

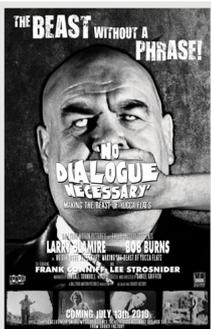
Filmmaker talks his “BEAST” docu for “MST3K” DVD set

Written by Michael Gingold
Thursday, 27 May 2010 13:04



Daniel Griffith, the documentary/disc supplement producer/director whose credits include the terrific DARK SIDE OF EDEN for the STANLEY DVD, got in touch with details of his latest project: NO DIALOGUE NECESSARY: MAKING “THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS.” This 30-minute feature will appear in Shout! Factory’s upcoming MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 XVIII DVD boxed set.

Having contributed the critically well-received SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE DEVIL: A 50-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE, about the K. Gordon Murray CLAUS flick, to last year’s MST3K XVI package, Griffith was contacted by Shout! to provide some extra-value material for XVIII (streeting July 13). Informed of the four flicks to be included—BEAST, LOST CONTINENT, CRASH OF THE MOONS and JACK FROST—he knew quickly which one he wanted to go for. “THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS stood out,” he tells Fango. “I mean, this film is ambitiously bad, from start to finish.” Written and directed by Coleman Francis and first released in 1961, BEAST stars cult-favorite actor Tor Johnson as the hulking result of a nuclear blast that mutates a Russian scientist. Among other defects, the film is notorious for the fact that Francis lost the soundtrack, and replaced a good deal of it with his own narration.



“After revisiting the film—without the MST3K accompaniment—I realized that I had my work cut out for me. The documentary about SANTA CLAUS was a piece of cake compared to this! But then I reached the scene where Tor Johnson is wondering around the desert with a cane, and I was thinking, ‘Surely there is a reason why the Beast has a cane? What a preposterous idea! Tor must have requested it! But why give your villain such a disadvantage?’ That was it! Proof that there was a story worth exploring, even if the film itself lacked one. A documentary was born!”

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Although both Francis and Johnson are no longer with us, Griffith was able to track down Lee Strosnider, BEAST’s cinematographer and editor. NO DIALOGUE REQUIRED features exclusive interviews with Strosnider as well as MST3K’s Frank Conniff, B-movie historian Bob Burns and modern cult filmmaker Larry Blamire (whose features THE LOST SKELETON RETURNS AGAIN and DARK AND STORMY NIGHT will hit DVD from Shout! August 17). “Like the SANTA CLAUS featurette, the YUCCA FLATS documentary playfully combines historical fact with comical satire,” Griffith says. “We really tried to top ourselves, and I think MSTies everywhere, as well as cult fans, are in for a big surprise!” In addition, Griffith’s Ballyhoo Motion Pictures produced the short COLEMAN FRANCIS: THE CINEMATIC POET OF PARKING, with Strosnider recalling his experiences with the late filmmaker, which will also be part of the MST3K XVIII set.

Despite the fun he and his subjects had with BEAST, Griffith doesn’t totally disdain the movie. “If you look beneath the surface, the film actually has a heart. Someone struggled to make it. And it got released! Over 40 years later, people are still scratching their heads. It takes a lot to complete a motion picture, even with today’s technology, so you have to give Coleman Francis some credit. Not much...but some.”

With its more expansive recent MST3K packages, as well as its Roger Corman’s Cult Classics series and special editions of such fright favorites as THE STEPFATHER and KINGDOM OF THE SPIDERS, [Shout! Factory](#) has become a major player on the genre-disc scene. Says an appreciative Griffith, “Shout! has been very supportive in regards to the adventurous approach I take with these documentaries. They are truly an amazing bunch! They really do respond to the needs of the fans. And plans are already in motion for more in-depth making-of bonus features for future MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 DVD sets.”

Griffith’s got further projects of his own coming along, including the full-length documentaries [THE WONDER WORLD OF K. GORDON MURRAY](#) and [THEY CAME FROM THE SWAMP: THE FILMS OF WILLIAM GREFÉ](#). You can see his Ballyhoo Motion Pictures blog [here](#).

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