

**DRIVE-IN CULT CLASSIC!  
EDWARD FAULKNER ON  
THE NAVY VS.  
THE NIGHT MONSTERS**

*As Told To  
Tom Weaver*

As movie monsters go, walking trees certainly haven't gone far: These freaks of nature got their best exposure in 1963's *The Day of the Triffids* and perhaps their worst in 1957's *From Hell It Came* (whose ambulatory "Tabanga" came complete with oversized scowling face reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*'s ornery apple trees!). One of the few additional movies in this subgenre, writer-director Michael A. Hoey's *The Navy vs. the Night Monsters*, new on disc from Cheesy Flicks, is on many Monster Kids' lists of favorite '50s flicks made in the '60s. The 1966 Realmart release is set at an American Navy base on an island off the South American coast, where tree specimens newly delivered from Antarctica's "Hot Lakes" region get up on their hind roots and set out to prove that their acid-oozing bite is worse than their bark. Anthony Eisley (as an executive officer) and Mamie Van Doren (as a medical assistant) gamely head up the counter-attack—and must also contend with Edward Faulkner as civilian meteorologist Bob Spalding, a one-man storm system whose bad humor results in additional squalls in the early rounds of this battle for survival. Best-known to movie fans as a member of the latter-day "John Wayne Stock Company," Ed Faulkner recalls the most-asked-about subject on his film festival rounds.

*TOM WEAVER* It was on the Elvis Presley movie *Tickle Me* (1965) that you first met Michael Hoey.

*EDWARD FAULKNER* I was scheduled for an interview with Norman Taurog, the director, at Paramount Studios, so I showed up promptly at Mr. Taurog's office and met him. There were several people in the office, including a chap by the name of Mike Hoey. Michael Hoey was an assistant or right-hand man to Norman Taurog. Michael's father, by the way, was Dennis Hoey, the marvelous English actor who had played Inspector Les-trade in all of those magnificent Basil Rathbone-Nigel Bruce Sherlock Holmes movies of the 1940s. Michael and I struck up a friendship in talking and, I think it was toward the end of *Tickle Me*, he told me that he had a screenplay that he wanted to direct, and he said, "There's a nice part in there for you." I said, "Well, that's great!"

*TW* Navy was low-budget and made quickly, yes?

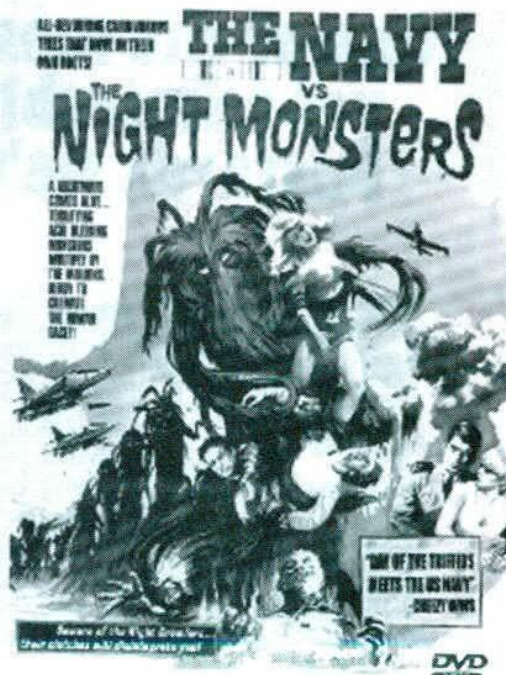
*EF* Yes. I believe that everybody made minimum wage on that; I know I certainly did! We did it over at Producers Studios, right across Melrose from Paramount. The title that we were using during production was *The Nightcrawlers* and subsequently it was changed. Mamie Van Doren was the star, Tony Eisley was the costar, and I played a civilian meteorologist who's based on this little island out in the Pacific and I've got the hots for Mamie but she doesn't like me, she likes Tony Eisley. In all of the films that I did, I never got the girl. I never even got the horse! We had a good time making it, and the cast was great. Bobby Van [as a wisecracking Navy lieutenant] and I spent a lot of time together. He was very outgoing, a very gregarious person. Everybody in the cast liked him. In the film business there's so much waiting around that, in the time when you're not actually in front of the camera, you sit around in groups and that's where Bobby and I would converse. He was just a nice person to be around and somebody you wanted to get to know. He was a very talented fella; in addition to the acting, he was quite a dancer. He passed away when he was fairly young [51 years old].

