

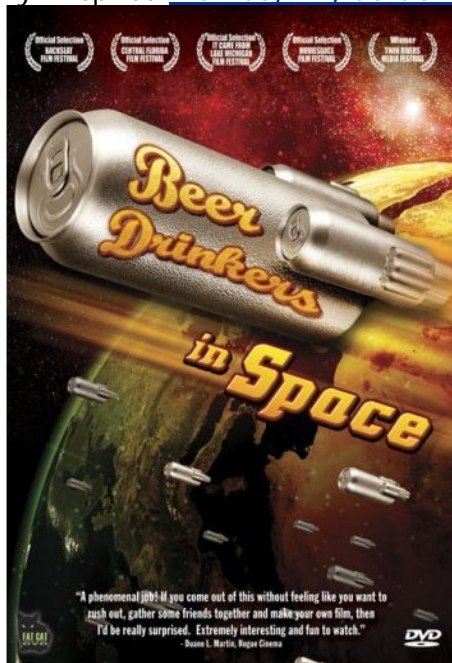
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August 28, 2007 - Tuesday

B-Movie of the Day No. 12: Beer Drinkers In Space

Current mood: inspired

Category: inspired [Movies, TV, Celebrities](#)



Today's selection, *Beer Drinkers In Space*, doesn't really qualify as a B-movie. Not that anything I've reviewed really has, since, technically speaking, nobody makes B-movies anymore. A B-movie was a film that was produced specifically to run as a second or third feature on a double or triple bill. It was just filler product meant to add bonus value to the A-movie, like a buy-one-get-one-free sale. That meant that as long as it had a cool title, the B-movie didn't have to be any good. It didn't even have to earn any money, since all ticket revenues were attributed to the main attraction, not the B-movie. This "quantity over quality" sales model is what accounts for the B-movie Golden Age in the fifties and sixties, when cheesy sci-fi/monster movies were churned out by the hundreds with no regard for watchability. This lack of professional standards was a hotbed for eccentricity, spawning movies like *Robot Monster* or *The Beast of Yucca Flats* that cannot be accounted for by any logical reasoning. But then the double-feature died out, and these movies suddenly had to stand on their own two feet. They could no longer piggyback off of the success of the A-movie, and so production standards had to be raised, leading to the modern special effects movie, which is generally just a B-movie with an A-budget. Or, barring that, exploitation standards had to be pumped up, which led to the rampant gore and sex of the seventies and eighties. Thus removed from their symbiotic relationship with A-movies, the term "B-movie" came to mean any cheap movie made for indiscriminating drive-in, grindhouse, or, later, home video audiences.

So *Beer Drinkers In Space*, having never served on a double bill and having been created for no audience whatsoever, is not technically a B-movie. In fact, as near as I can tell, its only public screening was in 1983 at the Ground Round in Orlando, where a crowd of mostly friends and family of the cast and crew sort of paid attention while picking at their jalapeno poppers. What it

is is a home movie, shot on VHS on the slowest speed, about a crew of space truckers hauling a space tanker full of space beer to Nebulae 7-11 (the name of which the characters repeat so many times, it's like they planned out the drinking game before they wrote the script). It's a Star Trek parody made by Disney World employees who would take a break from designing and building Epcot Center to work on this ambitious no-budget sci-fi comedy. They built all of the sets in the director's rented one-bedroom house out of styrofoam and duct tape. They made model spaceships and blew them up themselves. They drank beer and read their dialogue off of cue cards. They made history.

Now, the movie itself is what it is. It was made for fun by a group of friends, with no thought of it ever seeing the light of day. And as such, I have a lot of affection for it. You see, around the turn of the century, I made my own backyard movie, *The Hanks Hill Hippie Horror* (available on DVD from Poop-In-A-Box Home Video), about an undead acid casualty who stalks and kills people at an old house in the country. My movie might have been funnier, but I have to say, *Beer Drinkers In Space* is much better. The sets are pretty impressive, and the models aren't bad, even if most of them are just Star Wars toys turned upside down and spray-painted. What kills it is the picture quality. This is 24-year-old VHS we're talking about. Sometimes, it gets so faded that you can actually see the background through the characters. I don't know how this is possible, but apparently, it is.

If the DVD just consisted of the movie (chopped down to 59 minutes because even the director admits that its original 90-minute version was unwatchable), I probably wouldn't be writing this review. But it also comes with an hour-long documentary about the making of the movie, and it's probably the most inspirational thing I've seen for some time. After being slaves of the Disney corporate monolith, these folks sacrificed their time, money, and dignity to make something that was all their own. They never wanted to sell it, license it, or profit from it. They made it simply out of the joy of creation, at a time when home video technology was in its infancy. Nowadays, shot-on-video features are a dime a dozen (and most of them are worth less than that), but back then, this kind of thing had never been done before. And I don't think it has ever been done since, at least not on this scale. Most of the time, these things are just dudes in rubber masks running through the woods, pretending to be zombies. This was a space opera with explosions and aliens. It's a minor miracle that it even exists, and it makes me want to get out there with some friends and some intoxicants and create something.

I've always had this idea for a sequel to *The Hanks Hill Hippie Horror* (or *4H*, as the marketing folks called it). It's called *The Brooklyn Beatnik Bloodbath* (*B4* for short), and it's about a spoken word artist who gets possessed by a demonic poem and goes on a killing spree on the streets of my home borough. So if anyone has a) time or b) a camera, let's get this thing going. Nobody should go through life without leaving a little art behind.

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