



The Jungle Jim Pages

Jungle Jim

Almost immediately after departing the Tarzan role, Johnny Weissmuller was signed up to another license more appropriate for his age. It was Jungle Jim from the popular newspaper comic strip. These flicks were made to very low standards and I have to presume they were aimed at the Saturday matinee bubble-gum crowd. Weissmuller mostly plods through his role in these, he doesn't seem to be enjoying himself as he did in the Tarzan movies. Of course, that may just be the effect of what was obviously a very rushed shooting schedule.

Although some are outlandishly silly and are fun to watch, and they all have a certain charm -- it must be said: these films are awful.



films in chronological order

JUNGLE JIM

(1948) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Virginia Grey, George Reeves.

In his first adventure, Jim escorts a lady scientist and a shifty photographer to a secret temple in the jungle. It's hard to tell if the plot is constantly interrupted by stock footage and cute animal scenes, or if it's the plot that's the interruption. Jim only gets to fight a few critters on his first flick; but it may be the first & only time that he ever *shoots* an animal rather than using his knife (of course, he was using someone else's gun). He also tussles with some weird cross between a crocodile &

a piranha that looks like it floated in from the set of a bad horror movie. And I could swear that the lion Jim was “fighting” only wanted to bugger him...

the LOST TRIBE

(1949) dir: William Berke; W/ Johnny Weissmuller, Myrna Dell, Elena Verdugo, Joseph Vitale, Ralph Dunn, George J. Lewis.

This second Jungle Jim movie is almost fun to watch. There is lots of action -- separated by lots of boring bits. The threadbare plot involving greedy jerks out to loot the treasure of a lost city serves as an excuse to get Jungle Jim into a fight with everything in the jungle. Thus proving that you have nothing to fear from crocs, lions, or sharks as long as you have your trusty pocket knife! The scene where he defends the momma gorilla from a lion is particularly bizarre. Another thing -- with around a dozen on-screen deaths (some of them deliberate murders), this flick has a surprising body count for a kiddie movie.

CAPTIVE GIRL

(1950) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Buster Crabbe, Anita Lhoest, Rick Vallin, John Dehner.

In his third outing, Jungle Jim gets involved in some mixed-up silliness involving a wild jungle girl, a murderous witch doctor, & a greedy treasure hunter. This thing doesn't really have a plot, just some events that vaguely resemble a story. Crabbe is kinda neat as the bad-guy treasure hunter, but his character is shoe-horned in as an afterthought -- obviously, they had a chance for a great co-star & squeezed him into the script. But this thing is so full of padding & nonsense that nothing can save it -- even for a Jungle Jim movie, this one just stinks.

MARK OF THE GORILLA

(1950) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Trudy Marshall, Suzanne Dalbert, Onslow Stevens Robert Purcell.

Jungle Jim gets into his 4th mixed-up melodrama -- this one is about Nazi gold and some thugs disguised as gorillas. Added to Jim's sparring partners this time is an eagle and a giant rubber eel. In this flick, we see people walking through the jungle, an African wildlife preserve with tigers & jaguars, people walking through the jungle, a fight between a tiger & a lion, people walking through the jungle, and a little rock climbing. But the best part was seeing the guy in a gorilla suit cop a feel as they abduct the princess.

I wonder if parents who dropped their kids off to see the Jungle Jim matinee were aware of the high body count in some of these films -- this one features three murders -- not to mention the opening scenes, which are a narrated nature lesson about the grisly details of the food chain.

PYGMY ISLAND

(1950) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Ann Savage, David Bruce, Tris Coffin, Billy Curtis, Steven Geray, William Tannen.

Jungle Jim fights a gorilla and comes to the aid of a WAC Captain and a tribe of “white pygmies.” Then it’s the US Army in a pitched battle with commie agents over some plants. The pygmies have to save the US Army & Jungle Jim from the Commies! Featuring midgets swinging through trees (actually it’s only one tree, they just show it over & over), and the silliest-looking elephant stampede ever filmed. [Billy Barty has a bit part (no pun intended); he does not play the pygmy chief as reported in some guides.]

