

Trashfiend

Disposable horror fare of the 1960s & 1970s



Key to film review abbreviations & symbols

DIR Director/s
PRO Producer/s
SCR Screenwriter/s
NOV Film novelization availability
PB Mass market paperback, **SC** Softcover trade or **HC** Hardcover trade edition
DOP Director/s of photography
EXP Executive producer/s
MXF Makeup effects artist/s
SFX Special effects artist/s
VFX Visual effects artist/s
MUS Music composer/s
SND Soundtrack availability
CD Compact Disc or **LP** Vinyl release
STR Cast members
aka Pseudonym of cast or crew member
AKA Alternative title of production
m Running time rounded to nearest minute
RTU Running time unknown
DVD DVD availability
PAL PAL VHS availability
SE SECAM VHS availability
VHS NTSC VHS availability
WS Widescreen presentation or **FS** Full screen presentation
ADL Promotional adline

DVD region & video encoding formats

R0 Region Free Encoding
R1 Specific to the United States, Canada
R2 Specific to Western Europe, the Middle East, Japan, South Africa, Greenland
R3 Specific to Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong
R4 Specific to Mexico, South and Central America, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean
R5 Specific to CIS, Eastern Europe, India, most of Africa, North Korea, Mongolia
R6 Specific to China

NTSC Specific to the United States, Canada, Japan, South America, the Philippines; **PAL** Specific to Europe, Hong Kong, Australia and most African, Asian countries; **SECAM** Specific to France, the USSR, some African countries

THE ASPHYX (1972)

Glendale [UK] Paragon Films, Inc. [US] DIR: Peter Newbrook PRO: John Brittany SCR: Brian Comport DOP: Frederick Archibald Young (aka Freddie Young) SFX: Ted Samuels MUS: Bill McGuffie STR: Ralph Arliss, Paul Bacon, Tony Caunter, David Grey, Jane Lapotaire, John Lawrence, Robert Powell, Alex Scott, Terry Scully, Robert Stephens and Fiona Walker

AKA: *L'Esprit de la Mort* [The Spirit of the Dead]
Experimente [Experiments]
The Horror of Death
Spirit of the Dead

Approximately 98m; Color; Rated PG

DVD: *The Asphyx* [All Day Entertainment; 99(98)m; WS; NTSC R1] [Anchor Bay UK; 82m; WS; PAL R2] [Elite Entertainment; 98m; WS; NTSC R1]

VHS: *The Asphyx* [Interglobal Video; 90m; FS; NTSC] [InterVision; 76m; FS; PAL] [Magnum Entertainment; 98m; FS; NTSC] [Something Weird Video; 90m; FS; NTSC] [United Home Video; 98m; FS; NTSC]

ADL: "When It Leaves, You're Dead"

CIRCA 1875. Sir Hugo (Robert Stephens), a widower obsessed with photographing the soul departing at the moment of death, hopes to prove the existence of the human spirit and take it from the realm of the priest to that of the scientist. It isn't until the death of his own son in a boating accident that he discovers the existence of an unearthly creature he dubs the 'asphyx', and that by trapping it he can impede its victim's mortality. Things take a turn for the dangerous when he attempts—with the aid of his adopted son Giles (Robert Powell)—to immortalize his loved ones, even at the risk of their own lives.

This film is loosely based on the efforts of one Hippolyte Baraduc (1850–1909), a Parisian gynecologist-cum-neurologist obsessed with photographing a dying person's spirit as it left the body. His most famous photograph is one taken



Videobox art for *The Asphyx* (1986)
Magnum Entertainment #M-3117

of his wife twenty minutes after her departure on October 15, 1907; hovering above her still warm corpse are three fuzzy white splotches that even today some believe is the manifestation of ectoplasm. Whether this was a carefully conceived hoax, or a simple glare marring what is otherwise an undistinguished photo, it remains that the *idea* of capturing the image of one's soul is far more interesting than the results. It also shouldn't come as any surprise that *The Asphyx* is far more interesting than Baraduc's dodgy postmortem snapshot.

Despite a few breaches in logic, this is an adeptly made and thought provoking supernatural thriller. This period piece is further elevated above the low budget trappings by some excellent



They make What! What! in the moonlight?
US one-sheet art for *The Beach Girls and the
Monster* (1966) American Academy Pictures

performances and lavish backdrops. The ban-
shee-like asphyx is one of cinema's more chilling
apparitions; unfortunately, its (ahem) over expo-
sure reveals some jerky stop motion photography
and conspicuously looped footage that ultimately
renders it toothless. Had the over ambitious ef-
fects artists on this film applied the cinematic
principle of less is more, the manifestation of the
asphyx itself would have truly been noteworthy
as one of the creepiest bogies of horror film his-
tory.

