



The Cinematic
Misadventures of
Ed Wood

by
Andrew J. Rausch
and **Charles E. Pratt, Jr.**

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The Cinematic Misadventures of Ed Wood

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*This book is dedicated to
Edward D. Wood, Jr.
and the cast and crews of his films.
Thank you for all the great movies.*

“I have lived too long among the Woodites.”

So saith my late acquaintance Mark Carducci, the mastermind behind *Flying Saucers Over Hollywood*, the two-hour celebration of the 79-minute *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and Ed-Wood-mania in general. He spent several years putting the documentary together with research, video interviews and editing, then several more years trying to find an honest distributor. He never did, but he found a distributor. In corralling a network of loony fans, loonier Friends of Eddie, and people who wanted to downplay their association with Wood the way one would avoid mentioning a pedophile grandfater he could not seem to get the stink off his boots.

I, too, have lived too long among the Woodites. I have spoken to Criswell, I have received Kathy Wood and Delores Fuller as guests into my home. I have conversed with Ed’s dapper collaborator Steve Apostoloff, and hardcore gay-porn film maker Joe Robertson, been blitzed by Conrad Brooks’ irrepressible rabid puppy-dog enthusiasm, and managed intentionally to avoid dealing with Paul “Kelton the Cop” Marco, primarily because I knew he went through a period during which he knew the world was populated by people with dog heads; however, I did arrange to drop an armored car on him in my spoof of sci fi movies, *The Naked Monster*. The one thing I never did was experience Ed Wood in person, but I figure I also saved myself the experience of being chased around a filthy apartment by a drunk with a knife, and getting a rambling call at three in the morning which ended in him calling me a shitbird.

His friends who knew him from the 1950s described him as movie-star handsome. Though it’s true that his later mustached appearance gave him a sort of Kent Taylor/John Carroll look, I always thought he resembled a baffled Alan Young from *Mr. Ed*. Which seems appropriate.

How much can you say? He tried, mostly failed, and died.

A guy I worked for once gave me a soft cover Citadel Press film book, on horror movies, or westerns, or whatever, something he picked up cheap at a yard sale. I had fancied it because I’d noticed the inscription in the fly leaf: “From the library of Edward D. Wood, Jr.” in Ed’s own quite legible, even beautiful handwriting. I treasured it for a couple months, then gave it to director Joe Dante as a gift. I expect Joe treasured it for a while then gave it to someone else, who then treasured it for an appropriate period, then...you know. Sort of like a Christmas fruitcake: the Gift That Keeps On Getting Given.

As a writer and film maker who did more than his share of hack work, I relate to Ed Wood and do not envy him. Imagine for no reason I’m speaking in a broad Scottish burr when I say, “It’s *crrrappp*. It’s all *crrrappp*.” ‘Cause t’is. The best of the worst is fun *crrrappp*. The medium worst is amusing *crrrappp*. The worst is just damned dull. And the damnable paradox with Wood is, the “better” the film in production value, script or competency, the less enjoyable it usually is.

Can we get a few stupid misapprehensions out of the way? Most of them stem from the Wood revival inspired by *The Golden Turkey Awards*, by the brothers Medved. You may know one of them, Michael. He’s the Gene Shalit clone (or a well-dressed Ron Jeremy) who rants in print and on TV talk shows how all Hollywood movies are perverted commie-symp propaganda. It’s a wonder he doesn’t say they turned him into a newt. That book was a follow-up to *The 50 Worst Films of All Time*, which does not even mention Ed Wood or any of his films. Ron Jeremy (or Gene Shalit) gave up writing this after screening a mere 200 pieces of *crrrappp* and his 17-year old brother Harry finished the project, along with his cousin Randy Lowell, alias Randy Dreyfus (also a cousin to Richard, or maybe Harry

Reems) alias Bag Man McGurk, alias The Green Lake Peeper. *50 Worst Films of All Time* requested readers to nominate their own favorite cinematic piles of *crrrrapp*. The overwhelming majority of responses nominated Ed Wood, whose person and work was apparently unknown to the Medveds, or at least unworthy of original inclusion. They actually interviewed a few drunks and liars to get background on Wood, hence worldwide mistaken impressions in general and specific (*i.e.* that *Plan 9 from Outer Space* is the worst movie ever made), including uncountable errors about the films and the man. Harry has more than atoned for his sins by working vigilantly for the Screen Actors Guild for many years, protecting the solidarity of SAG, and the rights of thousands of actors. Randy Lowell went on to a stable three-decade career as a performer. Michael, the elder and malcontented Medved, still hates commies, liberals and deviates. Especially Ron Jeremy.

There really is no big filmic idiocy involved in intercutting of real night shots and day-for-night shots, as in *Orgy of the Dead*, *Violent Years* and famously, *Plan 9*. In those films, many of the day-for-night shots are incorrectly printed. You expose the shots as best you can for the sunlight, then the editor or director orders that portion stopped down in the printer to make it look darker. When you forget to tell the lab which is striking your print, or if they just ignore the notation, it looks like regular daylight, because it is. There are tricks to make *good* day for night shots, like using a red filter when shooting in black and white (which makes the blue sky go dark) and using natural shadows whenever possible, and avoiding showing the sky if you can, but these “bloopers” were commonplace back then. I just saw a 60s *Dragnet* episode last night with a “night” driving clearly shot at noon, then printed darker. John Ford did it all the time, especially in westerns. Don Siegel’s Elvis movie *Flamingo Star* has beautiful examples of the technique, in color (blue filter instead of red). Ida Lupino’s classic noir *The Hitchhiker* seems 80% day for night, all shot in full sunlight. Today, you’d CGI the hell out of the shot and it’ll look like a perfect midnight. When you’re trying to make a picture on a buck ninety-eight, especially in the 50s or 60s, you don’t have the option of repeatedly kicking the thing back to the lab to demand perfection.

Okay, Ed Wood substituted his chiropractor for additional necessary “Ghoul Man” shots in *Plan 9* but holding the cape over the bottom half of his face was perfectly appropriate, in fact, an ingenious tribute. Lugosi had done exactly that in *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* nine years previously, plus, in my opinion, about half the graveyard long shots in 1943’s *Return of the Vampire* are probably a double. Had Eddie popped in some stock shot inserts of Lugosi’s eyes from *Bride of the Monster*, and varied the blocking (with his back to camera the chiropractor would not have had to hold both hands in front of him), it might’ve sold the sequences a bit better, maybe even competently. And the movie would not be as perversely funny.

