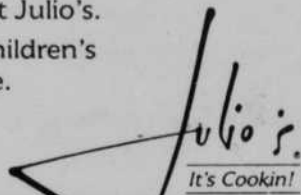


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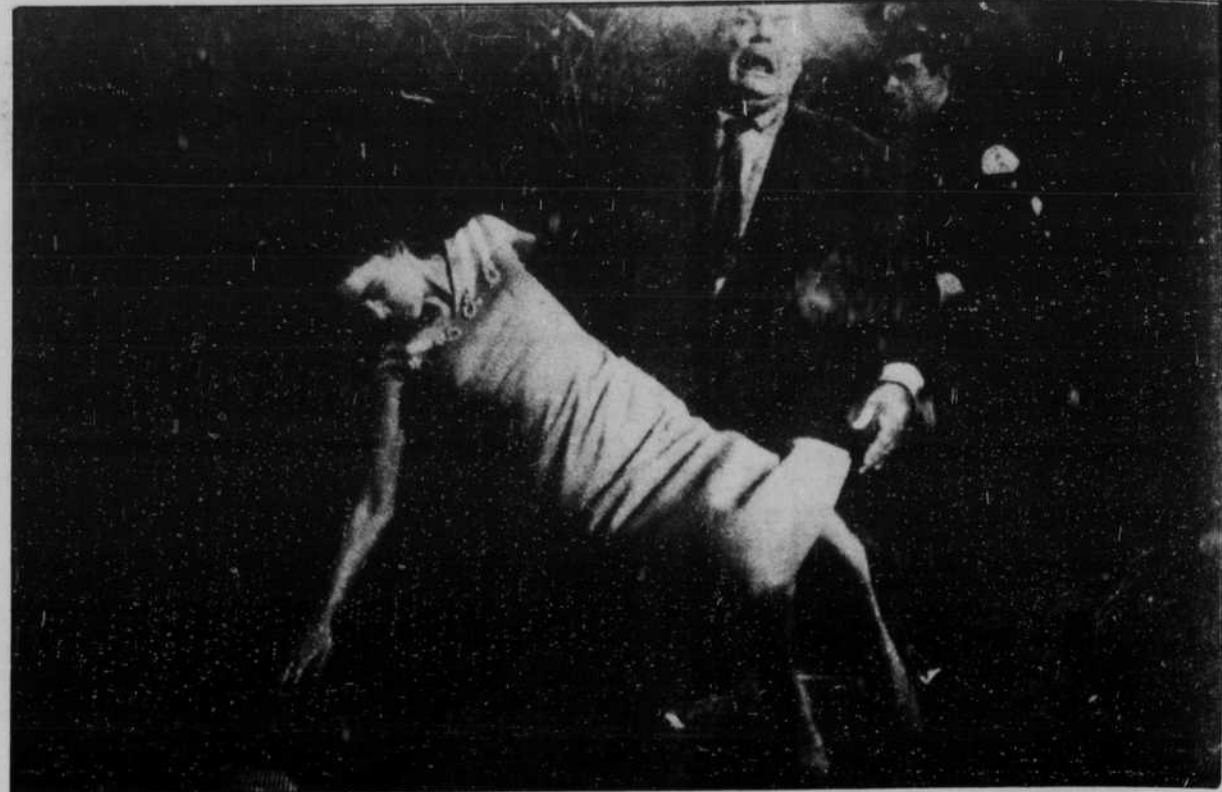
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Tor Johnson returns from the dead in Ed Wood's film, "Plan Nine From Outer Space."

## 'Plan Nine' called true, twisted classic

The Glassy  
Eye  
By Dave  
Meile

First take a transvestite director and a kooky TV psychic named Criswell who once predicted that the United States would fight World War III in 1975.

Then add Bela Lugosi, former horror star and recovered morphine addict still attempting a comeback while in his 70s, a wasp-waisted horror-show hostess whose claim to fame was that she was James Dean's lover, a 350-pound Swedish wrestler named Tor Johnson (whose knowledge of the English language was sketchy at best) playing a police inspector, the great-grandson of colonial Vice President John Breckinridge (in a medieval knight outfit) as an alien ruler, and, somewhere in the equation, Paul Marco, a small-time actor with a penchant for chronic self-promotion.

