They're Always Caught (MMG, 1938) Directed by Harold S. Bucquet; Original story and screenplay, John C. Higgins 20 min.
With Stanley Riders, Louis Jean Heydt, Charles Waldron, John Eldredge.

The 18th (of a total of 48) in MGM's popular "Crime Does Not Pay" series, this is very slightly more of a documentary than most of the hard-hitting but inevitably somewhat unsubtle shorts that ran from 1936 to 1947. Perhaps its slightly underplayed (almost to a point of smugness at times) and therefore more realistic quality was responsible for it being nominated for an Academy Award. (It didn't win; but two others did, while a further four were also nominated).

HUNTED MEN (Paramount, 1938) Directed by King King; Produced by Harold Hurley; Assoc. Producer, Stuart Walker; Screenplay by Horace McCoy and William P. Lipman from a play by Albert Duffy and Marian Grant; Music, Boris Morros; NY premiere at Criterion Theatre; Directed by Ralph Dreyer; With Earl Williams (Joe Albany); Mary Carlisle (Jane Harris); Lynne Overman (Peter Harris); J. Carrol Naish (Henry Rice); Anthony Quay (Legs); Johnny Downs (Frank Martin); Dorothy Petersen (Mary Harris) Buster Crabbe (James Flowers); Delmar Watson (Bobby Harris); Regis Toomey (Donovan); Louise Miller (Virgil); Fern Emett (Miss Quinn); John Hamilton (Police commissioner); Zeffie Tilbury (Flower lady) and Dick Rich, George Davis, Hooper Atchley, Dick Rush, J. P. McGowan, John Elliott, Mitchell Insgraham, Wallace Clarke, Jerry Mille, Phillip Warren, Stanley Price, John Hart, Ruth Rogers, Janet Waldo, Tommy Bupp, Sonny Bupp, Sammy McKim.

"Hunted Men" is almost an object lesson in both the advantages and the shortcomings of the "B" movie. On the plus side is its lack of pretention, and its lean taut pace. Compare it for example with William Wyler's much later "The Desperate Hours", a top-heavy, overlong vehicle for Bogart and Fredric March with a virtually identical plot. The dialogue is intelligent without being profound, and keeps the plot moving quickly yet with a humanistic touch. On the other hand, the short running time prevents sufficient character establishment or the maintenance of too much logic. If Regis Toomey is there to engender more suspense, then his character is almost totally neglected. And no man as intelligent and basically decent as the Lloyd Nolan character, crook or not, would ever commit suicide so flat-out and needless a murder as he does in this second-rate without that murder, there is no reason for the story to go on. But basically, "Hunted Men" has far more plus than minus factors to offer — and fortunately there are a lot of these very little Paramount "B" thrillers still awaiting unveiling in future New School sessions.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

TELL NO TALES (MMG, 1939) Directed by Leslie Fenton; produced by Edward Chodorov; Camera, Joseph Ruttenberg; Screenplay by Lionel Houser from a story by Pauline London and Alfred Taylor; Montages by Peter Ballbusch; Music: Dr. William Axt; NY premiere at the Capitol; 66 mins.
With Melvyn Douglas (Mike Cassidy); Louise Platt (Ellen Frazier); Gene Lockhart (Arno); Douglass Dumbrille (Matt Cooper); Florence George (Lorna Travers); Zeffie Tilbury (Miss Mary); Hallie Street (Mrs. Lovelace); Harlan Bragg (Dave Body); Aimee Johnson (Chalmers); Addison Richards (Ned); George Fawcett (Mr. Lovelace); Esther Dale (Mrs Haskins); Gladys Blake (Myra Haskins); Hobart Cavanaugh (Charlie Daggett); Theresa Harris (Ruby); Ernest Whitman (Slab Giffin); Mary Gordon (Mrs Bryant); Roger Imhof (Taxi driver); Frant Orth (Sartender); Norman Willis (Joe Nevez); Anthony Warde (Frankie Lewis); Ian Wolfe (Fritz); Brandon Hurst (Butler); Madame Sul-te-Wan (Alley Cat's mother); Mantan Moreland (Gambler); Phil Terry (M.C.); and Ray Walker, Clayton Moore, Thomas Jackson, Claire Bloom, Chester Clute, Charles D. Brown, Sara Meeches, Warren, Pat Flaherty, Fred Kelsey, Laura Brooks, James Flavin, Harry Tyler, Phil Tea, James Alains, John Dilson, Claire Rochelle, Gladwen James, Heinie Conklin, Billy Engle, James C. Morton, Harry Depp, Thad Jones, Ben Carter.

At any other studio but MGM, this would have been at least a programmer, but after production gloss aside, for MGM its 68 minute running time meant that for them it was strictly a "B". Normally pride in the studio image made their Bs too big and too long — but this one is a beauty, and full of surprises, not the least of which is the dramatic and touching Negro wake, a major breakaway from stereotyping at that time. In his first venture as a director, former actor Leslie Fenton does a really fine job. The excellent script has a Chandler-like quality to it as it ventures into high society and low, uncovering unrelated scandals and crimes on route. The film's only (minor) disappointment is that after leading the plot up to lesser miscreants like Dumbrille and Lockhart, the final major criminals turn out to be strictly "B" hoodlums! And Dumbrille's gesture towards decency at the end is a hard act to accept, even though he reformed even more spectacularly as the crooked politician in Gene Autry's "Rovin' Tumbleweeds" the same year!

Program Ends:10.23. Discussion follows.

--- William K. Everson