

MOVIE MARATHON

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The Victory Theater was desperately in need of a victory. It had one screen and the seats needed to be replaced. It smelled like mildew and failure. It had business being in business. To an unemployed, rudderless, forty-year-old like Tim Miller, it was a perfect way to spend an afternoon. Watch old movies and get high. The perfect way to spend a cold and dreary fall afternoon. His ticket and popcorn were ten bucks. Popcorn was delicious. Enough salt to damage his kidneys. He bought a diet soda and strutted into the theater. There were only a handful of people in the seats. He sat in the back and fired up his vape pen loaded with THC. This was the culmination of forty years of doing absolutely nothing with your life. The lights dimmed and the credits began.

The name of the first movie was called "RETRIBUTION" with Ted Kelley and Martha Hurley. It was full of ridiculous dialogue and semi nonsensical situations. Ted and Martha are lovers. They decide to rip off Ted's boss, some old fart named "Big Pete". They almost get away with it. Big Pete ends up shooting Martha, instead of Ted. Naturally, Ted doesn't take very kindly to this and goes on a killing spree, which culminates in the death of Big Pete. Right as Ted is about to be shot by the cops, the movie suddenly goes dark and cuts out. It opens to show a dog peeing on the grass. Tim is more than a little perplexed.

The hell happened to the movie? He thought to himself.

"Jesus doesn't live at this house. This is the house of life. Life pisses on all of us when we're down." said a very creepy voice-over.

The scene quickly ends and we see Ted's character getting shot by the cops. That's it. The closing credits come on and the lights come on in the theater.

Tim isn't quite sure what the hell he just saw. Not that it matters. In ten minutes from now, we'll have another golden oldie on the screen. He took a deep hit off his vape pen. The THC hit his receptors like an avalanche. Getting high is wonderful.....simply wonderful.

The lights went dark and the music came on. The next movie was pretty much a rip-off of Hitchcock's LIFEBOAT from 1943. It's all about these people trapped in a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean. It was pretty bland. Tim almost left at one point but dozed off. When he came to, the movie was almost over. The movie quickly cut out and went dark. There were a few seconds of darkness, then we see all of the people on the lifeboat having sex with one another. It wasn't a new scene spliced in with the film. These were the exact same actors and actresses. The woman was riding some black dude and climaxing hard.

"Come on, fuck me! You big ape!" she screamed.

Tim looked around at the rest of the audience. No one even seemed to be paying attention.

The hell is going on here? He thought to himself. Is this some kind of a joke?

The movie ends with them throwing their German captive overboard and being rescued by a navy ship. Everyone lives lustfully ever after. Tim had to wonder if perhaps his vape pen had just a little too much juice behind it. This was getting weird. Hopefully, the next movie will get us back on track. The lights came on in the theater. He saw a few people get up and leave. There were now just three of them in the theater. He had to wonder how the place stayed in business. He wanted to be wowed. He had paid a whole ten bucks for this crap. The movies went for 24 hours. He figured there would be more people in the theater.

Clearly, he figured wrong.

The name of the next movie was titled LONG WALK OFF A SHORT BOW from 1948. It's about a small-time hood who punishes his victims by dragging them out to the ocean and making them walk the plank, with their hands tied behind their backs. Tim was actually into this one. Excellent mood and atmosphere. The director clearly knew what they were doing. About halfway through the movie, we see the hoods in the film are at a cabaret or strip club and a woman is dancing. She turns and takes her top off. She then looks down at the men and flips them the bird.

"Bet you'd like to fuck me wouldn't you?" she says looking straight ahead, into the camera.

The scene quickly cuts out and we see the hoods are now in a gunfight on the boat with our protagonist.

Maybe this one escaped the sensors back in the day. Maybe the cast and crew decided to have a little fun after hours. Maybe.....cause this was getting weird. Tim wasn't quite sure what the hell was going on in this theater. Someone clearly had a very strange sense of humor.

The next opus was titled NAKED AMBITION starring Tanya Hayes and Chet Wilson. It's about two small-town lovers who show up in Hollywood, hoping for instant fame and fortune. When reality comes crashing down into their lives, things take a turn for the worse. They end up killing their landlord and making off with his money, only to be found by the police and killed in a shootout. The screen cuts out and goes dark. We see another scene, unrelated to the movie. Tim has a hard time grasping just what he's seeing on the screen. He sees two old people and a woman wandering around a field in a daze, just stumbling, blindly, without any direction or purpose.

