

# **GOLD WAR CREATURES**

**FOUR FILMS FROM SAM KATZMAN**

Booklet Produced by  
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Artwork and Stills Courtesy of **Columbia Pictures**

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# CREATURE WITH THE ATOM BRAIN

An Introduction by Stephen R. Bissette

A gangster kingpin (Michael Granger) coming out of exile overseas returns with his own Nazi scientist (Russian-born character actor Gregory Gaye) to mobilize a remote-controlled militia of “atom brained” zombies in *Creature with the Atom Brain*, the first and more innovative of two zombie movies Sam Katzman’s Clover Productions and Columbia Pictures offered the drive-in and hardtop theater circuits in the 1950s. The film was innovative not so much for its science-spawned zombies—pseudoscience had been manufacturing zombies since Cesare the somnambulist in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and lovable Edmund Gwenn resurrected Boris Karloff as *The Walking Dead* (1936)—but for its vivid-for-its-time violence.

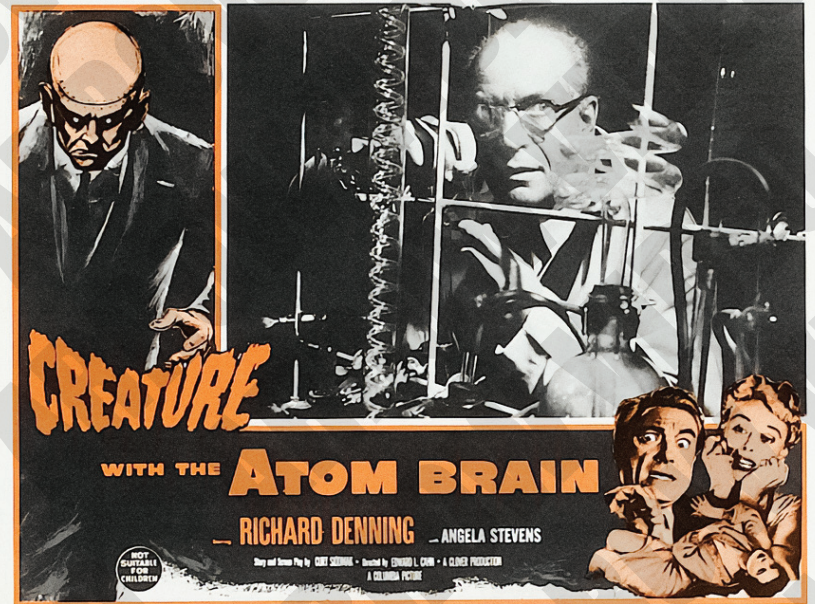
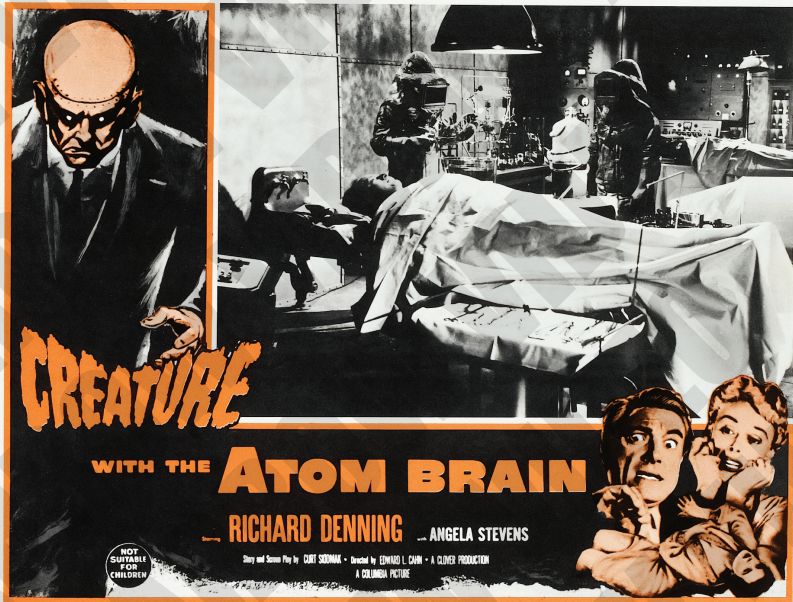
The mayhem seems tame today, but *Creature with the Atom Brain* showcased the first extensive use of special-effects squibs to simulate bullet hits in a horror movie. As was the case with the bullet hits briefly seen in *White Zombie* (1932), the “atom-brained” zombies survive dry bloodless bullet wounds, but we see the gunfire rip into (and through) the zombies! There had been nothing like it since bullets bloodily ripped across Bruce Cabot’s chest in the finale of George Marshall’s *Show Them No Mercy* (1935). Not even war movies or westerns had used squibs so extensively before *Creature with the Atom Brain*; horror films

wouldn’t do so again until Roy Ashton rigged up the blood-squirting shots that took down lycanthrope Oliver Reed in Hammer’s *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961, gore trimmed from the American theatrical release). If the original audiences for *Creature with the Atom Brain* noticed this graphic violence, it’s more likely the stop-motion special effects Ray Harryhausen created for its double-bill co-feature *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) left the far greater impression.

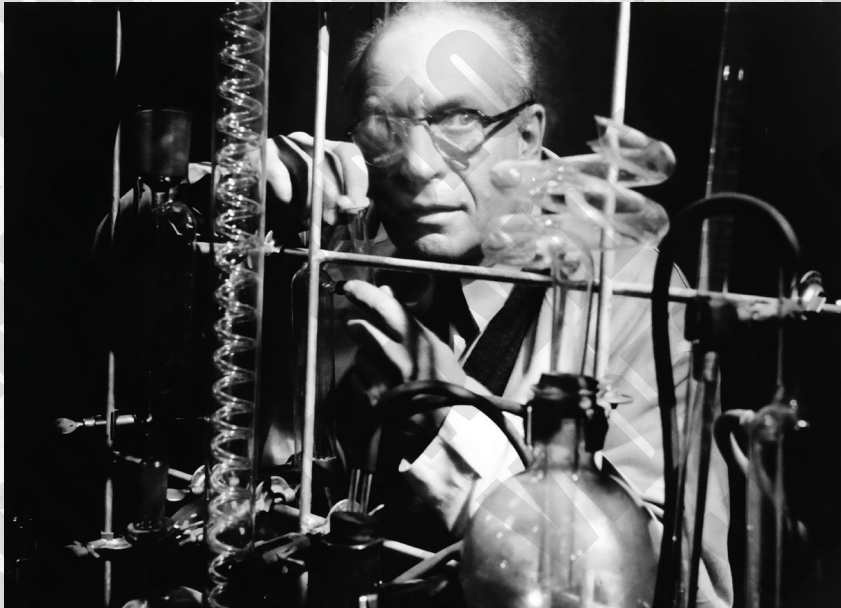
It had been over a decade since Katzman’s last zombie opus. Aside from villains and science-fiction elements in his serials for Columbia, Katzman had left mad scientists behind by the end of World War II, with the last of Katzman and co-producer Jack Deitz’s Bela Lugosi features for Monogram (*The Corpse Vanishes*, 1942; *The Ape Man*, 1943; *Voodoo Man and Return of the Ape Man*, both 1944). *Creature with the Atom Brain* overtly resurrects the hidden laboratories, tense relations between domineering male fiend and lackey medical sidekick, and stalk-and-kill elements of the Monogram mad science thrillers. However, screenwriter Curt Siodmak (with *Bride of the Gorilla*, 1951, *The Magnetic Monster*, 1953, and *Riders to the Stars*, 1954, already to his credit in the first half of the decade) streamlined these tropes for 1950s entertainment, offering a savvy, informed, and aggressive scientist hero (1950s SF staple/star Richard Denning) and more sophisticated surveillance technology for the mobster and Nazi doctor to control and observe their stitch-domed stooges. Alas, director Edward L. Cahn fudges the surveillance shots: what could have been a further genre innovation—framing the action via exclusive POV of the zombies, pioneering “found footage” horrors in the screen-within-screens of the lab set—resorts to completely pedestrian presentation of the action-within-the-action. Like all such remote-control TV monitoring in Katzman’s serials, the alert viewer can’t help but wonder at where in hell the apparently invisible cameras might be, and how the action on the observation monitors cuts so handily to-and-from medium shots to closeups... but as in a dream or nightmare, one must simply accept such impossibilities and absurdities and go with the flow—or not.





