JUNGLE MANHUNT

(1951) dir: Lew Landers; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Bob Waterfield, Sheila Ryan, Rick Vallin, Lyle Talbot.

6th in the Jungle Jim series. Even in Weissmuller’s second film career, we can’t get away from Mexicans in Polynesian dress substituting for Africans, stock footage, and cute monkey shenanigans. In between all this is a threadbare plot about a missing athlete and an evil tribe. Weissmuller’s performance is very flat (I don’t think he’s having as much fun as during the Tarzan days), and the script is awash in racist attitudes. And in the middle, they splice in some footage of giant lizard-dinos just for the heck of it. A weird mish-mash.

FURY OF THE CONGO

(1951) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Sherry Moreland, William Henry, Lyle Talbot, Joel Friedkin, George Eldredge.

Jungle Jim first tries to explain some random stock footage, then gets mixed up with drug smugglers who are taking the glandular secretions of the rare “oongo” antelope (which are just a bunch of horses with sloppy stripes painted on their fore & hindquarters). Jim fights a leopard and some kind of gargantuan feather-duster bug. The last half of the movie consists of a bunch of people running after a bunch of other people -- for the longest time.

VOODOO TIGER

(1952) dir: Spencer G. Bennet; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Jean Byron, James Seay, Jeanne Dean, Charles Horvath.

This entry in the Jungle Jim series is less fantasy-filled, but doesn’t make any more sense than the rest. Lets see...we got an African Voodoo cult that worships tigers, Nazis with looted art treasures, art thieves, and a night club dancer. Yup, that about covers it. There are lots of fist fights and several cruel staged fights between a tiger & some other animals.

JUNGLE JIM & THE FORBIDDEN LAND

(1952) dir: Lew Landers; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Angela Greene, Jean Willes, Lester Matthews, William Tannen.

The 9th Jungle Jim flick sports a wandering, byzantine plot involving greedy poachers, betrayals, murder, frame-ups, & the secret land of the “giant people,” who turn out to be tall guys in werewolf masks. We also get white “natives,” a pathetic, laughable wrestling match with a stuffed leopard, and an underwater fight scene with a plastic hippo head. Somewhat entertaining, for drivel.

KILLER APE

(1953) dir: Spencer G. Bennet; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Carol Thurston, Max Palmer, Burt Wenland, Nestor Paiva, Ray Corrigan.

A Jungle Jim tale revolving around, but not really involving, a “killer ape” that is actually a Cro-Magnon dude (although the flick hints that it is some sort of disgusting human-gorilla crossbreed). Ya see, there’s a bunch of bad guys inventing an insidious hypno-drug, a tribe of animal trappers thinking Jungle Jim is trying to kill everybody, the man-ape wants the princess’s nookie, and smack in the middle of it all is a weird snippet of stock footage featuring a fight between a Tasmanian devil and a Monitor lizard (!?). And in the end, they’re all rescued by the pet chimp. No, it doesn’t make much sense, but it’s less dull than most Jungle Jim flicks.

VALLEY OF THE HEADHUNTERS

(1953) dir: William Berke; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Christine Larson, Robert C. Foulk, Steven Ritch, Nelson Leigh, George Eldredge.

Jungle Jim defends the jungle from a greasy lawyer who manipulates the simple tribesmen & steals their oil. This entry is notable for including *black* tribesmen and lots of African stock footage. And Jim gets in what must have been the roughest fight of his career -- it’s just another stuffed leopard, but this time his shirt got all torn up! Truthfully, it’s way more entertaining than most of Berke’s flicks, but he’s still much too fond of that chimp. Not only does the damn monkey help rescue everyone, but he even gets to kill the bad guy! Jeezus!

JUNGLE MAN-EATERS

(1954) dir: Lee Sholem; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Karin Booth, Richard Stapley.

An adequate adventure yarn pitting Jungle Jim against diamond smugglers and rebellious tribes. It seems like this one had a little less filler and a little more plot than usual. Jim gets to take out a lion and a crocodile -- and there’s one more cruel staged fight, this time between a bull and a lion (the bull won). They even tried to inject a little humor into Jim’s character -- but the biggest laughs are unintentional.