No, Lugosi didn’t hate Karloff, nor was he a foul-mouthed old geek, as shown in the Tim Burton film. In the fascinating book *Nightmare of Ecstasy*, Wood historian Rudolph Grey collected a series of lengthy interviews, which were then rearranged by topic by editor Adam Parfrey of Feral Press, but neither felt fact-checking was necessary. The multiple, conflicting recollections was one of the fun aspects. One of the interviewed Woodites was a half-crazed drunken street person named John Andrews, who vaguely knew Wood in his last years. He’s one of the dire masked monsters in *Orgy of the Dead*, and I don’t care which one. Andrews’ normal speech was peppered with expletives, and so were his third-party anecdotes, like Wood’s recollections of Lugosi. Andrews never even met Lugosi. Given Andrews’ potty mouth, everyone in his stories swore like a sailor. The boys who wrote *Ed Wood* simply used Rudolph Grey’s book as if it were all true.

No, Bela Lugosi does not say, “Don’t be afraid of Lobo. He is as harmless as a kitchen,” although the *Bride of the Monster* scene does take place in a kitchen, which doubles as an atomic laboratory and

basement aquarium. He says “kitten,” just like in the script. I repeated that canard in the very first article I ever had printed in a national magazine; I was wrong.

No, Ed Wood did not use pie plates or hubcaps to create the saucers for the *Plan 9* special effects. They were 6-inch wide plastic models painted silver. I know; I built one when I was a kid. The scenes might well have worked better if Wood had the two-foot long metal saucer from *This Island Earth* and an entire soundstage at his disposal, plus a crew of twenty. But he didn't.

Wood was not the worst writer in history, nor even the worst ever to work in Hollywood. His ideas — *Glen or Glenda?* being the weird exception — were relatively mainstream and semi-comprehensible. Had he been working in the legitimate studio system, his stuff undoubtedly would have been rewritten by betters, but the concepts were mainstream. *Violent Years* and *Sinister Urge* could have been low-end Universal or Paramount or Allied Artists programmers. His unmade *The Ghoul Goes West* is not all that much different from Universal's *Curse of the Undead*, or Embassy's *Billy the Kid Meets Frankenstein's Daughter*. *Bride of the Monster* is an anachronistic anomaly more like a 1940s Lugosi film for Monogram, but, hell, *The Human Centipede* is the same thing on shit-eating steroids, and that's fifty years later. *Plan 9* is a combination of ideas used in *Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*, and the old *Weird Tales* pulps. *Night of the Ghouls* lifts the oft-used “phony spiritualist” set-up popular from the Houdini era through *Scooby Doo*, but pays off with a scene and a scream that is genuinely horrific.

As for competency: two of the most “competent” Eddie Wood films I've seen are the feature *The Sinister Urge* and the half-hour TV film *The Sun Also Sets*. *Sinister Urge* was made in 1960, *The Sun Also Sets* a decade before that, and both have production values comparable to other films of their eras, both have relatively decent performances, and both have Wood scripts which actually go from Point A to Point B and eventually arrive at Point C. The studio lighting and set design is passable, the stock music is appropriate and correctly placed (the *waa-waa* saxophone in *Sinister* is evocative of *noirs* of the time, and the ten zillion detective shows then on TV). And both films show the same dilemma: they're dull. They're without the surreal zaniness brought on by a lack of funds as with *Bride of the Monster*. There's little of the idiosyncratic dialogue of *Glen or Glenda?* They don't even have the occasional “WTF!?!” scenes like *Night of the Ghouls*' séance, with its eerie Looney Toons slide-whistle accompanying the wire-operated dancing tambourines and the bug-eyed guy in the Devil hat mouthing “Wah-oh, wah-oh, wah-oh.” None of that. They're just dull.

There were less talented, even less coherent contemporary movie makers than poor old Woody. Wyatt Ordung comes to mind, a guy with a name that sounds like a question from Satan, or a psychotic farmer. Ray Dennis Steckler. Phil Tucker. Ronnie Ashcroft. Andy Warhol, whose entire *oeuvre* was a smarmy “Fuck you” to the deluded artsy audience. For sheer audience insult, any movie hydrant or cinematic tree Jerry Warren pissed on. Oh, yeah, there were worse directors. At least Ed Wood actually tried to shoot coverage, unlike Vincent Minnelli, who, unaccountably, was absent from either Medved book.

I think many of us laughably-classified “artistic” types want in their hearts to make movies like those which so affected us as children. But you have to adapt this nostalgia to a contemporary style. With Ed, though, he had no luck convincing genuine movie companies that audiences would shell out scheckles for updated variations on Dwayne Esper schlock or Bob Steele westerns. Even AIP's Sam Arkoff, who released some real *crrrrapp*, referred to poor Ed as “a one-lung producer.” And this, coming from the guy who distributed *Invasion of the Star Creatures* and *Reptillicus*...pshew!

Wood's last ten years had little to recommend them as regards artistic output. The soft-core scrip he wrote for Steve Apostoloff stunk on ice while simultaneously managing to be stultifying, though

Steve thought to his dying day that the world would adore a sequel to *Orgy of the Dead*. Wood's hardcore porn screenplays were indistinguishable from anyone else's.

Incidentally, his literary work was one of the cornerstones of my early sex education. A relative gave me a half-dozen dirty paperbacks when I was 16, already not a virgin but still unwise in the way of the bedroom. Among these included something depressingly bleak called *The Itch* and a charming novel titled *Sally in Black Bondage*, with the titular virgin defiled by a humongously endowed and repulsive black dwarf. Memorably, there was *Love of the Dead*, about necrophilia. The early chapters were an overwrought history of death and funeral trivia, with hard core anecdotes involving necrophiliacs feigning death, and the joys of screwing in a coffin. As it progressed, it got ickier. There were graphic chapters on making love to real corpses in mortuaries, funeral homes and morgues. Detail by detail, erotic revulsion after revolting erotica. I never felt that creeped out until I read a book on Ed Gein. I wanted to wash my brain with Clorox and gouge my eyes out for betraying my soul. That book was written by Ed Wood, one of dozens, maybe hundreds he wrote in the 1960s and 70s. And honestly, it was given to me by my Aunt Shirley. When you finish Andy & Charlie's book, you will understand the synchronistic significance.

A couple of Criswell anecdotes. Criswell was the phenomenally inaccurate "psychic" who appeared in both *Orgy of the Dead* and *Plan 9*, as well as his own LA TV show, on which he always used the catchphrase which crops up in *Plan 9*: "We are *all* interested in the *Future*, for *that* is where we will spend the *rest* of our *lives*!" Every New Years, he appeared on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* prognosticating things like "I predict — in April, Captain Kangaroo will be assaulted by wolverines!" and "I predict — this year, Pasadena, California, shall become the homosexual capital of the world!"