Alas, this was the only feature film directed
by Newbrook (1920–). His other credits include
that of producer and/or cinematographer on
such genre efforts as *Corruption* (1967), *School*

for *Unclaimed Girls* (1969) and *Crucible of Terror*
(1971). He also worked on *The Bridge on the Riv-
er Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), as
camera operator and second unit photographer,
respectively. (We won't hold against him his as-
sociation with these earlier efforts, though, as he
was probably hard up for cash at the time.)

Cinematographer Young (1902–98) boasts
a similarly mediocre résumé, having received no
less than three Oscars in a career that spanned
almost sixty years, and inventing pre-fogging, the
process of pre-exposing film stock in order to
mute the colors, which was first applied in 1966.
But you and I will always remember him first
and foremost for photographing *The Asphyx* and
Gorgo (1961).

Despite numerous releases on both videotape
and DVD, this film still remains difficult to track
down because it never remains in print for any
length of time. Although the digitally re-mas-
tered DVD releases are undoubtedly better than
previously issued prints, it is rumored that the
only surviving positive prints of the film were se-
riously marred, and even some patchwork editing
between several prints would not yield a perfect
copy of the film.

Those viewers expecting out and out trash
may be sorely disappointed, but those looking for
an above average albeit low-key shocker should
be pleasantly surprised.

THE BEACH GIRLS AND THE MONSTER (1966)

American Academy Pictures [US] DIR: Jon Hall
PRO: Edward Janis SCR: Joan Janis (aka Joan
Gardner) SFX: Robert Hansard (aka Bob Hansard)
MUS: Elaine DuPont, Walker Edmiston, Arnold
Lessing and Frank Sinatra Jr. STR: Clyde Adler,
Sue Casey, Dale Davis, Elaine DuPont, Walker
Edmiston, John Hall, Arnold Lessing, Reed Morgan

(aka Read Morgan), Gloria Neil, Tony Roberts,
Carolyn Williamson and Kingsley the Lion

AKA: *Invisible Terror*

Monster from the Surf

Monster of the Surf

Surf Terror

Approximately 74m; b&w and Color; Unrated

DVD: *The Beach Girls and the Monster* [Image

Entertainment; 66(74)m; WS; NTSC R1]

VHS: *The Beach Girls and the Monster* [Englewood
Entertainment; 74m; FS; NTSC]

ADL: "Beach Party Lovers Make Hey! Hey! in
the Moonlight... While the Monster Lurks in the
Shadows!"

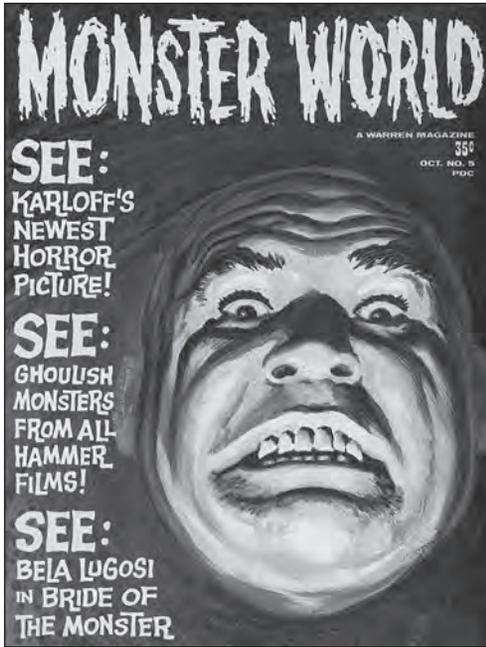
BUNNY, A TEENAGE GIRL playing hard to get with her rutting beau on the beach at night, is murdered by a waterlogged beastie after wandering out of sight of her friends. Distraught, a fellow beach bum, Richard Lindsay (Walker Edmiston), mounts his own investigation when the police prove next to useless as well as prejudiced. (Those surfers "are capable of anything... even murder!") Unfortunately, Rick is unable to make much headway on his own, as he either spends his time staving off his horny stepmother's advances, or arguing with his father (John Hall), who insists he quit frittering his life away and assist him with his scientific research. The viewer's suspicions are clumsily steered towards Mark (Arnold Lessing), an affable but creepy artist living with the Lindsays having been injured in a car accident. (Although he claims to have no feeling whatsoever in his leg, he walks with only a slight limp.)