"These people aren't alive.....but they aren't dead either. Kind of like the rest of us." said that same creepy voice he heard earlier.

We see two men throw some dead animals at the group, and they quickly start to devour them whole. Tim is watching with both fascination and horror. We then see church bells ringing and the zombies quickly cover their ears.

"Do they hate the sound because it's loud? Or because it reminds them they are no longer alive?"

We see one of the men shoot the woman zombie in her chest with a pistol. She just keeps walking towards him as he quickly scampers away. The movie quickly resumes and Tim is left wondering what he just saw.

What the hell did that have to do with anything? He asked himself. Why do I seem to be the only one concerned about this? Who the hell did the editing for this movie? Let's hope the next one goes off without a hitch.

The title was LITTLE FEATHER, starring Preston Brown as the good guy in white and Jack Hunter as the bad guy wearing black. Things were very clearly spelled out for the audience back in 1938 when the film was made. Brown was called in by a rancher to defend his property from Hunter who was a wealthy railroad tycoon. It was exactly at the 47-minute mark that the movie suddenly cut out. The next scene looked completely different. Tim recognized it as being 35mm Monochrome. It was different than the film used to create LITTLE FEATHER. It showed some kind of strange city overhead like it was being filmed by a drone. There were several unusual structures that looked like giant pyramids. The camera showed several inhabitants walking around the city on these strange-looking horses pulling carts. The entire scene was very surreal.

"Do you know what you're looking at boys and girls? This is hell. This is where all the bad people go to die. This is the city of Satan. They have such beautiful eyes.....the bluest eyes you've ever seen." said the creepy announcer.

The camera zoomed into this beautiful woman. Her eyes were so blue, you couldn't see anything else. She opened her mouth and we could see some giant fangs coming out. The scene quickly cut out and the cowboy movie resumed.

This had to be one of the strangest things he had ever seen. Tim liked to think of himself as a film connoisseur of sorts. He was a very knowledgeable millennial. Some of these scenes were just downright....*disturbing*. Who the hell green lighted this mess? Some answers were needed and needed

quickly.....before the next movie with weird scenes started.

He asked to speak to the manager at the concession stand.

"We don't really have a manager here. Just the owner, Ted." said the girl working behind the stand.

"You guys are showing some really weird movies here," said Tim.

"Okay. So what do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I mean they're black and white films, from the forties and fifties. They shouldn't have the scenes in there they do. It's very strange."

"I just play the films, I don't choose them. You need to talk to Ted."

"I thought Ted wasn't here."

"He's here in spirit." said the girl as she buttered the popcorn.

"This is getting me nowhere. You're talking in circles," said Tim.

"What do you want from me?" asked the girl.

Tim storms away, defeated. He wants more answers but isn't getting any. He should just leave, but he had nothing to do and his apartment was cold.

The truth is often stranger than fiction.

THE BELLS OF WINCHESTER was the name of the next movie. it's about a nun who questions her faith and her choices but finds redemption at someplace called Winchester, wherever that was. It was kind of pointless and boring, meandering quite a bit. Tim was recording the entire movie on his camera.

He was going to have some evidence next go around. At 52 minutes in, the movie suddenly cut out and a new scene emerged. Tim could see a man and a woman riding bicycles in what looked like southern California. As the camera got closer, he could clearly see who it was. Tim had watched enough movies about the two of them to know.

It was Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun, enjoying the sights and sounds of Los Angeles. It was really them.

He made sure his camera phone recorded the whole thing. He even got closer to the screen to improve the recording.

"Let's see them talk their way out of this one. Maybe just one more to seal the deal." he thought. The marathon still had almost sixteen hours to go. That was quite a few terrible movies to have to sit through. No matter, he was in this for the long haul.

The next one was called CROSSBOW. It was an interesting little piece about a serial killer who stalks and kills his victims with a crossbow. It was pretty risque for the time it was filmed. Tim stopped and looked at one of the girls. She looked exactly like the girl working the concession stand. Not just similar.....*it was her. She was even wearing the same uniform.*

This was bordering on the absurd. These people must take him for a fool and a fool he was not. They must have gotten a hold of the original prints and decided to have a little fun. He cut out both clips from the movies. They were both about a minute long. This would go a long way.

