

# FILMS FANTASTIC 13

The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau



Happy Turkey Day To All. This issue we have a few turkeys to brighten your holiday season and to keep you safe on Black Friday.

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NOTE: As most of you out there who read this will note, I do not tend to watch too much in the way of contemporary movies. I have been disappointed too many times, and the trends in current genre films do not appeal to me. So, please, if there is anyone out there who would like to write on the modern stuff, let me know. Contributions are requested and welcome.

Thanksgiving, the day turkeys are on tables across the nation, when millions fall asleep in front of the television set. Those of us in the screening room are also thinking of turkeys, but of a different variety. These are the turkeys turned out by Hollywood that entertain us, but for all the wrong reasons. No one sets out to deliberately make a bad movie (for the most part) but low budgets, and the occasional lack of talent tend to guarantee less than satisfactory results. Fortunately, the results are often funny, presenting us with unintentional comedies. We shall highlight some of these Turkeys for holiday viewing. These are only a few of the treats lurking in the shadows out in the film world.



**ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS** is a pretty good place to start. This Roger Corman opus from 1957 provides a lot of laughs. The plot has a group of scientists trapped on an island with some giant, telepathic crabs. I forget exactly why the crabs are here, but it probably involves wiping out

humanity and taking over the world. Will the Professor from GILLIGAN'S ISLAND be able to save the day?

The cast is competent, the behind the camera staff has the routine down, and Corman delivered this drive in masterpiece on a budget of \$70,000. It contains enough unintentional comedy to make it worth watching. Cinematographer Floyd Crosby had been in the business since 1931 and was highly regarded in the trade. Music was by Ronald Stein.



**THE GIANT CLAW** I have written about this 1957 beauty before, so all I will say now is what could have been an average Sci Fi programmer turned into a comedy classic thanks to the ridiculously cheap special effects and one really ugly bird puppet. A good cast just can't compete with the real star of this gem.



**KING DINOSAUR** Bert I. Gordon started his directorial career with this turkey from 1955. Sadly, it lacks the entertainment value of his later, better movies. A new planet, dubbed Nova, enters the solar system and four scientists (two men, two women) are sent to explore. After much muddling around they cross a lake to a dinosaur inhabited island. Among the supplies they carry is a convenient atom bomb. The dinosaurs are lizards, and a bit of stock footage from **1 Million BC** (more reptiles). The scientists are so annoying you wind up cheering for the lizards early on.

**LAND UNKNOWN** is one of Universal's later Sci Fi efforts. This one is from 1957. On a naval expedition to Antarctica, three men and reporter Maggie Hathaway crash-land in a crater 1000 m below sea level. There, they encounter steamy tropical forest, dinosaurs, carnivorous plants, and human footprints, as Maggie's clothes become more and more abbreviated. The cast is led by Jock Mahoney, stuntman and actor. Outstanding is Henry Brandon as a man marooned in the crater for four years. The Tyrannosaurus suit is a comic highlight.



**TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE** What can you say about this 1959 grade Z flick? Well, for one thing it's a pretty good comedy, even though it was not intended to be. The no name cast is no worse than many I have seen. The director appears to have demanded the space teens speak in a monotone and this just adds to the laughs when used in the line "I wish to make the earth my home forever." Special effects are also weak, although a few are creative.



**FIRE MAIDENS OF OUTER SPACE** After landing on the 13th moon of Jupiter, the men from Earth debark from their ship to find a forested area containing the last remnant of lost Atlantis: an old man named Prossus, a bevy of nubile young women eager for husbands, and -- The Creature. "The beast with the head of a fish," laments Prossus. "It must be destroyed -- yet it is indestructible!"