Filmmakers have led us to believe that all teenagers did in the early sixties was either surf, hot rod, or spend their off hours go-go dancing on the beach. (So what did the kids in the midwest do? Oh, yeah... move to Californ-I-A.) I wasn't there, and since most of what we have in the way of documentation is a slew of beach pictures, we will simply have to toss skepticism to the wayside

and assume this was indeed the case. We'll also have to assume that these 24-7 parties were only interrupted by men in rubber monster suits and the occasional grounding for bad behavior.

Parental restriction aside, the interludes in *The Beach Girls and the Monster* are provided by some truly painful musical numbers (accompanied by stabs at humor that are about as jocular as being poked in the shin with a rusty penknife) and a particularly destitute looking monster. (No amount of seaweed affixed to its rubbery hide will obscure its dime store origins, although—for reasons best left unsaid lest I spoil your viewing experience—it makes sense within the context of the film.) The intentional humor is best illustrated by a scene of a teen ogling a gaggle of bikini clad birds while wearing a pair of slink-eyed glasses, his leering accompanied by a zany 'spring' sound effect and gunfire. Hopefully, the gunshot was the sound of the guilt stricken sound engineer shooting himself having contributed to the whacky goings-on. (Being without our supposititious engineer in mid production may explain some of the glaring oversights in the way of sound editing, particularly in the scene where the engine of a teen's roadster is completely drowned out by the soft, soothing post synch sounds of the ocean in the distance and some local avian wildlife twittering nearby.)

There is a noticeable lack of scoring through much of the film, which is disappointing since this will probably hold the most appeal to viewers with its Ventures-like rhythms and occasional spats of jazzy sixties stylings. (While sister Nancy Sinatra was off being fitted for a new pair of boots, Frank Jr [1944–] was spending his days recording surf tunes, some of which appear in this film.) When these dated instrumentals do surface, it is often incongruously placed, as in the discovery of the film's first corpse.



Portrait of the late Tor Johnson by Gray Morrow, presumably based on the actor's reactions at the 1961 premiere of *The Beast of Yucca Flats*.
Monster World #5 (October 1965) Warren Publishing

As far as the actors are concerned, most of the performances are even more wooden than the surfboards cluttering the beaches for miles, which may explain the filmmakers' decision to rely on the far more lively pipelines and hang tens to pad out the shy running time. (Although much of the surf footage shown here was originally in color, some of the later prints in circulation have had it desaturated so that it doesn't detract from the remainder of the monochromatic film stock.)

It appears much of the film's budget was exhausted when obtaining film and music rights, and precious little left for the special effects department. In addition to the miserable looking beastie that gets far too little screen time, all of the victims—mauled to death by the shambling, bug eyed fish man—suffer from nothing more than grazes that barely qualify as skin deep. De-

termined not to outdo itself, *The Beach Girls and the Monster* is not only festooned with continuity problems, but also culminates with an overlong car chase that—with its projected backdrop spinning wildly out of control whilst the passengers barely waver—gives new meaning to the word slapdash.

Yes, this movie smacks of a quickie trying to cash in on a trend that plagued many a coastal community, if only because it is difficult to imagine that *The Beach Girls and the Monster* was a labor of love for anyone involved. (I was, uhm, lucky enough to see this flick back to back with Roger Corman's *Attack of the Crab Monsters* [1957]. If you didn't much care for AIP's effort, but wish you had, do what I did and you'll gain a whole new appreciation for Roger Corman's crusty crustaceans.)

This was the last film to feature ex-matinee idol Jon Hall (1915–79) in front of the camera. It was also his first and only credited role as director; he and Arthur C Pierce would pick up the slack for Michael A Hoey while on the set of *The Navy vs the Night Monsters* the following year, for which Hall also supplied 'special photographic effects.' *The Beach Girls and the Monster* also marks the one and only appearance of Kingsley the Lion. Of this, we can all be very grateful.

The titular monster in the surf gets his own rockin' theme song. Whether or not this reverb saturated ditty graces the B-side of an obscure 7 inch single somewhere, I haven't the foggiest, but that won't deter me from looking.

As bad as *The Beach Girls and the Monster* is, remind yourself that out there, waiting patiently for unwary viewers like ourselves, is a monster movie so inexcusably bad that it makes this film shine in comparison. Case in point...

THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS (1961)

Anthony Cardoza Enterprises [US] Cinema Associates [US] DIR: Coleman Francis PRO: Anthony Cardoza and Coleman Francis SCR: Coleman Francis DOP: John Cagle EXP: Roland Morin and Jim Oliphant MUS: Gene Kauer, Irwin Nafshunand and Al Remington STR: Larry Aten, Linda Bielema, Conrad Brooks, Alan Francis, Barbara Francis, Coleman Francis, Ronald Francis, Tor Johansson (aka Tor Johnson), Marcia Knight, Bob Labansat, Douglas Mellor, Jim Miles, John Morrison, Jim Oliphant, George Prince, Bing Stafford, Graham Stafford and Eric Tomlin
AKA: *The Atomic Monster*

Girl Madness

Approximately 54m; b&w; Unrated

DVD: *The Beast of Yucca Flats* [Alpha Video; 54m; FS; NTSC R1] [Image Entertainment; 54m; FS; NTSC R1]

VHS: *The Beast of Yucca Flats* [Anthony Cardoza Enterprises; 75(53)m; FS; NTSC] [Englewood Entertainment; 54m; FS; NTSC]

ADL: "Commiss Made Him an Atomic Mutant!"

IT WOULD BE SILLY for me to deny my pathological devotion to horror fare made during the sixties and seventies. Even the most somnambulist efforts made in this twenty year stretch fill me with an inexplicable sick pleasure. The cheaper the effects, the more painful the dialogue, the more hackneyed the execution, the *better*. I have not only plowed through the entirety of Andy Milligan's oeuvre, I have also gone back for seconds. My name is Scott Aaron Stine, and I have a problem.

Eventually, though, even the worst drug addict, the most irredeemable junkie, will hit rock bottom. Everyone has their breaking point, an epiphany where the realization hits them: "Jesus, this is just *bad!*"

For Devon Bertsch, who helped out with the initial stages of this book, it was Ray Dennis

Steckler's *The Hollywood Strangler Meets the Skid-Row Slasher* (1978). Knowing that I had already once brought the man to his knees, there was no way I could subject him to *The Beast of Yucca Flats*; any sadistic pleasure I may have gleaned from this act of psychological terrorism would surely have been overshadowed by the guilt I would feel for him having to eat his meals through a straw for the remainder of his days.

Over the course of a year, *The Beast of Yucca Flats* made it into my videocassette player no less than seven times. Having watched and rewatched my library of several thousand videos, I would inevitably drag out this one with the intent of finishing it once I had tired of ransacking my video collection. I rarely made it through more than five, maybe ten, minutes before I came up with a more pressing engagement. The video would sit on my entertainment center for days thereafter, but would eventually make its way back downstairs when I got tired of looking at the nondescript box. There it would sit until another moment of quiet desperation coaxed it back into my player a few months down the road. This ritual, I might add, was far more interesting than anything the film itself had to offer. (As if some mad poet were calling the shots, it took the filmmakers just as long to shoot *The Beast of Yucca Flats* as it did for me to consume the film in its entirety.)

A bedraggled Tor Johnson(1903–71) stumbles across the empty desert, a scarred and degraded victim of an atomic accident. He abducts a young woman, stumbling even more with her in tow. A couple of guys stumble across her, and drag her to safety. A family of four stops at a gas station; the two young boys wander into the desert, and their parents stumble after them. The boys, hopelessly lost, stumble across Tor in a cave, but make their escape. Tor stumbles after them. Everyone does a lot of stumbling in this film and—

suffice to say—it's not relegated to the people in front of the camera.

It's not easy sympathizing with a cast of players who are upstaged by scrub grass. Even a film like *Frozen Scream* (1975) is a much more emotionally charged outing than Cardoza's seventy five minute excursion into tedium. The Ed Wood Jr-like narration—riddled with so many browbeaten clichés and pointless observations that there is little enjoyment to be derived from its deadpan guidance—is no exception. (“It was a 112 degrees in the shade. And there was no shade,” our host exclaims with profound disinterest.)

Technically, the film—which was shot in 35mm and not 16mm as one might guess—is as flat as the wasteland on which most of it was staged. (One has to wonder how much of the \$34,000 budget was actually laundered, as it looks as if the film was made for far less money than reported.) Granted, it may not be nearly as shoddy or incompetent as many other Z-grade features, but at least some of its peers exhibit something that could be mistaken for *style*. *The Beast of Yucca Flats* simply forgoes such luxuries. Furthermore, one wonders if sexploitation filmmaker Doris Wishman took her cue on post synch dubbing from this film: the actors rarely speak, and when they do, their faces are conveniently off screen so there are no worries about matching the droning voices to their chapped lips during editing. (It wouldn't have mattered if they were out of synch, as the viewer's attention is instead focused on the patches of dead flora surrounding the players.) People have the gall to say that Ed Wood was the worst filmmaker ever? At least his efforts were enjoyable, or at the very least passably engaging; Wood's young ingénues—director Coleman Francis and producer Anthony Cardoza—could scarcely make these claims in the years to come.

