The GOLDEN WEST (Fox, 1932) Directed by David Howard; Screenplay by Gordon Rigby from a story by Zane Grey (see notes below); Camera, George Schneiderman; 60 min.
With George O'Brien (David Lynch/Natano); Janet Chandler (Betty Summers/Betty Summers Brown); Oskar Homolka (Calvin Brown); Marion Burns (Helen Sheppard); Arthur Pierson (Robert Summers); Bennett Corrigan (Colonel Summers); Bert Harlan (Rupstein); Edmund Breese (Sam Lynch); Stanley Blystone (Cavalry officer); Georges Regas (Black Wolf); Eddie Dillon (Pat).

There's enough story in "The Golden West" for a trio of Westerns, and there are signs that it might have been intended as a bigger budget western and then trimmed down to size. But whatever grandiose elements its plot has, they don't come from any specific Zane Grey novel. If anything, it's somewhat of a Grey movie, and the writing of his pet themes, with a leaning towards "To The Last Man" and "The Last Trail". (Fox filmed the latter three times, each version having a totally different story!)
Possibly Grey may have sketched out a rough story-line, but it's more likely that Fox just paid him for his name and an idea or two. Although not one of O'Brien's very best from this period, it is certainly one of his most elaborate and really looks like one film and its sequel, somehow squashed into a single film. Made before Fox were officially doing EP movies, it is really a high-grade programmer, produced on a very big scale, and making discreet use of footage from other films, including Walsh's "The Big Trail". A buffalo stampede sequence is incredibly well done, and from the Wyoming locations looked as though it was shot at the same time as the buffalo footage in that film, but always intended for a different film. It carries a real thrill, and its last-minute rescue is something I've never seen equalled in any other western, big or small, possibly towards the end, the care extended on the film meant that they were running over budget, and this may explain why there is too much footage used from John Ford's "The Iron Horse", rather too recognisable and also used at the wrong speed. However, it makes for a bang-up climax. Of best elements in the film include O'Brien's dual role, and the interesting inclusion of Bert Harlan's role, one of the few times that the importance of travelling Jewish peddlers in opening up the West has been incorporated into a Western plot. O'Brien is in fine form (literally), though the role is a serious one and he doesn't get much of a chance to display his sense of fun. However, his abbreviated Indian costume does allow him to display plenty of torso.

-- 10 Minute Intermission --

SPAWN OF THE NORTH (Paramount, 1938) Directed by Henry Hathaway; Produced by Albert Lewin; Screenplay by Talbot Jennings and Jules Furthman from a story by Barrett Willoughby; Camera, Charles Lang; 2nd Unit Director, Richard Talmadge; 110 min; NY premiere, Paramount Theatre.
With: George Raft (Tyler Dawson); Henry Fonda (Jim Kimmerlee); Dorothy Lamour (Nicki Duval); Akim Tamiroff (Red Skain); John Barrymore (Windy Turion); Louise Platt (Dame); Lynne Overson (Jackson); Fuzzy Knight (Lefty Jones); Vladimir Sokoloff (Dimitri); Duncan Renaldo (Ivan); Richard Ung (Tom); Lee Shumway (Fisherman); Stanley Andrews (Patridge) and Alex Olovich, Archie Twitchell, