

'Release the Kraken...!' 'Where is William Castle when we need him?'



Photo:
http://www.hauntedamericatours.com/ghosts/House_on_Haunted_Hill.jpg



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April 5, 2010

Actor Michael McKean tweeted last night that the "[e]arthquake hit seconds after they released the Kraken; it worked in a William Castle kind of way."

William Castle was the Alfred Hitchcock of the fifties and sixties exploitation movie crowd. He ran away to Hollywood in his early twenties and was directing before he was thirty. Though he worked for Orson Welles as a second unit director on "The Lady from Shanghai," he didn't aspire to Wellesian heights. Castle was notorious for marketing gimmicks, like issuing \$10,000 life insurance certificates from Lloyds of London with tickets for the 1958 horror movie "Macabre." You did have to die from fright during the movie.

1959's "House on Haunted Hill" was filmed in "Emergo." This took 3D, a popular gimmick at the time, a step further. An inflatable, glow-in-the-dark skeleton floated over the audience during the film's

climactic moments. This assumed the projectionist didn't miss his cue, and rowdy audience members didn't throw too much debris at it.

"13 Ghosts" featured the gimmick "Illusion-O." That meant you got a viewer with your ticket, with strips of blue or red cellophane. Which color you looked through was determined by whether or not you wanted to see the ghosts in the movie.

But the best had to be "The Tingler." The title referred to a mysterious creature that supposedly lives in our spinal cords and is awakened by fright. Select theater seats were wired with devices sort of like big joy buzzers that were activated when the tingler was loose.

That and McKean's remark can only make us wonder if Sensurround is going to make a comeback. (For the uninitiated, Sensurround was a technique used in the seventies by Universal, involving really big speakers, to make the audience feel like they were shaking. It was first used for "Earthquake," and then subsequently for "Midway," "Rollercoaster" and the theatrical release of the original TV pilot for "Battlestar Galactica.")

Castle would have loved the current 3D mania. He'd have combined it with Sensurround and possibly added flamethrowers. It boggles the mind to think of the marketing gimmicks we're missing. Where is Castle when we need him?