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# I WAS A TEENAGE SURFER ZOMBIE FROM MARS

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CULT CINEMA

Andrew Graves

### Week 4: Gimmicks, Ghosts and Hollywood Has-beens

#### William Castle (1914-1977)

- Orphaned at 11
- When he was 13 he went to see a production of Dracula – starring Bela Lugosi
- Transfixed, he returned nightly for almost two weeks

*"I sat in the balcony and listened to the frightened audience scream. Soon I was no longer watching the play; I had more fun watching the audience."*

**William Castle**

- When he was 15, Lugosi recommended him for the position of assistant stage manager
- He spent his teenage years working on Broadway
- He decided that he was going to make a living 'Scaring the pants off audiences'
- He soon required a knack for creating hype and publicity
- In 1938, a German actress he was working with received an invitation from the Nazis to attend the Munich Arts Festival
- When she turned the invite down, Castle used this to publicise his own production – creating stories in the press about 'the girl who refused Hitler'
- He also vandalized the theater with swastikas and Nazi slogans to create more press footage
- He quickly learned the film business and was given the task of directing low budget B movies for the studio
- He decided he was going to make his own self-financed films.

#### **Macabre (1958)**

##### **William Castle**

- He remortgaged his house to pay for the film's production
- His innovative publicity gimmicks included giving each customer a certificate for \$1000 insurance policy from Lloyds of London in case they 'died of fright'
- He also stationed nurses in theatres and parked hearses outside
- It worked, the film was a hit

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***House on Haunted Hill (1959)*****William Castle**

- This time he used the 'Emergo' gimmick
- At a key moment in the film, a skeleton with red glowing eyes would 'float' above the audience in the theatre

***13 Ghosts (1960)*****William Castle**

- Was filmed in 'Illusion-O' - each patron received a handheld ghost viewer/remover. During certain segments of the film, a person could see the ghosts by looking through the red cellophane or hide them by looking through the blue.

***The Tingler (1959)*****William Castle**

- Directed by William Castle
- Produced by William Castle
- Written by Robb White
- Cinematography by Wilfred M. Cline
- Edited by Chester Schaeffer
- Music by Von Dexter

**The plot**

A pathologist (Vincent Price) discovers that the tingling in the spine when scared is caused by the growth of a parasite which lives on fear. The more fear there is the tighter its grip on the spine becomes. The only way to weaken its grip is to scream.

*"I am William Castle, the director of the motion picture you are about to see. I feel obligated to warn you that some of the sensations—some of the physical reactions which the actors on the screen will feel—will also be experienced, for the first time in motion picture history, by certain members of this audience... But don't be alarmed—you can protect yourself. At any time, you are conscious of a tingling sensation, you may obtain immediate relief by screaming. Don't be embarrassed about opening your mouth and letting rip with all you've got, because the person in the seat right next to you will probably be screaming too. And remember—a scream at the right time may save your life."*

**Prologue to *The Tingler***

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***Whatever Happened to Baby Jane (1962)*****Robert Aldrich**

- Directed by Robert Aldrich
- Produced by Robert Aldrich
- Screenplay by Lukas Heller
- Based on *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* by Henry Farrell
- Cinematography by Ernest Haller
- Edited by Michael Luciano
- Music by Frank DeVol

**Robert Aldrich (1918– 1983)**

- Began working in the film industry in 1941 when he became a production clerk for RKO
- He quickly became script clerk then assistant director and an associate producer
- He began writing and directing early TV productions
- In 1953, he directed his first feature film *Big Leaguer* (1953)
- He also set up his own production company producing, directing and co-writing many of company's features
- In July 1956 Robert Aldrich signed a two-picture deal with Columbia to make films through his own company.
- Aldrich started directing *Garment* but was fired towards the end of filming
- In March 1957 Aldrich sued Columbia for renegeing on a promise to make a film of the play *Storm in the Sun*, which he wanted to do with Crawford. The case was settled the following month.
- Afterwards Aldrich struggled to receive funding for a range of projects he'd been planning
- Unable to get work, he relocated to Europe, making Hammer film, *Ten Seconds to Hell* (1959) in Germany
- He worked on a number of projects whilst in Europe including *The Angry Hills* (1959) and *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962)
- *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) can be seen as the film which kick started the 'hagsploitation' or 'psycho-biddy' run of films

**Bette Davis (1908 –1989)**

- Born Ruth Elizabeth Davis
- She began a stage career at an early age
- She made her Broadway debut in 1929
- She moved to Hollywood and gained a contract with Universal Studios
- However, Carl Laemmle didn't really know what to do with her and considered firing her - "*about as much sex appeal as Slim Summerville*"
- After more than 20 film roles Davis finally won critical acclaim in *Of Human Bondage* (1934)

