Written by Tony Timpone
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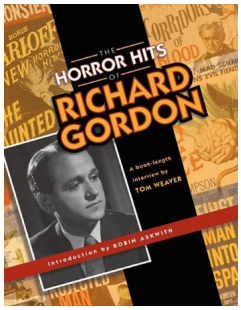
My friend, the largely unsung British horror/sci-fi producer Richard Gordon, died last November. This past New Year’s Eve would have marked his 86th birthday. It’s sad that Richard’s no longer here, as I can’t tell you how much I enjoyed getting together with the adopted New Yorker to hear his wonderful stories about the making of his ’50s/’60s films such as FIEND WITH A FACE (his best-known effort), CORRIDORS OF BLOOD, THE HAUNTED STRANGLER, etc. and his palling around with the likes of genre legends Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing and Michael Gough. Though Richard is no longer with us, I now have Tom Weaver’s terrific book THE HORROR HITS OF RICHARD GORDON to reminisce about the man’s colorful career.



What I like best about this photo-filled BearManor Media trade paperback, which debuted last summer, is that it takes the form of a book-length interview, so reading it brings Richard’s voice alive in my head once more. Richard and older brother Alex (the late Fango columnist) grew up in WWII-era London, sharing a passion for B-movie monsters and cowboys. Alex ventured to Hollywood to work for American International Pictures and Western star Gene Autry, while Richard hit the Big Apple to start a fledgling distribution and production company. In rapid succession, Richard churned out a steady stream of lurid shockers, beginning with the Karloff-starring HAUNTED STRANGLER in 1958, right up till his last major movie, 1981’s ALIEN-inspired INSEMINOID (a.k.a. HORROR PLANET).

I’ve read many of Richard’s recollections in past magazines (some recycled for this book) and heard them directly from the man’s lips, but in THE HORROR HITS OF RICHARD GORDON, author and subject reveal cinematic tidbits rarely discussed before. For example, I never knew how closely Gordon and the executives at “rival” UK studios Hammer and Amicus helped each other out on their pictures with casting and whatnot. Each chapter examines the making of one or two of Gordon’s movies, from finding the stories to preproduction to post to the selling and marketing of each scream flick. I especially enjoyed the revelations on how the casting came together and which actors proved to be ballbusters (you’d want to claw CAT AND THE CANARY star Daniel Massey’s eyes out too!). Equally illuminating are Gordon’s comments on the life of eccentric and largely forgotten director Antony Balch (SECRETS OF SEX, HORROR HOSPITAL); how MGM tried to stiff Gordon on CORRIDORS OF BLOOD; and his meeting the likes of junkie author William S. Burroughs (!) and a pre-007 Sean Connery (!!).

Fans don’t have Gordon around anymore to recount his horror adventures (he quietly regaled them at many a convention over the years), but THE HORROR HITS OF RICHARD GORDON will survive as a lasting testament to Gordon’s offbeat movie legacy. (Go here and here for author Weaver’s Gordon/book comments.)