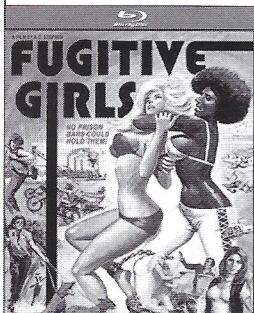


## FUGITIVE GIRLS AKA FIVE LOOSE WOMEN

Directed by Stephen C. Apostolof (as A.C. Stephen)

(1974) Vinegar Syndrome Blu-ray/DVD combo



The "Ed Wood Jr." name has become a magical brand in the 40 year since the trash auteur's demise. Films Wood worked on, even peripherally, have drawn attention far beyond that which they'd normally receive. *Fugitive Girls* (1974) has a somewhat stronger case for such attention than some other Woodian efforts: he co-wrote the script, plays two roles, and was also the assistant director to Stephen Apostolof.

Vinegar Syndrome's Blu-ray version of *Fugitive Girls* is actually the 96-minute softcore "X" release known as *Five Loose Women*. *Fugitive Girls* was the original, "R"-rated release, then Apostolof sent out the "X" version as *Five Loose Women*, and at some subsequent point the "Fugitive Girls" main title was spliced onto the "X" version.

The difference between the "R" and "X" versions is largely the inclusion of a number of sex scenes, expanded to include more graphic nudity. This footage is softcore and ranges from innocuous to fairly explicit (particularly the lesbian scene between Tallie Cochrane and Margie Lanier). The resulting scenes consume a fairly substantial portion of *Fugitive Girls'* 96-minute running time (the "X" version is about 12 minutes longer than the "R" cut).

After her boyfriend robs a liquor store and shoots the clerk, Dee (Lanier) is sentenced to prison despite her obvious innocence (she refuses to drive the getaway car and is pushed out into the street by the killer!). Perhaps this is why the "prison" she is sent to is a summer camp in the California mountains with no fence, no guards, and only 4 other inmates. Dee's fellow convicts are (in the words of the trailer) "bank embezzler!" Toni (Rene Bond), "pimp-killer!" Paula (Jabie Abercrombie), "lesbian!" Kat (Tallie Cochrane), and "dope smuggler!" Sheila (Dona Desmond). The five women "escape" the "prison" by . . . walking away. They subsequently have various "adventures"—spending some time in a hippie commune, waylaying a driver and stealing his car, thrashing 4 lecherous bikers, killing gas station operator Pop (Wood in role #1), and invading the home of a disabled man and his wife. At this point Dee rebels and shoots Kat; she and Sheila are arrested. Paula and Toni—who have a very mild *Defiant Ones* thing going on (Paula is African-American and Toni is a bigoted Southerner)—flee, retrieve some hidden loot, are pursued by several cops (one of them is Wood in role #2), and come to a bad end.

*Fugitive Girls* is tedious stuff, only occasionally enlivened by some skin and/or exploitation nonsense. Ironically, the location shooting (notably the final sequence shot in some sort of semi-abandoned industrial site) and technical aspects overall (especially the cinematography) are fine, despite the obvious low budget.

The real problem is that nearly every sequence goes on for far, far too long. The sex scenes are not very exciting (they seem to go on forever), the sequence in which Pop is hassled by some bikers is pointless and boring, the final chase sequence—despite the interesting location—is too long, and so on and so forth. The plot is episodic, there's little sense that the women are actually in danger of recapture, and character development is minimal. One would imagine the unjustly-convicted Dee to be the "good one," but until she rebels and shoots Kat (apparently because Kat is viciously beating the disabled man), Dee is just another one of the bunch.

The extras on the disc include an expansive (4:25) trailer and a 30-second TV spot for the "R"-rated *Fugitive Girls*, and two audio commentary tracks. One of the tracks is a telephone interview by Casey Scott with Tallie Cochrane. Not synched to the film's action, the interview does however run the full length of the movie. It's not without interest but the audio quality is not good and makes listening a chore.

The 2nd audio commentary pairs Frank Henelotter (director of *Basket Case*, *Frankenhooker*) and Rudolph Grey (author of the Wood Jr. book "Nightmare of Ecstasy"). The two men seem a bit bored by *Fugitive Girls* itself. He and Grey occasionally comment on the film and performers, but just as often go off on peripherally-related tangents. To be fair, *Fugitive Girls* gives them little to work with and thus the 96 minutes drag by . . .

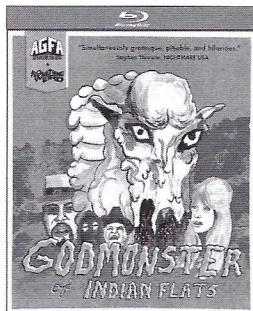
The audio/video quality of *Fugitive Girls* is quite high overall (the Tallie Cochrane interview notwithstanding). The print is sharp and clean. However, a beautiful copy of a fairly boring film is still fairly boring.

