

“THE DISEMBODIED” (DVD Review)

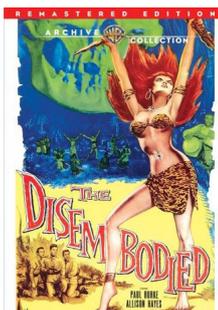
Written by Michael Koopmans

Tuesday, 08 November 2011 13:46



THE DISEMBODIED (1957) is one of two Allison Hayes-starring films from Allied Artists (the other is THE HYPNOTIC EYE) available via the Warner Archive Collection, the manufactured-on-demand initiative launched last year. Anyone familiar with the busty bombshell already knows the selling point of this film—and the stock, repetitious plot involving voodoo-induced spirit migration is not it.

A remote station located deep within the dark, steamy African jungle is the setting for this compact tale. We're immediately introduced to the mild-mannered Dr. Carl Metz (John Wengraf), who's lounging outside his home/office in the sun, and his much younger, voluptuous, kimono-clad, dagger-wielding native wife Tonda (Hayes). She's in the process of attempting to murder her husband by tightening a noose around a voodoo doll's neck. Her spell is interrupted when their native servant, Suba (Dean Fredericks), enters the room, causing her to cease all operations. Later, a pair of white visitors, Tom and Norman (Paul Burke and Joel Marston), along with their black guide, arrive at the outpost carrying their buddy Joe (Robert Christopher), who's on death's doorstep after being mauled by a lion while "making motion pictures." At first, Metz turns them away in fear his wife will turn her seductive charms on the men, but upon seeing how severe Joe's injuries are, he decides to help.



That evening, while on a midnight stroll, Tom runs into Tonda, who begins working her hypnotic

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voodoo sex-appeal magic stuff on him until he regains his will and departs. Suba comes out from behind a tree and threatens to tell the doctor she is being unfaithful. In response, she places him under a spell, causing him to force himself upon her just as his wife, Mara, enters the scene. We then return to the house, where Tonda places two chicken bones on Joe's blood-covered chest and makes an odd hand gesture. Later, accompanied by rhythmic drums, the three conscious outsiders are led to a bizarre voodoo ritual involving Tonda, Suba, a chicken and a knife.

The following morning, to everyone's surprise, Joe has made a full recovery and his wounds have magically scarred over. Suba's corpse is discovered, and it's revealed to the viewer that the voodoo queen switched Suba and Joe's spirits during the midnight ceremony, giving Suba's personality to Joe. He eventually assumes Suba's former role and leaves with Mara. Tonda's next course of action is to attempt to swap her elderly husband for the younger, more handsome Tom, while still maintaining his brilliant mind and kind demeanor.

A lot to swallow? You bet it is! And that's all dumped on the viewer within the first half-hour of this 66-minute (barely a) feature. However, at this point, the proceedings go from lightning-quick to a sloth's pace as the remainder of the film crawls to the much-expected ending. Everything that occurs beyond the midway point seems reminiscent of previous scenes and never really goes anywhere. Numerous moments are cut just when you think a character will discover something enlightening in regard to the current situation, but it's usually revealed in the next scene that little came of it. Also, plot-progressing conversations are often abruptly ceased due to one character needing rest or the fact that it's getting dark out. The script has a rush-job feel to it, and also reveals much ignorance when it comes to the subjects of race and voodoo.

The highlight of the flick—and probably the main reason it was made—is Hayes' sensual ritualistic dance in a leopard bikini (see cover art). Hayes plays the femme fatale role flawlessly and would, the following year, go on to cult status in a far superior film, *ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN*. The acting all around is slightly above par for what you'd expect from a 1950s B-movie involving voodoo, and Walter Grauman, who made his directorial debut with this film, also seems to have used it as a springboard. His competent direction would lead him to helm literally hundreds of television films and series episodes.

The production values are quite generic, but passable considering the time period. The jungle sets have little character, and every exterior sequence seems to have been filmed in the same spot (which they may very well have been). And compared to the small list of other voodoo/jungle-adventure films I've seen from around this time period, I was surprised by the

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lack of animal appearances, aside from a single chicken. It would have been great to at least see stock footage of a lion, representing the one that mauls Joe and is later accused of another attack.

THE DISEMBODIED, like much of the Warner Archive Collection, is available on a bare-bones “official” DVD-R as opposed to a standard DVD. The full-frame transfer is surprisingly cleaned up nicely, and I’m willing to bet looks clearer now than it ever has. I can only recommend this film to completists of the “white voodoo” subgenre and fans of the lovely Hayes. Or maybe anyone with an hour to waste. There definitely are worse things you could be watching.