Sadly, this inauspicious production—which was shot under the working title of *The Violent Sun*—was Tor Johnson's cinematic swansong. To add insult to injury, the aging strongman with a heart of gold was paid a paltry \$300 for starring in this career-killing feature. Producer Cardoza (1930–) also helped finance such no budget creature features as Wood's *Night of the Ghouls* (1959) and *Bigfoot* (1970). Late director Coleman (1919–73) spent most of his nine year film career writing, producing, directing, and even starring in exploitation films (some of the latter being directed by Ray Dennis Steckler and big boob connoisseur Russ Meyer). Although official sources generally cite hardened arteries as the cause of the filmmaker's death, it is rumored that his body was found in the back of an abandoned station wagon, a plastic bag pulled over his head and a tube shoved down his throat and/or wrapped around his neck. Creepy, regardless of how he managed to wind up in such an unfavorable position.

If ever there were a film that perfectly illustrated the cinematic definition of mind numbing, *The Beast of Yucca Flats* would surely be it. And for once, *please* don't presume my beratings to be a recommendation. C'mon... any film that casts a 390lb Swedish wrestler as a Russian physicist has got to have issues.

BEWARE! THE BLOB (1972)

Jack H Harris Enterprises, Inc. [US] DIR:
Lawrence Martin Hagman (aka Larry Hagman)
PRO: Anthony Harris SCR: Anthony Harris and
Jack Woods DOP: Al Hamm EXP: Jack H Harris
SFX: Tim Baar MUS: Mort Garson STR Margie
Adleman, Tim Baar, Shelley Berman, Godfrey
Cambridge, Marlene Clark, Del Close, William
B Foster, Gwynne Gilford, Robert N Goodman,
Danny Goldman, Gerrit Graham, Lawrence Martin

Hagman (aka Larry Hagman), Preston Hagman, John Houser, JJ Johnston, Carol Lynley, Tiger Joe Marsh, Burgess Meredith, Larry Norman, Fred Smoot, Richard Stahl, Randy Stonehill, Rockne Tarkington, Dick van Patten, Robert Walker, Richard Webb and Cindy Williams

AKA: *Beware of the Blob*

Cuidado! Con el... Blob! [Beware! It's the... Blob!]

Son of (the) Blob

Approximately 87m; Color; Rated PG

DVD: *Beware! The Blob* [Image Entertainment; 87m; FS; NTSC R1]

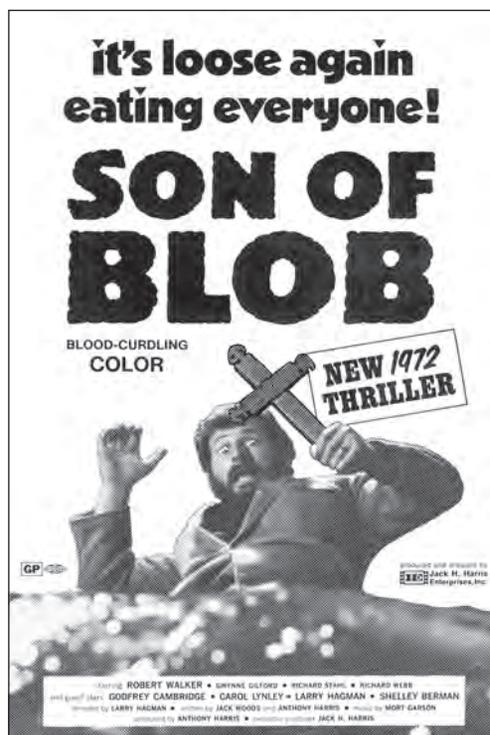
VHS: *Beware! The Blob* [Image Entertainment; 87m; FS; NTSC] *Son of the Blob* [Video Gems; 87m; FS; NTSC]

ADL: "It's Loose Again Eating Everyone!"

Dear Mr Hagman,

What the heck were you thinking? Did producer Harris have in his possession some compromising photos of Bill Daily, Barbara Eden and yourself, thus forcing your hand into helming this project? I would have surmised that the blank fired at you on the set of Dallas had lodged in your noggin and caused irreparable brain damage, but that incident didn't take place until eight years after you decided to sully the silver screen with Beware! The Blob.