# THE WEREWOLF

## An Introduction by Stephen R. Bissette

"You're going to shoot me? Why? What have I ever done to you?"

By 1956, working separately and together, producer Sam Katzman and director Fred F. Sears had made more westerns than they'd ever make monster movies. Sears second feature as a director was the western-musical *The Lone Hand Texan* (1947); by 1956, Sears had already helmed 21 westerns since 1949. Katzman had produced over a dozen since 1950 plus a half-dozen western serials. No surprise, then, *The Werewolf* unreels as an outdoor western adventure as much it does a horror film, in many ways the best of the Katzman/Sears science-fiction/horror features, even in light of its original Columbia double-bill co-feature *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956).

Ray Harryhausen and Charles H. Schneer's alien invasion epic made the most of Sears's efficient, no-nonsense skills as a low-budget director, anchoring the often audacious spectacle. Sears scored a greater box-office hit for Katzman helming Bill Haley and His Comets and fellow musical stars for *Rock Around the Clock* that same year, but the comparatively modest and now-long-forgotten *The Werewolf* packs a surprising emotional punch to this day.

*The Werewolf* follows in the noir footsteps of the Katzman/Sears crime programmers the team had been grinding out for Columbia: *Target Hong Kong*,

*The 49<sup>th</sup> Man* (both 1953), *The Miami Story* (1954), *Chicago Syndicate* (1955), *Inside Detroit*, *Miami Exposé*, *Rumble on the Docks* (1956), and personal favorite *Teen-Age Crime Wave* (1955), with its face-off finale in the Griffith Observatory. *The Werewolf* begins like another noir: on a frigid winter night, a tormented amnesiac (Steven Ritch, giving a powerhouse performance) stumbles into a small-town bar; tossed out on his ear, he is attacked in a nearby alley by a local (Charles Horvath) intent on stealing the drifter's money. The film sets up audience expectations it immediately dashes: the action (and its bloody consequences) remain in the shadows, but the turning-of-the-tables on the thief is swift and brutal, and in short order, a manhunt is underway in the California mountains for what the only witness (Jean Harvey) to the alley murder describes as "a thing."

Screenwriters Robert E. Kent and James B. Gordon's inventive fusion of contemporary western/crime/horror/science-fiction hits the trail running and doesn't let up. Sears and cinematographer Edward Linden make the most of the expansive rugged environments, lending sun-lit urgency to a subgenre (the werewolf film) dominated by dark nights and full moons. The Werewolf's pioneering fusion of science-fiction and horror posits Steven Ritchie's agonized lycanthrope's transformations being triggered by high emotion, not the lunar cycle; he's the offspring of Dr. Jekyll and PRC's *The Mad Monster* (1942), a predecessor to the Hulk. The following year, similarly science-spawned "supernatural" predators were everywhere (*I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *The Vampire*, *Blood of Dracula*, etc.), but it was still a fresh notion in 1956. Columbia's makeup department head Clay Campbell was responsible for the distinctive look of the titular shapeshifter, echoing Campbell's earlier werewolf for Columbia's *The Return of The Vampire* (1942) and his monster makeups for Katzman's *Jungle Jim in the Forbidden Land* (1952) and *Killer Ape* (1953): Katzman's first SF/horror exploitation of the 1950s.

