

Movie Review



Greetings all, it's Reaper Rick back at you again this issue. You may have noticed in our last issue the powers that be brought back that hack, Moviegoer Grim, to do the Movie Reviews. Oh, sure, people with money can go out and spend ten or twelve bucks to see a new movie several times a month, but some of us ain't that lucky, you know? I mean, the economy tanked not over long ago, remember? I live on a fixed income, after all, and can't even afford NetFlix anymore. Well, I am not going to alter my reviews just because they changed The World of Myth back to a monthly publication and the owner didn't think I was up to working every month. Hey, it's not as if I was dragged back to that place with the padded walls or anything, you know? Thanks for nothing, boss. I hardly ever hear those voices anymore. What? Oh, okay...

So anyway, this issue I am going to do a Horror/Monster movie retrospective review. Some of these movies were likely released before most of our readers were even born (at least one of them came out before I was born), but that does not mean they aren't worth watching, even in this day and age. Some of the best actors in the genre appear in these movies, so sit back, grab a bowl of popcorn and enjoy!

We are going to use the Way Back Machine quite a bit this issue, and first of all I want to go back a full 80 years to 1932 (and yes, that is before I was born—but just barely) to discuss the movie, "White Zombie." This classic starred Bela Lugosi, Madge Bellamy, and Joseph Cawthorne.

A young couple travel to Haiti to be married, and are invited to have the ceremony performed at the home of a local land owner, but he has an ulterior motive for this seemingly kind gesture. He and the young woman were on the same ship from the United States to Haiti, and as he came to know her the land owner decided that he must possess her. Meanwhile, Bela is a mysterious and odd fellow (no surprise there) who runs a sugar cane mill staffed by workers who are all zombies.

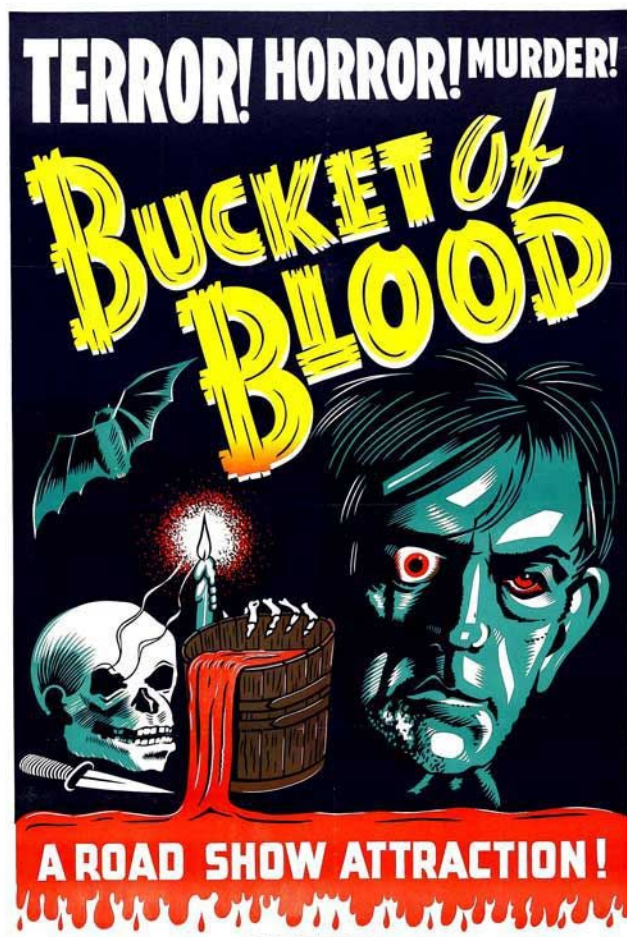
Don't forget that this is 1932, and these zombies are not the undead brain-eaters we recognize as zombies today. In fact, these zombies are not dead at all, but are merely under the mind control of Lugosi, who secretly fed his enemies—as well as some healthy workers for his mill—a special powder of his own design which puts them helplessly under Bela's control.

Our land owner (not surprisingly) wants the future husband out of the way so the fair maiden might be his own, but doesn't have the stomach to actually kill the young man, so goes to see Lugosi for a dose of his 'special' powder. Bela agrees to his request, but the evil mill owner has some ideas of his own for the young woman.

Remember that in 1932 'talking motion pictures' had only been around for a few years, and many of the actors in the new 'talkies' got their start in silent films. Thus, many of the stars in early talking motion pictures still used exaggerated facial expressions and elaborate arm and hand motions to make their emotions more understandable to the audience. This was no longer really necessary, however, since dialog was introduced (even if the dialog was not all that well written), but I suppose some habits are hard to break. "White Zombie" is such a film, which makes this horror movie somewhat comical when watched today, but it is still worth a view.

