

BELOVED BINEMA

#1

(FOR AFICIONADOS OF THE KIND OF SF FILMS YOU FIND ON SALE IN BINS)



WHAT THE HECK?

Of course you recognize the Martian from the film ANGRY RED PLANET gracing the cover... a very bad portrait, excruciatingly bad... proudly displayed...

Blame it on Dale Speirs. He recently reviewed a number of 'Giant Meteor Impact' type of movies. In response came a loc stating:

"My firm belief has always been to never support bad movies by paying money to see them." To which Dale replied:

"I haven't been to a movie theatre in years. The ones I review are from \$5 bargain bins. I view the bad ones not as SF or serious drama but as comedy, albeit unintended as such by the producers. My reviews follow the style of R. Graeme Cameron (a Vancouver zinester) who wrote a series of hilarious reviews back in the 1990s, and after which I pattern mine."

Well, I feel flattered, by Ghu. And I got to thinking. My reviews were first published in BCSFAzine, then reprinted in SPACE CADET and WCSFAzine, but it's been a while... many current fen may not have read them... had vague ideas of putting them all into some sort of book...

Then it hit me!

Why not put out a quicky zine once a month... restricted to a single review... give it a really bad title... and illustrate it using the worst artist I know of, namely ME!

Highly unlikely I will have any competition.

This be my loving tribute to some of my favourite films. Each issue focuses on a single film, is a really quick read, and should amuse some people. In the time it takes to print all my old reviews, I should be able to write numerous new reviews. Think how much you have to look forward to!

And then there's the art. I search through old issues of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND looking for appropriate photos, and carefully copy them to the best of my artistic ability. Stunning, eh?

ANGRY RED PLANET

Critics say this 1959(1960?) film is slow, talky, absurd and a disjointed collection of SF clichés with mismatched acting styles.

True enough.

But I saw this film in the theatre as a child and loved every minute of it. As an adult, I can see how this film would be viewed as dull and ridiculous, but the child yet within me still rejoices in the magic of this film. Seen with a child's eyes, it's a wonderful film. And even for adults, there are gems of insight to be gleaned from the script, insight into the human condition, into the role of women in particular....

We see Generals gathering in a tacky boardroom in the Pentagon. Turns out the expeditionary X1 MR1 Rocketship thought to have crashed on Mars has been spotted drifting in orbit 90,000 miles above the Earth. The crew may still be alive! It's decided to bring the ship down by remote control.

Cut to a Nevada base and plenty of stock footage of control room scenes. Rescue chaps in radiation suits are standing by. "That thing up there is a flying coffin," says one hopefully. We see footage of an Atlas rocket taking off reversed to make it look like it's landing. Surprisingly effective.

"Anything on the distant radiation counter?" The answer is no, so the rescue crews move in. The door to the spacecraft opens.

Cut to the generals peering at a monitor screen. "It's the girl!" shouts one. "The hell with the radiation, let's go!" She clings to the door while the rescue crews stand around and stare at her. Not till the Generals arrive in a jeep do they leap into action. A stretcher-team removes a shrouded figure from the craft. A hand dangles free, covered with green goop.

"What's that, man?" asks a clever reporter.

Adds the heroine "How can anyone cope with that?" How indeed?

Back at the base hospital, we learn that the unfortunate chap with yucky stuff all over his arm is Colonel Tom O'Bannion, now unconscious and slowly being covered by the spreading goop. The girl is Dr. Iris Ryan, a woman with a curiously immobile face (with an acting style to match) who seems to have forgotten everything about the mission. A Professor Theodore Gettell and a Sergeant Sam Jacobs have gone missing. The Generals' curiosity is rampant, after all, they're the ones who'll have to face the Senate appropriations committee! They put pressure on Iris.

"Will you talk to us now?"

"Yes, I'll try."

"Try to remember."

"Yes, yes, I'll try." Etc.

We flash back with her to the rocket just after take off. There's much talk of how much the actual liftoff resembled the training simulations. Ever the killjoy, Tom states "Just so you blasé space travelers don't get too bored, the radiation is jumping."

Now my first thought would be that something was wrong with their engine, but the Prof (played by Les Tremayne in an understated fashion, he was much more fun as the 'goat-lover' in THE SLIME PEOPLE) pipes up with "Radioactive meteor?"