Eclipsed by Ritchie's indelible performance, the ensemble cast fulfill their roles professionally enough—led by stoic sheriff Don Megowan, caring nurse (and film's love interest) Joyce Holden, and cold calculating doctors George Lynn and S. John Launer—but the confusion and heartbreak suffered by the lycanthrope's wife (Eleanor Marsh) and preteen son (Kim Charney) burn into the heart and memory almost as vividly as Ritchie's plight. Filmed as rapidly and in the can and onscreen as quickly as any of the Katzman/Sears collaborations, *The Werewolf* still registers and resonates like none other of their efforts.

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TERRIFIES THE SCREEN!**



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TURN MEN  
INTO BEASTS!**



**YOU  
SEE IT  
HAPPEN!**

# THE WEREWOLF



with  
**DON MEGOWAN · JOYCE HOLDEN**  
introducing **STEVEN RITCH** as **THE WEREWOLF**

Story and Screen Play by **ROBERT E. KENT** and **JAMES B. GORDON**  
Produced by **SAM KATZMAN** - Directed by **FRED F. SEARS**  
A CLOVER PRODUCTION - A COLUMBIA PICTURE

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PEOPLE'S PUBLICATIONS

1955

**THREE  
DROPS  
OF  
DEADLY  
"WOLF-  
SERUM..."**



turn a man  
into a blood-  
thirsty fang-  
and-claw beast..  
*before  
your  
very  
eyes!*



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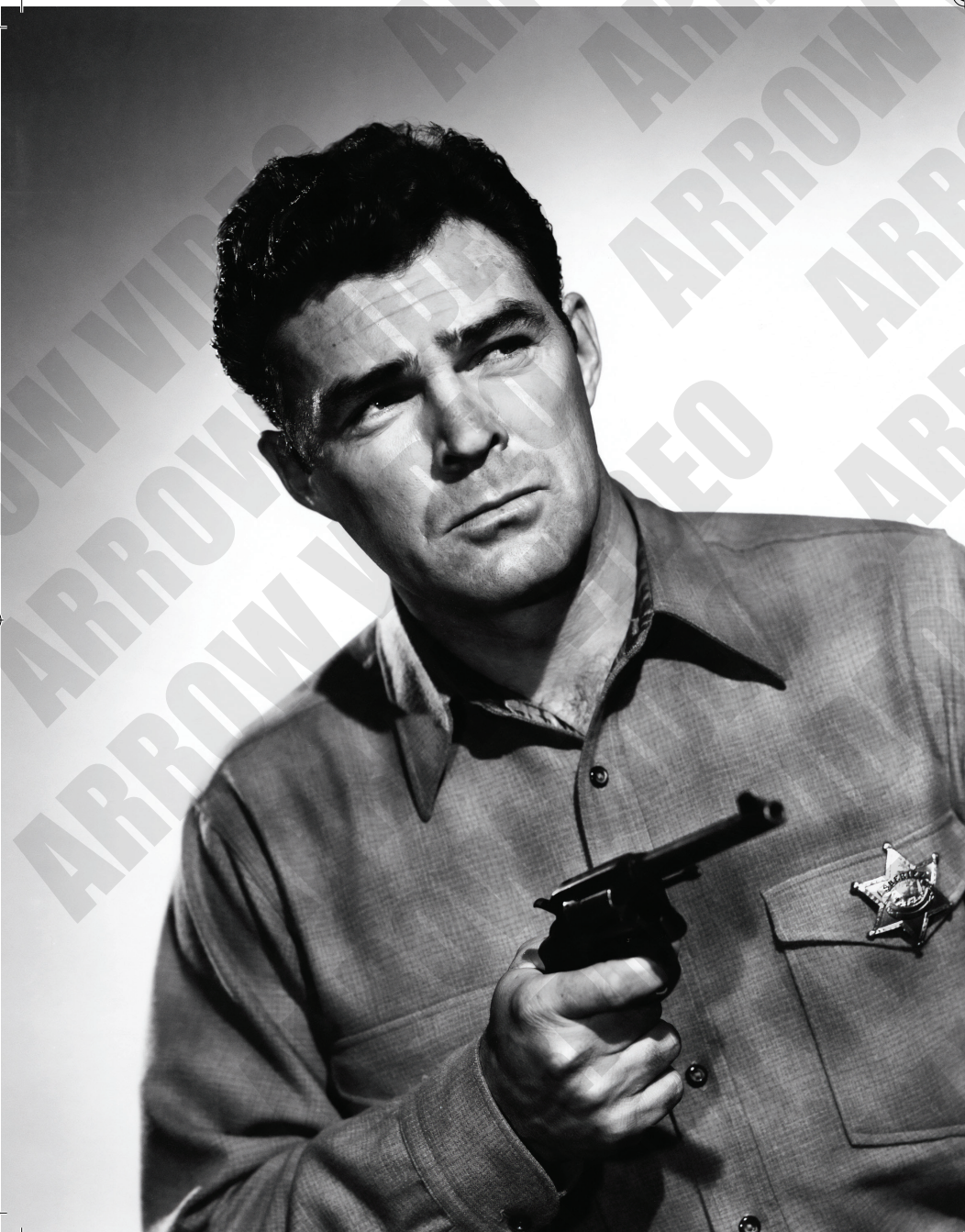
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# ZOMBIES OF MORA TAU

An Introduction by Stephen R. Bisette

In terms of Katzman's career, the spring 1957 double-bill of *Zombies of Mora Tau* and *The Man Who Turned to Stone* were essentially revamps of the Katzman/Jack Dietz Banner Productions horror films for Monogram. The former was an ersatz zombie exotic, the latter another mad-science-extending-human-lifespans-at-any-cost, supplanting the likes of Bela Lugosi, George Zucco, and John Carradine in the Monograms with a cabal of semi-immortals (electronically sucking the life out of imprisoned "girls in trouble") under the stern leadership of sage screen veteran Victor Jory (who had plenty of past suspect heroism and/or villainy to tap, from playing the Shadow to threatening Tom Sawyer as Injun Joe and lording over slaves in *Gone with the Wind*, among other cruelties).

Both films were also scripted by HUAC-blacklisted screenwriter Bernard Gordon under his "Raymond T. Marcus" nom de plume, lending a possibly auteurist status to the double-bill: surely, Gordon was painfully intimate with the costs associated with secret cabals artificially extending one's (creative) life, the constant threat of being found out by the authorities, the harboring and protection of hidden treasures, and a very real-world kind of "life after death." In terms of Gordon's script, the rarely-screened *The Man Who Turned*

to *Stone* is more compelling than its lackluster reputation allows, not only as a genre hybrid (meshing "reform school girls" women-in-prison tropes with the venerable Monogram/PRC impoverished mad science archetypes) but as a particularly downbeat and fatalistic 1950s slice of SF/horror effectively helmed by László Kardos.

For *Zombies of Mora Tau*, screenwriter Gordon misappropriated the African roots of Voodoo/Vodun (aka Vodon, Vodoun, Vodou, Voudou) to curse an all-white undead ship crew with the obligatory guarding of diamonds still hidden aboard their sunken ship. Enter opportunistic tycoon (Joel Ashley) and equally opportunistic wife (Allison Hayes, soon to be schlock cinema's immortal *50 Foot Woman*), ignoring the dire warnings of the elder matriarch (Marjorie Eaton) who knows-what-lurks-beneath-the-waters. Hiring a salvage team led by a get-it-done American (Gregg Palmer), the zombies-versus-diamond-hunters antics somberly play out under the rock-steady direction of *Creature with the Atom Brain*'s Edward L. Cahn.

