

The Monster That Took On Walt Lee

At the age of 4, Walt Lee developed a consuming interest in insects. By the time he was 8 he had switched to astronomy. At 10 it was chemistry. And by 14 it was atomic and nuclear physics.

In other words, Walt was a natural for Caltech. He came here as a freshman in 1950, majored in physics, and graduated with honor in 1954. After a year of grad school at the University of California at Berkeley, Walt joined the technical staff of the Hughes Aircraft Company, where he is currently writing and coordinating their technical publications and films.

This compressed biography makes Walt sound like a lot of other Caltech alumni. But there is one staggering difference. From the time he could read, Walt was addicted to comic books and science fiction. It's an addiction he has never shaken off. At the moment, it's got Walt at its mercy. If he makes one false move, in fact, it will take over his life.

It all began back in a simpler time, 1958, when Walt took it into his head to work up a *Science Fiction and Fantasy Films Checklist*—a small pamphlet that sold for \$2, and was soon out of print. (Ten years after its publication, rare copies were sold for as much as \$75.) Walt was thus encouraged to try putting together a really comprehensive (he is enough of a realist to avoid using the word "complete") listing of all the films ever made that had some content involving science fiction, fantasy, or horror. His life hasn't been the same since.

For more than 15 years now, the Lee homestead in West Los Angeles has been engulfed by science fiction, fantasy, and horror. The Lee cars have never been in the garage, because that has become a library and work room, crowded with complete runs of science fiction magazines, books on films, motion picture



still, and cartons and shoeboxes stuffed to the brim with index cards.

The cards, of course, contain information on the films, and they include everything from *Cauldron of Blood* and *Wrestling Women vs. the Aztec Mummy* to *The Seventh Seal* and *2001*—even such esoterica as *Girls Scouts vs. the Cookie Creature*, a 10-minute silent film, in color, made by Girl Scout Troop 370, under the supervision of Walt and Eve Lee, with this crisp plot description: "Girl steals Girl Scout cookies, eats too many, turns into monster."

The three-volume *Reference Guide to Fantastic Films: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror* based on data from all those cards is now in print—and selling fast—so the project has outgrown the Lee garage. What was once a den in the house has now become a storage and mail room. The *Guide* is available, by mail, from Walt himself. A first printing is already running low, and a second printing is scheduled. A revised and much enlarged second edition, though still far in the future, is a frightening possibility that can't be ignored. If the Lee family ever thought they were going to recover some spare time after publication of the *Guide*, they don't think so now. Eve Lee and the two Lee children, Steven and Cindy, are doing as much indexing, filing, and mailing as ever. (The *Guide* carries a sentimental dedication "To my wife, Eve, whose valuable help is especially appreciated since she feels so strongly that the vast majority of fantastic films are junk.")

Publication of the *Guide* has stimulated people all over the world to enter into correspondence with Walt and give him new listings and information for future editions.

It's quite clear that things have changed since 1958, when Walt had only a few hundred films to deal with. The film business, books about films, and the interest in films have all exploded since then. Walt's 1974 *Guide* has more than 20,000 listings.

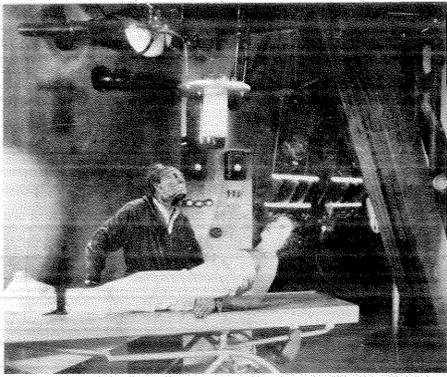
It should be noted that Walt has anticipated us all, in his introduction to Volume I of the *Guide*, by answering the question he knows we will inevitably ask: Why did he do it?

First of all, he says, because these films have held a particular fascination for him all his life. "In my view, the unique appeal of the fantastic stems from our curiosity about things beyond our normal experience and knowledge, possibly beyond the limits of our knowledge.

"What lies beyond death? Are there other intelligent beings in the universe? Could humans turn into beasts or beasts into humans? Can we create artificial beings? What does the future hold? Can it be foretold by supernatural means? Can the dead return?

"... How the tremendously popular motion picture medium has treated these subjects is fundamentally important."

Walt wrote that in 1972. In spite of everything, he still stands by it in 1975. □



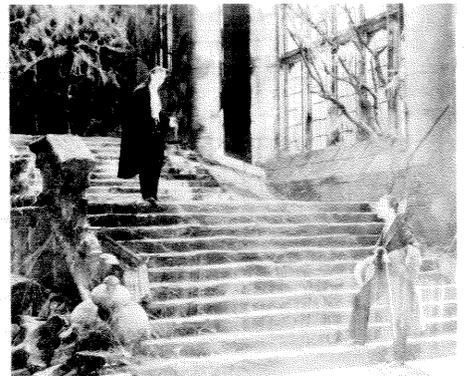
The Mystery of the Wax Museum - 1932



The Phantom of the Opera - 1925



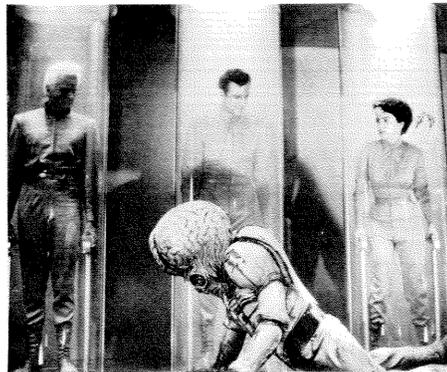
The Bride of Frankenstein - 1935



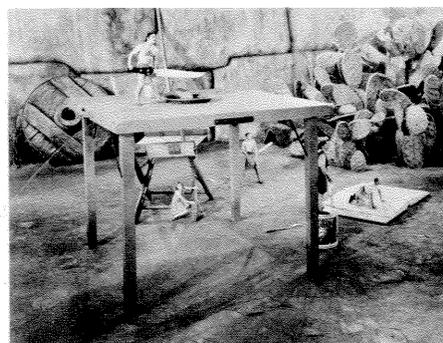
Dracula - 1930



Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde - 1931



This Island Earth - 1954



Dr. Cyclops - 1939



King Kong - 1933



King Dinosaur - 1955

Some Classic Stills From The Lee Collection