I attended a goofy psychic fair with my ex-wife about 1980, and among the kiosks of crystal-hawkers and sellers of cure-all bottled water, there was a big carnival-style striped tent and a huge photo portrait of Criswell! I got in line to meet the man himself, who was telling fortunes with Tarot cards, in his resplendent tuxedo and yellow-white Gumby pompadour. I could hear him with the enraptured client just ahead of me.

"*Cut* the cards *three* times to the left with your *left* hand," cooed Criswell, who then flipped the cards over and studied them seriously. "I see a *marriage* in your future. Are you *planning* to get *married*?" The woman shook her head. Criswell said, "*Someone you know* is planning to get *married*."

I sat down and explained I didn't need my future told, I wanted to talk about the old gang. "Oh, Eddie was a nice man," Criswell said, dropping his stentorian tones. "Full of energy, very good-humored. The pictures he made were not very good, but I enjoyed myself with Ed." I asked, And Lugosi? "He was also a very nice man. Dignified, but not stuffy, very Old World, and courtly. I remember one Christmas, at Eddie's home or maybe Paul Marco's, the tree was decorated in his honor with black snowballs hanging from the branches! Festive and macabre in equal measure. He got quite a chuckle out of that." We spoke for a few more minutes and I excused myself, "I'll make way for the paying customers." He shook my hand and went back to the booming professional tones. "Thank you so much, and good luck. Next, please."

As the next customer sat opposite him, Criswell said, "*Cut* the cards *three* times to the left with your *left* hand. I see a *marriage* in your future. Are you *planning* to get *married*?" The man shook his head. Criswell said. "*Someone you know* is planning to get *married*."

The other time I saw him was a couple years later, at an all-Wood film festival at a small neighborhood theater in the same building in which Ed Wood and Alex Gordon shared an upstairs office thirty years before. The place was packed, the height of post *Golden Turkey* Wood-mania. The show featured special guests, like Paul Marco, in his invariable "Kelton the Cop" uniform. No longer

seeing the world population as mutants with dog heads, he'd exchanged that delusion for one in which he was a cult movie star, a mistake he made by taking a joke from director Joe Dante seriously.

Parenthetically: Marco frequented the home of my friend David del Valle, campy film archivist, acidic raconteur, and wrangler of such Hollywood fringies as *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* psychotic John Lazar, the dapper and hideous Reggie Nalder (whom David's friend Barbara Steele referred to as "that ghoul") and mystic nut bar Kenneth Anger. Marco would drink himself maudlin and whine, "Oh I'm so lonely! I need a trick. David, please, buy me a trick. A pretty boy, oh, please." On slightly more sober occasions, Marco showed the new *chotskies* he planned to sell to all the potential members of his make-believe "Kelton the Cop" fan club: "I Love Kelton" bumper stickers, buttons featuring him in his legendary police uniform, and official membership certificates suitable for framing.

"We'll have meetings every week and watch all my films!" Marco told those around him, real or imaginary. "We can look at *Bride of the Monster*, then the next week we can see *Plan 9*, and then we can all watch *Night of the Ghouls!*"

"Paul-l-l-l...", drawled David, "what are we going to do the *fourth* week?"

At the film festival, irrepressible Wood crony Conrad Brooks introduced a short subject he made himself in 1960, *Mystery in Shadows*. "If you think *Plan 9* is lousy, wait til you see this!" he shouted enthusiastically and accurately. Finally, the guest of honor was called up to the front of the theater. Rolled out, actually. Criswell was trapped in a wheelchair by then. He was still the pink-faced, white haired apparition in his decades-old spangled tuxedo, but clearly frail. They pushed his chair up to the microphone and he leaned into it. In a thready but still theatrical voice, he said, "Thank you, my friends. As I always used to say...on my television program..."

And then he went silent. He looked out into the audience steadily, as if into the distance, or the past. Everyone felt uncomfortable.

Some of us thought of finishing his sentence for him. Others worried that he'd simply blanked. Or had a stroke. Or died. The theater was silent as night, three hundred people waiting. The absence of sound was frightening. No one rustled even a kernel of popcorn. Oh, God. No.

Then, loud and firm as ever: "We are *all* interested in the *Future*, for *that* is where we will spend the *rest* of our *lives*."

The relieved mob sighed, and cheered.

My other brush with the Woodian world was accidental, shortly after the Wood revival began. I saw a man in his 60s in a copy store paying for his Xerox order and sneaked a peek at the receipt to verify this was indeed Greg Walcott, stalwart "Jeff Trent" of *Plan 9*. Politely, I expressed interest in his one film for Eddie. He smiled indulgently and chuckled. "Oh, that awful thing." He had a Southern lilt to his voice, like Randolph Scott, also a native North Carolinian. "Of all the pictures I've made, that's the only one anyone ever asks about." He did indeed work a lot, and in major films nearly from the beginning of his career. *Mister Roberts*, *Perry Mason*, *Maverick*, *87th Precinct* (he was a regular for two seasons), *Every Which Way But Loose* and three other features for Clint Eastwood, *Norma Rae*, *Midway*, *Dallas*, *Murder She Wrote*.

"I was young 'n' wanted to work," Walcott said, "and through my pastor, I got the lead in this science fiction picture. I read the script and thought, okay, this might work. Then I got to the studio, this tiny little ol' place off an alley, and saw the sets and thought, 'Ho-ho, oh, boy, what have I gotten myself into?' But we did it. And here it is a long, long time later and people still watch that thing. You just never know."

I wrote and directed *Ed Wood: Look Back in Angora* at the suggestion of my friend Arny Schorr and Rhino, to whom I'd sent Mark Carducci's film for potential distribution. They thought it was boring

and overlong, but liked the basic idea of a Woodian video, since they'd made money distributing *The Violent Years* and *Orgy of the Dead*. Indeed, I'd always needle Mark about the two hour length of his *Plan 9* documentary, telling him my mine was twice as good as his, because it was half as long. I wanted to do mine in an entirely different way from Mark's, which was talking head, film clip, talking head, talking head, film clip. Instead, in my first cut, I used as much film footage and movie dialogue as I could, letting Wood's own words tell the story with minimal narration and no interviews.