All were Hollywood nobodies, the loony fringe: the cast of "Plan Nine From Outer Space" a.k.a. "Grave Robbers from Outer Space."

"Plan Nine from Outer Space," a staple of late-night TV since the 1960s, officially has been a cult film since the mid-1970s — since authors Harry and Michael Medved rather confidentially declared it the worst film of all time in their book, "The Golden Turkey Awards."

Some have grown hostile to these assertions, but few — particularly those who have seen it 20 times, a la "Rocky Horror" — will deny its cock-eyed charm, warped logic and almost surreal look. It is one of the sci-fi genre's true twisted, low-budget classics.

Eros and Tanna, two aliens from an undesignated planet have been given

orders to use "Plan Nine," a hideous plot to resurrect Earth's dead people to take over the world. Eros and Tanna climb aboard their hubcap on wires and boogie down to Earth where two ghouls kill 350-pound wrestler Tor Johnson and then revive him.

Further extrapolation is futile, as "Plan Nine" grows progressively surreal and nonsensical. Jim Morton, in "Incredibly Strange Films," says, "Plan Nine borders on Dada, such as when two women wearing pilot outfits sit in front of a shower curtain and pretend it's an airplane cockpit. All the actors furiously run back and forth over the same tiny graveyard set trying unsuccessfully to avoid toppling spindly trees and plywood gravestones. Tragic footage of the aging Bela Lugosi in broad daylight abruptly melds into footage of director Ed Wood's chiropractor Tom Mason stalking the dark cemetery with a cape over his face. Yet despite the skewered logic and the paltry budget, it is Ed Wood Jr.'s dialogue that is unmistakable."

"Like it or not," says Bill Warren in "Keep Watching the Skies," "Ed Wood was a real auteur."

All of Wood's films are marked by a mind-boggling ignorance of how normal people converse, but then Wood wasn't working with normal people either.

"Inspector Clay is dead . . . murdered . . . and somebody's responsible!" says Detective Duke Moore as he scratches his neck with a loaded pistol.

"Flying saucers . . . you mean the kind from up there?" inquires Mona McKinnon of broad-shouldered hubby Gregory Walcott.

In Wood's first film, "Glen or Glenda" (1953), Glen tries to explain his transvestism to his lover while the narrator intones: "Glen decided to tell Barbara of the night gowns, the negligees, the robes, the high-heeled shoes. He spoke softly — hurriedly at first — and then slowly he became more technical."

Documentations of "Plan Nine from Outer Space" always are loaded with stories of the film's equally bizarre director/writer/transvestite, Edward D. Wood Jr., a man with minimal talent, who, despite his shabby productions, wanted nothing more than to be a major Hollywood director.

In 1953 he directed and starred in "Glen or Glenda," an autobiographical film whose philosophy could be summed up as: yeah, I'm a transvestite; now get off my back! The Medved brothers awarded him the lifetime achievement award for worst director and indulged in lengthy dissertations on his penchant for women's angora sweaters.

Fred Mollin, co-founder of the now-defunct Admit One video line, which features almost all of Wood's films ("Night of the Ghouls," "Sinister Urge," "Jailbait," "Bride of the Monster" and "Orgy of the Dead"), threatens to write an Ed Wood biography titled "Look Back in Angora" and told Fangoria magazine:

"Wood fits in like a square peg in a round hole. I think it was Jim Hoberman who called Wood's works anti-masterpieces. In the same way that there are anti-heroes, Wood was an anti-genius. There was something so incredibly terrible about what he did, yet there was also this incredible conviction that persevered so that he was able to get through a film and get it released. A sort of anti-Hitchcock, who did everything wrong, like a real-life Wrong Way Corrigan."

My own euphoria with "Plan Nine" reached its peak when several friends and I called "Plan Nine" co-star Paul Marco live as part of our KZUM radio program. The way the guy stuttered and stammered, you'd have thought he was discussing "Citizen Kane." He told us all sorts of invaluable information. Barely five minutes into the interview, Marco blurted out: "I'll tell you scenes where Ed was dressed as a woman!" and then

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