



1959 – Black & White – 79 Minutes

Written, Produced & Directed by..... Ed Wood Jr.
Executive Producer..... J. Edward Reynolds
Director of Photography ... William C. Thompson

Cast: Bela Lugosi, Gregory Walcott, Tor Johnson, Vampira, Lyle Talbot, Criswell, Tom Keene and Paul Marco

Print courtesy of Wade Williams



Gregory Walcott (above right) appeared in films with Clint Eastwood, worked opposite Tony Curtis and co-starred with Ben Johnson in Steven Spielberg's first feature, "Sugarland Express" but even with his stellar credits and long career, Walcott admits that it was poverty row producer/director Ed Wood who kept his name alive. Now, as the last surviving cast member of Wood's 1959 classic PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE, fan mail still arrives from all over the world, asking for an autograph from one of the stars of the uber-cult movie that features Bela Lugosi's last screen appearance.

The Making of a Classic

Shortly before Bela Lugosi's death in 1956, the actor had been working with poverty row Producer-Director Ed Wood on numerous half-realized projects variously titled *Tomb of the Vampire* or *The Ghoul Goes West*. According to Ed Wood, "Lugosi needed a thousand dollars, so I shot some footage of him." Lugosi's scenes were probably shot in the Spring of 1955 before Bela entered Norwalk hospital for treatment for his morphine addiction.

These scenes featured Lugosi weeping at a funeral, walking in front of Tor Johnson's house in the daytime, walking in and out of Johnson's side door at night, and walking through a graveyard in daytime. Only the first two sequences had reached any level of completion. When Lugosi died, Wood shelved these projects.

Shortly thereafter Wood developed the story and screenplay for *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* planning to use the unconnected, unrelated footage of Lugosi to put a credit for him on the picture. Wood hired his wife's chiropractor, Tom Mason, as a stand-in for Lugosi, even though Mason was taller than Lugosi and bore no resemblance to him. Narration from Criswell was also employed in an attempt to better link Lugosi's footage with the rest of *Plan 9*.

Grave Robbers from Outer Space was shot in four days during November 1956 at Merle Connell's Quality Studios, and finished by the following year, when it had its preview in March at the Carlton Theatre in Los Angeles. It would be another year before DCA (Distributors Corp. of America) picked the film up and copyrighted it, intending to distribute it during the Spring of 1958, but the company folded and it was not released



until July 1959 through Valiant Pictures, the receiver of DCA. It went into general release in the US in July, 1959, as *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, on the bottom of a double bill with DCA's *Time Lock*.

The original title is mentioned at the end of Criswell's opening narration when he asks the audience, "Can your heart stand the shocking facts about grave robbers from outer space?" Like many independent films of the period, *Plan 9* was distributed under a states' rights basis. Not long after, the picture was distributed through a television package. It was during this exposure as a staple of Shock Theatres all across the country, that millions of 'baby boomers' learned to love Ed Wood's magnum opus.

In 1980 authors Michael and Harry Medved dubbed *Plan 9 from Outer Space* the "worst movie ever made" and Wood was posthumously awarded the Medved's Golden Turkey Award as the worst director ever.

However, when as many reviews as possible were collected on the review site [Rotten Tomatoes](http://www.rottentomatoes.com), the report was that 66% of critics gave the film positive reviews. Many of them stated that the film was simply too amusing to be considered the worst film ever made, claiming that its ineptitude added to its charm.



Jumpin' Jupiter (1955)
Merry Melodies
Warner Bros.

Directed by
Chuck Jones

Print courtesy of the
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