A lawyer representing Wood's widow Kathy approached Rhino, and then so did ex-gal pal Dolores Fuller, each volunteering for an interview, on one condition: I had to edit out the clip from *The Photographer* in which a greasy, bloated Eddie, held on a leash by some unsexy hookers, licks the dirt off the bottom of a woman's dominatrix boot. It showed just how low Wood sank in his career and his life. I grumbled, then acquiesced to adding interviews, avoiding repetition of anyone Mark used: Steve Apostoloff, gay-porn director Joe Robinson, Dolores & Kathy, and in so doing, had to cut a corresponding twelve minutes out of the original show.

I'd first tried to get John Waters to narrate, but I could not get through. Next on the list was Johnny Depp, but a wall of secretaries, agents and flunkies effectively threw up a barricade. Then I had a brainstorm: the narrator of *The Final Curtain*, the alien philosopher-soldier of *Plan 9*: Dudley Manlove! Yes, that's his real name, though heaven knows he must've suffered for it when he was a kid. Can you imagine? It's like growing up with the name Alfredo Dickjuice or Morry Buttburger.

Somehow I got his phone number in Palm Springs, and called one Saturday morning. Dudley was already in the bag and it was only 10:30. Luckily he was affably plastered and we spoke for a half hour. I have a tendency to speak quickly, and he chided me, sounding just like Eros admonishing the Earthlings. "Young-g-g man-n-n-n," he said, "you must LEARN to e-NUN-ciate clearly. It is es-SENTIAL communication. I-I-I was the VOICE of Lux Soap on the AIR for over twenty YEARS." I wanted that voice. Rhino overruled me and got Gary Owens, who did a wonderful job for a reasonable price.

Rhino hit the streets with *Look Back in Angora* exactly one week before Tim Burton's movie with Johnny Depp premiered. We coasted on a multi-million dollar ad campaign for not one cent. Take that, William Castle.

Several years later, film collector Jeff Joseph called me with a notion for yet another Ed Wood show. It was already past the Woody saturation point by then, but he did have tapes of some fascinating stuff. He had all sorts of rare films, so perhaps we could package them for release — assuming I could find some sucker company to shell out the price Jeff thought his stuff was worth. He had the competently morose *The Sun Also Sets*, with Tom Keene and Lois Lane, a.k.a. Phyllis Coates (both just fine). There was a series of interminable spec' "commercials," all shot in a single-take wide shot, with the ingenious idea that they would be generic, each one targeting a different sort of local store or service: a car repair commercial, a bakery spot, a supermarket version, haberdashery. The theory was to cut in the local sponsor between the "comedic" set-up and the final gag. They proved two things: 1) it was a lousy idea badly executed, and 2) Eddie Wood was as good at comedy as he was with drama, westerns or sci-fi.

Jeff also had the original half-hour version of *The Final Curtain*, most of which was incorporated into the feature *Night of the Ghouls*. I saw the stupid thing twenty-five years ago. No, Bela Lugosi didn't have the script in his hands when he died, and he was lucky to die five years before it was made.

The most fascinating rarity Jeff Joseph had was a reel of 8mm home movies. Understand, old 8mm film was 16mm wide and 25 feet in length, about two minutes running time. It was run through the camera twice, first exposing on one side of the film, then carefully opening the camera (not in the sunlight or you'll ruin everything), flipped the now-full take-up reel around and put it on the feed reel.

re-threaded the film through the aperture, then shot on the unexposed side. In processing, the lab would split the film down the middle and splice it together, making one small 50-foot reel.

In final form, the brightly colored Kodachrome footage, eerily silent, showed Ed, not in his prime but at least not the tub of guts he'd later be, grinning and mugging on a suburban front lawn, playing Fetch with someone's dog. Assorted friends or relatives or whogives-a-shit smiled motionlessly at the camera, as if holding still for a Kodak Brownie snapshot. Standard stuff for amateur home movies.

Then a magical thing happened. There were weird flashes and arbitrary light splotches, swish-pan of table lamps inside the house, new and cockeyed angles of waving relatives. The interior shots were too red-orange and dark (Uh-oh. Someone didn't remove the yellow Type A sunlight filter), which were all superimposed with extended uncut takes of dogs romping out in the front yard — *upside-down*. Someone threaded the 8mm film into the camera backward and it exposed twice on the same side, but reversed top to bottom, bottom to top.

There was Edward D. Wood in a living room, laying in a leather recliner, napping and drunk, or napping and not drunk, his face turned toward camera. He was dead to the world, completely slack and gloriously relaxed. And over him, across him, around him were the upside-down jumping dogs out on the lawn. A little dog, a bigger dog, a really big dog, all running and romping with each other. They chased each other, frolicked freely, snapped at each other and bounced, all superimposed and upside down over the continuous shot of unconscious Ed on someone's recliner. Was he dreaming of dogs, or simply exhausted? Were the carefree mutts playing or arguing, or both? Would he ever open his eyes and look at the camera? The double images were hypnotic, arbitrary, and baffling. There was a quick bright flash of light — an overexposure caused by removing the film clumsily from the camera — and the home movie flickered to black.

The sequence at once conjured memories of the amateur Lugosi *Dracula* footage inserted into *Plan 9*, the incongruous buffalo stampede stock shot in *Glen or Glenda*, the surreal cinema of Kenneth Anger and the intentional extended-take boredom of Warhol — and in a weird way, even the brilliant theme of Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Was I seeing Eddie's personal Rosebud? Did the moving pictures mean something, or nothing? It was home movies transformed into art by accident.

Now you're prepared to read this book, everything explained in loving detail. But bear this in mind. No one can tell the story. Mistakes are made. But there is no mistaking the thoughts in a man's mind.

That, and the movies are all *crrrrrap*.

Greetings, my friend.

If you're anything like the "average" sci-fi or B-movie fan, you're more than likely familiar with Ed Wood by name — and perhaps by his most well-known film, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) — and not much else. Certainly, get ready for this book to open your eyes to a world of bizarrely entrancing entertainment that your feeble human mind never knew existed!

I'm honored (and a little concerned for my own mental faculties) to be included in a fairly elite circle of folks who might be considered "experts" on part or all of Ed's legacy. I'm in the process of writing the novelized version of *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, working directly for a reputedly-authentic original copy of the film's script, with my end goal being to bring to life the incredible story that Ed wanted to tell with the film, the story that didn't quite translate to the silver screen due to a variety of factors. I can see the tale in its fully-envisioned grandeur in Ed's script and liner notes; with unlimited resources (or at least the backing of a semi-reputable film studio), he could have created a truly enjoyable blend of visual feast and thought-provoking tale, but as we all now know, that was not destined to happen.