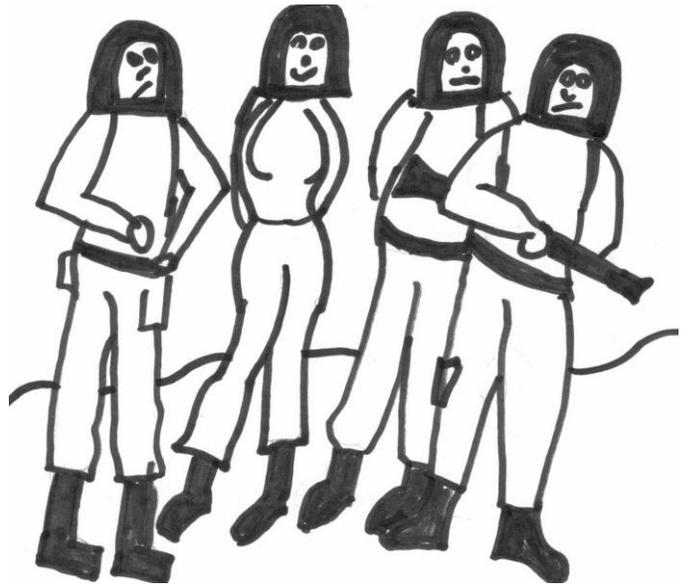
"Looks like it."

"Intersecting course?" They stare out the porthole to check. A glowing basketball zips by.

"Ah," sighs the Prof, "safety margin adequate."

Iris stares at the instruments around her. "We're thousands of miles out in space, I can hardly believe it." All I can say is, you'd better, because you'd get quite a shock if you were to open the door to go for a walk.

Tom seeks to reassure her, "This reminds me of when I was a kid and I got my first dog...." There follows a long story ending with the line "soon people will be just as sure of space travel as I was of that dog...and as I wish I was of you."



The intrepid crew: Tom, Iris, Prof, & Sam

Perhaps confused by the story, Iris doesn't pick up on his hint, so he crowds her close to the porthole, commenting, "Makes Broadway look like a dark alley, how about exploring that dark alley together?" Iris backs away, perhaps convinced Tom has gone crazy and is suggesting an intimate space walk. She seems a trifle dense. But Tom won't take no for an answer.

Later, hefting a can of food, Tom says for no particular reason, "Mars, the angry red planet."

So Iris comments "Sounds so foreboding, doesn't it?" Her voice drops a dozen octaves. "Mars, the ancient God of war."

"Afraid, Iris?" asks Tom. What he really means is 'Going space crazy?' but he's too polite to say it.

"A little," she admits.

Tom adds "We all are, we wouldn't be human otherwise." but this has no effect on her.

Her voice drops again, "This may seem funny for a scientist, but I wonder if some things aren't better unknown..."

Desperate, Tom changes the subject, "You're the first scientist I've ever known with lovely red hair."

"And you're the first pilot I've ever gone to Mars with," she retorts brightly. Ah, the gay wit of this merry crew.

Cut to Sam, the only sane person onboard. He's reading a pulp mag, to wit "Super Fantastic Science Fiction Stories" with subheadings "The Monster and the Martian Maid" (catchy title that), "Weird Monsters!" and "Loathsome Beasts!" Where can I get a copy? I want one!

"Mars, Martians, monsters," he muses, then tosses the mag aside. "I wonder if I'll ever get to read the next issue?" No, of course not. We already know you're going to die.



Sam & Cleo

Various shots of life aboard ship. In one we see Iris crouched over a table, self-consciously glancing around before applying perfume behind her ears while Tom and the Prof exchange condescending glances. Ah, the 50's were a wonderful time, weren't they?

Well, soon it's time to land on Mars. "Hold on to your hats, kids. Here we go." Which seems an oddly juvenile thing for a Spaceship pilot to say.

Once down, Sam asks "Shall we go out and claim the planet in the name of Brooklyn?" Instead they crowd around the porthole, which glows with a strange red light.

"Strange," says Iris. "Nothing moves, everything seems to be waiting."

Adds Sam, a more practical sort, "Shoot everything that moves, pick up everything that doesn't, right?"

"With all that vegetation out there," comments Tom, "there's bound to be something alive." Like, how about the vegetation for starters? Meanwhile the viewer is frustrated because we're not shown what the crew are looking at!

Cut to later, they're still staring out the porthole, though now the light is blue! It's obvious from later sequences that the light is always supposed to be red, but filmmakers slip up now and again you know. The crew is still making comments on the scenery we can't see.

"Weirdsville, as my grandmother used to say," says Sam.

They're bugged because the outside mikes aren't picking up any sound.

"I wonder, could it be intentional?" asks the Prof.

"You mean you think it's controlled?" says Tom.

"What beings could possibly exercise such fantastic control?" inquires Iris, just a little short of hysteria.