Bela Lugosi is at his best in this early classic, and I give "White Zombie" Three Stars





Now we're going to move forward in time some 25 years to 1959, and look at one of director Roger Corman's early film efforts. "A Bucket of Blood" starred Dick Miller (his one and only leading role, but he went on to be a well-known character actor), Anthony Carbone, Ed Nelson, and John Brinkley. Actually, a number of the male actors in this movie went on to become recognized character actors in the 1960s and 1970s. And oddly enough, although the title would indicate a fair amount of blood-letting to be seen (like, maybe a whole 'bucket' full), there is nary a hint of blood, save for a smear of such on a pancake skillet.

Anyway, most of the action in this movie takes place in a beatnik coffee house called the Yellow Door. (The film is in black and white, however, so we never really know what color the door actually is). Within the Yellow Door poor excuses for poets spout their gibberish to guitar or bongo music, while drug addled adults (the precursors of the 1960 hippies) drink coffee, purchase drugs, and reflect on how bad their lives are. And artists (who are also apparently drug addled) show their paintings and sculpture at the coffee house. Plus, there are a couple of Narcs at the Yellow Door, searching (while undercover as 'real' beatniks) for drug dealers.

Walter Paisley is a somewhat emotionally underdeveloped bus 'guy' at the coffee house, and he deeply admired all of the artists who slithered their way through the coffee house. Unfortunately for Walter, some of the patrons treated him as if he did not fit in with their pompous attitudes of themselves.

In order to fit in with his imagined friends, Walter tells everyone that he is going to create a 'great' sculpture, and goes home to his flea-bag hotel room and opens up a ten pound cube of soft clay. After he tries for several minutes to create a bust of a young lady he loves (from afar) at the Yellow Door, and fails miserably, he freaks out due to his artistic ineptitude and slams a knife through a paper-thin wall in his room. And how weird is this?—his landlady's cat was trapped in the wall and Walter skewers the poor feline with his steak knife. Bummer.

Walter tears part of the wall down and removes the dead cat (which is now stiff as a board, even though it only died a few moments before), still with the knife sticking out of its side. He sets the furry corpse down on the table where the cube of clay still reposes, and has a masterful idea. In case you haven't figured it out yet, this movie (although perhaps unintentional) is more of a comedy than a horror flick.

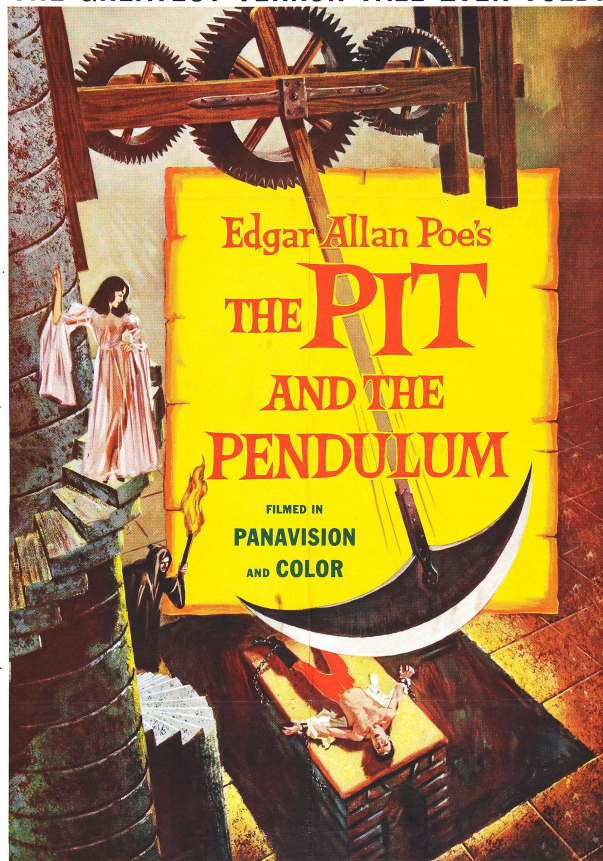
So Walter covers the dead feline in wet clay and when it dries, he takes it down to the Yellow Door to show everyone his mastery of sculpting. Oddly enough (except in this movie) everyone *loves* his work and they want to see more. He allows this temporary success to go to his head and claims he has more sculpting projects in mind, but when his pseudo girlfriend wants to see what else he has, Walter again freaks out. There aren't any more cats living in his building that he can kill and cover with clay, so he kills a female model and does the clay thing to her. Everyone is really impressed—she looks so *lifelike*. But now, in order to keep up the appearance that he is an actual sculptor, and to keep his new adoring fans appeased, Walter must keep killing people and covering them with clay.

Again, while this movie was originally presented as a horror flick, over several decades the poor dialog, rather stiff actors, and funny situations seems to have turned it into a semi cult classic of comedy/horror. This is a great popcorn flick and well worth a weekend rental for some good laughs. I give "A Bucket of Blood" Three Stars for

gruesome humor



THE GREATEST TERROR TALE EVER TOLD!



