

Terror from Beneath the Earth

A Film by Christopher R. Mihm

Most of you following our summer reading festival already know that Chris has done one film a year since 2006. He has written, directed and edited all of them.

His offering for 2009 was *Terror from Beneath the Earth*. It has been fun for me as I view each film in sequence to determine which old classics (or, sometimes, non-classics) the Mihm films remind me of. Perhaps because of the presence of the children, here I am reminded of 1953's *Invaders from Mars*, and the excellent *Them!* from a year later. Michael Cook as Dr. Vincent Edwards, (Vince Edwards. Is anyone besides me reminded of Dr. *Ben Casey*?) who has displayed an impressive range in his acting skills, calls to mind the great Edmund Gwenn in his role of Dr. Medford in *Them!*, which my son used to call "Big Ants."

Terror from Beneath the Earth is 69 minutes long and presented in glorious black and white. It was filmed entirely within the basements of the homes of Chris and his mother.

I love Chris's DVDs. Here is the promotional description from the back of *Terror from Beneath the Earth*. On the DVD, there are several photos included:

After years of underground testing, one of the animals living within the Wisawa caves has undergone a radical and unimaginably horrible transformation! While exploring the caves, Dr. Vincent Edwards (Mike Cook) and colleague Rosemary Bennett (Stephanie Mihm) stumble across evidence in the disappearance of local children. After reporting the find to the authorities, Dr. Edwards and Rosemary are tapped to lead a rescue attempt. Along with Sheriff George Elliott (Justen Overlander) and the children's father, Stan Johnson (Daniel R. Sjerven), the rescue party quickly comes to the realization that if the caves don't get them, whatever unseen terror lurking in the shadows just might!

Allow me to present the remainder of the cast:

Michael G. Kaiser --- as Deputy Hayes (and the Creature)
Elizabeth Kaiser --- as Alice Johnson
Elliott Mihm -- --- as Danny Johnson
Shannon McDonough --- as Julie Ann St. Marie-Jackson
Christopher R. Mihm --- as the Radio announcer

The DVD contains all of the extras we've come to expect on the Mihm DVDs. They include a blooper reel, the full trailer, a photo gallery, a special featurette, an introduction by Dr. Ivan Cryptosis and the audio commentary with Dan Sjerven. The commentary is really enjoyable as it is evident that Chris and Dan

are good friends. They have to be the way they rag on each other!

This film truly did remind me of *Them!* Chris captures the mood of the 1950s well as he presents us with conflict over what to do the creature if and when it is subdued. The monster in this film is the best I've seen so far in the Mihm films. A very strange and bizarre monster it is! Within a B-film that salutes other B-films, you want your monsters to look frightening but not to really BE frightening. This one was ugly and came very close to genuine repulsion. Chris almost did too well this time.

Another thing that was done almost too well was the fight scene between the monster and Stan (Dan Sjerven). Stan beats the monster severely with a flashlight before the monster recovers to torture him with electricity-charged hands. This had to be a difficult scene to film. Yet, this and the appearance of the monster prove to us yet again that Chris, now four movies in to his career as a film-maker, is gaining experience and honing his skill.

On a lighter note, Shannon McDonough made a brief appearance as Julie Ann St. Marie Jackson, now married to Professor Jackson and pregnant with the good professor's baby, who would grow up to be Captain Jackson. All members of the Mihmiverse will understand what I'm describing here. We met Captain Jackson in the last film, *Cave Women on Mars* which was set in the then futuristic year of 1987. This allowed the pipe-smoking professor to make a cameo non-appearance. (In the Mihmiverse, anything can happen, or not happen!). The exaggerated laughter at the end of her scene was a nice salute to one of the Mihmiverse's leading ladies.

Once again, Christopher Mihm was very Corman-esque in his use of resources. The caves were papier mache walls made to look like stone. He even had stalactites and stalagmites thrown in for good measure. All of this was done in the basement of his home, and I enjoyed the atmospheric cave set very much. We are also introduced to another piece of Mihmiverse scientific gadgetry. The "Sonic Amplitude Oscillatoratron" played a huge part in fighting the monster, which possessed superior size and strength.

I enjoyed very much the attack of the bats. The bats were made of plastic and string and were shaken very fast to give the illusion of flight. I confess to not noticing the strings until Chris pointed them out on the audio commentary!

I have enjoyed all of the Mihm films very much. By now I am fighting the temptation to start suggesting to Chris projects I would like to see him do but will pass on that. I would, however, be very interested in seeing what he could do with a greater budget to work with.

To close, since this film was truly scary in parts, I share with you the disclaimer at film's end. We may now breathe a collective sigh of relief:

No bats or rather large and oddly bat-like yet humanoid creatures were harmed in the making of this film.

In a few days we will review, from 2010, *Destination: Outer Space*.

I will see you in the Mihmiverse!