"Martians!" every kid in the audience shouts in unison. It finally dawns on the crew that maybe if they go outside they might just find out. But they're still hesitant.

"First time in my life I've ever really been scared," admits Sam, "even though there's nothing out there but a bunch of crazy plants."

Tom, of course, has an encouraging cliché handy, "It takes a brave man to admit his fears, Sam. We're all afraid of the unknown."

Iris walks by in her spacesuit, distracting Sam from his fears. "You know, I can't say I recommend

space suits for all you beautiful young dolls. What happened to all your lovely curves?"

"Why Sammy, some of the fashions I've seen in New York store windows didn't look too much better."

Somewhat grumpily, perhaps jealous because Sam has better (or at least more direct) come-on lines than he does, Tom states "Well, I'm convinced that all fashion designers are women-haters." The first interesting thing he's said, but our interest is cut short by a Martian peeking through the porthole, a critter with three eyes, two mouths and two antennae. Naturally Iris is the only one to see it. Naturally she screams.

And we cut back to the hospital on Earth. And we still haven't seen the surface of Mars! We have to wait for five minutes while the doctors talk about giving Iris drugs to force her mind to remember. She volunteers to take the drug. Back we go to Mars.

Finally we see the Martian surface. It's a treat. Various sets and cartoon-like matt paintings are combined under a process called "Cinematic" in which the darker areas of the negative were etched out with acid, then the film was printed positive with a red tint, the bright 'shadows' glowing eerily. Bill Warren in his 'KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!' attacked the process as *"doomed from the start. After all, who wants to watch a movie in which the effects as well as the people look like cartoons, but aren't?"* Well, as a child I instantly accepted the idea that everything about another planet, including how light passed through the atmosphere, would be weirdly different. I loved it!

So anyway, our merry crew are traipsing about the weird landscape. Sam has a 'sonic' gun to 'freeze' nasties so they can be shattered if you poke them with a stick.

Nevertheless Tom warns Iris "You better stick close to me."

She laughs and replies "Oh Tom, I know I acted like an hysterical female back there in the ship, but I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, and I won't get out of your sight."

So naturally the first thing she does is walk out of sight straight into the clutches of a large carnivorous plant with yee old wrap-around tentacles. She screams. She screams again. Tom tears her loose. Sam freezes the plant.

"It's not a plant," declares the Prof, "It's a low form of neuro-muscular vegetal creature." Yeah, a plant.

"Well, that's enough swash buckling for one day," he adds.

Declares Sam, "I'm all for that, any swash I ever had just came unbuckled." Who wrote this stuff, Woody Allen?

Back on the ship, Tom comments, "Only a little bit of difference between sticking your chin up and your neck out."

Properly abashed, Iris says "I for one know it now, Colonel Sir."

There follows about fifteen minutes of gibberish about community minds controlling lower life forms, etc. Then it's back to staring out the porthole.

"Jumpy, Irish?" asks Tom. He always calls her Irish, explaining, 'If I ever call you by name, you'll know it.' Cryptic lad.

"Yes, afraid so, a little."

"See anything?"

"Nothing, everything seems to be dead out there, like a nightmare of unending silence." Well, at least it's a quiet nightmare.

"We all feel it," states Tom.

Iris stares lovingly into his face.

"It isn't just me because I'm a woman?" She asks, breathing heavily.

Needless to say, this film is wildly popular with the feminist movement. Talk about role models!

They go out on another walk-about. This time they penetrate beyond the jungle into a sandy region with a few bushes.

"Look," says Iris, "those trees over there, they look different, like nothing we've seen before."

I'm not surprised, since those six 'trees' are legs sprouting from a distinctly hairy monster. WE don't know this because the body of the critter is out of camera view, but THE CREW should notice this since all they have to do is look up, but it seems they're all suffering from tunnel vision. The base of the 'tree', which looks an awful lot like a giant claw, has huge spikes growing out of it. Iris hacks one off with a machete. Bad idea! The monster emits ear-splitting shrieks and begins to move.

This wonderful critter stands about 40 feet tall, has 6 crab-like legs sprouting from its oval body which is covered with fur except for its flat, striped belly, has a ratty tail, a mouse-like face with big ears, intensely staring beady eyes, two tiny little arms with clutching three-fingered hands, and it walks -- I should say skitters -- on the tips of its claws with a sound very much like the clattering of hooves. I would love a model of this. It's one of the cutest monsters in filmdom.



