

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE

Lisa Jane Persky January 2020

A movie all at once from 1959 and from the future, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* is the most punk-ass movie of all time. In fact, if you were to time-travel by one of its spray-painted paper plate UFO's to punk rock's mid-'70s inception at CBGB's, a shared language would be dialogue from this best-worst zombie film, i.e.: "...ALL YOU OF EARTH ARE IDIOTS!" In those early punk days, before cable TV as we've come to know it, we'd have to wait until Chiller Theater, a local television movie showcase, ran the film. Now — "now" being the future — we can see it whenever we want.

The only thing that isn't bizarre and preposterous about *Plan 9 From Outer Space* is its premise: We, the humans, are endangering ourselves, our planet, the universe. To save all life, space aliens — of only slightly more intelligence than humans — arrive in a Burbank cemetery to save the universe from our sad earthling stupidity by unleashing *Plan 9* (Plans 1 through 8 are never explained). As quickly as we glean the gist it is more and less forgotten by director/writer/producer Ed Wood and we are lost in our LOL's.

Pasty blowhard psychic (The Amazing) Criswell, a fixture of the '50s, bookends the piece with scold-y, foreboding monologues. In his arch delivery style, commas become periods: "The ever beautiful flowers she had planted. With her own hands. Became nothing more than the lost roses. Of her cheeks." He's describing the recently deceased character played by wasp-waisted goth goddess Vampira (Maila Nurmi). Ms. Nurmi smartly insisted she be given no lines at all. Mirroring the *Plan 9* plot thread, which relies on the revivification of a few good corpses and it being from the past and the future all at once, the film's star Bela Lugosi was dead in real life. Outtakes from Wood's earlier work with Lugosi are sprung for *Plan 9*. Bela's Dracula-inspired cape-whipping is a strange fit but we go with it, even when Wood's wife's chiropractor, a full foot taller than Lugosi, steps in to fill out the same role. They, too, have no lines. As they say in Hollywood: everyone is replaceable. Everyone.

The rest of the movie is exposition that takes place in two-shots in front of a curtain or a wall or a wall broken up by a curtain; dangling space toys; government stock footage; and much "creeping": creeping around a cemetery, creeping around a house, creeping along a road. Night shots intercut with day shots form the same scene. These are just some of the weird charms of Wood's allegiances and DIY ethic. This is the movie that made anyone think they could make a movie: anyone.

By the time Criswell returns to finish the picture off, we've had plenty of time to form questions, including: Did Ed Wood write his screenplay with a hammer? How, in 1959, did this movie cost sixty thousand bucks?

You might wonder if it's camp but it's not. It's as earnest as a basset hound. *Plan 9* has a musty odor as antique as your great-great-grandmother's antimacassars, and that isn't at all unpleasant.

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