Allow me to briefly champion Cahn as a director, if I may. Though his workmanlike dedication to directing low-budget fare within budget and always on time makes his filmography (128 films!) an easy target for critical brickbats, a theatrical 35mm screening of a handful of Cahn's AIP features awakened me to how professionally Cahn's films were composed for the big screen. What always played slow-and-sluggish on television suddenly seemed like a wholly different experience. Every shot of *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (1958) was alive with some detail previously obscured on TV: fog rolling over the ground, textural plays of shadow and light, even the risible miniatures filled the screen with more authority. A double-bill of Cahn's *The She-Creature* (1956) with Roger Corman's celebrated *It Conquered the World* (also 1956) demonstrated how seeing these films only on television had essentially inverted their virtues: Corman's pacing crackled with energy on TV while handily obscuring the paucity of the imagery, whereas Cahn's films played as stately and somewhat dull on TV. But the 35mm prints revealed Cahn's staging to be surprisingly alive, filling the screen, the comparatively lavish imagery (especially compared to Corman's film) enhancing the experience, the pacing affording time to savor the set pieces, whereas Corman's effort was glaringly threadbare, crude, the editing clumsy and jagged, with jarring disconnects between shots and scenes. Growing up only able to experience Cahn's films on TV screens had sucked the

life out of them as surely as Victor Jory's experiments drained the life out of his victims, turning Cahn's films (if you will) to stone.

Whatever your own opinion of Cahn's works, starting with his two Katzman undead opuses, Cahn inadvertently became the 1950s zombie movie maker of note. Working for other producers, Cahn followed *Mora Tau* with *Voodoo Woman* (1957: monstrous skull-faced and bewigged titular zombie), *Curse of the Faceless Man* (1958: resurrected Pompeii lava-man afraid of water), *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake* (1959: headshrinker vengeance assisted by undead unshrunk-headed stitch-mouthed zombie), and *Invisible Invaders* (1959: invisible aliens reanimate our dead). Thus, Cahn directed the nascent catalyst of almost every zombie narrative springboard to follow, including the unlikely immersion of zombies in/emerging from water as an oddly haunting cinematic trope (*Carnival of Souls*, 1962; *Shock Waves*, 1977; etc.).

As Kim Newman accurately points out, Bernard Gordon's conception of zombiedom being somehow contagious also means *Zombies of Mora Tau* is the Ground Zero of the every-expanding Zombie Apocalypse. It took George Romero and John Russo making the walking dead's bite contagious in *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968) to codify this notion, but this was an irrational and persistent narrative conceit Gordon would reinvigorate in a very different manner via his role in the creation and production (credited as producer) of *Pánico En El Transiberiano*/*Horror Express* (1972).









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# THE GIANT CLAW

An Introduction by Stephen R. Bissette

The last straw for Katzman was the one-two punch that wasn't delivered by the double-bill of *The Giant Claw* and *The Night the World Exploded*, which hit drive-ins and theaters in the summer of 1957. *The Night the World Exploded* was a disaster movie—a previously-undiscovered inert subterranean element detonates upon contact with air, threatening cataclysmic consequences—that never exploded. There were compelling SF films featuring intangible energies (*The Magnetic Monster*, 1953) or organic substances (*The Monolith Monsters*, 1957) as their respective menaces, but such SF was harder to dramatize and to sell than easier-to-ballyhoo beasts, behemoths, big bugs, or BEMs. *The Night the World Exploded* was a misfire, but *The Giant Claw* was something else altogether.

Having scored in 1955 and 1956 with horror/SF double-bills as an immediate contemporary of Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson's American Releasing Company (soon renamed American International Pictures, aka AIP), by 1957 Katzman found the box-office paydays compromised by a too-crowded SF/horror double-feature market. Similar fare from AIP, Allied Artists, Universal-International, Howco, and others meant the profits diminished with each genre outing. *It Came from Beneath the Sea* was a surprise hit in 1955, with or without co-feature *Creature with the Atom Brain*; the following year, executive

producer Katzman and the same production team (Charles H. Schneer and Ray Harryhausen) delivered the more topical *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers*. It did fine (with or without co-feature *The Werewolf*), but earned less than *It Came from Beneath the Sea*.

