets a more sympathetic male, and prospective mate, at a gathering of the clans, he still gets his head bitten off by a captive bear in the act of rescuing Ayla from it, while she stands helplessly by. When push comes to shove, her character reverts to the stock damsel in distress.

It would be misleading to paint her as a pouting Germaine Greer – the producers no doubt whittled down the story's more polemical aspects while discussing Hannah's cutaway wardrobe – and a strong heroine need not necessarily be read as an archetype of gender war, but it is specious in the extreme – now that human culture has escaped the imperative of raw physical strength – to translate contemporary notions of equality back on an age when raw physical strength counted for everything. The Amazons were a myth (a *patriarchal* myth, nota bene), and all the self-serving revisionist portraits of Cleopatra, Boudicca and Elizabeth I as proto-modern women only serve to remind us that history is never safe from the interference of historians. And what's more, looking around Britain today, you have to wonder sometimes whether the Neanderthals didn't win out after all.

It isn't quite the numbskull production some of the reviews have suggested. The older characters do convey warmth, confusion, social discomfiture despite the impediment of monosyllabic dialogue, and the hunting scenes in particular are well done. But as *Variety* very rightly says, the film is too lazy to intrigue us with the rituals and habits of a nomadic folk who never enjoyed the complacency of being top of the predatory tree. All the tabus of 20th century civilisation are already securely in place – no cannibalism, no paederasty, no incest, no stoning of the aged, and all the X certificate parts are safely stashed away from view. On that level it is only marginally more sophisticated than the caveman scenes of silent cinema.

Emma Flöia plays Ayla as a girl approaching puberty, and Joey Cramer Broud as a boy. It's not known who plays the younger Ayla (±5), who is mauled by a cave lion after watching her mother swallowed in an earthquake, nor the boy who plays her son Durk, but of these the only significant presence on screen is Flöia's, and she metamorphoses into Hannah after some ten or fifteen minutes. Nothing else is known of her, but Joey Cramer, unrecognisable behind the feral kid make-up, was the boy who starred the following year in "**FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR**". Here 11, he also appeared in "**RUNAWAY**" (84) and "**THE STONE FOX**" (87), a TV film with Buddy Ebsen about a boy winning a dog-sled race against all odds to save his grandfather's farm.

See subject index under **CHILDHOOD PROLOGUES, HISTORY** and **ORPHANS / ADOPTION**.