



ZOOM IN ON THE USA

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THE ENCHANTING WORLD OF MOVIES

The April issue of *Zoom* brings you stories from the world of movies. Join our virtual tour of Universal Studios on pages 3 and 4 and don't miss the photo tour on page 5. Read two first-hand accounts of the spell that movies and movie theaters can cast on our whole life.

Take a little quiz to see if you believe in the magic of the big screen and read about a man who wanted to scare his audiences out of their wits.



*The drive-in theater, a uniquely American institution
A Photo © AP Images*

Take a little quiz

Answer the following questions "Yes" or "No" and read "William Castle's World of Gimmicks" on page 2.

WOULD YOU GO TO THE MOVIE THEATRE ...

1. to see a film advertised with the warning: "See it with someone who can carry you home!" or "If it frightens you to death, you'll be buried free of charge?"
2. if the film director offered insurance for \$1000 against death by fright while watching the movie?
3. when plastic skeletons flew over the audience's head during the movie?
4. if you knew that the seats were wired to vibrate violently during the most frightening scenes?
5. if a free set of colored lenses would reveal a throng of ghosts to your eyes?
6. where the audience had the choice to vote for the film ending?
7. that offered seat belts to people who were afraid during the film?
8. had a special marked place for "chickens" who were scared and wanted to leave the screening before it ended and get their money back for the ticket?



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William castle's realm of gimmicks

If all or most of your answers in the quiz are "Yes", it means that you would like the movies of William Castle - film director, producer, actor and show biz tycoon. Castle employed these gimmicks to market and pack movie theaters in the 1950s and 60s. During these years, movies were gradually losing the battle with the one-eyed monster - the home TV set. Castle's goal was to bring more entertainment to the movies.

If you mostly answered in the negative, it does not mean that you would not enjoy the spell a movie theater can offer. It could just be that you prefer 3-D, Cinerama, Vista Vision and IMAX, which are nothing but modern variations of Castle's old gimmicks.

Castle, whose real name was Schloss, had the love of stage in his blood. A New Yorker by birth, he never missed the opportunity to go to the circus, the theater or the movies. In the 1920's, when he was in his early teenage years, he knew more about script, makeup, direction and lighting than most of his peers. His passion for mov-

ies soon drove him to Hollywood, but it was not until the 1950's that he was finally able to direct the movies he was made for: horror and macabre.

The films he made were called 'B' movies because they were less prestigious. In order to lure crowds to see movies made with smaller budgets, lower production values and smaller advertising budgets, Castle marketed his films with pranks and gimmicks intended to draw people to the box office. The Quiz on page 1 provides some examples of such tricks.

Contrary to the genre he favored, he was a warm and amusing person, well-liked by the film crews he directed. The 1993 comedy *Matinee*, starring John Goodman and Cathy Moriarty is a tribute to William Castle, the man who believed in the magic of the big screen. For, when the lights go out and the film tape begins to roll, the audience sets off on a mysterious and unreal adventure. Watch out - because anything can happen.

AIRC Krakow

what are b-movies?

B-Movies are Hollywood's step-children productions: horror films, science-fiction, monster and road movies. In contrast to the more prestigious and higher budget "A-movies," B-movies are less costly productions, less publicized and generally less ambitious. The original B-movies were Westerns, dime-store romances, detective films and slapstick comedies, made cheap and fast for a mass audience in the 20's and 30's.

Up until 1948, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the practice illegal, the Hollywood studios sold theaters both A and B-movies and required them to show them together. This phenomenon was known as the double feature and had its roots in the beginnings of the movie industry, when the first talking movies were the main but not the only part of the show; others included a live act, a newsreel, a comedy short, a cartoon, a musical, etc. It also gave the Hollywood studios a market for its less successful films.

Independent film-makers like Ed Wood and William Castle made careers from the low-brow entertainments of *Plan Nine from Outer Space* and *The Tingler*. B-movies generally now refer to low-budget, independent produc-

tions. The 70's were the golden age of exploitation films and *The Blair Witch Project* would be a recently successful case in point. The *Friday the 13th* series has become the most obvious example of how most B-movies have become synonymous with violent slasher films.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to say that all B-movies are second-rate films with no ambition. The early productions of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* were made by ambitious directors with great craft. Hitchcock intentionally made *Psycho* as a B-movie on a budget of \$800,000. Jack Nicholson's career began in working with schlock-meister Roger Corman in *The Little Shop of Horrors*. More recently George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* series and Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street* are examples of recent B-movies made with ambition and to great effect.

Quentin Tarantino, Tim Burton and The Coen Brothers have built their careers from their love of low-brow movies. The recent *Death Proof* is an homage to the gory thrills of early B road movies, but *Reservoir Dogs* is just as much a gritty crime film. The very title *Pulp Fiction* is a reference to the fast action, low-brow entertainment of classic B movies.

my Saturday morning matinee

A long time ago, in a valley far, far away, I grew up at the movies. I remember going to the movie theater every weekend when I was young. There was always a double feature - two movies for the price of one. Even better - the matinee show in the afternoon was half the price. What a deal. Sometimes these were movies we had seen before. It did not matter whether we already knew the story - the fun was just to be at the movie theater. Sometimes we knew the dialogue so well that we could say the lines with the characters. By the time my brother and I were 10 and 12 years old, our parents would drop us off at the theater and we could go in by ourselves. We always saved our allowance for popcorn and candy from the snack bar. There were so many lousy Disney movies from those years - *The Apple Dumpling Gang*, *Herbie Rides Again*, *The Shaggy D.A.*, *Freaky Friday* -

but all I remember was how much fun it was to be in this big, old movie theater with all those other happy people and our friends from school, kids running up and down the aisle, up the stairs and into the balcony. Then the lights would go down and the curtain would start to open and everyone there would say "Ooooooh!" as loud as they could and then start laughing. I remember seeing previews for *Close Encounters* and *Star Wars* and looking forward to when they would open for the premiere. Between movies, we would buy more popcorn and run around again. The best part of it all was just being there - just the magic and the ritual of going to the movies on a Saturday afternoon. I have never lost that sense of magic and still love that moment when the light goes down and the curtain starts to open.