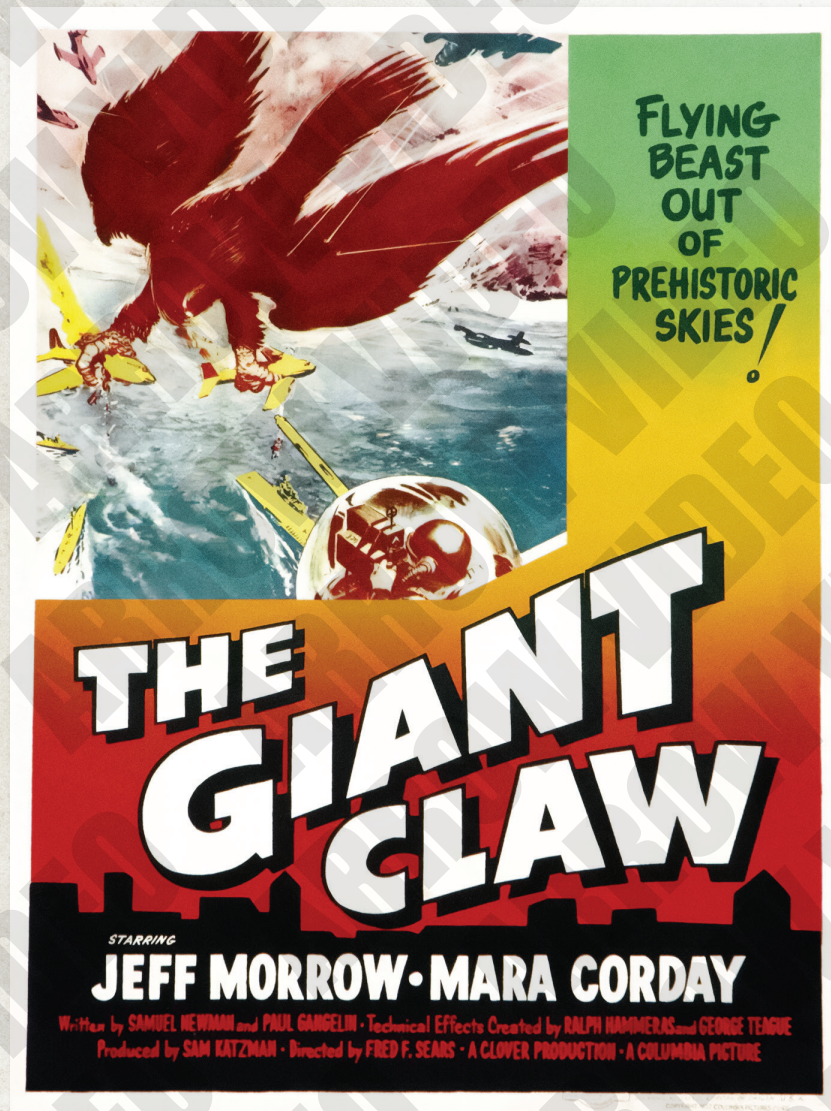
Thus, one can easily see, and perhaps even defend, Katzman's decision to make *The Giant Claw* in the manner it was made. So, Fred F. Sears directed *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers*, shooting the live-action pieces of the movie—surely, the only absolutely irreplaceable and essential part of any movie—footage which then had to wait while Harryhausen painstakingly stop-motion animated his creations. But what if you didn't wait? What if you hired some other effects expert? What difference did it make if the giant whatsit was animated or a live-action miniature—they're all puppets, when you get right down to it, right? Besides, it's the advertising, not whatever's actually on screen, that gets butts in theater seats and dollars in the box-office, right? Thus, as Schneer and Harryhausen left Katzman's Clover Productions umbrella to pursue their own future efforts directly with Columbia—starting with *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957)—Katzman didn't fret. It made more sense to construct “the same movie” around a cheaper, quicker packaging of special effects. The rest of the film, from conception to scripting to primary production to filming to editing, was the same hotdog, made the same way.

