

■ Forgotten film

Odd, non-classic films have quality entertainment value

Horror films that trumpet over-the-top gory imagery are meant to scare viewers, but induce laughing instead

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The Forgotten Films feature is usually a way for the writer to inform readers about a movie that has been undeservedly lost in the sands of time. But this time I've decided to do something a little different, namely inform the readers about any old crap that I think they should see. And since one great film is worth four bad ones, I've decided to offer critiques of four movies rather than one. While none of these films are classics, they do possess oodles of entertainment value, which is more than you can say for plenty of the cinematic offerings out there today. Most of these films also have some further cultural significance worth touching on. Some of them are just worth mentioning anyway.

To start things off, we have "The House on Haunted Hill." Not to be confused with the soulless 1999 remake, the original 1959 film stars Vincent Price as the owner of a creepy-ass house. He offers a group of people \$10,000 apiece if they'll spend the

night in the place. The doors and windows are sealed shut until daylight and the guests wait out the night. Everything is mildly spooky until the owner's wife is found hanging from a rafter. Directed by William Castle, one of the great schlock purveyors of the 1950s, the film is full of comically macabre imagery. (My personal fave is when Price presents each of his guests with a coffin-shaped box containing their own pistol.)

The film is enjoyable due to its over-the-top attempts to scare people, and it contains some of the most delightfully absurd dialogue ever found in a horror film.

At one point Price says to his wife, "Remember that time you poisoned me with arsenic? What fun we had."

If you're in the market for a DVD of this, I would recommend the 2001 Diamond Entertainment release. Though that company is not known for its quality transfers, this edition actually looks great and is doubled up with another Price film, 1964's "The Last Man on Earth."

Now if you want to know what

can make a bad film endlessly entertaining, this next movie is the one to check out. Released in 1968 by England's Hammer film studios, "The Lost Continent" begins with a plot about a ship lost at sea that ends up trapped in a bizarre island dominated by man-eating seaweed, the survivors of other lost ships and a plethora of vicious, giant puppets. The plot takes so many twists and turns that it often seems as if the screenwriter is just free associating. The surreal atmosphere of the production adds to the bizarre tone of the film, and all of it feels like two or three movies were involved in a near-fatal collision.

For this film, I would suggest picking up the Hammer Collection edition put out by Anchor Bay Entertainment. The main assets of this version are the Technicolor print and its paring with another Hammer classic, 1966's "The Reptile."

While we're on the subject of Hammer, another good one to check out is "The Plague of the Zombies," also released in 1966. The story concerns a doctor in a small English town who has to deal with a series of mysterious deaths. Enlisting the help of his mentor, the two doctors discover that the deaths are being caused by the town's overlord, who is resurrecting the bodies with voodoo rites and using them to run a nickel mine underneath the city. Though the film is slowly paced, it makes up for it with pure atmosphere and mood, occasionally coming up with some genuinely ghastly moments. Once again I would suggest the Hammer Collection version of the film, which is remastered well.

Speaking of zombies, the last film on the list is 1932's "White Zombie." Best known for being the namesake of Rob Zombie's old band, the film stars Bela Lugosi as a witch doctor who uses zombie slave labor in Haiti. He is asked by a jealous man to take control of another man's fiancé. Disgusted by the woman's emotionless state, the man asks Lugosi to change her back, but is instead turned into a zombie himself. You can probably pick it up from there. The film is actually the first cinematic attempt to deal with the subject of zombies and has some oddly gothic moments. The set design (the matte paintings are really incredible) and the production are all top notch for the time, but the film suffers from pacing problems. It's still worth checking out.

The original print of the film disintegrated decades ago, so decent copies of this are hard to find. I would suggest the 1999 Roan Group release, which is the best version available and has some nice extra features. If quality isn't too much of a concern, pick up the 2002 Madacy Entertainment edition. In exchange for quality you get two other hard to find Lugosi films, 1942's "The Corpse Vanishes" and 1947's "Scared to Death."

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'The Plague of the Zombies' is a slow-paced but effective film.

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IN BRIEF

'Shrek 2' lives happily ever after at the top of the charts

Any cartoon that can squeeze in songs from such dark souls as Tom Waits and Nick Cave is all right by us. In case you've been living in a swamp the past year, 2004's top-grossing hit reunites the vocal talents of Mike Myers and Cameron Diaz as newlywed ogres and Eddie

Murphy as their donkey pal in a not-so-happily-ever-after animated follow-up. DVD featurettes have some lighthearted cast interviews, along with the directors and their technical crew discussing techniques used to bring more lifelike qualities to the computer-generated characters.

'Dr. Strangelove': Nuclear paranoia 40 years later

Forty years later, they're still fighting in the war room. Stanley Kubrick's 1964 black-comedy

masterpiece gets yet another DVD makeover with a two-disc 40th anniversary edition. Peter Sellers leads the cast with three key roles in the nuclear-doomsday farce, co-starring George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden and Slim Pickens. Among new DVD extras are a Sellers retrospective, a documentary about the nuclear paranoia of the era, an essay on the film by critic Roger Ebert and an interview with Robert S. McNamara, defense secretary for Lyndon Johnson.

— The Associated Press

ANDROID

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