

FILMS TO DIE BEFORE YOU SEE

DARWIN AFTER DARK*

Dir. Arne Striblee, EEA Productions, USA, 1984. (B&W?) *Horror*

By day Charles Darwin is a respectable mild-mannered botanist but come dusk he turns into a crazed killer. Driven mad by his own insane Theory of Evolution, the Father Christmas look-alike unleashes a reign of terror on Victorian Britain. He seeks out religious teachers of all faiths and begs them to reason him out of his atheism and, when they fail, he tears them apart with his bare hands. Can American tourist Drew Trueheart, whose crew-cut be seen under his tam o'shanter, stop this monster before he can ruin Queen Victoria's Coronation by dismembering the Archbishop of Canterbury? But first Drew must defeat Darwin's mindless slaves, Karl Marx and Greg Rasputin. You can perhaps guess what happens.

Perhaps the producers hoped that the dense fog they conjure up to represent Old London saved the of convincing sets, costumes and special effects. Similarly, the thick 'foreign' accents of the cast, including an inexplicably Scottish Darwin, make it hard to judge the quality of the dialogue, or follow the action.

Legend has it that entire movie was shot in an unventilated garage in Burbank and that footage was re-edited to produce the equally incomprehensible follow-up “**DARK2**” where a re-incarnated Darwin battles Quasimodo for control of Notre Dame Cathedral.

The whole cast demanded their names be removed from the credits. Then, together with the rest of the crew, launched a raft of law suits.

THE HUNT IS A BIT OFF *

Dir. Hilary Adcock, Tally-Ho Productions, UK, 1937 B&W - *Fantasy*

When a strangely glowing meteor crashes into the private reservoir of De Canvey Castle late one night seen only by a lonely hermit. The local people laugh at his story but it soon it becomes clear that the whole De Canvey Family (Motto: Nos Normannos superavimus et te superabimus - We outlasted the Normans and we'll outlast you!) – have been contaminated by their polluted water supply and turned into the very things they most love to hunt: Foxes.

So when the De Canvey Hunt assembles on the following Sunday it is the turn of the De Canveys to be hunted.

An engaging premise that never lives up to its promise. Costume and effects are laughably unconvincing. Chunks of 'fox hair' regularly fall off the female cast, perhaps not accidentally, and the dubbing rarely syncs. Nor does hilarity really ensue as the entitled aristos struggle to survive on the lands they think they own. And there is sentimentality rather than pathos as the Family's 'cubs' are sheltered by the Grandmother Vixen whose own young have been decimated by years of hunting. The romantic element never heats up either: Lady Constance De Canvey falls helplessly for the soulful brown eyes of the quick brown Fox who jumped over the vicious hound to save her life. But their trysts take place held in bushes that tremble decorously rather than orgiastically. Will the De Canveys ever regain human form? Does Lady Constance even want to? Do we care? Might be palatable remade as a vehicle for a Wallace and Gromit Xmas Special.

LE YÚUMO'OB PÁAJTAL U BEEL JUMP'ÉEL NA – (PARENTS CAN BE HELL)*

Dir. Cresta Adlug, Essurreal Prodco, Mexico, 1971 B&W (*Surreal Horror*)

Adolescence is already hard enough for teenage Joao. But then gets worse for Joao when his irritating parents are killed in a car crash and he wakes to find that an LSD-addled Surgeon has grafted their heads onto the poor lad's shoulders. Shunned by fearful locals, Joao wanders around Brazil searching for the Surgeon who ruined his life while his extra heads bicker endlessly about where to go and the best route to take. Worse still are the erotic nocturnal whisperings of reconciliation that keep him awake all night.

Joao is torn between his desperate longing to be free of his forebears and his pity for them. And so are is the audience. Then Joao meets a young two-headed woman who teaches him love and tells of

the multi-headed Goddess Cuhuticlp who might help them. Together they search for Her secret kingdom to beg her help. And find it...

So far so Freudian. But whenever this film gets anywhere close to coherence it turns and runs a mile. The final scene takes place in Cuhuticlp's realm with an orgy, mass, hootenanny, that lasts 45 minutes and features 150 extras with extra heads and zebra-style body paint, and takes place in a storm of red and yellow dust. Once seen it cannot be forgotten. However hard you try. Therapy can't help. Although there is a support group for those who saw the film on its limited release in the early 1970s.

ROSES ARE RED AND NOW YOU ARE DEAD*

Dir. Fratz Ling, ASU Pro, USA, 1945, B&W (*Film Noir*)

New York 1944 - Hank Yanklin, Private Eye, is 'volunteered' for secret government service by a 'Friend' from the old days with the Tinkerspoon Agency. He will partner Russian agent Noza Vemblaya to investigate Nazi agent cells in Washington. The two hate each other on sight and despise each other's politics but national interest must come first. However, since their work involves night-long stake-outs around the Capitol and their saloon cars have comfortable back seats, another kind of interest soon looms large. The couple overcome their differences and plan to marry once they have destroyed the Nazi cell plotting to depose the President. Surely the two grateful nations will let them live happily ever after?

Sadly this is not to be.

The War ended during the shooting of the final scene. The Soviet Union is now seen as an enemy and the end of this pro-Russian propaganda film is hastily re-written. Noza shoots Hank and tells him she has been using him all the time. "So no do svidaniya for you, Sucker!" she laughs. "I knew you were cheating all the time," says Hank. "That's why I'm wearing a bullet-proof vest and you're the one with no do svidaniya, Sweetie." And he shoots her in the back.

Test viewing reports suggest audiences were totally confused by the film and it was withdrawn by the Studio.

AND ONE WE'D LIKE TO HAVE SEEN...

Mrs Dalloway and the Damnation Army

Orson Welles decided to make his own version of Virginia Woolf's classic novel and drafted a shooting script with Russian exile Victor Serge. Like the original, their story is set in London over one day in 1925, but adds a large cast of characters and a plot involvings a tidal wave of killings of the 'Great and Good' deemed responsible for the carnage of the Great War. Are these murders the work of the so-called Damnation Army? And is the DA a revolutionary movement or a weird Death Cult? Or both? Or something else altogether?

And why does the sequence of killings appear to describe a spiral converging on the Dalloways' house that very night at the time when Clarissa will be hosting a party?