We see stock footage of Black Africans rowing down a river -- then we see a closeup of Jungle Jim in a canoe full of Mexicans. Later we see stock footage of an African tribal dance -- while the soundtrack is playing a Native American chant. And when someone sets fire to the native village, we suddenly get stock footage of some Arabs caught in a fire. Yeesh.

I believe these last few Jungle Jim flicks were made after the rights for the name were taken over by the production company for the TV series. They are identical to the previous movies, but they refer to the main character as “Johnny” instead of “Jim”. There’s a scene in one where the party is introduced to their safari guide, “Johnny Weissmuller,” and one guy says, “Oh yeah, I heard of you lots of times!”

CANNIBAL ATTACK

(1954) dir: Lee Sholem; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Judy Walsh, David Bruce, Bruce Cowling.

A Jungle Jim movie without Jungle Jim -- Weissmuller stars as “Johnny.” He tracks down a ring of cobalt thieves disguised as crocodiles in a juvenile & very disjointed tale wherein just about *everybody* turns out to be guilty.

JUNGLE MOON MEN

(1955) dir: Charles S. Gould; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Jean Byron, Helen Stanton, Bill Henry, Myron Healey, Billy Curtis.

Weissmuller stars as that famous jungle man, “Johnny Weissmuller.” The plot is still the same mixed-up hokum: the moon men are a tribe of midgets who worship an immortal ancient Egyptian blonde babe, and they kidnap studs to be her high priest. Notable in this installment is that Johnny doesn’t get to kill anything, although they do find an excuse to squeeze in some Mexican bowhunting footage.

DEVIL GODDESS

(1955) dir: Spencer G. Bennet; w/ Johnny Weissmuller, Angela Stevens, Selmer Jackson, William Tannen.

The final Jungle Jim movie has a plot like leftovers stew. Jungle Johnny heads deep into Africa where he finds a polynesian tribe that worships a volcano operated by a crazy magician. Meanwhile, greedy treasure hunters are digging up Solomon’s jewels and there’s this young lady who does *not* want to be a human sacrifice. All this sort of intersects and they all fight each other and only the nice people get out alive. I just know they ripped off some footage from another picture to provide some of the “native” shots -- it gets suspicious when the volcano blows up and we see the village being destroyed by a hurricane. Oh well, it was less boring than usual, anyway.

A hopefully complete list of all Jungle Jim titles -

Jungle Jim, 12 chapter serial (starring Grant Withers - 1936; see the Serials page)

Jungle Jim (1948)

The Lost Tribe (1949)

Pygmy Island (1950)

Mark of the Gorilla (1950)

Captive Girl (1950)

Jungle Manhunt (1951)

Fury of the Congo (1951)

Voodoo Tiger (1952)

Jungle Jim in the Forbidden Land (1952)

Valley of the Head Hunters (1953)

Savage Mutiny (1953)

Killer Ape (1953)

Jungle Man-Eaters (1954)

(these last three are Jungle Johnny movies...)

Cannibal Attack (1955)

Jungle Moon Men (1955)

Devil Goddess (1955)

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Icon Glossary:



Good Stinker -- These are the films where a good deal of the entertainment comes from filmmaking incompetence; fun to watch in spite of themselves.



Goopy Gore -- These films exhibit distinctly above-normal quantities of unpleasantly abused body parts.



Naughty Nudie -- Films with this flag feature frequent and/or explicit nudity (almost always female) beyond that normally found in your average T&A flick.



Butt Stompin' -- These films feature at least one superior violent fight or shootout scene that will get the testosterone pumping.



Gold Star -- These are the flicks that I felt reached above their expectations or at least pleasantly surprised me; they may not always be actually good flicks, but I did find something in them worthwhile.



Blue Max Medal of Really Goodness -- These are flicks that I not only enjoyed, but I think are actually quite good films (not always the same thing).



Lethal Cinema -- These wretched viewing experiences go beyond being merely bad to become genuine sources of pain and regret; they should be avoided by all but the most masochistic trash cinema veterans. Don't say I didn't warn you.