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DO YOU DARE VENTURE INTO... VIDEO VAULT

By Lane Van Ham
 Staff Reporter

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen to the Video Vault. I'm the Old Flick Fiend, your M.C. for the festivities... or should I say, 'fleshtivities!'
 "No, it's not a porno -- get your heads out of the gutter and back on

the guillotine where they belong! Actually, this week's selection regards some nasty critters who want their din-din, which happens to be flesh. Unfortunately, they go up against some fairly resourceful people, who get away by the skin of their teeth (which actually exists -- that's what happens when you don't floss!) ...

Oh fine, Mr. Fiend, just go ahead and give away the ending. We hopefully this will still be good even if you know some of the people escape.

It seems like every week I think the feature film here is the best of ever, and "The Flesheaters" (1968) is no exception. Several qualities make this film work: a pseudo-Nazivillain, cheap but neat special effects, blood, gore and a beatnik.

As it opens, drunk actress Laura Winters and her secretary, Janet Letterman, hire a cynical pilot named Grant Murdock to fly them to a town where Laura has a show opening. Of course, nothing goes as planned. Because of plane troubles, they have to set down on one of many surrounding islands. As one might expect, they have to pick the island inhabited by a mad scientist, Peter Bartel.

Nosooner have they landed than they have to tie down the plane and shack up in Bartel's tent, for a ferocious tropical storm is on the way (actually it consists of 30 seconds of ocean stock footage).

Once that's over though, it's flesheater city. As they explore the beach after the storm, they discover the beach has fish skeletons scattered on it -- stripped bare by something in the water. This "something" is never really defined, but it's kind of an amoeba-like glowing silver stuff that was created by scratching the film with pins!

For the fairly standard plot and what there is to work with, it's clear that the production staff of "The Flesheaters" had at least some idea of how to make a movie.

As this scene progresses, for example, we're treated to a well-executed situation that goes beyond the tension achieved in most movies like this. Laura, in pursuit of her liquor suitcase, becomes stranded on some rocks dangerously near the rushing water, and the flesheaters. Murdock ventures onto the rocks and brings her back to shore, but slips and exposes his leg to the water. Boy oh boy, do those flesheaters go to it! Murdock survives, but his leg becomes the subject of the film's first gore scene.

The intensity of this situation is followed by the welcome arrival of the boating beatnik, Omar. The group is standing on the beach, trying to figure out what to do about all these pin scratches on the film, when they hear jazz coming from the phonograph on Omar's raft (don't ask me how he's playing a record with all those waves, or how it's plugged in).

Letterman's line "It sounds like a Martian hymn," in reference to the jazz, bears a strange similarity to the film "Zontar, The Thing From Venus" in which a character hears a message from Venus and asks if it's "progressive jazz!"

Omar yells to the people on shore: "Hey-hey! I dig you! You are

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