"SUPERNATURAL" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Victor Halperin
Screenplay by Harvey Thew and Brian Marlow from an original story

I must confess that "Supernatural" is the only film that I booked
into the four New School series thus far (series #4 is wrapped up and
will be announced in due time) without having seen it first. Such
tempting of the fates was occasioned by the fact that there have been
a great many inquiries about it. And like its co-feature tonight, it
has had no theatrical exposure in New York for well over 25 years.
On the basis of its cast and its director (Halperin also made the
superb "White Zombie") it would seem to be worth the risk; and even if
it disappoints, it will presumably still be of great interest to an
audience drawn to two unfamiliar horror films. I will of course be
screening it prior to the actual showing, so any panes of praise—or
the donning of sack-cloth and ashes—can be held over for the
introductory remarks.

"ISLAND OF LOST SOULS" (Paramount 1932; released 1933) Directed by
Erle C. Kenton; screenplay by Philip Yule and Waldemar Young
from "Island of Dr. Moreau" by H.G. Wells; camera: Karl Struss.
With Charles Laughton, Richard Arlen, Bela Lugosi, Leila Hyams, Arthur
Hohl, Kathleen Burke, Stanley Fields, Paul Hurst, Tetsu Komai, Bob

With "The Mystery of the Wax Museum" and "The Ghouls" now rather
definitely established as extant, "Island of Lost Souls" is thus the
last of the "lost" horror films of the 30's likely to turn up.
Despite being billed by Paramount as "H.G. Wells' surging rhapsody
of terror" and being ballyhooed by a spectacular stunt advertising cam-
peign, built primarily around the "Panther Woman" angle, the film was
a comparative commercial failure at the time, despite coming at the
very height of the horror film boom. Wells was quite outspoken in
denouncing the film as a travesty of his original, which while contain-
ing horror ingredients, was far from the lurid grand Guignol of
the movie. In England the film was banned outright by the censors
along with "Freaks"—and it was only in recent years that both films
did finally secure a British release. The basic problem with "Island
of Lost Souls" (and it must have been especially apparent in 1932,
when horror films had such grand style) is that all of the
 Hammer chillers of the 50's and 60's, it has all the ingredients but
little of the mood required. The film is often repelled by the film, but
rarely is a film within the limited powers of conviction
of most horror films—and thus one is never really frightened by
any of it either. Although the sets and locations (mainly Catalina) are
effective, there is not a note of background music to help create
mood, and there is a listlessness in direction which is telegraphed by
the casual and almost disinterested first introduction of Moreau.
Perhaps inadvertently Laughton is partially to blame. He gives a
marvellous performance, but it never quite seems to match the rest of
the film. His lines are polished and matchlessly delivered, some of
his best lines almost thrown away, but despite his Satanic beard he
rarely suggests anything much worse than a medically-curious Captain
Hook. (After showing us the human monsters that represent
satisfactory scientific operations, he refers casually to some caged
and deformed creatures as "my less successful experiments"!)
Every so
often he relaxes into a mischievous, cherubic grin, like a schoolboy
playing with test-tubes in a fourth-form lab. This macabre humor
worked wonders for Ernest Thesiger in Whale's "Bride of Frankenstein",
but here everything—permutations, cannibalism, attempted matings of
human and monster—is so glibly straightforward that the elements of
humor, so beneficial to horror films, never get a chance to mesh.
Nevertheless, visually the film does have much to offer, and many
scenes have a curious power, especially the crane shots as Laughton,
God-like, addresses his creatures with a staccato speech that seems
like a deliberate perversion of Kipling's child-like "Jungle Book"
lingo. Lugosi, in an incredibly minor role, gives a surprisingly good
performance itself if the climax itself is a real shocker, a nightmare of
horror comparable only to the climax of Browning's "Freaks". Director
Kenton, in the 20's a 2nd-string Lubitsch (he also did the "42 'Ghost
of Frankenstein") misfires, but does so interestingly. ---We---