David Wilt

## GODMONSTER OF INDIAN FLATS

Directed by Frederic Hobbs

(1973) Something Weird Video/AGFA Blu-ray/DVD combo



*Godmonster of Indian Flats* (1973) has been something of a punchline in cult film circles for years. The very mention of the film's laconic, underactive mutated sheep creature is usually sufficient to generate eye-rolls and condescending chuckles among those who have experienced the picture and excited "This, I gotta see!" reactions among those who haven't. Initial viewer response upon actually watching the film usually ranges from complete boredom to mild disappointment to intrigue and wonder at what the hell these people were trying to accomplish. Despite its legion of microbudget failings *Godmonster* appears to have had some serious artistic intent lurking beneath its woolly exterior.

The picture was the brainchild of San Francisco painter and sculptor Frederic Hobbs, who indulged in all manner of performance art and outré forms of expression, including drivable sculptures molded around automobile chassis. Hobbs made several films prior to *Godmonster*, including the musical sort-of satire, *Roseland* (1971) and the delirious curio *Alabama's Ghost* (1971), which stars Christopher Brooks as an African American custodian who gets dragged into a world of stage magic, ghosts, robots, and a lot of implicit social commentary. It also may be the source for the name of the character Alabama Whitman, played by Patricia Arquette in the Tarantino-scripted *True Romance* (1993), and also referenced (perhaps) in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). As captivating as it may sound, *Alabama's* raggedness, amateur-level acting and other low budget shortcomings can make it a tough slog for many. Still, its novelty and sheer exuberance of spirit may make it worth a repeat watch, with viewer expectations suitably readjusted. Much the same can be said for *Godmonster*, although it is a somewhat more polished picture.

Filmed in Virginia City, Nevada, a tourist town still exploiting its Wild West mining heritage in the 1970s with period saloons, 70s prostitutes who obligingly dress up like the women on *Deadwood*, shootout stunt shows, cowboy parades, and crowds of non-actors who stare at the camera, *Godmonster of Indian Flats* has a point to make about greed, exploitation of the masses, the dream of the American West, and the destruction of the environment. Far from being just a "mad scientist and his monster" tale, the picture juggles an unwieldy ensemble cast and multiple subplots, as the horror elements take a back seat to the shenanigans of shady civic leaders who are determined to outwit Barnstable (rhymes with constable), a corporate operative who is assigned to buy up much of the town's depleted land and mines for his company.

Played by Christopher Brooks, Barnstable is the default protagonist of the picture, primarily because his challenges and travails are given the most screen time. In actuality, Barnstable is just repping for a rich industrialist back east. There is nothing particularly noble about the character. The film's secondary protagonist is Eddie (Richard Marion), a local cowboy with little connection to Barnstable who discovers a mutated sheep embryo and brings it to the attention of local scientist and sheep experimenter, Dr. Clemens (E. Kerrigan Prescott) and his team. The embryo, as I'm sure you can guess, grows into a hideous monster—slowwwlllllyyy. In reality, it spends most of the film's running time sitting around semi-conscious, like Glenn Strange in *House of Dracula*.

The creature, which walks upright and has one foreleg about three times as long as the other one, is not particularly impressive to look at, although it was sculpted by Hobbs himself. It has kind of a sheeepy head, although much of the time it is cloaked in darkness or out of focus. We check in on the creature's status in the lab from time to time, as the film's other plot elements unreel back in town. We see a near lynching (Barnstable's status as the only black guy in a town full of backward cowboys repeatedly evokes *Blazing Saddles*), a false-flag dog funeral, standoffs, shootouts, and the guy who played Leo on *Hill Street Blues* as the film's most recognizable star (other than a seconds-long appearance by Erica Gavin). Matters between Barnstable and the townsfolk come to a head, just as the creature breaks loose and begins stalking the countryside. Everything then culminates in a surprisingly bleak and apocalyptic ending. For those looking for a straight-up monster movie, even a cheesy one, *Godmonster* is likely to disappoint. Those who appreciate low-budget, singular vision genre film-making and can sit through seemingly endless discussions of land deed swindling before they get their creature fix, however, may want to give it a first, second, or third look.

*Godmonster of Indian Flats* is now available on Blu-ray from Something Weird and American Genre Film Archive. Don't expect miracles from the transfer, but this new 2K scan from the film's only surviving theatrical print is certainly the best it's ever looked on home video. The extras here are very worthwhile as well. Aside from some trailers, we get some creature/cryptid-centric material from the Something Weird vaults, including the full-length Ivan Marx 1975 documentary *The Legend of Bigfoot*, which is uneven but still worth having by itself, a one-reel 8mm cut down of *White Gorilla* (1945), *Strange Sightings*, an odd short apparently produced by 1950s-era UFO contactees (UFO cultural history buffs, take note!), and a lengthy tutorial on what to do when your school bus catches fire. This early 80s short repeatedly suggests that driver and students rush back into the burning bus to fight the fire themselves.

Chris Henze