"The Mad Doctor" (Warner Brothers, 1932) One reel

Made at the height of the early 30's Hollywood horror cycle, this Disney spoof of films like "Dr. X" shows the old master at his most uninhibited sadistic best. Although its grim nightmare images have lost a little of their punch through the years, they must really have given the horrors to infants back in 1932, especially since they were then not imbued to horror by constant casual exposure to it on TV. The film was somewhat of an embarrassment to Disney; British critics for example first banned then drastically cut it. Disney withdrew the film rather quickly, and his organisation has since generally tried to deny its existence. Even allowing for the fact that Disney's most creative work has often been in the sadistic and/or horrific highlights of films like "Snow White" and "Pinocchio", he never again went in for such a concentrated emphasis on fright material to the almost total exclusion of comedy content.

"THE MARK OF THE VAMPIRE" (MG M, 1935) Producer/Director: Tod Browning

Screenplay: Guy Endore, Bernard Schubert; Camera: James Wong Howe; editor: Ben Lewis. 6 reels

With Lionel Barrymore, Elizabeth Allan, Bela Lugosi, Lionel Atwill, Jean Hersholt, Henry "adsworth, Donald Meek, Jessie Ralph, Ivan Simpson, Leila Bennett, Carol Borland, Holmes Herbert, Michael Visaroff

One can't really say much about "Mark of the Vampire" without discussing its ending - and it would ruin the fun for those of who do not know the plot. It's a remake, albeit a much simplified one, of F. W. Murnau's 1922 Lon Chaney vehicle "London After Midnight". While the denouement is admittedly a bit of a cheat, at the same time the plot is cunningly enough constructed so that the wild explanations do all hold water, if not logic; all that is, but for the revelation of the mode of murder. Tod Browning has always been a much over-rated director I feel, with "Freexas" as his only really notable achievement. Just as "Dracula" owed its greatest debt to cameraman Karl Freund and the evocative visual flair of the opening reels, so here does "Mark of the Vampire" owe far more to the camerawork of James Wong Howe than to Tod Browning. Superficially, it all has a lot of good atmosphere and individual scenes of real terror; but as a whole unit, it is sadly let down by that climax, and by the shocking waste of Lugosi. Still, it hasn't been seen (except on tv screens) for years, and certainly deserves this one opportunity to return to life on a big screen before being returned to the obscurity of its cans of native nitrate.

- intermission -

"THE WALKING DEAD" (Warner Brothers, 1936) Directed by Michael Curtiz

Cameras: Hal Mohr; Screenplay by Ewart Adams, Peter Milne, Robert Adams and Lillian Hayward from an original story by Ewart Adams and Joseph Fields; 7 reels

With: Boris Karloff, Edmund Gwenn, Ricardo Cortez, Marguerite Churchill, Warren Hull, Barton MacLane, Henry O'Neill, Joe Sawyer, Addison Richards, Joseph King, Eddie Acuff, Ruth Robinson, Kenneth Harlan, Miki Norite, Adrien Boley, Walt Kibbee, Bill Elliott

An always under-rated Karloff vehicle, "The Walking Dead" is far more thoughtful and directorially stylish than its thick-ear title and a misleadingly gruesome trailer would lead one to expect. It was also the only "traditional" chiller to emerge from Karloff's curious Warner contract, which shunted him into generally disappointing and (for him) time-wasting films like "Devil's Island", "British Agent", "West of Shanghai" and "Invincible Menace". "The Walking Dead" is a good thriller rather than an out-and-out horror film, quite shielded of the vulgarity and cheap shocks that characterized "The Monster and the Girl" or a B-spanish "monstur" film of the 40's or the similar plot, apart from one concession to horror tradition - a laboratory sequence in which Karloff's makeup and Mohr's angled shots contrive to make Boris look suspiciously like the Frankenstein monster - the film never really tries to scare its audience. Horror would be difficult here anyway, since audience sympathy is immediately with Karloff, hero, heroine and innocent bystanders are never in jeopardy, and the audience is virtually rooting for the successful completion of Boris' series of reasonably justifiable murders. Instead, director Michael Curtiz, who deserves a lot of credit for getting down to "The Charge of the Light Brigade" - concentrates instead on pace, mood, and getting good performances for the often quite literate script. With cameraman Mohr to beck him up, he's too good a showman to use such reliable props as rain and thunder, but he uses them as dramatic backdrops to already taut scenes, not as lazy devices to beef up dull scenes.

--- Mr. K. Eversen ---