For many years, I was convinced the giant space booger that terrorized Steve McQueen in 1958 had indeed returned for an encore. Cherishing the gooseflesh I felt when I first caught The Blob on TV at the impressionable age of five, I spent years trying to track down a copy of your nearly lost opus. Unfortunately, I was seriously distressed, nay, traumatized when I finally chanced upon your film many, many years later. Anyone who insists that Beware! The Blob is a direct sequel to the fifties sci



Sorry, Larry, crosses are used to keep vampires at bay, not disgruntled theatergoers.

Re-release pressbook advertisement for *Beware! The Blob* (1972) Jack H. Harris Enterprises

fi classic is no more trustworthy than the nitwit who tries to persuade others that Return of the Living Dead (1985) is a sequel to George A Romero's Night of the Living Dead (1968). Both 'sequels' are nothing more than tongue in cheek send-ups. Similarly, both tarnish the reputations of their predecessors.

To say that your directorial debut is a bad film would only beg interest from someone such as myself, when in reality it smacks of forged trash. Any self respecting trashfiend would keep their distance from a film that attempts to mimic the manic ineptitude of bona fide gutter cinema. All of this



Mexican lobby card for *Beware! The Blob* (1972) Jack H. Harris Enterprises, Inc.

may simply be the result of your being an inept filmmaker, but one gets the feeling that you and/or Harris were simply ridiculing the genre by forgoing craftsmanship. Granted, a few of the scenes may elicit an honest chuckle, but it is no recompense for what is otherwise an embarrassment for everyone involved. The script, as it were, would leave even poor old Ed Wood scratching his head until his scalp bled, with the rampant improbabilities undermined only by the complete and utter lack of continuity.

It is said that there is nothing sadder than a sad clown. How about competent has-beens or aspiring actors reduced to eke out a living reciting

drivel unfit for even a Troma film? Somehow, in light of this debacle, Dick van Patten and Cindy Williams managed to work their way 'up' to Eight is Enough and Laverne & Shirley, respectively, but did any of the other actors ever forgive you and your cohorts? Do you still get death threats, I wonder, for many a burgeoning career you may have cut short? At least poor Mr Meredith (1907-97)—wrapped in a serape and five years away from saving face with Michael Winner's The Sentinel (1977)—was spared seeing his name in the final credits.

I feel particularly sorry for Del Close, though, who tried to redeem his contribution in a fit of madness by

co-starring in the remake of The Blob sixteen years later . . . yet another earthbound disaster that should have been consumed by flames before it reached the surface. I can't help but feel a sense of relief that he passed away just before the ultimate degradation, when Beware! The Blob was rescued from obscurity by the DVD revolution.

At best, 'the film that JR shot' amounts to little more than a string of skits stripped of their punch lines. When the only suspense to be found is dependent upon whether or not some poor sap is going to plop down on a weathered recliner in which the Blob has already made itself cozy, the viewer is reminded just how short life really is.

I have to ask, in which shopping mall did you find the composer for your score? It must have been tough dragging him away from his Hammond organ, with the bustling crowds held in rapt attention and all.

However, I must congratulate your crew for a few palatable space booger effects. That is, those not conceived through forced perspective shots. Or through the reversal of the film stock. Or utilizing inflatable stand-ins. The rest isn't half bad.

I just don't get it. Are we to assume that your cameo in Beware! The Blob as a begrimed transient was indicative of your state of affairs at the time, and that taking this job was a desperate attempt to pull yourself out of the gutter? If this was the case, we could forgive such transgressions as long as you promised never to step behind a fully loaded camera again.

Please don't take this tirade as a personal attack. From all reports, you sound like a really great guy, having contributed much time and resources to some very worthy causes. But couldn't you have rested on your laurels? It's safe to say that many a boy discovered his sexuality long before puberty, thanks to I Dream of Jeannie, and thus you-Major Nelson-were cool by association and the envy of all. For this you would not be forgotten, but then you had to go muck it all up by making fun of both the sci fi genre and its aficionados by having a hand in this lousy sequel.

Jeezus, Larry . . . what were you thinking?

Sincerely, Scott Stine

P.S. Could you sign and return the enclosed photo of you as Cedric Ac-ton from the Dec. 16, 1970, episode of Night Gallery? Thanks.

BLOOD AND LACE (1971)

The Carlin Company [US] DIR: Philip S Gilbert
 PRO: Ed Carlin and Gil Lasky SCR: Gil Lasky
 DOP: Paul Hipp MUS: John Rons STR: Peter
 Armstrong, Dennis Christopher, Maggie Corey,
 Gloria Grahame, Len Lesser, Terry Messina, Melody
 Patterson, Milton Selzer, Louise Sherrill, Mary
 Strawberry, Ronald Taft and Vic Tayback
 AKA: *El Martillo Macabro* [The Macabre Hammer]
El Sotano del Terror [The Cellar of Terror]
Visión Sangrienta [Bloody Vision]
 Approximately 86m; Color; Rated GP
 ADL: "Shock After Shock After Shock... As Desire
 Drives a Bargain with Death!"