John Surface



a universal studios dream tour



Photo by Dalydose on Flickr

Lisa, the tour guide: A very good morning to you here on this sunny morning. My name is Lisa and I have the pleasure of taking you on this tour of Universal Studios today. I can see that you're a great group. I see that you come from all over the world. Splendid! Welcome to the studio where more movies and TV shows have been shot than anywhere else in the United States. The Studio has been in operation since 1912, very nearly a hundred years!

Janne: Good morning, Lisa.

Ludo: Good morning, Lisa. I'm looking forward to the thrills! I've heard so much about the explosions!

Kimiko: I hope there won't be any splashes or dirt falling around. I'm going to a conference right after the tour.

Lisa: The tour is thrilling, alright, but you needn't be scared. Let's get on the tram right over there. Come, you'll see for yourselves!

Lisa: Oh, the lady in the beautiful blue suit, going to a conference afterwards ... I wouldn't take a seat in the front, not on the right side anyway ... or you'll get wet when we encounter the shark from *Jaws*.

Kimiko: I'll sit in front. That's my favorite always.

(The whole group take seats in the car, get their cameras ready and make themselves comfortable.)

Lisa: Welcome aboard. The video screens above my head will show you some of the history of Universal Studios. So, let's get going ... Our Studio tour lasts about an hour and features locations you know from the movies. We'll drive by the sound stages - the "front lot" as we call it - as well as the large outdoor sets we call the "back lot". On some of the sets, they will be shooting scenes as we drive by. If we're lucky, we may see some of the stars while they work. I nearly bumped into Naomi Harris, Kevin McNally and Johnny Depp yesterday. They are shooting *Pirates of the Caribbean* on the "Little Europe" set.

Tina: I would love to get Naomi Harris's autograph to show my friends at school...

Lisa: Now we are driving by the offices of film directors. Steven Spielberg's office is here on your left. Up ahead are the giant sound stages, buildings where movies are shot. The first famous sound stage at Universal was Stage 28, which

was built in 1925 for the Lon Chaney version of *Phantom of the Opera*. The same Stage 28 was used for *Psycho*, *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Jurassic Park*.

Lisa: We are now driving past the famous Universal Streets: On your left is "New York Street" with a series of brownstones, ... now the "Small Town" set on your right, ... and up ahead you can see the dusty streets of "Old Mexico" with the old church tower that was used on the set of *Vertigo*, and the most used set, "Little Europe" with its little shops that you would remember from *An American in Paris*, *Funny Face* and *The Pink Panther*. Today, it's the port in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* ... And here we are in the famous Old West town. It is our largest outdoor set and they were able to shoot as many as six different Westerns at the same time because it had six streets, each with its own saloon.

Artur (five years old): Mommy, I want a cowboy hat like that cowboy!

Lisa: Now we are approaching the *Courthouse Square* with the bending street in the distance. I am sure you recognize it. It "starred" in *Bruce Almighty*, *Crossing Jordan*, and *Spider-Man 2*.

Lisa: And now we are going past the "Bates Motel" and the famous old house from the movie *Psycho*.

Janne: *Psycho*, wow. It has such atmosphere... even in broad daylight...

Lisa: We're now heading towards the "Red Sea" used for the scenes where Charlton Heston parted the waters. No need to worry. We'll just drive through, no one drowns here.... See how the pumps part the sea for us. Now some of you on the outside might get splashed. Here, hand this to the lady in the blue suit!

Janne: Oh my, I'm all wet.

Artur: Look Mum, a shark!

Artur's mother: That's alright, darling. It's not real. This shark was built for a movie.

Lisa: The lakes here at Universal Studios are man-made... and the bridges ... are man-made too, of course, which means they can collapse. This is where the pier scene for *Jaws* was filmed. We keep the shark here because there is nowhere else to keep him. Oh, my! The wooden bridge is shaking, we're too heavy ... it's ... breaking. Hold on! And here comes the shark! Stay away from the rails! BOOM! He just bit one of the tires! BOOOOM!

Lisa: OK, it looks like he just wanted to say "hi." Everyone still here? OK, now you can tell all your friends that you survived a shark attack. As he swims away you can see the hydraulics at the back. As we come around the turn, we see a scene of chaos and destruction. It's the set from Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, starring Tom Cruise. This is the actual, full-size 747 jet airliner that crashed into a residential area. You can still see the engines smoldering in the ruins.

(continued on page 4)



zoom special: Universal Studios Photo Tour



At the entrance to the tour area at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif.
Photo © AP Images



Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, right with Universal Studios President Ron Meyer in Universal City, California on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2006. NBC Universal on Wednesday unveiled an ambitious plan to revamp the unique 390-acre complex that includes movie sets, office space and a theme park. Photo © AP Images

with a little bit of luck you can meet celebrities on your tour



Johnny Depp (left) and Naomi Harris (right) starred "Pirates of the Caribbean". Some scenes were shot in Universal Studios

Photos © AP Images



Surprised visitors applaud as Whoopi Goldberg prepares to take a guest turn as guide aboard one of the studio's trams at Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, July 18, 2006.

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