

ScienceFictionMovies1959TextTVS

By Tim Van Schmidt

The Angry Red Planet \*\*

There's a good reason why the planet Mars should be angry. It's because the humans who finally come to visit the neighboring planet in "The Angry Red Planet" are boorish and dumb. That becomes the message that the inhabitants of Mars send back to Earth with the first manned expedition when it returns, crippled and cloaked in mystery- along with a warning. The powers that be on Mars have seen the people of Earth develop at home and they don't want any of that returning to their planet- or else.

The four explorers who do reach the surface of Mars in "The Angry Red Planet" begin their adventures on the planet by testing their main weapon on the plant life. Then they disturb, then kill some local wild life as well as maim and blast a hideous monster. When the planet retaliates, they then fry a big blob attacking their space ship with intense electricity. The humans are reckless and short-sighted and deserve to go home with their tails between their legs.

Other than that message, there really is no good reason for watching this movie. "The Angry Red Planet" is a cheap and wooden production with lousy writing, lousy acting and unconvincing "special effects." The lousy writing and acting go together- there's little here to inspire the actors to do more than go through the motions. The "special effects" are as "un-special" as bad drawings for the Martian landscape, filtered photography for the Red Planet's general atmosphere and a monster puppet that looks like, well, a puppet. The attack of the blob creature- seen through the rocket ship's portholes- looks more like an icky mix of goo in a Laundromat washing machine.

But beyond this basic failure of the production to suspend reality and draw the viewer into a different world, the attitudes of the humans is just embarrassing. They don't give a care about what damage they do to the foreign planet and its inhabitants. Added to this is the sexism that is displayed between the three male members of the crew and the one female. She doesn't seem to mind being categorized as a screaming female or the males' arrogance. She's just as dumb as the rest of them, despite her attractive red hair. If I lived on Mars, I would also send them back to Earth with a dire warning never to return.

"The Angry Red Planet" is one of the worst science fiction movies I've ever seen and adds nothing but filler to the genre.

Directed by Ib Melchior...1959...83 min...featuring Gerald Mohr, Naura Hayden, Les Tremayne, Jack Kruschen, Tom Daly.

Journey to the Center of the Earth \*\*\*

When it came to the bottom of the list of movies I could stream from 1959, it became a horrible choice- Pat Boone in "A Journey to the Center of the Earth" or Jerry Lewis in "Don't Give Up the Ship." I'd watched a little bit of each and had choked on returning to either. Boone appears so sickly sweet as a grinning fool of a graduate student in "Journey" and Lewis is a dimwit Navy man in "Ship." Looking for adventure, I went with Boone but I'm not sure that was the best choice as the better of two evils.

Despite Boone, some silly dialogue and a slow start, there are some things to admire about "Journey." Especially the final quarter of the movie has some eye-popping visuals worth exploring, including dinosaurs and lizards, the lost city of Atlantis and a volcanic eruption. The scenes portraying the underground ocean are also enchanting. These things elevate an otherwise tedious production.

One of the elements that I thought was extremely dumb at first was the duck Gertrude, a part of the exploration party. Finally, however, I thought Gertrude was one of the best characters- at least not spewing self-conscious doggerel.

In general I thought Arlene Dahl was very attractive and even sexy as the widow of an explorer involved in the adventure. James Mason is his usual self as a commanding figure, even when appearing in a cartoonish affair like this. His speech pattern and presence bring to mind actor Sam Neil.

There are some real nasty elements to "Journey." That includes a murder by cyanide and a discussion between the characters about executing a man, so not everything here is squeaky clean, just mostly.

Directed by Henry Levin...1959...132 min...featuring James Mason, Pat Boone, Arlene Dahl, Diane Baker.

Manster \*\*

A foreign correspondent working in Japan begins a horrible transformation after interviewing a genetic researcher who has gone too far. I like the promo slug for this one- "Half man, half monster, all terror!" The concept here- of a totally separate being growing out of your shoulder and ultimately splitting off from you- is still frightening and adequately portrayed here with impressive special effects and what's reflected in the terrified, confused guy's face.

Directed by George P. Breakston, Kenneth G. Crane...1959...72 min...featuring

Peter Dyneley, Jane Hylton, Tetsu Nakamura.

Invisible Invaders \*\*

This has a script written for 10-year-olds, but there is a flicker of creativity here, mixing aliens, zombies and basic ethical philosophy. The aliens here are mostly invisible- revealed only after being subjected to a sound gun- and they have come to earth with an ultimatum. That is, they have observed humans for centuries and paid them no mind- until these pesky humans started reaching for the stars and threatening their peace. So if the humans don't behave, they'll be destroyed, as simple as that. Of course, a group of top scientists work nervously to defeat the invaders, and they succeed as the landscape fills with the best-dressed zombies I have ever seen.

Directed by Edward L Cahn...1959...67 min...featuring John Agar, Jean Byron, Philip Tonge, John Carradine

The Wasp Woman \*\*

Very poor production, especially in comparison to Corman's other 1959 effort, "A Bucket of Blood." There's a little tiny bit of suspense here as a cosmetics queen lets her obsession with looking youthful get the better of her. That thin thread- and an inventive instrumental soundtrack, so much abused by being in this movie- is all that keeps this one out of the rubbish bin- the "monster" here is just stupid looking.

However, it's great to see some of Corman's stable of actors- Barboura Morris and Bruno VeSota- appear here and in "A Bucket of Blood." Morris is an attractive girl next door type, but not so naive, and VeSota plays two very different comic character roles.

Directed by Roger Corman...1959...73 min...featuring Susan Cabot, Anthony Eisley, Barboura Morris, William Roerick, Bruno VeSota, Terri Zimmern.