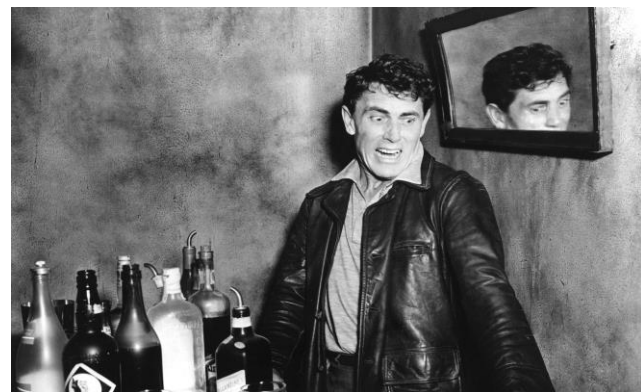
Poor Anthony Dexter. After landing the title role in VALENTINO (1951) he was expected to go on to bigger and better things. Handsome and talented he never managed

to make it out of low budget programmers and this 1959 Sci Fi turkey was the low point of his career. Filmed in England with a mostly unknown cast it offers its shares of laughs and should be seen on a double feature with TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE. The Fire Maidens spend a lot of time dancing to Alexander Borodin's dances from Prince Igor. At least there is some good music in the movie.



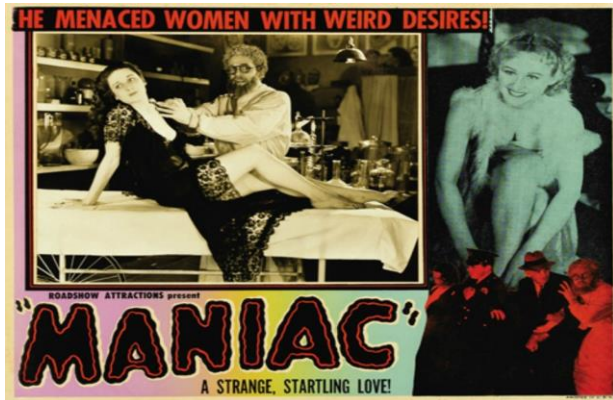
## THE STORY OF MANKIND

Never have so many stars appeared in such a film as this one. Irwin Allen rounded up fifty stars for his 1957 adaptation of the book by Henrik Van Loon. A framing device has a trial to determine if Humanity will be allowed to survive because they have entered the nuclear age. Prosecuting is Mr. Scratch, aka Satan, ably portrayed by Vincent Price. For the defense is Ronald Colman as the Spirit Of Humanity. The cast includes Hedy Lamar as Joan of Arc, Peter Lorre as Nero, Groucho Marx as Peter Minituit buying Manhattan Island from the Indians, Chico Marx as a monk, and Harpo Marx as Sir Isaac Newton discovering gravity. This movie is definitely one of a kind.



A small group of people are stranded on an island by a hurricane. Adding to their problems are giant shrews willing to chow down on anyone they encounter. The shrews are actually dogs in bad shrew costumes. James Best and Ken Curtis star. Amazingly

their careers survived this unintentional comedy extravaganza.



**MANIAC** For a while in the early sound era Dwain Esper was regarded as the king of the exploitation films. These were intended to get around the Production Code and distributed to individual theaters. They were also advertised as “Adult Only” to try to avoid trouble with local authorities. Titles like REEFER MADNESS come to mind. **MANIAC**, also known as **SEX MANIAC** involved a mad scientist who experiments with bringing the dead back to life. Performances are over the top, the plot makes no sense, and there are some disturbing moments. But there are also many unintentionally funny moments too. Not for everyone, but is is an interesting relic of a bygone era. NOTE: Despite appearances, no cats were harmed during the production of this film. People may be another thing.



We close with **ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES** from 1959. A backwoods game warden and a local doctor discover that giant leeches are responsible for disappearances and deaths in a local swamp, but the local police don't believe them. Another drive in classic the monsters in this gem are some of the funniest seen on film. The story offers many opportunities for unintentional laughs.

Here is to hoping everyone has a good Thanksgiving and beats the Corona Virus.