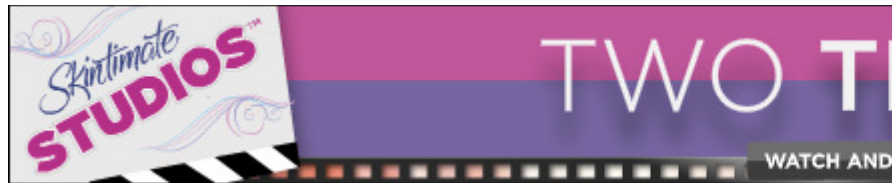


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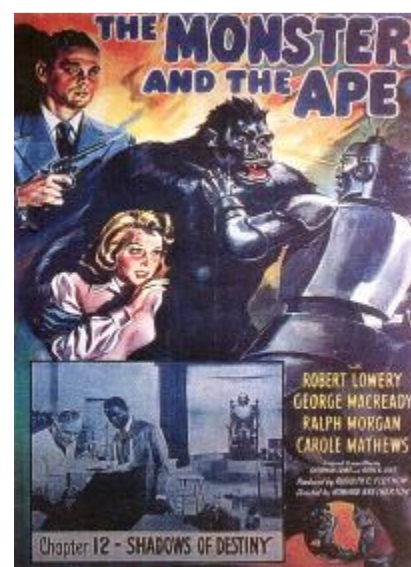
## Scary Robot Fights Guy in Ape Suit in 'The Monster and the Ape'

By [W. Scott Poole](#) 16 August 2010

Ok, so there's this trained ape and an invincible robot and a mad scientist is trying to use the trained ape to steal the robot... never mind, you really don't want to hear the plot of *The Monster and the Ape*. It is juvenile and generally awful. It's also a worthy addition to your collection if you love mid-century popular culture.

American culture at mid-century fell in love with sequential story telling. In the '30s, comic books and comic strips offered daily and monthly cliffhangers for kids and adults alike. In the same decade, the movie serial ruled the Saturday afternoon matinee. Kids (and often their parents) appeared week after week to see 20-30 minute installments of adventure tales, each one ending with some impossible conundrum that the heroes could not possibly escape.

Except that they always did escape, soon to find themselves in the hands of the villain all over again until they finally defeat his



dastardly doings in the final reel. Buster Crabbe became the darling of this genre, appearing first as Tarzan and later as both Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers. Some of these serials could run up to fifteen installments. This reveals just how often Americans, especially kids, went to the movies in the '30s and '40s.

*The Monster and the Ape*, one of Columbia pictures numerous serials, is one of the later and weaker entries in this genre. The 15 -installment fantasy tale relates the story of the "Metalogen Man", a robotic construct built, we are told, to save humanity from "industrial slavery." Ken Morgan (George Macready) stars as an agent of some kind for the company that wants to purchase it.

Morgan is the good guy, though we are never told why this representative of a corporate entity is to be trusted. In fact there seems to be reasons not to trust him since he seems like more than a sales rep. He's armed and has all the fighting skills of 007.

The villain of the piece is a combination mad scientist/gangster named Ernst. He is obviously German and thus, in 1946, obviously evil. We never learn why Ernst wants to steal the Metalogen Man though he seems to be jealous that he didn't receive credit for helping to create it. Fair enough I say though he probably shouldn't have trained a gorilla to kill. Famed stuntman Ray Corrigan put on the monkey suit for all seven hours (total) of this feature.

My rating for this film serial is all about its value to collectors and its inherent historical interest and doesn't at all reflect the quality of story, plot and character. Lots of silly dialogue and atrocious acting make it mostly unwatchable. There are moments that surprise you. The special effects are terrible but are also efforts to do a lot with little. It doesn't work but still deserves some credit. The Metalogen Man is particularly cool looking with a diesel-punk aura and a genuinely creepy way of moving. Like most serials, this one featured rock 'em, sock 'em fisticuffs and the choreography for these bouts is surprisingly good (with some exceptions).

One of the treats of *The Monster and the Ape* is the opportunity to see the work of character actor William "Willie" Best whose story reminds us of the tragic role of race in mid-century popular culture. Best had come to Hollywood as a chauffeur to a vacationing white Mississippi couple. He decided to stay and seek his fortune and became recognized as one of the most talented African American character actors of the era, starring in Charlie Chan films and eventually an ABC TV series.

Unfortunately, Best was never able to show his versatility as he consistently found himself playing drivers, porters, janitors and butlers. In *The Monster and the Ape* he played "Flash", the driver for the good guys. The best lines are his and he is frankly the only one of the crew that brings some inspired moments to the proceedings. But he is reduced to Stepin Fetchit-style comedy, as in most of his other work. Best died of cancer in 1962 with accolades from the likes of Bob Hope for his acting and comedic chops.

The picture quality for this feature is pretty poor. Cheezy films obviously used several prints as the installments vary greatly in quality. All of them have the scratches and pops you would expect for an old, mostly unloved film. The sound quality, however, is surprisingly good.

Cheezy films didn't go overboard on the extras but, delightfully, they did try to recreate the Saturday afternoon at the movies experience. A wonderful feature called "Intermission" gives us commercials for the refreshment stand, a Bugs Bunny knock-off advertising Orange Crush cola and a Frankenstein's monster (called Igor on the clip, maybe for fear of copyright infringement) advertising Shasta cola with voiceover by Tom Bosley (the Dad from *Happy Days*).

So forget the Depression (I mean, the really bad recession), pick up a dope (that's just mid-century slang for coca-cola-kids, don't do drugs), and spend a Saturday afternoon pretending you're not all that sophisticated.

**Rating:** 

## The Monster and the Ape

Director: [Howard Bretherton](#)

Cast: George Macready, Carole Mathews, William Best, Ray Corrigan

(US DVD: 27 Jul 2010)

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Extras rating:  6



W. Scott Poole is a writer and an associate professor of history at the College of Charleston. He is the author of five books dealing with race, religion and popular culture in the American South. His latest is *Satan in America: The Devil We Know*, a cultural history of the concept of the Devil in American history that explores the dark side of popular religious movements and pop culture. He has worked with several documentary film projects, including the acclaimed PBS series *Slavery and the Making of America*.

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