Everyone has to start somewhere when learning of Ed's legacy, and as an avid Wood fan myself, I must admit that I started out much like you in the knowledge (or lack thereof) of this very quirky and tirelessly motivated individual. In college, when I saw *Plan 9* for the first time, the movie initially seemed to me as it probably did to the vast majority of its viewers: some chintzy B-movie from the black-and-white era, plagued by a bad script, wooden actors, and a budget that was likely smaller than what I was paying for my tuition in that year alone.

To be fair, a large chunk of people who sought out *Plan 9 from Outer Space* did so because, like myself, they heard about it as being labeled "the worst movie ever made" by someone, somewhere, and they wanted to watch it to see if that title held true. And most viewers probably came to the same conclusion after the end credits started to roll: it was pretty bad, yes; but was it THE worst movie of all time? Definitely not.

Amazingly, something else also happened at the end of a first *Plan 9* viewing for a good-sized portion of the viewership: they couldn't shake an odd feeling in their brains. A feeling of strange intrigue. A feeling of piteous reverence. A feeling of backhanded respect. Were these feelings due to the subliminal backlash of having seen a movie unfairly branded as the worst of all time, or did viewers just simply *know* that, on some level, there was more to this movie (and its creator) than meets the eye?

When I first watched the film, in the mid-1990s, I was at a point in my life when I was intentionally seeking out bad movies. The mesmerizing allure of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was at its prime, and I had caught the *MST3K* fever big-time. I had seen the other "worst movie ever" front-runners: I bravely and willingly sat through viewings of *Manos: The Hands of Fate* (1966) and *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* (1964), both the joke-tracked *MST3K* and the original versions. (Growing up as a sci-fi and horror fan in the 1980s, I had also seen plenty of other really bad movies, but the haze of time passing mixed with the blur of nostalgia meant that I didn't truly realize that those movies were *that* bad until at least twenty years after the fact.)

After my first viewing of *Plan 9 from Outer Space* all the way back then, I wish I could tell you that I was instantly enamored and spent the rest of my days between then and now learning everything I could about the quirky film and Ed, it's even quirkier director; alas, it was not quite "love at first

sight” as a romanticized Hollywood might have you believe. I put the movie in my mental repository of B-movies and left it there, untouched, for years.

Remember those feelings I spoke of earlier — the nagging suspicion some *Plan 9* watchers had that there might be more to the story of this film than simply what was captured on camera? I was a victim of these sentiments as well, and in 2003 I had a chance encounter with a book in a secondhand store that brought things full-circle for me: the Medved Brothers’ *The Golden Turkey Awards*.

The Medveds, you see, had been judging Hollywood’s worst of the worst in movies, actors, and directors for some time, and *The Golden Turkey Awards* was a collection of “honors” given to the most god-awful, as judged by the brothers themselves and a write-in campaign they held prior to the book’s release. It didn’t take long in flipping through the book to recognize many of the names and films sprinkled throughout the pages.

Then, as if by divine providence (or just the fact that I had seen a lot of really bad movies in the last twenty years), there were the names of the appointed Worst Director and Worst Film of All Time — names I recognized instantly from watching that oddly-enthralling movie so many years before.

Ed Wood. *Plan 9 from Outer Space*.

That essentially sealed it for me. As I mentioned previously, I had heard that someone, somewhere had given *Plan 9* this dubious moniker, but I never knew the “who” or “how” until that moment. I couldn’t fathom how a pair of writers (let alone their fans via the write-in campaign) could assign *Plan 9* that title — even though at that time I hadn’t seen the movie in years, I remembered it being more...*cheesy* rather than outright-bad.

Soon after the bookstore, I found and bought *Plan 9* on DVD and watched it again.

And again.

And again.

I was officially hooked.

Every time I watched the film, I saw something new in the action that made me think “if the budget had only allowed for _____, then that would actually be a really awesome scene.” Or “if the actor had only delivered that line differently or had said _____ instead, then this whole part would make a lot more sense.” Or “if only Ed had included a scene about _____, then the whole movie would have flowed together so much better.”

The list goes on and on, but the point is this: through the layers of muck and grime, I saw the *true* story that Ed Wood was trying to tell — and I thought it was a damn good one.

Now it’s true, to an extent, that you could probably say this about most films: “if only the director had more money and better actors and done a better job telling the story, then the movie wouldn’t be so bad.” I get that. But what I think makes Ed Wood’s story so compelling is how much he *cared* about the projects he created: he firmly believed that *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* (the original title of *Plan 9* before, allegedly, the Baptist church that funded part of the film demanded that the title be changed to something less “highly offensive”) was the best story he had ever written — even if it didn’t translate as well on film as he had hoped.

Anyone who has seen the movie has seen the gloriousness of its ineptitude. The questionable dialogue delivered by wooden and emotionless “actors” (some of whom who were members of the aforementioned Baptist church, given starring roles in exchange for the church’s funding of the film) The flying saucers on strings and other effects that are a far cry from “special.” The scenes that switch from night to day back to night again due to a serious lack of editing (or attention to detail in general)

Yes, the film *Plan 9 from Outer Space* is bad.

But is the story itself so bad?

Well, my friend, if you find yourself as intrigued as some with this particular Ed Wood film, you now have the chance to decide for yourselves. I've made available a copy of the script I have in my possession for anyone interested in giving it a read (a quick search on Amazon for "Plan 9 screenplay" or my name should help you find it), and of course my novelization of the story is certainly going to be my heart-felt attempt at helping Ed's "true" story reach the masses. My goal is to — hopefully — create the narrative version of the story that Ed was unable to bring to life on film due to constraints with his budget, acting talent, and production timetable.

If you've bought this book, are reading through this introduction, and are finding yourself getting more and more excited to read all of the intricate details of Ed Wood and his films that wait in store for you here, I want you to know that even though this is not an officially-recognized support group (mostly for tax and legal reasons), you are not alone! Ed's cinematic creations are so alluring and mesmerizing that many folks have created new fictions entirely based on or inspired by Ed's works. I myself compiled and edited a fiction anthology, *Before Plan 9: Plans 1-8 from Outer Space*, that tell the tales of the first Plans enacted by the aliens prior to the events shown in the *Plan 9* film. "Yes, but Tony," you're saying to yourself, you appear to be bonkers over this film, and you're like a man in public not wearing any pants, because I can clearly see you're nuts." That's a fair assessment, but what if I told you again that you (and I, we) are not alone: the authors of the tales of the first eight plans include a *New York Times* best-seller, a Marvel Comics writer, and multiple literary award winners. People from any and all walks of life find it very easy to recognize Ed Wood's passion and eccentric idiosyncrasies. You are not alone.