*TW* Funnily enough, I think the movie that Anthony Eisley did just before *Navy* was *Frankie and Johnny* (1966), in which he played Elvis Presley's adversary!

*EF* Tony Eisley's gone too. He carried a lot of *Navy vs. the Night Monsters*, so I didn't have a chance to spend a considerable amount of time with him, but he struck me as another nice fella and easy to work with. In *Navy* he and I had a fight sequence that we blocked out ourselves, and it worked fairly well. In one take, Tony didn't pull a punch to my midsection like he was supposed to. He pulled it, but it still landed, but it wasn't a severe blow. Some years ago, I was in a Palm Desert grocery store and I heard somebody call my name and I looked up and there was Tony, who I had not seen since we did the movie together. I had a birthday coming up in a few days and my wife had planned a big party for me, so I invited Tony and his wife to the party. He said he'd try to be there, but his wife was not in good health. Well, Tony did come to the party and he brought me a *Navy vs. the Night Monsters* lobby card and autographed it for me! In my collection of photos and posters, I have it to this day! He was a very nice person and I wish I had gotten to know him better.

*TW* And Mamie?

*EF* Mamie was a little distant. I've heard the stories about her wardrobe in *Navy*, how she wanted to display herself. I'm not talking about nudity or anything like that, I mean that she had her own ideas about the wardrobe she should wear and they didn't coincide with Michael's. But I guess she had her own set way of doing



things. As far as I was concerned, she was nice to work with, I had no problems with her. I saw her about a year and a half ago in Palm Springs and she looked good.

*TW* Navy may have been low-budget but you did have a fairly elaborate jungle set for a movie on that level.

*EF* I thought that set was quite good, as a matter of fact. We also had a hospital room set and other offices and so forth. And then we had a location trip to Vasquez Rocks.

*TW* When you saw the "walking trees" on the set, close-up, did they strike you as adequate?

*EF* They were...okay. It seems to me that in one of the video copies of the movie that I have around here somewhere, there's a shot where you can see feet under the tree, you could see them moving [the feet of a man inside it]; I don't think Michael was really pleased with the way the trees were animated.

*TW* He told me that when he first saw them, he got upset and refused to photograph 'em! But he eventually did.

*EF* On these low-budget films, you've got to hit and run with those things. You don't have the time or leisure to say, "No, let's go back and recreate this and instead of filming them this Friday, we'll get to them next week." Michael didn't have the latitude to do that. It was a hurried production. But Michael was good and very nice to work with. I'm sure he benefited from his relationship with Norman Taurog on a lot of the Presley movies. *Tickle Me*, for example, was not big-budgeted, but when it came out, it made enough at the box office to rejuvenate Allied Artists and save them from bankruptcy.



Michael had to have absorbed a lot from having a mentor like Taurog, who was an Academy Award-winning director [for **Skippy**, 1931]; Michael was a very attentive person, he was not lackadaisical in his chores with Taurog. So on *Navy* he was good, he was efficient, he knew what he wanted and we didn't have to wait around too much while they made decisions. Or at least I wasn't aware of it. The actors often aren't aware of how much or how little goes on in the background between the director and the people who are producing the film, concerning the schedules and time and money and overtime and all that stuff. Michael was a delight to work with. I saw him a couple of years ago at an autograph show in Burbank, for the first time since we made the movie. Of course we've both put on a few years.

*TW Behind the camera, the "star name" on Navy had to be the cinematographer Stanley Cortez.*

*EF Cortez was a pugnacious kind of a man. He wanted things his way, or...no way! He was very firm in his convictions and obviously he did a good job on the film. I was surprised at some of the positive reviews that *Navy* got; but the reviewers were talking primarily about the camerawork, about Cortez. He was a fine photographer. I've worked with some of the best ones: Bill Clothier, a real workhorse and a wonderful person, Winton Hoch, who won Academy Awards for **She Wore a Yellow Ribbon** (1949) and **The Quiet Man** (1952), and so on.*

*TW Cortez and Hoey got along well, even though Cortez had that "My way or the highway" mindset?*

*EF As far as I know, they did. I think they were pretty much in harmony, in sync.*

*TW Earlier you mentioned the fight scene you had with Easley, and you also had another with the "comatose" pilot [Mike Sargent]. Have you done a lot of fight scenes, and do you enjoy doing them?*

