

"Sight"

The Glassy Eye

By Dave Meile

Saturday, 7 p.m., USA ch. 17

"Man With the Synthetic Brain" (1971) John Carradine

Run for your lives, it's another atrocious Al Adamson film! Don't forget Al's patented formula: Point a camera at some old horror-film geezers babbling pseudo-scientific claptrap, steal some footage from another film, throw in a couple of pathetic monsters, and whammo, a stimulating melange of incoherence and shoddiness. Bored with stealing footage from other people, Adamson stole parts of his own 1965 film "Psycho a Go-Go," tacked on some stuff and released it as "Fiend with the Electronic Brain" in 1969. By 1971 Al, itching to steal again, filmed John Carradine and Kent Taylor, added it to the other junk and released it as "Man with the Synthetic Brain."

In the first five minutes of the film, six people are choked by Acro, a guy with blue-green skin. Soon paunchy, alcoholic, former Disney star Tommy Kirk (as a detective) receives a human head in the mail. "That's it, the Corey case!" exclaims the monkey's uncle.

His partner expresses surprise. "Wait a minute, lieutenant. You don't mean the time that dead guy was brought back to life and slaughtered all those people?"

Wow, talk about subtle nuances. The amazing Corey case (told in 57 flashbacks) involves a Vietnam vet with a shell fragment lodged in his brain. Tired Dr. Carradine grabs a metal hardhat with phone cords attached, hooks it to the dude's head and turns him into hideous homicidal maniac with a synthetic brain and an ugly 1965 haircut. The third "film within a film" involves Kent Taylor, who kidnaps whiny, bad-acting Regina Carroll (Al Adamson's wife) and shoots her up with colored water. By then Acro has shown up again, and Regina turns into a hag while cool chicken-scratch guitar plays on the soundtrack. Regina, without benefit of talent (or studying the script), calls him "Acro." It was also released as "Blood of Ghastly Horror." Horror films don't get much worse than this. Thank God.

Saturday, 10 p.m. USA, ch. 17

"The Invisible Ghost" (1941) Bela Lugosi, Clarence Muse

Bela thinks his wife is dead, but everytime he looks out the window, he sees her on the lawn. This causes him to walk around like a zombie and choke people. Any cheapo '40s movie with Bela puts lead in my



pencil, but there are two other reasons to watch this. It's directed by the largely unsung Joseph Lewis, who can usually give even the most pedestrian of films a certain visual flair. Second, watch for the classy black actor Clarence Muse as Bela's butler. While the role is hardly gratifying, Muse projects a kind of unusual dignity; there is no disgusting "yessuh, boss" crap that so many black actors had to put up with during that period. Bela even thanks Clarence for preparing his meal.

Saturday, 1:30 a.m. WOWT, ch. 6

"Confessions of a Nazi Spy" (1939) Edward G. Robinson

Eddie Robinson is always great, and there's the usual nice production in this Warner Bros. effort that preceded WWII by several months. Congress was sniping at the studio about this film and others of its ilk which they described as "war mongering" and "propagandistic." Warners countered that it was based on the drama that surrounded a real-life Nazi espionage ring in the United States in 1938. Watch for one of my favorite movie villains, Martin Kosleck as Joseph Goebbels. He was so good at playing slimy Nazis that he played Goebbels four times.

Saturday, 4:50 a.m. WOWT, ch. 6

"The Killer Shrews" (1959) Ken Curtis, Roscoe P. Coltrane

I loathe Festus from the "Gunsmoke" series. I seethe with rage every time I see that shuffling gait of his. That two-week stubble, the cloying little rustic dialect, the shameful devotion to Marshal Dillon. I hate it. I have a recurring fantasy where all scraggly guys named Festus, Fuzzy or Gabby are thrown in a pit and ripped apart by carnivorous mammals. "The Killer Shrews," directed by Ray Kellogg in 1959, is the culmination of that fantasy.

"Those who hunt by night will tell you that the wildest and most vicious of all animals is the tiny shrew . . . The shrew devours everything. Bones. Flesh. Marrow. . . everything," says narrator/executive co-producer/star Gordon McClendon. McClendon, a Texas millionaire, invented the Top 40 radio format, and if that's not sufficient grounds for slaughter at the hands of killer shrews, then I don't know what it.

Somewhere near the southern coast lies an island inhabited by director Sidney Lumet's brother

Baruch, his bad-acting daughter with a Swedish accent, McLendon, sniveling, pusillanimous little Festus, and token minority Mario, the Mexican handyman. A storm is brewing, and up sails Roscoe P. Coltrane (James Best) from "Dukes of Hazard" and his black sidekick, Rook (token minority No. 2). Doc Baruch has been working on genes, metabolism and shrews, and soon the little critters become giant killer shrews (dogs with masks on their heads and shag carpet samples on their backs!) Hundreds (we only see about six) of famished killer shrews have surrounded the house, and they start munching through the adobe foundations. For some reason they can't eat through a wooden fence outside.

Anyway, it is 1959, and it is the South, so racism pervades as the black guy and the Mexican guy are the first to be devoured. The Swedish actress (Ingrid Goude) becomes so frightened that she breaks world records for cliché-spewing: "I love an open fire, don't you." "The wind has a lonesome sound, doesn't it?" "You're a strange man; I never met a man like you." Festus drinks a lot and acts like a wimp, till the carpet/dog/shrews munch him. At the end, Roscoe, the Doc and his daughter hide under some barrels and duckwalk to safety. Despite all this it's a bit more intelligent than most low-budget horror flicks of the period and loads of fun.

Director Ray Kellogg worked with John Ford, and after directing "Killer Shrews" and "Giant Gila Monster" went on to do the totally macho, militaristic film "The Green Berets" with famous redneck John Wayne.

McLendon (who along with Festus and Kellogg made "The Giant Gila Monster" in '59) appeared on the fantabulous "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and called "The Killer Shrews" "one of the worst movies ever made." Them's fightin' words, Gordo. He passed away last year. There was no mention of shrews in any of his obituaries. Set the timer on the ole VCR.

Other stuff:
"Dark Passage" (1947) Bogart and Bacall (Friday, 1 a.m. ch. 6)

"Conflict" (1945) Bogart and Sydney Greenstreet (Friday, 3 a.m. ch. 6)

"Cave of the Living Dead" (1964) (Saturday, 1 p.m. ch. 17

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