I sincerely hope that, if you enjoy the zany wonder of Ed Wood and specifically the odd allure of *Plan 9*, you will enjoy not only this painstakingly-detailed reference from Andrew Rausch and Charles Pratt that you now have before you, but you may also give a read to my take on Ed's story as well.

All we want to do is help bring his visions to the masses.

I just hope our stupid, stupid human minds are up to the task.

Author's Note

Ask ten different cineastes whom Edward D. Wood, Jr. was and you're likely to get ten different responses. He has become something larger than life, more than a man. He represents different things to different people. To some, he is the much-ballyhooed "Worst Filmmaker in History"; a hack, if you will. To others, Wood was an artistic genius whose work contained layers of subtext and profound artistry. The truth, as usual, likely lies somewhere in the middle.

Was Wood the worst filmmaker in history? Definitely not. That title easily goes to the hundreds upon thousands of workmanlike directors who toiled on films that are now forgotten. We do not speak of them today as we speak of Wood. They are the gentlemen who helmed the comedies that weren't funny and the dramas that lacked drama. Were they more technically proficient than Wood? In most cases, yes, they probably were. But they lacked the passion that Wood carried with him on each of his projects. They lacked the singular vision and hunger of Ed Wood. They were given larger budgets with which to conceal their flaws.

Ed Wood's passion was his driving force. He had very little training in filmmaking, and it didn't matter. Things like that couldn't stop the indefatigable Wood. By god, he wanted to make motion pictures and he did. They may have lacked the sophistication and excellence of something like *Citizen Kane* (1941), but by and large they contained Wood's blood, sweat and tears in each and every frame.

For most film buffs, Wood is beloved for overcoming his own shortcomings. He didn't always have the talent to make the pictures the way he wanted to make them, and he definitely didn't have the budget to fully realize his dreams. But nevertheless he persevered. Like thousands of other people (many of whom may have actually possessed more talent than he), Wood went to Hollywood with the dream of making movies. Was he successful during his lifetime? Not in terms of artistic acclaim or financial reward, but he was successful because through all of the trials and tribulations he found a way to continue making movies. The truth is that he probably didn't make the movies he truly wanted to make in a way that he envisioned, but he was too stubborn to back down. Through a mixture of naivety, ignorance, and flat-out obsession, Wood created films that have stood the test of time and are beloved by millions.

There is an innocence in Wood's work that shines through as brightly as his passion. His views on the world and the way things worked weren't always accurate, and his often child-like perceptions show through in his films. But his films are somehow more than the sum of their parts. Sure, they can be dissected and picked apart piece by piece; flaws abound. But somehow those flawed pieces came together to make something memorable and special.

As we will discuss in this volume, Wood loathed filmmakers who peddled in smut, and yet he himself would later become associated with such pictures. He wrote a handful of soft-core sex pictures, as well as nearly one hundred lurid novels, and even directed a hardcore porno film. It's likely that he loathed himself for doing so. We'll never know exactly how Wood viewed himself and his work during this period, but it might be said that his excessive alcoholism may well be an indicator of his self-loathing. But he shouldn't have loathed himself. He continued writing screenplays he was passionate about during this period. They didn't find financing, which no doubt brought him great distress, but his perseverance in these endeavors indicate a man with an undying passion. Perhaps this drive was unhealthy as it seems he cared more about his art than he did his own well-being. And maybe the porn films weren't exactly the movies he longed to make, but the undeniable truth is that he was a success because he found a way to continue making movies of some sort even

when the deck was stacked against him.

Ed Wood is a legend and deservedly so. He earned that right by fighting tooth and nail for decades to make motion pictures. He was a filmmaker, and no one can take that away from him. He was also an auteur in the truest sense of the word; unlike other filmmakers who had larger budgets, Wood was forced to do almost everything on his pictures himself.

Ed Wood loved motion pictures perhaps more than anything else, and that love behind the camera is what makes his films endure today. Audiences can feel his passion, his motivation, and his desperate desire to succeed.

This volume is dedicated, with love, to the man and his many achievements.

Author's Note #2

In the course of writing this book we discovered that some people revere Edward D. Wood, Jr.'s work in a different way than we do; they don't revere it more, just differently. While we are huge fans of Wood and his work as both a filmmaker and as a novelist, we find unintentional humor in them. We find Wood to be naïve at times in terms of the way he viewed people, their actions, and the world around him. We found his sense of logic to be, at times, skewed. We find him to have been, at times, somewhat inept in the creation of these works. This is not to say he was a stupid man; by no means do we believe that notion. Again, here was a man who loved movies and found a way (with no real training to speak of) to write, direct, and produce films for the better part of his life. That is a substantial feat which cannot be ignored.

We are not in the camp who laughs at Wood and labels him a failure, nor are we a part of the camp who labels him a misunderstood genius and a genuine artist. We tend to fall somewhere in the middle on that scale; more than anything we admire Wood's endless passion for creation, be it personal film, pornographic films, or lurid paperback novels. We are not here to mock the man, and that is not the purpose for this book. Again, this book falls somewhere in between those two premises; our book holds Wood in great regard as a creator, but also acknowledges his missteps and the unintentional comedy to be found as a result of them.

Our beliefs regarding Wood's work tend to be somewhat different than the more academic writers like Rudolph Grey and Rob Craig, who have preceded us in writing tomes on him. We have the utmost respect for both of those great writers, but we look at things differently than they do. For instance, many Wood aficionados hate the posthumously-produced film *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died* (1998) because either A) they feel it was too slick and too polished for a Wood film, B) they feel it makes fun of Wood in some way, or C) because it's a more intentionally comedic film than Wood's own offerings were. We, on the other hand, see that Aris Iliopoulos-helmed film as being the single greatest achievement in the Wood canon; we believe it is the sort of quality production that Wood always wanted to make but could not due to deficiencies in talent and/or budget. (This is not to say Wood was completely devoid of talent, either. There are different levels of talent and we simply believe Wood to have been more than a few rungs beneath that of guys like Orson Welles, John Ford, or Budd Boetticher.)

Rudolph Grey advised us not to include the three posthumous films (*I Woke Up*, *Devil Girls*, 1999 and *Tomb of the Vampire*, 2013) as he felt their inclusion might help to diminish Wood's legacy. Because we wanted to be as thorough as possible we include them here, be they good, bad, or ugly (which is actually sort of the order in which they fall). It is certainly not to diminish or in any way harm Wood's good name and legacy. This book was intended as a celebration of Wood the filmmaker and all of the films on which he was either a writer or director.

