"MURDERS IN THE ZOO" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Edward Sutherland.
Screenplay by Philip Wylie and Seton I. Miller; Camera, Ernest Haller.
With Lionel Atwill, Randolph Scott, Gail Patrick, Charlie Ruggles, John Lodge, Kathleen Burke, Harry Beresford, Edward McVade.

Made at the height of the horror film cycle of the early 30's, "Murdere at the Zoo" garnered little attention at the time, mainly because unlike Paramount's other horror film of the period, "Island of Lost Souls", it seemed rather tasteless, and lacked the genuine Gothic style of the best of that cycle: "The Mummy", "The Old Dark House", "Frankenstein". Tastelessness is a matter of relativity however; in comparison with the physically repellent obsession with gore and clinical detail that has marked recent horror films, and especially those from Hammer, "Murdere in the Zoo" today seems a model of restrained decorum, and if there is any tastelessness at all, it is probably in the healthy vulgarity of some of Charlie Ruggles' comedy. Even so, "Murdere in the Zoo" is sometimes quite grim stuff; even on its original release, many states' local censorship boards took out hefty slices of footage, including the villain's death scene, and on its very limited tv exposure today, it is also usually cut. The film has never been revived theatrically. A slick and fast-paced production, unusually well-cast (though with Connecticut's Governor John Lodge, a first-class actor, rather wasted in an undemanding role), it scores principally of course as a showcase for the bravura villainy of Lionel Atwill, who relishes every single line and single scene a bare two months after his now (at least for the present) lost classic "The Mystery of the Wax Museum" it is of course a less subtle and interesting film, but until that film's rediscovery it can serve very nicely as the best extant illustration of Atwill's unique brand of polished nastiness.

"KING KONG" (1933) Excerpts: censored scenes

"Kong Kong" was first reissued in the mid-30's when the Production Code was in full force, and a number of changes were made. First, the negative timing was altered, so that all prints made thereafter were several shades darker, eliminating much of the detail. Secondly, a number of violent scenes were taken out in toto. These are the scenes we are showing today. The cuts eliminated some of the most intricate process work in the whole film: Kong carefully undressing Fay Wray for example, and the brilliantly matched-up shots of him rampage through the city. But most of the cuts are in the squashing natives and trampling them underfoot do tend to mitigate against him. In the cut version he emerges as a justifiably cranky s.o.b., but withal sympathetic; dramatically at least, the cuts seem justified and the film does work better without these scenes.

"WHITE ZOMBIE" (United Artists, 1932) Directed by Victor Halperin
Original story & screenplay: Garnett Weston; Camera: Arthur Marinali.
With Bela Lugosi, Madge Bellamy, Robert Frazer, Joseph Cawthorne, John Harron, Brandon Hurst, Clarence Muse, Dan Crammings, John Peters, George Burr McMann.

A writer in "Films in Review" recently made the lib assertion that "White Zombie" was a "horror film for imbeciles". Without dignifying that with an argument, I will admit right off that it has its silly elements. Its greatest flaw is that it tries too hard to horrify, and when it fails to horrify (e.g., the closing of the repellent zombies riddled with bullets) it proceeds least. But for the most part in its own unique way, it is one of the very best of the early 30's horror films. It is really a Beauty and the Beast fairy tale (with a little of The Sleeping Beauty thrown in too) and it is told in the simple and eloquently visual style of a fairy-tale. The performances are admittedly theatrical and old-fashioned - but they work. Every line, and especially Lugosi's, is delivered deliberately, and none of the players are overly underplayed or thrown away. But much of the film is virtually silent (in terms of dialogue) and the mood carries the film: sets, some beautifully-done glass shots, superb atmospheric photography, imaginative use of split-screen images, and above all the sound track with its rich old "mood" themes and agitats, its interesting use of a humming chorus, and its deliberate harshness in emphasizing the morbidity in the ritual of death - coffin-wood rasping against a stone crypt for example. Dramatically, "White Zombie" was dated even in 1933; but cinematically it is a fascinating minor classic, far too long neglected. And "Dracula" notwithstanding, it probably provides Lugosi with his best and most fairy-tale-like uncomproportionally malevolent - screen villainy. - Wm. K. Everson