### Bette Davis (1908 –1989) CONT...

*“I think Bette Davis would probably have been burned as a witch if she had lived two or three hundred years ago. She gives the curious feeling of being charged with power which can find no ordinary outlet”*

**E. Arnot Robertso**

- During the war, she sold war bonds
- She was also the only white actor to perform to black regiments
- She set up and helped run the Hollywood Canteen – ensuring that big names would make appearances to entertain the troops
- She became a committed Democrat
- She refused the title role in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), a role for which Joan Crawford won an Academy Award
- By 1961 her career was in decline, she had appeared in a Broadway version of *Night of the Iguana*, but after many mediocre reviews she left the production early
- She accepted the role of Jane Hudson in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962), believing it could potentially tap into the same audiences that had flocked to *Psycho* (1960)
- She negotiated a contract which allowed her 10% of the world-wide profits of the gross profits as well as her original fee

### Joan Crawford (1904? –1977)

- Born Lucille Fay LeSueur
- Her father walked out a few months before she was born
- Her childhood ambition was to be a dancer
- She began dancing with touring shows and reviews
- In 1924, she was offered a contract with MGM
- Her first part was as a body double
- Though the studio recognized her potential, her name was holding her back – LeSueur sounding like ‘sewer’
- She changed her name and, frustrated by the roles she was being offered went on a campaign of self-promotion, using her looks and dancing abilities to gain attention and notoriety

*“Joan Crawford is doubtless the best example of the flapper, the girl you see in smart night clubs, gowned to the apex of sophistication, toying iced glasses with a remote, faintly bitter expression, dancing deliciously, laughing a great deal, with wide, hurt eyes. Young things with a talent for living.”*

**F Scott Fitzgerald**

- By On May 3, 1938, Crawford—along with Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, , John Barrymore, Katherine Hepburn, Fred Astaire , and others was dubbed ‘Box Office Poison’
- Her contract with MGM was terminated in 1943

### ***Whatever Happened to Baby Jane (1962)***

Robert Aldrich

- Apparently, Crawford suggested Davis for the role
- The two stars maintained publicly that there was no feud between them
- However, Robert Aldrich (possibly fueling publicity) reported that *"It's proper to say that they really detested each other, but they behaved absolutely perfectly."*

*"Why am I so good at playing bitches? I think it's because I'm not a bitch. Maybe that's why Miss Crawford always plays ladies."*

**Bette Davis**

*The best time I ever had with Joan Crawford was when I pushed her down the stairs in Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?"*

**Bette Davis**

*"She has a cult, and what the hell is a cult except a gang of rebels without a cause. I have fans. There's a big difference."*

**Joan Crawford**

*"Sure, she stole some of my big scenes, but the funny thing is, when I see the movie again, she stole them because she looked like a parody of herself, and I still looked like something of a star."*

**Joan Crawford**

### **The Plot**

Spoilt child star Jane Hudson, over shadows her sister Blanche, who is ignored by her father. However, later on, Blanche eclipses Jane's fame and her sister's stardom begins to wane. One night, in a car crash Blanche is crippled – Jane being blamed for the drunken accident. We cut to much later – Jane is in charge of looking after Blanche (both now has-beens), she uses her power to make Blanche's life a misery.

*"The impact of "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?" was considerable in 1962. Today's audiences, perhaps not familiar with the stars, don't fully realize how thoroughly Crawford, and especially Davis, trashed their screen images with the coaching of Aldrich. Imagine two contemporary great beauties -- Julia Roberts and Cate Blanchett, say -- as aged crones. The personal dislike between Crawford and Davis no doubt deepened the power of their onscreen relationship."*

**Roger Ebert**

### **The aftermath and continuing feud...**

- Bette Davis was nominated for Best Actress in 1963 for her role in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*
- This did nothing to improve the fractious relationship which had grown to bitter proportions
- Crawford apparently made it her mission to undermine Davies and her nomination
- She petitioned Ann Bancroft, also nominated to allow her to accept the award on her behalf.

***Straight Jacket*** (1964)

- Directed by William Castle
- Written by Robert Bloch
- Cinematography by Arthur E Arling
- Edited by Edwin H Bryant
- Music by Van Alexander

**The Premise**

- Lucy Harbin has a solution for adultery—an axe. So when she finds her husband in bed with his lover, it's chop, chop, chop...

**The Marketing**

- During the film's original release, moviegoers were given little cardboard axes as they entered the theater. At the end of the closing credits, the Columbia logo's torch-bearing woman is shown in her traditional pose, but decapitated, with her head resting at her feet on her pedestal.