So where do you draw the line? Well, we chose to not include films Wood is merely rumored to have been involved with, such as *Revenge of the Virgins* (1959); if we couldn't verify his involvement we left it out. We also chose to omit the film *Hot Ice* (1978), which Wood appears in and worked on as assistant director, because he was not the picture's writer or director. Finally, in terms of posthumously made films, we left out films that are simply homages or fan-made sequels to his work; we included only the three films on which he is credited as a screenwriter. (A fourth, John Johnson's *Plan Nine*, 2014, was in the works but was not completed in time to be included in this volume.)

So, in the end, we love Wood's films as much as anyone else does. Maybe some will believe that

we love them for the wrong reasons. We love and respect these films for what they are and what we see them as. ~~Many of them are undeniably classics, but are they really art? Or, even more to the point, are they really *artless*? We don't really support either of these positions. But, in the end, do our motives really matter? After all, we're all here for the same reason — to celebrate the life, art, and passion of Edward D. Wood, Jr.~~

Glen or Glenda? (1953)

Originally titled *I Changed My Sex!*, *Glen or Glenda?* was to be an exploitation film based on the famous transgender surgery of Christine Jorgensen. However, Jorgensen threatened to sue if her name was used in the film, so producer George Weiss hired then-unknown Edward D. Wood, Jr. to write the screenplay and then shoot it in four days. Wood, a cross-dresser himself, ultimately changed the premise, turning it into a film about transvestism. In order to appease Weiss' demands that the film be a sex change picture, Wood tacked on a short second story, titled "Alan or Anne?," dealing with the operation. Thus was born the single weirdest cinematic PSA announcement and plea for acceptance of all time. One can only imagine what the reaction from the theatrical crowd was.

Glen or Glenda? is probably Wood's most important film — important because Wood had the opportunity to make an exploitation film and turned it into a chance to communicate directly with the audience. Yes, his skills were inept, but Wood's message comes across loud and clear. There has never been another film like this one, where a filmmaker has tried so valiantly to pour out his heart and plead for understanding. It took courage for Wood to craft such a personal film, even taking the lead role himself. Unfortunately all of that comes to naught for casual viewers and schlock hounds who enjoy the film for its plethora of WTF? moments, while failing to consider what Wood was trying so hard to communicate. One wonders what today's filmscape might look like if some of our talented independent filmmakers possessed Wood's fierce drive and sincerity.

Despite Wood's changing the nature of the film, the film's misleading trailer would still tout it as being primarily about a sex change operation.

With *Glen or Glenda?* Wood first proved his unique inability to tell a coherent story. Here, he utilizes narration by multiple sources including a god-like mad scientist, a psychiatrist, the title character himself, and maybe strangest of all, an occasional dream-like manifestation of his own subconscious. The film swings willy-nilly from one viewpoint to the other and the goings on are convoluted — to say the least. The film begins with the following warning, letting us know that Wood means business:

In the making of this film, which deals with a strange and curious subject, no punches have been pulled — no easy way out is taken. Many of the smaller parts are portrayed by persons who actually are, in real life, the character they portray on the screen. This is a picture of stark realism...taking no sides...but giving you the facts...all the facts...as they are today...You are society...Judge ye not!

One of the biggest problems with the film — and there are a great many to choose from — is the film's thin plotline. The majority of the film is about a transvestite, Glen, who is afraid to tell his fiancée, Barbara, about his dirty little secret. As their wedding day grows nearer and nearer, Glen knows he must tell her. However, he is afraid he will lose her once she learns the truth. Eventually he tells her, and in a scene that was surely Wood's own fantasy, she is accepting; so much in fact that she takes off her angora sweater and hands it to him to wear.

Also telling that this is, in many ways, Wood's own story is his constant insistence that he is not homosexual. This point is needlessly made repeatedly throughout the film. It is sadly ironic that Wood, who longs for the world to understand his situation as a transvestite, seems to look down at homosexuals.

As one might expect, Wood's logic and reasoning in the film is often silly. In one scene, he implies that there is a little bit of Glenda in every man. "Little miss female," the narrator says, "you should feel quite proud of the situation. You of course realize it's predominantly men who design your

clothes, your jewelry, your makeup, your hairstyling, your perfume.”

The high or the low point of the film, depending on your particular viewpoint, is a ten-minute long surreal sequence that feels like the cinematic equivalent of an LSD trip. The scene, which features Bela Lugosi stoically observing such unexplained scenes as a man whipping a woman, a woman performing a striptease, and a strange S&M act between two women, is difficult to make heads or tails of. No doubt a psychoanalyst would have a field day with this sequence, but for the average viewer it is incomprehensible. Then the devil, which may or may not be Glen’s father, shows up, and more indescribable strangeness occurs.

What is little known about the dream sequence in *Glen or Glenda?* is the fact that producer Weiss was the person responsible for adding in the nonsensical bondage and S&M bits from one of his previously unreleased films (directed by Merle Connell). Weiss did this to pad out the picture and bring its running time up to the minimum time for a feature film.

By 1953, actor Bela Lugosi, best known for his turn in *Dracula* (1931), was at the end of his life and the end of his career. Down on his luck, the former star agreed to appear in Wood’s semi-autobiographical *Glen or Glenda?* as a type of narrator (who appears to be a god of some sort), here credited as “The Scientist,” who says nothing specifically about the plot or any of the events in the film. Instead, he dramatically says: “Beware! Beware of the big green dragon that sits on your doorstep. He eats little boys...Puppy dog tails, and big fat snails...Beware! Take care! Beware!” This dialogue makes absolutely no sense, but as performed by Lugosi, it does have a sort of simple lyricism to it. (When he says it, it sounds like “*bevare.*”) This same ridiculous dialogue will be delivered three times in the film; twice by Lugosi, and once by the devil character.

Despite the madness which surrounds him, Lugosi gives a credible and fascinating performance. He is as elegant and transfixing as ever, and is easily the finest performer in the film. Also decent (despite extremely wooden dialogue) is veteran performer Lyle Talbot, who plays police inspector Warren. The rest of the cast displays the lack of acting chops that would ultimately become a trademark of Ed Wood’s films. Leading the way here is Wood himself, who appears in the lead role. Judging from his performance, Wood may well be the worst actor Wood would ever work with, and that is saying a great deal.

Also extremely dull and robotic is Wood’s then-girlfriend Dolores Fuller, who naturally appears here as Glen’s girlfriend, Barbara. Scenes between Wood and Fuller are cringe-inducing and rather painful on the ears. In real life Dolores had learned of Wood’s transvestism just before the production of *Glen or Glenda?* and was appalled at her boyfriend’s splashing their private lives and problems across movie screens for everyone to witness. It’s not difficult to imagine her heart not being in this production. Fuller would soon leave Ed Wood after the completion of the film.