The infamous RatBatSpider

The prof is briefly trapped in a crevice between two rocks which the monster attempts to crush with one of its claws. But Sam shines his sonic gun into the critter's eyes, blinding it and sending it skittering across the Martian landscape. It must have hollow bones, it's weight barely keeps it attached to the surface. Why, the monster moves as if it were held up with wires! Truly alien!

Never say die, our intrepid explorers keep on till they reach the shores of a lake.

"So there it is, a Martian lake." says Tom. Very astute of him.

One thing I discovered as I watched the film again is that the lake has a concrete lip around it which hides the feet of the astronauts from our view as they approach the edge of the 'shore'. I guess they thought nobody would notice. And they were right, I didn't see it when I watched the film in the theatre nearly 50 years ago. I was enthralled with the idea of a Martian lake, I didn't want to see any evidence it was a mere swimming pool on a set! And so I didn't.

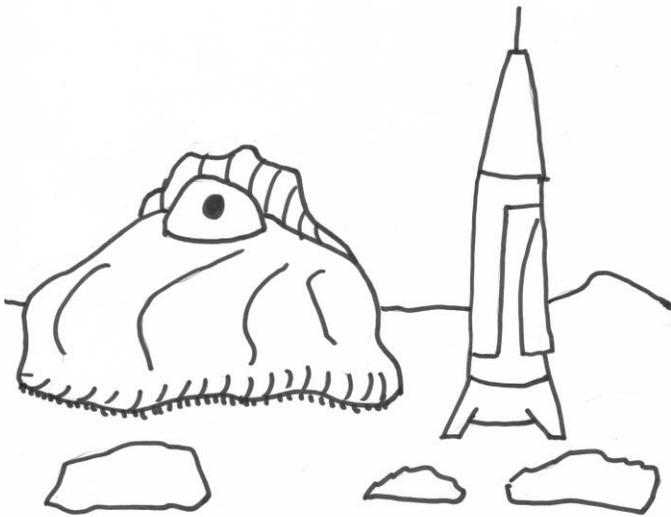
They turn back to the ship. Once inside, while cleaning his sonic gun, Sam comments, "Some baby that Rat-bat-spider eh? It walked away from Cleo (his gun) even after she turned on all her charms too. Someday maybe she'll meet a monster that'll ignore us, break her heart, mine too." You just know he's going to die! Well, he does.

When next they go outside their ship, they take an inflatable dingy with them. Paddling out on to the lake, they get close to a Martian city only to be chased back to shore by a ludicrous blob with rotating eyes. Sam gets eaten. Or at least absorbed and dissolved.

The Prof, on the other hand, succumbs to a heart attack during liftoff. And Tom gets touched by a piece of the blob and goes all to pieces on the trip home. Poor Iris has to take care of everything herself. No mention is ever made of how she disposes of the Prof's body. Perhaps she ran short on rations?

There's another half hour of boring suspense back at the hospital on Earth till Iris figures out how

to get the blob off of Colonel Tom's arm. They live happily ever after.



Martian Blob and spaceship X1 MR1

The joy of this film lies not in the plot, not in the acting, not in the dialogue, but in the weird sense of other-worldliness the film managed to convey, if only by accident. It was stilted enough to seem documentary-like, and so I believed. I believed with all my heart. Oh, to be a kid again!

BONUS REVIEW: ROBOT MONSTER

I like to write reviews of B movies. What is a B movie? Traditionally, the low budget bottom-half of a double bill. More recently, any formula-ridden low budget exploitation quickie. But the latter description smacks of condescension. The truth is that B movies are lovingly crafted philosophical film essays, often cleverly disguised as mere entertainment, containing a self-consistent mythos which explores fundamental human problems. I shall prove this to you by analyzing the famous classic B movie ROBOT MONSTER.

Let us consider the symbolism screen-writer Wyott Ordnung employs, keeping in mind that his theme is the conflict between reasoning man and emotive man, and where this struggle may ultimately lead us. Note the subtle structuring of the cast. The HU-MANs consist of three couples: two children, two young adults, and two elders. Here we

have the three stages of human sexuality, the basic paradigm of all that is human. These allegorical figures represent innocence, youthful vitality, and learned wisdom. In sum, the best the human race has to offer. And then there's RO-MAN, representing the monster conflict which threatens humanity, that basic split in our psyche, our Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy, which is illustrated by the contrast between RO-MAN's robot aspect (metal helmet, antennae, face hidden by a blank white cloth) and the beast aspect which his obscenely shaggy body amply demonstrates. Wyott Ordnung speaks to us all when he poses the problem. Can we destroy the monstrous wound we have ourselves created?

