

## Fango Flashback: “CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER”

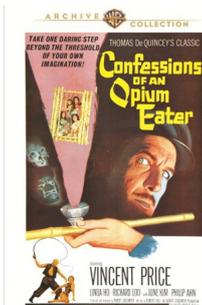
Written by Bekah McKendry

Wednesday, 10 October 2012 17:07

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Halloween is coming, kiddies! That wonderful time of year full of monsters, candy and slutty schoolgirl costumes. It's also the time when the fine folks over at Warner Archives send the Fango staff gifts of new DVDs—so it's kind of like Christmas, and Warner is the Easter Bunny. Over the next few weeks, you can expect Flashbacks of a few Archive titles; let's begin this journey with CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER (a.k.a. SOULS FOR SALE), starring Vincent Price.



No one actually eats opium in CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER. Nope, not a single nibble. Sure, there is an opium-laced backstory, but the main focus of this 1962 shocker is human trafficking. Price plays a man in turn-of-the-century San Francisco searching for danger and adventure. He ends up involved in a smuggling ring where Asian women are kidnapped and brought to the U.S., where they are auctioned off to the wealthy residents of San Fran's Chinatown. Price fights to free the captive girls, but does stop to smoke a solo opium pipe along the way.

The film is based on the 1822 book CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER, an autobiographical novel by Thomas De Quincey (that explains the non-applicable title...). The book stays fairly strictly focused on exquisite opium, but this movie limits the poppy pleasures to Price's one smoking scene. It's kind of like if they made William S. Burroughs' heroin-addiction saga NAKED LUNCH into a movie about giant talking insects. Oh, wait...

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I must applaud director/producer Albert Zugsmith (known for many other genre and exploitation flicks, from THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN to HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL!) for his sweet display of film's hallucinogenic power during the single drug-trip scene in CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER. Both visual and audio cues become all types of psychedelic as Price journeys into dreamland. Even when he wakes up, the subsequent scenes are not only silent, but in slow motion. It is dizzying to watch, and a brilliant use of cinematic devices.

I spent much of the rest of this film trying to decide if it was racist or just outdated. The many Asian characters speak in ridiculously broken English while dressed in over-the-top Asian garb (which Price at one point calls their "Halloween costumes"), and are often seen eating bowls of rice. It feels racist, but it is exploitation after all, and one of the form's main tenets is to overexaggerate a common misgiving or fear, in this case Asian culture. Plus, there is a jester-like midget who follows Price around, playing pipes and causing mischief. It's all wrong on so many levels, but so much fun to watch.

This pulpy treat is now available from Warner Archive [here](#) .