It must also be noted that Conrad “Connie” Brooks, an actor Wood would later work with again on three more features, appears here in four different roles (Banker, Reporter, Pickup Artist, and Bearded Drag Queen).

The film also features interesting cameos by cinematographer William C. Thompson (as the judge), producer George Weiss (as an onlooker at the scene of a suicide), and Conrad Brooks’ brother Henry Bederski (as a man whose hairline recedes because of his hat — and yes, this *is* as ridiculous as it sounds).

Copious amounts of stock footage are used in the film. This would later become another staple in Wood’s films. Here he uses much more stock footage than he would ever use again, utilizing nearly fourteen full minutes of it. Footage of New York City pedestrians appears numerous times throughout the film. Other uses of stock footage “integration” include World War II battle footage and a

stampede of buffalo, which makes absolutely no sense in the context in which Wood places it in the film. Wood uses stock footage of lightning an astounding six times in the film.

One of the elements of Wood's films that he would ultimately be most remembered for is his dialogue, which is often absurd, wooden, awkwardly phrased, and/or redundant. As Wood collaborator Stephen C. Apostolof would later explain, Wood would write screenplays in a stream-of-consciousness manner, spilling words onto the page as quickly as he could type them. This will come as no surprise to anyone who's ever heard Wood's dialogue, but it does explain a lot. *Glen or Glenda* features a lot of Woodian dialogue, most of which falls under the category of awkwardly phrased, such as "Here's a story from fact."

Then there's the silly and the redundant, such as "People...all going somewhere...all with their own thoughts...their own ideas...all with their own personalities."

Later the Scientist says almost the same thing: "The world is a strange place to live in. All those cars. All going someplace. All carrying humans, which are carrying out their lives."

In another scene, the psychiatrist, Dr. Alton, says, "Only the infinity of the depths of a man's mind can really tell the story." This of course makes no sense, but then this is an Ed Wood film...Later *Glen or Glenda* will explain that he "can't make sense to myself sometimes."

Then there are the unnatural phrases like Inspector Warren saying, "you men of medical science." All of this dialogue is ridiculous, but it's a big reason why we all love the films of Edward D. Wood, Jr.

It should be noted that this is the only film Wood would ever direct that he did not also produce.

CREDITS: Producer: George Weiss; Director: Edward D. Wood, Jr.; Screenplay: Edward D. Wood, Jr.; Cinematographer: William C. Thompson; Editor: Bud Schelling.

CAST: Bela Lugosi (Scientist); Lyle Talbot (Inspector Warren); Timothy Farrell (Dr. Alton/Narrator); Dolores Fuller (Barbara); Tommy Haynes (Alan/Anne); Edward D. Wood, Jr. (Glen/Glenda); Charles Crafts (Johnny); Conrad Brooks (Banker/Reporter/Pick-Up Artist/Bearded Drag); Henry Bederski (Man with Hat); Captain DeZita (Devil/Glen's Father), Shirley Speril (Miss Stevens); Harry Thomas (Man in Nightmare); William C. Thompson (Judge); Mr. Walter (Patrick/Patricia); George Weiss (Man).

Jail Bait (1954)

When you first learn that Edward D. Wood, Jr. wrote and directed a film titled *Jail Bait*, you expect an exploitation film about reckless youth. Well, don't get your hopes up, because that's not what this movie is. In this instance, said "jail bait" is a gun. This isn't an exploitation flick, but rather a melodramatic public service announcement about the evils of firearms. Co-written with Alex Gordon, with whom Wood would later collaborate on *Bride of the Monster* (1955), this is the director's first truly competent production. Sure, it has the wooden acting that one expects from a Wood film, but the dialogue is better than the average and the plot, while still silly, is far more effective than what we find in most of his films.

If the credits didn't inform you that this was a Wood-helmed picture, you'd never even guess he was involved. This is perhaps a hint that Wood could have produced really solid work had anyone even given him an "A" movie budget. Think about it — money would have given way to more realistic props, soundstages, and more takes for each scene, as well as better actors who would have given more convincing performances. But that never happened. However, Wood fully utilizes the low budget in *Jail Bait* and creates something credible. Was *Jail Bait* astonishing? Was it a profound work of art? No and no, but it's at least an average crime melodrama that wouldn't have embarrassed anyone involved with it. (Saying that Wood, at his best, was average is no insult; after all, *most* Hollywood directors are merely average.) So why does no one talk about films like *Jail Bait*, where Wood did competent work? Likely because it does little to further the misconception that Wood was an untalented hack, or, even worse, the "worst filmmaker in history."

Jail Bait features a cast that is rather impressive for a minor production with a low budget. For every Dolores Fuller or Mona McKinnon in the cast there is a more accomplished actor like Lyle Talbot or Bud Osborne. The film also features an early performance by former Mr. Universe Steve Reeves (this was his first credited performance in a feature film).

The film's trailer promises that it will be a "siren-screaming bullet-blazing thriller," and *Jail Bait* delivers on that promise.

Don Gregor (played by Clancy Malone, whom Wood met when Malone delivered his groceries) has just been arrested for carrying a gun without a permit. Inspector Johns (Talbot) and his partner, Lt. Lawrence (Reeves), believe Don is keeping company with a low-life thug named Vic Brady (Timothy Farrell). After Don is released from police custody, his sister, Marilyn Gregor (Fuller), warns him that guns are "jail bait." Nevertheless, Don leaves the house with his back-up pistol.

Don's father, world-renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Boris Gregor (played by silent movie star Herbert Rawlinson, who died from lung cancer the day after filming on *Jail Bait* wrapped), comes home and tells Marilyn that the police have informed him of Don's illegal gun toting. (We know Boris is a doctor because he carries a black medical bag with him wherever he goes. After all, you never know when or where an emergency facelift might be required.) The doctor discusses an accident victim from earlier in the day whose face he had to remodel. (Could this seemingly pointless discussion be foreshadowing? Hmmm.) Both Don's father and sister believe his hanging around with Vic Brady will get him into trouble.

We then see Don, once again "carrying a rod," and hanging out with Vic in a bar. Off-duty cops Inspector Johns and Lt. Lawrence just happen to show up at the same bar, and a minor altercation takes place in which Don threatens to punch Johns. Once Vic and Don have left the bar, Vic advises Don not to treat police officers in such a manner. "He was out to get you sore," Vic says.

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