"Excuse me, young lady. What's your name?" he asked her as she was filling the soda machine.

"Skyler," she said without turning around.

"Well, Skyler. I thought you might want to take a look at this," he said and held up his phone. She turned around and looked at his phone.

"What am I looking at?"

"It's Hitler and Eva Braun., on bicycles in Los Angeles. Kind of odd."

"Dude, I just hand out the popcorn and drinks. Sometimes, I take tickets. Go talk to Winston. He's the usher." she said and turned her back to him.

Tim gallantly marched up to Winston who was standing behind the pole.

"Winston, look at these clips," said Tim holding up his phone. Winston looked at the clips.

"Okay. Very interesting. Was that guy Hitler?" he asked.

"It most certainly was."

"So, what am I supposed to do here?" he asked.

"These movies are bizarre and obtuse. They have scenes in them that clearly do not belong. Like Adolph Hitler riding a bike in Los Angeles." said Tim.

"I don't choose the movies. Ted does. This is all his baby. If you have a question about the movies, take it up with Ted."

"I'd love to if I could find him," said Tim.

"He's like everywhere and nowhere at the same time."

"Huh?"

"When I was younger, I was convinced that if you drank anything that was pink-colored, it would make you gay. It was crazy.....or was it?"

"Winston, this has been a most unproductive conversation. I'll crack this nut without your help. Thanks for nothing." said Tim and walked back into the theater.

"Good luck," he said.

He missed the opening credits of the next movie. It was about two sisters who fall for the same man. He couldn't tell if it was supposed to be a romantic comedy or an erotic thriller. It went back and forth, never really finding its footing. He recorded the entire movie on his phone. He wasn't going to miss a beat. This was going to be more ammo for his case against Ted, whoever Ted was. The leading man was played by Grant Hill. His car rolls down a hill and is just about to fall off a cliff when the movie suddenly cuts out and the screen goes dark. We then see a bunch of men dressed in white and a bunch of patients sitting around. Tim thinks it is some kind of an insane asylum. Some of the patients are screaming and others are in straight jackets. We see one patient in the corner. He looks to be trying to eat away at his toes. The camera zooms onto his face. We see his teeth are blood-stained, as are his clothes.

"*You can hang a prayer on me, Timmy!*" he says and then goes back to trying to eat his toes. The scene ends and then goes back to Hill's car falling off a cliff and exploding. Tim was floored. That must have been added later. After all,

That crazy guy couldn't possibly be talking to him. That would be absurd. This movie was made decades ago before Tim was even born.

This mystery had just suddenly got a whole lot more personal. He was now being singled out by Ted.

Tim was now bound and determined to get to the bottom of this mystery. He still had plenty of movies to go through.

The title was UNDERTOW. It was fairly decent, with recognizable actors and actresses. It's about a patriotic chef who decides to poison a left-leaning senator who is sympathetic to communism. The acting, pacing, and direction were solid. At minute 40 of the movie, the scene cuts out and we see some strange-looking footprints on the ground. They are in black and white, but very high definition. It looked as if they were filmed with a camcorder.

" These were made by humans living long, long ago. They've turned to rock. I wonder who these people were and how they survived? Did they have dreams? Did they reach orgasm often.....there is such a thin line between life and death, between right and wrong, and agony and ecstasy. Such a razor-thin line we walk every day. If we stumble and fall, God will not be there to save us. We fall into the pit of our lives and can never climb out. There is such a thin line between a first kiss and a first kill. Between the light in your eyes and the dirt on your corpse." said the eerie narrator. Ted wasn't so much watching a movie now, he was watching someone else's dream, with its own laws of physics and its own reality. Where nothing makes sense, but it doesn't have to. Our dreams tell us reality is very overrated.....and quite often dangerous.

The chef accidentally poisons his wife, instead of the senator at a government dinner. In the final scene of the movie, the dying chef looks right at the camera and says:

"Ted created us, Ted can destroy us. Ted is the final word on everything in this world and beyond."

Tim knew it was time to go. Whatever was happening here was way over his head. He got up to leave the theater and passed by the same couple who had been in the theater since he arrived.

