"SHANGHAI" (1935, dir: James Flood) EXCEPT.
In our January 26th progress we unwittingly reviewed a TV print that had been shipped late and changed on us, adding to an importantly hasty one although it finished neatly on an encore, marriage scene, and funeral. While we're sorry to disillusion those of you who would otherwise have gone through life happily believing that fast was allowed to meet West at least once in Hollywood of the Thirties, integrity and film history demand that we tramp on such sentimentalities. So, here is that missing climactic reel. We'll begin on a few minutes so that you can re-Orient yourself.

THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES (Columbia, 1940). Directed by Nick Grinde; Screenplay by Karl Brown from a story by Harold Sturges; Camera, Benjamin Kline; 73 minutes.

Karloff's four "mad doctor" thrillers for Columbia have little reputation, and to a degree, understandable so. After the first, fairly elaborate one - "The Beast With Five Fingers" - they rapidly became more stereotyped and increasingly more economical, although the last and cheapest - "The Devil Corradino", directed by Edward Daytrf, was rather surprisingly the best and a remarkably good call.
"The Man With Nine Lives" has always been regarded as the least exciting of the series (for the record, the other entry was "Before I Hang") and I suppose this still holds true. But the very qualities of restraint that reduced its appeal as a horror film, now give it a semblance of logic and quasi-literacy which now make it seem a much better and more sensible picture. Too, the score by Bernard Herrmann, though Karloff was always willing to be on fair terms with the music, is a major factor in the popularity of some of his theories. Given a good basic story, this could have been a much better film if more attention had been paid to details - from the title on down. The title is a unique and ambiguous one, and a little effort could have made it really apply to the film. On a purely practical level, Karloff has no more than two lives in the film. If it refers to the lives in his hands as I assume was the original intent, then the nomenclature just don't add up. Small point, but semi-pun titles in horror films can be both appropriate and witty, as witness Karloff's British "The Man Who Changed His Mind", the subtitles of which escaped the American distributors who gave it a succession of three increasingly blood-thirsty and no-nonsense titles. Once in a while the dialogue gets a little out of hand too. Roger Pryor's instructions to his nurse, concerning an ice-covered patient ("Are you the stethoscope?... hot coffee!" are exceeded only by his final tribute to Karloff, whose killings are brushed aside in a superbly worded understatement concerning his scientific zeal. But there are indications of care: the look-getting sets are quite effective, and traditionally hokey horror music is deliberately withheld until the moment that the door to Karloff's above-crescendo, and the restraint of the Karloff character makes for a nice contrast with the orthodox horror movie tactics. Lastly, it's an enjoyably anti-social film: the representatives of law and order and the medical profession are narrow-minded, whining and selfish, perfectly represented by such worthy as John Dinslen and Byron Foulger. One not only has the pleasure of their "getting it" from Karloff, but also the equally pleasurable anticipation of that moment. It's a solid and satisfying little thriller, if not a particularly shivery one.

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THE UNDYING KONSTEE (20th Century Fox, 1942). Directed by John Brahm; produced by Bryan Foy; Screenplay by Edith Headford from a story by Lesser Douglas Kearnish; Music, David Raksin; Art Direction, Richard Day and Lewis Courtier; Camera, Lucien Ballard; 50 minutes. (English release title, "The Hamon Cursed").


"The UnDYing Konste", made a year after Universal's surprisingly successful "The Wolf Man", was clearly an attempt to cash in on that film. Yet it is a remarkable little film, virtually a model of how to give a "B" picture real class. Perhaps not even wanting to make a full-blown horror film, hoping to strike a balance so that the film could serve both as a horror double-bill (with the equally handsome and brief "Dr. Cesnualt's Secret") and also as a standard mystery support to other Fox pictures, Fox aimed at mystery and
suspense rather than physical horror. As in "The Wolf Man", the setting was one of the lonelier areas of the British Isles, and a neat little werewolf jingle was recited on occasion (as in "The Wolf Man") to remind one of family curses and the fairy-tale nature of it all, this latter emphasized by pushing the tale back into a Gothic period setting. However, the werewolf was seen but sparsely, even in his climactic downfall, and the atmosphere throughout is an atmospherically and unseemly horror. Directed by John Brahm (who did so beautifully with "The Lodger" and "Hangover Square", and whose "Guest in the House", "The Locket", "Bito" and "Let Us Live" certainly qualify him as a leading film-noir director), the film shows care in every department: sets (both interior and exterior), art direction, lighting and photographic composition are all among the most elegant seen in any "B" movie -- although of course a look at the credits will show that many talents were employed in all departments, one of the great assets of the old studio-contract system. The production stills from the film show ingenuity as well as style, for many of the sets are actually quite small and cramped, a restriction that doesn't show up at all in the on-screen image. It may not be a classic among horror films, but it is some kind of a classic in seeming to give to a small-budget production all the lavish mountings and care of a deluxe production. It's both a good thriller, and good fun, with some delightfully overblown dialogue, and yet with everybody concerned taking it all so earnestly that it never once enters the tongue-in-cheek arena.

The first ten minutes of the film (containing some of the film's best lighting and atmospheric usage of sets) is an original negative reduction print; thereafter we must be content with a good quality dupe. And it is good quality. Nevertheless, there's nothing like first-generation material, and the juxtaposition does stress how much is lost of visual style when going into dupe material. (And of course, how much more is lost when the dupes are duped, and then duped again, as happens far too often these days!)

William K. Everson

Erratum: the reference to "many talents" should read "major" talents. Monogram "B" movies used "many talents" too -- but Frank Sannucci and William Sickner could hardly compare with their opposite numbers here, David Raksin and Lucien Ballard.