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The Monster and the Ape

1945

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The days of the movie serial are long gone but their impact is legendary and noticeable even today. The cliffhanger endings that each of these episodes had is something that we see today with many television series. The movie serials had a number of significant entries that brought heroes such as Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon, and even Batman to the silver screen and gave some a reason to come back every week so they could see what was going to happen next.

Today all we get is advertising prior to the movie that force feeds us car commercials as well as promotional spots from upcoming television series and video games; rarely anything that actually deals with movies.

The Monster and the Ape was the 26th serial released by Columbia Pictures. Debuting back on April 20, 1945, the 15-part serial wasn't the typical Western that often dominated theaters but instead a blend of science fiction, action, and adventure. Professor Franklin Arnold (Ralph Morgan) has recently unveiled a robot that he has created known as the Metalogen Man which he hopes should revolutionize the world. There are others out to steal his creation however, namely Professor Ernst (George Macready) who send his trained ape Thor (Ray Corrigan) to do his bidding. With the robot missing, Arnold along with his daughter Babs (Carole Mathews), Ken Morgan (Robert Lowery) and some occasional assistance from Arnold's aid Flash (Willie Best) try to locate Ernst, Thor and the robot before it can be used for evil.

Here we have a serial that came prior to the Cold War hysteria that would follow events of August 6, 1945. While science fiction in nature, *The Monster and the Ape* doesn't feature anything dealing with atomic weapons, alien invaders, or the threat of giant monsters appearing to wipe out helpless communities. This is more of a pure, yet simplistic, approach to the genre that while far-fetched does try to stay a bit more grounded with its style. *The Monster and the Ape* also comes at a time when people weren't well-versed in exactly how to pronounce the word robot, so often "robut" is heard from just about every cast member, something that makes me giggle each time it's said.

If you're not familiar with the idea of the serial, it's basically like what you'd find in most modern television series and in case you've forgotten already, those examples would include the likes of *Lost*, *Prison Break*, *24*, *True Blood*, *Dexter* and a number of other entries. The serial however wasn't nearly as epic; there weren't quite as many twists and turns and they were drastically

shorter. The one thing that you could always count on however was that there would be a cliffhanger ending that would almost assure that the next week people would be back in the theaters to see how events played themselves out.

The Monster and the Ape often has what could be considered fairly standard character types. Ken Morgan is the handsome hero that wins over the ladies hearts and they most certainly don't want to find him in danger, something that often happens. Robert Lowery would also go on a few years later and assume the cape and cowl as the second actor to portray Batman. Babs is the girl that I suppose for the time men would have found attractive though she's often scripted as being the character who needs to point out the obvious and act as the necessary damsel in distress. Flash is one of those characters that really gives an example of the thought that Hollywood seems to have of African-American's at the time and he tends to be used as comic relief from times or given dialog that makes him seem a little ignorant, but there are moments when he also comes up with some very sound and rational ideas. But, *The Monster and the Ape* isn't nearly as racist as a good example Australian actors who apparently have gone off the deep end, beat their girlfriends, and have derogatory remarks to say about just about every race.

The Monster and the Ape at times can be a bit on the cheesy side, but I think that most who are familiar with how serials were done will not only expect this, they will appreciate it at times. The set design actually isn't nearly as bad as I've seen in some serials though they are moments when it has some very unintentionally funny looks at "technology." There are fist fights in partially every episode, often with "choreography", or what is supposed to pass as such, that is so bad it makes professional wrestling look amazing by comparison. At times the lead-in to the next cliffhanger is predictable, but this is another thing that can come across as being humorous. There are obvious signs of post-production overdubbing, a few moments when the lighting could have been much better, but overall *The Monster and the Ape* is really not such a bad serial and one that most people probably aren't as familiar with as those that became the standby's that were necessary to view for anyone interested in the genre.

The only real special features on the two discs are labeled as intermission time. These are small collections of some of the advertising that you might have seen in theaters for snacks, heaters at the drive-in's and such. There are trailers for other films from Cheesy Films, some of which I didn't even know were out, but *Jive Turkey* and *Convoy* I might have to go out and look for, though maybe I might not have to go far as they are based right here in Portland apparently.

The Monster and the Ape isn't going to get recognized as being the best of the serials that was ever done, but it's also something that can't be categorized as being the absolute worst either. It has its moments, both good and bad, and unintentional humor which often seems to be quite common for anything produced in that era, though at the time I'm sure it was considered cutting edge and brilliant because audiences simply didn't know any better. *The Monster and the Ape* is a serial that you can just sit back and have a good time with and not need to worry about returning the next week to see the "dramatic" follow-up, always a good thing, and I'm fairly certain there could be a drinking game fashioned around it which is another good reason to pick it up.

-mike-

Directed by:
Howard Bretherton

Written by:
Royal K. Cole
Sherman L. Lowe

Cast:
Robert Lowery
George Macready
Ralph Morgan
Carole Mathews
Willie Best
Jack Ingram
Anthony Warde
Ted Mapes
Eddie Parker
Stanley Price
Ray Corrigan

DVD Features:
Aspect Ratio: 1.33:1
Audio: English Mono 2.0

Disc 1

Episodes:
1 – The Mechanical Terror
2 – The Edge of Doom
3 – Flames of Fate
4 – The Fatal Search
5 – Rocks of Doom
6 – A Friend in Disguise
7 – A Scream in the Night
8 – Death in the Dark
9 – The Secret Tunnel

Special Features:
Intermission Time

Disc 2

Episodes
10 – Forty Thousand Volts
11 – The Mad Professor
12 – Shadows of Destiny
13 – The Gorilla at Large
14 – His Last Flight
15 – Justice Triumphs

Special Features:
Intermission Time

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