The result—the immortal-for-all-the-wrong-reasons *The Giant Claw*—exposes Katzman's formulaic approach to the genre. Solid source material: a 1951 *New Yorker* Samuel Hopkins Adams story entitled “Grandfather and a Winter's Tale,” involving “la Carcagne,” a wholly invented “mythical bird-like banshee from French-Canadian folklore.” Hire Academy Award®-nominated special effects experts, including Ralph Hammeras (he'd worked on the 1925 *The Lost World*, miniatures for *Just Imagine*, 1930, *Dante's Inferno*, 1935, Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, 1940, effects photographer on Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1954), George J. Teague (over 30 traditional special and photographic effects credits, sixteen in 1947 and eleven in 1948 alone), and uncredited work from Lawrence W. Butler (*Things To Come*, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, both 1936, *The Thief of Bagdad*, 1940, *The Jungle Book*, 1942, and films like the 1942 *Casablanca* and 1954's *The Caine Mutiny*). Pretty amazing credentials there, yes? Then add an affordable but solid SF movie cast—led by Jeff Morrow (*This Island Earth*, *The Creature Walks Among Us*, *Kronos*) and Mara Corday (*Tarantula*, *The Black*

Scorpion), along with lucky charms Morris Ankrum and Robert Shayne—and have it all helmed by Sears. What could go awry? Just removing Harryhausen and Schneer from the equation, it was all filmed exactly the same way both of the Schneer/Harryhausen films had been.

Not all aspects of even the most efficient production assembly line are interchangeable, and the results were apparent for all to see; as Jeff Morrow revealed in interviews, he was so appalled at his first glimpse of la Carcagne during a neighborhood showing of the film that he slunk out of the theater. If you replace Ray Harryhausen—even with a three-person team of veterans with literally decades of experience between them—you're left with... well, *The Giant Claw*. Rumors abound concerning the effects work, but I've never found a reliable or documented account of who actually constructed, operated, and/or filmed the marionette and miniature effects; suffice to note that it wasn't until Bent Barfod and Orla Høyer crafted the miniature puppet *Reptilicus* (1961/1962) that a more risible giant monster reared its ugly head onscreen. And poor Fred Sears was found dead from a heart attack at age 45, lying on the floor of his Columbia Pictures office bathroom. He deserved better—better, too, than to be primarily remembered for *The Giant Claw*. That sorrow duly noted, *The Giant Claw* remains a marvelous entertainment on its own wonky terms. It also remains the closest American studio films ever came to making a movie based upon the Thunderbird of Native American myths and legends and cryptozoological lore; years later, a stop-motion animated variant soared into John Newland's Manly Wade Wellman "Silver John" stories adaptation *The Legend of Hillbilly John* (1972), and the winged Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl sought victims in PRC's *The Flying Serpent* (1946) and Larry Cohen's *Q - The Winged Serpent* (1982).

Always stating his preference for musicals over other exploitation fare, Katzman gave up on SF/horror, happily abandoning the genre for more lucrative and easier-to-make features. These included a new breed of musicals: Katzman's *Rock Around the Clock* (1956) and *Don't Knock the Rock* (1957) rocked & rolled & raked in the green, so he cheerfully continued with the likes of *Calypso Heat Wave* (1957), *Juke Box Rhythm* (1959), *Twist Around the Clock*, *Don't Knock the Twist* (both 1961), before his contract with MGM afforded Katzman putting his moniker to musicals like *Your Cheatin' Heart* (1964) and a pair of Elvis Presley vehicles.





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GIANT  
CLAW**

starring  
**JEFF MORROW · MARA CORDAY**

Written by SAMUEL NEWMAN and PAUL GANCELIN Technical Effects Created by RALPH HAMMERAS and GEORGE TEAGUE Produced by SAM KATZMAN Directed by FRED F. SEARS A CLOVER Production

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