

Chatting with Mr. B.I.G.

Written by Lee Gambin
Sunday, 25 April 2010 08:56



Thank heavens we live in a world where B-movie czar Bert I. Gordon, he of the larger-than-life-monsters-vs.-puny-humans classics of the 1960's and 70's, still walks among us. With pictures like *THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN*, *EARTH VS THE SPIDER*, *THE BEGINNING OF THE END*, *VILLAGE OF THE GIANTS* and *FOOD OF THE GODS* on his résumé (he also worked with Orson Welles on *THE WITCHING* and made the underrated Zsa Zsa Gabor Gothic *PICTURE MOMMY DEAD*), Gordon has firmly stamped his signature on B-cinema, creating a body of work that will stand the test of time.

In honor of the recent self-published release of his autobiography *THE AMAZING COLOSSAL WORLDS OF MR. B.I.G.*, Fangoria.com sat down with the man and asked a few questions—all BIG questions, of course—about his life, work and creative legacy.



FANGORIA: Hollywood and your fan base have come to know you as Mr. B.I.G. because you are the master of the massive threat, from amazing colossal men to empires of giant ants. How did you first come up with the notion that oversized monsters would make for good pictures?

BERT I. GORDON: I didn't consciously decide to make films with giant kids, men, spiders, grasshoppers, ants, prehistoric creatures and more because they would "make good pictures"; the ideas came to me as stories I wanted to see on the big screen. During the writing of my autobiography, I asked myself many questions like this one, and the answers became gradually apparent: I loved horror, sci-fi and action movies since childhood, and it became my lifelong ambition to make them.

FANG: Which of your films do you consider your best to date?

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GORDON: I would say THE FOOD OF THE GODS, ATTACK OF THE PUPPET PEOPLE, VILLAGE OF THE GIANTS and THE MAGIC SWORD are my personal favorites. Regarding a film or films that I think is or are my best is a difficult question for me, because aside from a few of my films, I like them all.

FANG: You have directed some of the most interesting, talented and colorful people in Hollywood; among them have been Maila “Vampira” Nurmi, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Joan Collins, Basil Rathbone, Ida Lupino and Marjoe Gortner. What fond memories do you have of these actors?

GORDON: I remember Vampira portraying the role of the witch in THE MAGIC SWORD more realistically than any performance of a witch I remember seeing. Zsa Zsa’s performance before the camera and offscreen was all Zsa Zsa—right down to tossing the first lunch she was served in her dressing room on the floor, with the comment, “Zsa Zsa does not eat from a paper plate. I want to see my director.” After going to her room and telling her that she was the most beautiful woman I’d ever known, Zsa Zsa was as sweet as a kitten for the rest of the shoot. When we filmed EMPIRE OF THE ANTS in the Florida swamp, Joan Collins wasn’t too happy falling off a boat in an alligator-infested river, but she performed beautifully.

[MAGIC SWORD’s] Basil Rathbone couldn’t have been nicer to direct. One take and it was a print in filming his scenes. [FOOD’s] Ida Lupino was great in her death scene with a giant rat the size of a jungle tiger.



FANG: In making your nature-run-amok features, you have had to work with all sorts of real insects and animals, from the arachnid in EARTH VS THE SPIDER to the rats in FOOD. Which

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species was the hardest to work with, and which was the easiest?

GORDON: As I describe in detail in my autobiography, the hundreds of rats that we trained for their scenes in *FOOD* gave us a major problem when they were on camera. Of all the beasts I've had in my films, the easiest to work with was the 20-foot python on *THE CYCLOPS*. He just did his thing wrapping his huge body around the Cyclops, squeezing it tighter and tighter with the intention of having our star for dinner. Of course, our animal handler prevented it from happening by jumping into the scene after I shouted "Cut," at the end of the scene, and unwinding the reptile in time before we lost the actor.

FANG: *FOOD OF THE GODS* is my personal favorite of your films. How did that come about?

GORDON: Being a fan of H.G. Wells, I bought the film rights to the story from his estate in England, and after writing the screenplay, my agent made a quick deal for the production. Upon its release, it was a top box-office hit in theaters across the country, and it won first prize for fantasy films at the Paris Film Festival.



FANGO: What is happening now in Mr. B.I.G.'s world? Any new films we can look forward to?

GORDON: I just finished writing a far-out parody of the genre of films I've made, *COLOSSAL KIDS, BIG BUGS AND GIANT RATS!*

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