

GOLEM

Piotr Szulkin; Poland 1979; Second Run; region-free Blu-ray; in Polish with English subtitles; Certificate 15; 93 minutes; 1.66:1. Extras: commentary by Michael Brooke; early Szulkin shorts *Raz, dwa, trzy* (*One, Two, Three*, 1972), *Wszystko* (*Everything*, 1972), *Szkic do sześciu części* (*A Sketch in Six Parts*, 1973) and *Copyright Film Polski MCMLXXVI* (1976 – with annotated script and storyboard gallery); booklet.

REVIEWED BY KIM NEWMAN

A free adaptation of Gustav Meyrink's 1915 novel *The Golem*, which writer-director Piotr Szulkin admits he never finished reading, this is also a very Eastern European riff on the Frankenstein story. To avoid any possibility that it could be interpreted as a depiction of Poland in the mid-to-late 20th century, the film is set not only in an unnamed imaginary country but in an alternative timeline. After an atomic disaster of some sort in 1941, Europe is depopulated and dilapidated – but the authorities insist no programme exists to create artificial people as a workforce. That, of course, is a lie.

Amnesiac Pernat (Marek Walczewski) stumbles back to a building where he believes he lives – though we gather he's really an upgraded clone who doesn't need false teeth and glasses and that he was created from the remains of a deceased, unjustly convicted murderer. Returning to a futile job, slowly engraving an image of the Hanged Man tarot card, Pernat is drawn into the doings of fellow tenement dwellers who may or may not have been involved in the crime that led to his imprisonment. It's a surreal, strange drama – to such an extent that a finale which draws together threads of the mystery into something almost coherent is almost a surprise.

Szulkin followed this with *War of the Worlds: Next Century* (1981), another gloss on a classic genre text. This diptych constitutes an impressive, if dour double bill of dystopian visions – and also seems to have seeped into the groundwater of art/SF cinema, with images, characters and settings here that prefigure Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) and Jeunet and Caro's *Delicatessen* (1991).

DISC: It's a perfect transfer of a film which goes out of its way to look hideous. Michael Brooke's commentary very handily footnotes all the key players and explores Szulkin's place in Polish cinema in times of change. Also included are four short films, three student works which are almost parodically minimalist – *Wszystko* (*Everything*) is about emptying rubbish bins – and the black joke *Copyright Film Polski MCMLXXVI* which celebrates the country's film industry by showing an apple slowly being crushed to pulp.