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SCREENPLAY BY RICHARD MATHESON PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY ROGER CORMAN MUSIC BY LES BAXTER • AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURE

Back inside the Way Back Machine for a moment, we move forward a mere two years to 1961, and look at another Roger Corman film (this one quite a bit better than the last one of his movies I reviewed). This time Corman tackles Edgar Allen Poe's classic story, "The Pit and the Pendulum," and got author Richard Matheson to write the screenplay. This movie starred the great Vincent Price, along with John Kerr, Anthony Carbone ("A Bucket of Blood), and the scream queen of 'B' movies, Barbara Steele.

This movie takes place in 16th Century Spain, and Price plays Nicolas Medina, whose father Sebastian was a famous torturer for the Spanish Inquisition. Medina's wife, Elizabeth, dies suddenly—supposedly from fright—after becoming fascinated with Sebastian's torture chamber, deep within the bowels of the Medina castle. When Elizabeth's brother arrives to find out how and why she died, he finds that Vincent is close to a mental breakdown, as he feels that he may have buried his wife alive. But did he?

As usual with Roger Corman and American International pictures, Corman uses a lot of stock outdoor footage of a dark castle on the edge of a towering cliff, along with crashing waves and lightening for an eerie effect, but if you can get past that, the overall scenic design is done very well.

This movie is an amazing look at a man's slow descent into insanity, and no one is better than Vincent Price to show how it's done. The one scene that depicts this descent graphically has Price moving slowly down a spiral stone staircase, as he attempts to locate his (dead?) wife. Before he starts down this staircase he is depressed, confused, and teeters on

the edge of sanity, but as the viewer follows his progress down into the darkness, he changes, and literally spirals down into madness.

The end of this movie is a surprise shocker—and, yes, we finally get to see the pit and the pendulum in action—and is well worth a weekend rental. I feel Nicolas Medina is one of Price's best horror roles, and I give "The Pit

and the Pendulum" a full Four Stars





Okay. With one more two year jump forward in time, we come to 1963 and yet another Roger Corman film, where he teams up once again with Richard Matheson, American International, and Vincent Price. But in this movie we also get to see several more amazing genre actors share the silver screen with Vincent.

Corman brings another Poe classic to the big screen, and this time it is "The Raven." Along with Price, this movie starred Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, Hazel Court, and a very young Jack Nicholson. This effort, however, is a spoof of horror movies, and with this cast it's a movie that should not be missed.

The film starts with Price reciting Poe's poem, "The Raven," through the opening credits, and we then find Price reading an ancient volume of forgotten lore, on a bleak December night, as he laments the loss of his wife, Lenore. Suddenly there comes a tapping, as if someone gently rapping, rapping upon his chamber door. Anyway, he opens the chamber door and there's no one at the door, because the tapping is coming from a window. He opens the window and a raven flies in. It turns out the raven is actually Peter Lorre, who has been transformed into a bird by a spiteful Karloff.

It turns out that all three of them are magicians, and Karloff is the current head of the Sorcerer's Guild, who turned Lorre into a bird for challenging him to a magical duel. Lorre obviously lost the duel and went to Price to turn him back to a human. Price manages to do this, but Lorre sees a picture of Lenore and informs Price that his supposedly dead wife is very much alive and living with Karloff. Vincent decides

that Karloff must have somehow captured Lenore's spirit and vows to free her. As they are preparing to leave, Jack Nicholson shows up (as Lorre's son), so they all travel to Karloff's castle.

Once there, it becomes apparent that Karloff has lured the other magician to his castle to steal Price's magical hand manipulations, but they are evenly matched as far as their magic goes, and so decide on a magical duel to the death to see who is the more powerful. The duel itself is a marvelous comedic display, and while the special effects are decidedly weak, considering the fact that this movie was made almost fifty years ago they did the best they could.

The entire movie is filled with sight gags (mixed with the occasional surprise scenes of horror), together with some pretty funny dialog. In one scene Lorre even uses the Vulcan hand sign for 'Live Long and Prosper' in one of his magical spells—several years before it appeared on *Star Trek*. But the main draw of this movie is seeing these four iconic actors on the screen together. For an amazing cast and an overall funny movie, I give "The



Raven" Four big Stars . This is another great popcorn movie and well worth a weekend rental.

Basically, you can have fun with all four of these movies, and if you have never seen any of them, they are highly recommended. And, I guess that's it for the Reaper this issue. Hopefully I'll see you next time. Not *next* issue, of course, since apparently I am not mentally capable of producing a decent movie review every month, but I should be back in two months. If I'm still walking around free by that time. Later...

Reaper Rick

BIO: Reaper Rick is an avid movie lover who has never quite gotten over the terror he experienced as a young child when he watched his first horror movie on the big screen back before most of you were even born. He

really enjoys good movies and really hates bad ones.