Consider innocence as a weapon, or at least as a form of defence. The boy often escapes because he can outrun the ponderous RO-MAN. Yet we all know that to deny the reality of danger through the ignorance which innocence offers is an illusionary form of safety at best. Ordnung is quick to prove this in what must be the most callous and brutally shocking moment of violence in cinematic history. (You think the shower scene in PSYCHO was the worst? Read on.) RO-MAN confronts the little girl walking alone on a barren hillside. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?" he thunders. The girl stares defiantly up at the alien and replies, "I'M NOT AFRAID OF YOU. MY DADDY WON'T LET YOU HURT ME." Ah, the sweet trusting innocence of childhood. The RO-MAN lunges for her. We do not see her death. It is not necessary that we should. The idea suffices. The scene alludes to the loss of innocence we've all shared, the end of childhood, the entry into the adult world of sexual passion, the eternal adult problem of uniting mind and body in a coherent whole, a problem made more difficult by the growing power of the RO-MAN within us all. Wyott Ordnung warns us innocence is not enough. Innocence is fatal.

Perhaps we can turn to learned wisdom? To the rational mind warmed by experience and calm, civilized, humanitarian consideration? The professor has witnessed the destruction of the human race, yet believes RO-MAN will spare the few who remain if they can prove they are not a threat to him. What an idiot. Naturally his efforts to placate RO-MAN place his family in even greater danger. This is perhaps Ordnung's wryest comment on human progress. Wisdom is a form of innocence

and just as fatal. At best we might influence our Apollonian aspect, but the realm of Dionysus is beyond common sense, beyond rational awareness. The best of what we've become is ineffectual in the face of the worst of what we've become. Paradoxically, our growing sanity is but a symptom of our developing psychosis. Bold of Ordnung to point this out.

So the future lies with youthful vitality, with the lust for life, and above all, the power of love, which solves so many problems in so many films? Only a mixture of innocence and wisdom fired by enlightened human LUST can save us from the egalitarian ant-mind nightmare of the RO-MAN? Alas....No. As Ordnung and Director Phil Tucker clearly show. First, they take great pains to establish the essentially innocent power of the young couple's sexual fervour, as in the two-way TV repair scene, her hand on his, guiding his turgid soldering iron gently within the electronic components, saying, "NO, NOT LIKE THAT ... THAT'S RIGHT ... OHH, YES!" Ironically, their initial attempt fails. Do they give up? No. Consider the man's inspired comment: "DON'T YOU REALIZE, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, BUT YOU ALMOST DID IT!" (Perhaps the best piece of dialogue illustrating man's eternal optimism ever recorded on film.) All this is doomed, for just as the professor fell prey to the inhuman Apollonian robot-mind of RO-MAN, his daughter succumbs to the raw Dionysian power of RO-MAN's animal body. Her sexual excitement on volunteering to meet RO-MAN alone is so obvious her entire family wrestles her to the ground and ties her up. Later, when the powerful RO-MAN succeeds in carrying her off, her patently phony screams, delighted smile and half-hearted kicks reveal how pleased she really is. Will she tame the monster conflict? Heal the wound? No, for the lustful RO-MAN is repeatedly called away from the great experiment of unification (which he is as eager as she to attempt) by demands from his leader -- the GREAT GUIDANCE -- (read: the mind desperately seeking control) for information on what is going on. She is ultimately rescued, and RO-MAN experiences enormous frustration as any personification of humanity's greatest internal conflict rightfully should. Alas, when RO-MAN learns the power of love is useless, a chain-reaction of doubt and confusion is triggered in his mind, his two aspects warring. Ordnung's subtlest manoeuvre,

the image of the problem experiencing the problem it represents, a lesson for us all.

As a final consequence of the dilemma, the GREAT GUIDANCE destroys the Earth and everything on it by unleashing a ray which runs time backwards, spawning dinosaurs, etc., until nothing remains, for it has not yet formed. Ordnung's sly hint we still have a chance? Let us hope so. By showing us what won't work, Ordnung and Tucker urge us to find out what will work, stimulate us to survive. Truly, a message for our time.

Director Phil Tucker, in reflecting on the significance of ROBOT MONSTER, stated: "FOR THE BUDGET, AND FOR THE TIME, I FELT I ACHIEVED GREATNESS."

UPCOMING REVIEWS INCLUDE:

- The Brain Eaters
- The Giant Claw
- The Slime People
- Firemaidens of Outer Space
- Wild Women of Wongo
- Gor
- Mars Needs Women
- Wizard of Mars
- Cape Canaveral Monsters
- Space Monsters

And all kinds other goodies.

COLOPHON

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