


The Only Thing More Terrifying  
Than The Last 12 Minutes Of This Film  
Are The First 92.



Once You've Seen It  
You Will Never Again Feel Safe In The Dark

 RESTRICTED  
Under 17 requires accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian RELEASED BY INTERNATIONAL CLASSICS INC.  
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77/133  
SUSPIRIA

Suspiria (1977)

Binghamton University Art Museum  
Binghamton University  
PO Box 6000  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
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GRAPHIC!  
LURID!  
SENSATIONAL!  
EXPLOITATION AND B-MOVIE  
POSTERS

APRIL 7 - MAY 21, 2016

Binghamton University Art Museum

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)



THE ROCKY  
HORROR  
PICTURE SHOW

a different  
set of jaws

 RESTRICTED  
Under 17 requires accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian





## EXPLOITATION AND B-MOVIES 1930-1977

In the 30s, when Hollywood built its reputation as manufacturer of wholesome family entertainment, nomadic groups of independent filmmakers produced and distributed films dealing with issues prohibited by the industry's self-devised regulatory code. The Motion Picture Production Code, popularly known as the Hays Code, comprised a set of moral guidelines developed by the studios themselves to stave off government interference, interference provoked by abundant Hollywood scandals as well as by risqué films. Among other things, the Hays Code prohibited nudity, images of drugs or white slavery, venereal diseases or prostitution or childbirth. For almost 40 years Hollywood regulated itself, but the desire for the forbidden never went away.

Indeed, this desire proved an opportunity for small business, leading to the birth of the exploitation film. The term derives first from these films' advertising, which, as many of the posters here attest, sensationalized the forbidden, and exploited representations of drug use and sexuality in order to turn a profit. This was a necessary strategy since none of the films featured stars or anything resembling production values. Some of our examples speak to this directly: *Confessions of a Vice Baron* (dir. S. Roy Luby, William O'Connor, Melville Shyer, Herman Webber et al, 1943) purports to trace the career of mobster Lucky Luciano. The film offers a self-justification—what was called in the trade the “square-up”—of highlighting immorality in order to educate, which here takes the form of Lucky breathlessly confirming “Crime doesn't pay.” Lucky's clichéd message (which fools no one) also serves to signal what we can expect, that is, images banned in a Hollywood context: lurid sequences of white slavery, prostitution, a black market baby racket, abortion, drug trafficking, nudity and murder. But the many names attached as director tell us more: 59 minutes long, only eight minutes is new material, the rest cannibalized from earlier exploitation films. Why?

Because they were cheap, exploitation films deliver spectacle instead of narrative. Made by independent producers and filmmakers, distributed to neighborhood theaters as well as on the carney circuit, these films couldn't compete with the budgets and the vertical integration of Hollywood. They show signs of cut corners everywhere, narrative being the first casualty. *Confessions of a Vice Baron* offers no continuity—how could there be when so much of it is recycled?—and indeed, Lucky is absent from much of “his” story. Instead, and like the other exploitation films whose posters we've chosen such as *Chained Girls* (dir. Joseph Mawra, 1965), *Mondo Cane* (dir. Paolo Cavara, 1962) and *The Lonely Sex* (dir. Richard Hilliard,

RADLEY H. METZGER  
presents

## "THE WEIRD LOVE MAKERS"

They  
Do  
Every-  
thing!



AN AUDUBON FILMS RELEASE

The Weird Love Makers (1963)

1959), we get exhibitionistic spectacle, intent on producing a strong emotional response through direct address of the audience. Spectacle doesn't need narrative to do its work.

B-movie and Poverty Row films share several qualities with the exploitation film; they have no stars, low budgets and risibly fast shooting schedules. Because they were cheaply made they also appeared regularly at neighborhood theaters, like exploitation films. But the B-movie and the Poverty Row film typically filled out the bottom half of a double feature, whose main attraction was a big-budget Hollywood production. Both of these types heavily favored genre as a way of attracting an audience, but they differ in that B-movies were made by the major studios, while Poverty Row films were made by small, independent producers. The wonderful B horror *I Walked with a Zombie* (dir. Jacques Tourneur, 1943) was made under RKO, whereas the Poverty Row classic *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (dir. Ed D. Wood, Jr., 1959) was produced by Reynolds Pictures—basically Wood and whatever investors he could corral, including a Methodist Church group that had been promised the film would be morally educational. It was not.

Low budgets meant little oversight, by the Hays Office or by studio accountants, so B and Poverty Row films could push sex and violence a bit, though not to the extent of the exploitation film. Roger Corman's *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) features plentiful bikinis and decapitations; and *The Astounding She-Monster* (dir. Ronnie Ashcroft, 1957) gifts us with a lethal blonde alien in a skintight metallic suit, high heels, and Joan Crawford's eyebrows, as well as a great poster.

The posters, whether for an exploitation film, B-movie or Poverty Row production, have to be appreciated as essential parts of the experience. Like the films they promote, they attempt to address the viewer directly, appealing to visual curiosity and a desire to see what has been forbidden or repressed. While one might hesitate to call *Attack of the 50 ft. Woman* (dir. Nathan Hertz, 1958) a feminist film—the fight for gender equality deserves better special effects than this!—the poster offers an iconic, even utopian image of feminine power at a time when those were few on the ground. Like the films, these images betray their cheapness too. But even as the limited palette of *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (dir. William Beaudine, 1966) appears aesthetically impoverished it can't help but grab attention and stir curiosity—how can this genre mash-up work? It doesn't, but not for lack of trying. The poster had to create the audience; in many circumstances the poster had even to create the film, as it was often drafted before a reel had been shot.

*Maryjane* (dir. Maury Dexter, 1968), depicts a high school teacher framed for suggesting marijuana might not be so bad, and ends as it must: it affirms yes, pot is that bad—but not before titillating the audience with the spectacle of teenagers and heartthrob Fabian, here well past his best-before date, pretending to be high. So what do these films leave us as a lesson? In our era when Hollywood looks impoverished and homogenized despite ballooning budgets, when so many films are sequels or franchises, deformed by focus-groups, product placement, accountants and advertisers, the lurid cheapness of these images and their films must seem a tonic. Hollywood's competition for a global audience and capital has rendered it monolithic, and the desires it fosters now are less sexual than material, displacements onto “lifestyle”—clothes, cars, single-family homes, consumer technology—a lifestyle that fits the interests of its advertisers like a key in a lock, and a lifestyle in which desire's fulfillment is necessarily deferred. Exploitation and B-movies, not despite but because of their contradictions, iffy politics and lurid images, promise satisfaction now.

- Brian Wall, Associate Professor of Cinema and Art History