

Dime Movies

By Harry Zirkelbach 07-18-2011

He liked to open any book at random, begin reading, finish, then return to page one, proceed to the place where he had opened the book. He did this for years before someone mentioned that wasn't what the author intended, and in fact what he was doing made a mishmash of the writers intent. He protested for a time, relented. Now is the conformist we see everywhere.

Later at a malt shop he explained to me the source of his custom. He had been born not long after WWI. On school it was common for the nuns to open a text anywhere, and begin to discuss that topic, not completely dependent on what had preceded.

But his largest impression was from attending the Ten Cent Double Features, with parents, or older brothers. A ticket was purchased. They entered the gloom, blind, felt for seats together where practical, began watching a movie in progress. At times the story being told was crudely understood when missing the first reels, but for most films, the story was easily constructed, correctly, by word and action of believable actors.

It made no difference which of the two films was being shown when they entered, the one came to see, or the other. Entering with Newsreel, Short Subject, Previews and Comedy was a plus. However, when the time arrived when they entered, most often the oldest insisted in seeing the ending a second time.

He never learned anything new that second viewing, thought it a waste.

But it wasn't his dime.

Throughout young school years, that procedure never varied.

In fact when working as usher later, the projectionist often began the day showing a feature in the third or fourth reel.

Management never received a complaint, though few if any were in the movie house when the projectionist started.

There seemed no real reason for this.

The small Ten Cent theaters, second run houses, never presented a Major Studio offering that had not been shown earlier in the city. Those twenty-five cent Houses had exclusives. The thirty day productions of small studios, bread and butter of the ten cent houses, made a perfectly understandable story, same black and white film, the supporting casts often from the same gaggle used by Major Studios

Of course the The Major Studio needed pennies too, did not withhold their Features from the Dime theaters forever, though in instances would be months before the re-release. Thus dad and his peers, thought it madness to pay 25 cents for a single feature, when with patience it could be seen for free, really, assuming dad and his ilk would have paid to see the other feature.

And as a plus for Dad's dime, on Saturday afternoon, the Dime theaters also added Serial films, one Chapter a week, the first eleven ending in a cliff-hanger episode, threatening death to the Hero; this requiring out attendance the next week to resolve the impossible.
They always sold the boy and he sold Dad.

When will the good old days return? When will someone construct a 500 word print epic concluding with a moment that has all readers asking for more, next week?

Is that possible?
Is this as good as it gets?
What can that hard dime buy today?