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King Of The Rocket Men (1949/Republic/12 Chapters/Cheezy Flicks DVD)

Picture: C Sound: C
Extras: D Chapters: D

Ok, the production company is named Cheezy Flicks Entertainment. That signals one of two things: either this is going to be an ultra-hip, nod-nod wink-wink presentation of a relatively stale Saturday afternoon serial or it is going to be so ho-you-never-even-make-to-the-hum.

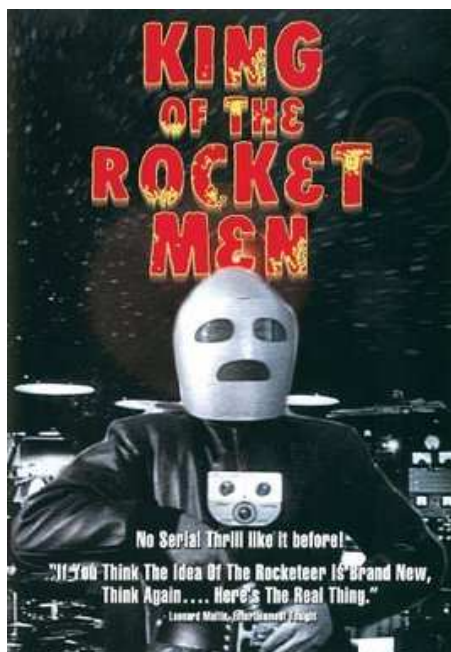
The news is not good.

On the cover of the DVD comes this whopping pronouncement: "No Serial Thrill like it before!" Huh? This is definitely not a sentence you can diagram and, let's face it, folks, the only audience for this stink bomb is the one that knows what diagramming a sentence is (read SSI'ers). Most folks who attended screenings of serials come from the Greatest Generation and there aren't many of them left. The next gen, the boomers, were treated to these same serials as rereads during the early era of television, when original programming was virtually non-existent. Still, not every kid would sit in front of the box and watch 12 successive episodes of anything as repetitive and un-thrilling as the largely uninspired **King of the Rocket Men**.

King Of the Rocket Men (1949) does appear to be cleaned up digitally; no perceivable scratching or myriad hairs-in-the-gate. However, one episode has a glaring glitch that no one bothered to address, namely an old edit. Evidently, the original film had snapped and someone went back, got another copy and stitched it back together. Unfortunately, the edits overlap, so a minute or so of a scene is repeated immediately after where the break occurred. I would guess all this happened before Cheezy Flicks even dreamed of purchasing the distribution rights and, once they got it, they didn't care enough to do anything about it. Fair enough, it's their dime, though our editor told us it seems to be in public domain.

Oh, that's right: it's yours, too.

The film hardly even deserves a brief synopsis. It is the stuff of the average serial. More fisticuffs break out than a Saturday Evening Smackdown, with similar wearisome predictability. Our hero, Jeff King, dons a rocket suit (which consists of helmet attached to a motorcycle jacket with dials vaguely reminiscent of a 1st generation Maytag washer, which say "Up, Down, Fast, and Slow," instead of "Start, Wash, Rinse, and Dry"). This, coupled with the "Atomic Decimator" that appears barely



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capable of annihilating a block and a half of already razed streets in Secaucus, provides the only vague hints of futuristic thrills. The evil nemesis is "Doctor Vulcan," who attempts to steal the secrets of "Science Associates" for his own nefarious ends.



Episode 10 supplies a complete recap of the 9 previous episodes using flashbacks, an old serial trick to keep production budgets down and frustrate the bejezus out 8 year old fans who were as hip to this old dodge as they were to crappy Cracker Jack prizes. The final episode is hysterically awful, with what appears to be really bad stock footage from some previous bargain basement serial. Casually, a tiny model of a generic city stands in for the total decimation of New York.

Someone somewhere was living out a particular nasty fantasy.

On the upside, some of this can be played for laughs. Not a lot, but some. I wearied of the "so bad its good" mood rather more quickly than a fellow viewer.

The extras include commercials for concession stand wonders and ancient cartoons, none of which have been digital treated and all of which are in horrendous condition. The original trailer is also included.

- Don Wentworth



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