US lobby card for Blood and Lace (1971) American International Pictures, Inc.

A WOMAN and her lover are murdered in their sleep by someone wielding a claw hammer; not much attention is given to the case, as the fairer of the two has a disreputation for being 'user-friendly,' and most of the clues are destroyed in a fire set to cover the killer's tracks. Being the only witness to the crime, the woman's daughter, Ellie Masters (Melody Patterson), is befriended by a detective assigned to the puzzling murder case, a sleazy ex-theatre owner named Calvin (Vic Tayback) who has taken time out from his busy schedule of "sniffing around for good breeding stock" to look for the culprit. Left without a mother and clueless as to the identity of her father, the teenage girl is shipped off to Deere Youth Home, an orphanage the abandoned youth of a Dickens novel would consider a summer camp.

The matron of this fine, fine establishment, the widow Mrs Dottie Deere (Gloria Grahame), is a little wiggly to say the least. In addition to sleaz-ing her way into the heart of the doctor (Milton Selzer) whose job it is to make sure everything stays up to code, she spends her off hours filling the basement freezer with the bodies of attempted runaways and ranting about bringing people back from the dead. (Suffice to say, her very dead hubby Jameson has been spared a proper burial as well.) She is assisted by her handyman Tom (Len Lesser), a work of art who makes the slimy detective look like a saint. Soon, Ellie starts having nightmares involving her mother's torched lover, back from the dead and ready to make short work of the surviving Masters with his own Stanley whack-o-matic.

In my early teens, a ratty one-sheet poster for this film adorned my bedroom wall, my reverence assured even having never seen it. (During my youth, *Blood and Lace* showed up on *Nightmare Theatre*—undoubtedly cut—but I was apparently indisposed the night it aired. It's safe to assume that even truncated this film would have left a lasting impression on my delicate psyche.)

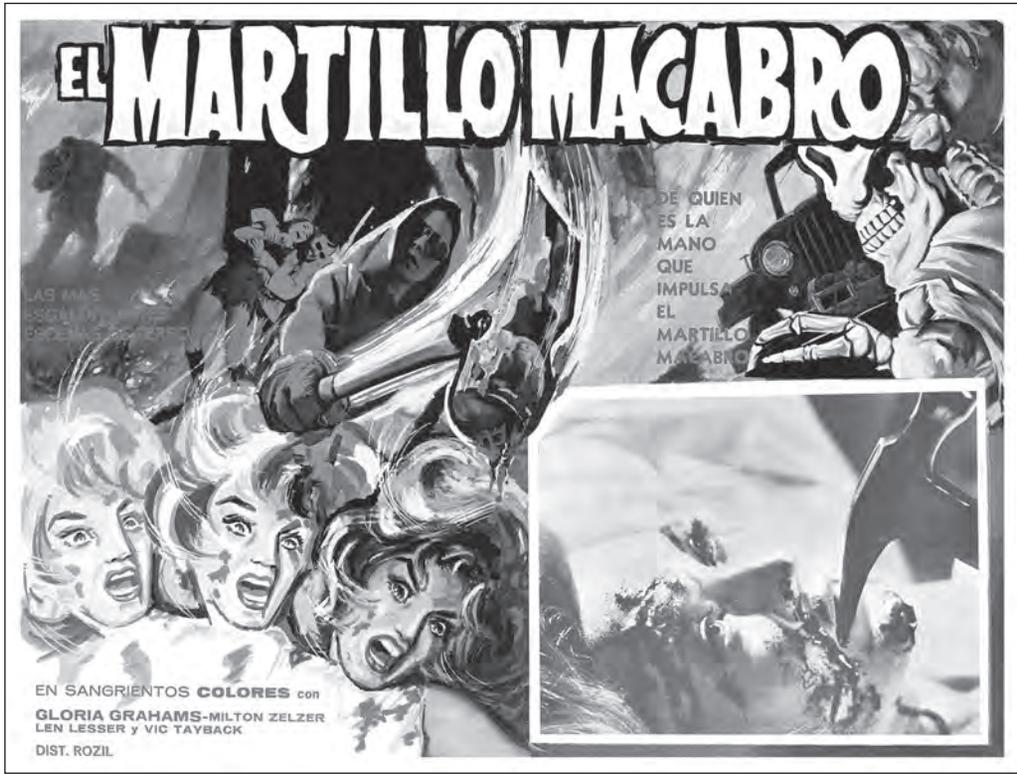
When I finally acquired a third generation copy of *Blood and Lace* just a few years back, I was not disappointed... except for one thing, something that still vexes me to this very day. Namely, this: where in Sam Hill is the claw hammer killer sporting sunglasses and a lavender robe? This androgynous psychopath graces every piece of ad art ever used for the film, both domestic and abroad, yet proves to be *in absentia* once the film rolls. I've grown very accustomed to the unfulfilled hyperbole that dominates advertising for trash horror from the sixties and seventies—hell, I live for it, knowing full well that the films can rarely live up to such great expectations—but discovering that this purple hooded hammer wielding sociopath was nothing more than the fever dream of a bored advertising executive has left me feeling unfulfilled.