"Man, what the hell is going on with these movies?" he asked.

He looked down at them and could see that they were not people, just mannequins. Props, dummies, test crash victims. He was completely alone in the theater. He checked up on the other couple and could see that they too were just mannequins, put in place to fool him.

"This is completely unacceptable," he said as the movie ended and the new one began.

It was a nameless western, full of nameless actors and actresses. There was a robbery. There were shootouts and more robberies and shootouts. About halfway through the movie, it suddenly cut out and Skyler and Winston appeared in front of him on the screen. They said nothing and just looked at the camera.

"Your dreams end where reality begins, Timothy," said Skyler

"You could be a part of this theater forever, Tim.....forever. All you have to do is ask. It's that simple."

said, Winston

"All you have to do is ask," said Skyler.

Tim ran out of the theater and towards the front doors. He pushed and yanked on the doors, but they wouldn't open. He tried running out the emergency door, but it too was locked. He ran around the building, looking for a fire door, but there were none. He was trapped inside. He saw Winston and Skyler at the concession stand.

"I want out of this place, right now, this very second," he said

"Tim, in the last movie, you get to meet Tim. Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what you've always been missing in your life?"

"You two are kidnapping me. That's a felony. Is that something you two are ready to bite off?"

"Why don't you go and watch the last movie. It's Ted's favorite," said Skyler.

"I think it's everyone's favorite."

"What the hell is this place?" asked Tim almost hysterically

"It's the Victory Theater."

Tim ran down the aisle. He looked for another person, but there weren't any. He tried opening the doors to the back, but they wouldn't budge. He walked slowly back to his seat and sat down. The credits began for the last and final movie. It was a horror movie called THE MAN WITH TWO HEADS, starring Jack Delaney and Karen Frost. After ten minutes into the movie, it suddenly stopped and the screen went black.

"Come and see me, Timothy. I'm in the projection booth." said the eerie voice.

Tim turned around and walked up the stairs to the door leading to the projection room. He turned the knob and walked inside.

"Do you like movies, Tim?" asked the voice. The same voice that had appeared in the weird scenes in the movies.

"Yes."

"Would you like to star in my movies? I could use a new leading man. The last one fell ill." said the creepy voice. Tim didn't want to see who it was. The projection room was dark. He tried not to look at the man sitting in the chair around the projector.

"I love movies too. Movies are my whole life. They can be your life as well."

"I watch movies. I don't want to appear in them. I'm too old and too straight to be in the movie business. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I think I'm going to have to pass.

"Sorry to hear, but I understand. The industry isn't for everyone. You may go now." said the man as he lit up a cigarette.

Tim walked out of the booth and down the aisle, towards the doors. He passed by both Skyler and Winston.

"Too bad. We were looking forward to you joining our team," said Winston.

"See you around," said Tim as he pushed the doors open and walked out into the rain.

He awoke in the theater, with the credits rolling. Skyler and Winston were cleaning the theater. He looked at his watch. He had been asleep for over four hours. That was one hell of a dream.

"Hey sleepyhead," said Skyler.

"Sorry, I must have dozed off," said Tim sitting up in his chair.

"Why don't you stay? We still have plenty of movies," said Winston.

"Sure," said Tim as he sipped his soda. He was more than just a little embarrassed about falling asleep like that. They left and the next movie came on. It was titled TIMOTHY MILLER'S PATHETIC LIFE....in color!

It detailed every failure and disaster that had ever befallen him and how they had led to his life being the mess that it was. Tim started crying in the theater. This was so cruel. He didn't want to be reminded of his failures. He ran up to the control room and flung the door open.

"Give me another chance, Ted. I won't let you down," he said defiantly.

"So glad to hear," said Ted.

Ravi loved old movies. He and his wife decided to spend the afternoon watching a doubleheader at the Victory. Two movies for the price of one. They bought their snacks and drinks and sat down in the theater. They had the entire theater to themselves. The lights went dark and they started watching. Something about the main character seemed odd. He recognized him, even though the movie was almost seventy years old. Strange, it looked just like him.

"That guy looks like my co-worker who went missing a few months ago," he said to his wife.

"He's cute," she replied.

"I always told him he belonged in the movies," said Ravi as he sipped his soda.