*EF They are fun. I'm always the guy that picks the fight, or somebody picks the fight with me because of the attitudes that my characters have in some of these films—conceited, arrogant, belligerent, kind of "taken with himself." In other words, a combination of all your typical S.O.B.s! I've done a number of fights and usually I've done all my own fighting. I've had the luxury many times of having good stunt people set up the choreography for them, but in **Tickle Me Elvis** and I worked out our own fight scene, as Tony and I did in *Navy*. They're fun, and in some cases they can become highlights of a film—the mud pit fight scene in **McLintock!**, for example. As a matter of fact, in **McLintock!** it was the character I*

played, Young Ben, kind of an arrogant fellow, who went off with a farmer's daughter [Kari Noven] and created the situation that led to that whole fight. When it was time to shoot the scene where I get my comeuppance from the farmer [Leo Gordon], John Wayne pulled me aside and he asked, "Have you ever worked with Leo?" I said no. He said, "Give him room. He sometimes does not pull his punch." So I gave Leo a little bit of room, and he swung, and off I went, down the mud slide.

*TW Did you like horror or sci-fi movies as you were growing up? Were you a movie fan way back when?*

*EF Oh, yeah, I loved the movies, including the monster pictures, which were fun and frightening. I loved the **Frankenstein** movies, and the **Wolf Man** movies were so good. Starting when I was seven, eight, maybe nine, my mother would give me 25 cents, and my best friend Len who lived around the corner from me would get a like amount of money from his mother. That provided us with a nickel on the bus to go to downtown Lexington, Kentucky; a dime to get into the movie theater; a nickel for a candy bar; and a nickel to get back home. We'd see the movies and then imitate what we'd seen. We were gangsters if we saw a Jimmy Cagney or a George Raft gangster movie; or if we saw Errol Flynn, we'd be swashbucklers. There always seemed to be construction sites around, so we used to get the wooden strips that the old lath-and-plaster walls were made out of and make "swords" out of them, and we would take the tops of garbage cans for our shields, and we would "sword-fight." Len and I would make these trips once if not twice a week; I'm sure our mothers were happy to get us out of their way! It's so much fun today to watch those same old movies on Turner Classic Movies and other stations. It brings back such warm memories of sitting in the theaters with my friend Len. And I can remember all of the wonderful character actors. In my estimation, some of those good, fine character actors were the glue that held those pictures together. That's not meant to take anything away from the leads, but the character actors contributed so much to the atmosphere.*

*TW Do you remember where you saw Navy vs. the Night Monsters for the first time?*

*EF I really can't get my mind to go back to the first time I saw it, I don't know whether it was in a theater or on television. I do remember having kinda mixed emotions about it; maybe that first screening was the one where I saw the feet under the tree and was disappointed in seeing that! But*



**TREE'S COMPANY:** Ed Faulkner and Mamie Van Doren encounter menacing ambulatory trees in **The Navy vs. The Night Monsters**.

the more I've seen it, the more I'm "okay" with what I did in it. I was happy with myself. Even one of my chief critics, my wife Barbara, was complimentary about my performance!

*TW And it's still got its clique of crazy fans today.*

*EF It does! I do a lot of western film festivals because I did a lot of John Wayne films like **McLintock!**, but invariably while I'm there, somebody will come up to me and say, "Oh my God, you were in **Navy vs. the Night Monsters!**" and chuckle and laugh. People are forever mentioning it to me, making me realize that it has risen to the level that it has. It's crawled out of the woodwork and in some ways I guess it's become kind of a semi-classic of the drive-in horror genre. I saw it again just recently and it holds up okay. It was a fun movie, fun and easy to do. When you're making a film, you never know where it's going to go. Obviously nobody intends to make a dud. One last story: A few years after we did *Navy vs. the Night Monsters*, I was in Durango, Mexico, doing a movie—it could have been **Chisum** (1970). Back then when a movie was shot in Mexico, outside of the key people—the cameramen and other folks of that nature—they would hire Mexican crews. And they were darn good crews. One day when we were shooting outdoors, there were two or three Mexican crew members staring over in my direction, kind of whispering, but I didn't really pay any attention to it. Then, a day or so later, one of these Mexican fellas came up to me and he asked, "Hey, Señor, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Of course." He said, "Was you in dee movie with dee trees that had dee feet?" It was showing in the theater down there in Durango! I said yes, and he let out a howl, and brought the other guys over and we chatted for a while. So *Navy* may have been a little far-fetched in some ways, but I've gotten a lot of mileage out of it. ☺*