In addition to *The Perplexing Case of the Misplaced Mascot*, *Blood and Lace* offers numerous mysteries... the most prominent being that it was released upon an unsuspecting public with a GP [General Public] rating. Although it is probably a stretch, one can't help but wonder if this production was singlehandedly responsible for the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] replacing the ambiguous GP with a far more pointed PG [Parental Guidance] the following year. That aside, even the more liberal filmgoers like myself recognize *Blood and Lace* as a clearcut case for an R rating. (Heck, it's a clearcut case illustrating just why we established a ratings board in the first place.)

Granted, much of the sex and violence is only implied, but had they shown exactly what was going on off-screen, most theatregoers would have found the film unbearable. Surprisingly, there is no nudity, and the bloodshed is negligible (a runaway's hand being hacked off with a meat cleaver being the only bit of graphic bloodletting); it is instead the implied necrophilia, the potentially incestuous situations, the attempted teen rape and molestation, the Nazi-esque torture tactics and what have you, that makes it a tasteless excursion. Heck, the lurid tone that permeates the script is enough to get the film slapped with a far more restrictive rating if it ever gets a legit video release. *Henry—Portrait of a Serial Killer* couldn't secure an R in 1987 because of its bleak atmosphere, and it's not nearly as scummy as this modest flick, made sixteen years previous.

Like McNaughton's piece de resistance, *Blood and Lace* also brims with unsavory characters in the midst of perpetrating unsavory acts, but here it is cheap and tawdry instead of artistic and thought provoking. (Although there is a somewhat somber moment when—having been confronted with the bloody fates of their peers and given the opportunity of escape—the troubled teens stand numbly instead of beating their feet, the oldest among them asking, "But where do we go?") And lest we forget the finale, which only emphasizes the sensational-minded script: neither of the revelations saved for the last act are particularly unexpected, but they make for a double whammy of a downbeat climax to what has already proven a downright downbeat film.

Technically, the film is just as gritty; it wouldn't surprise me in the least to discover that *Blood and Lace* was shot over a weekend using borrowed equipment. The overbearing soundtrack—pilfered classical music broken on occasion by a troubled theremin—is often used to great effect in distracting the viewer from the rugged produc-



Mexican lobby card for *Blood and Lace* (1971) Rozil Distribuidor

tion values. One of the areas in which the production would have benefited from a couple of extra bucks is the makeup department. Enter the vengeful apparition of the nameless John killed alongside Ellie's mother. Many films have used scarred killers to good effect, but our heroine's assailant looks like an old man who fell asleep at the breakfast table and took a face plant into his bowl of oatmeal.

Blood and Lace and the people involved demonstrate ingenuity on at least one occasion, though. I am, of course, speaking of the film's patented claw hammer cam. Too lazy to have the cameraman hold a murder weapon in front of the lens as he plays the part of a psychopath sneaking up on the intended victims? No problem. Simply attach the tool to an immobile extension from the camera rig, and voila! Claw hammer cam. Sure,

it robs entire scenes of anything even remotely resembling tension, but the viewer is simply too awed by the awkward gimcrackery to care.

Not enough tease? We have a teenage catfight involving sleepwear, after one of them successfully seduces the other's boyfriend. Not enough splatter? In one of the film's most effectively shocking moments, we are offered a loving close up of a defrosting corpse's seeping stab wound. These days, most gore effects have little effect on yours truly—having pretty much seen it all in the last twenty years—but this was just plain icky. God bless the seventies.

Femme fatale Grahame (1922–81)—thoroughly convincing with her Ilsa meets Norman Bates shtick—has a long career of films and television appearances to her credit, spanning thirty seven years from 1944 to 1981, including some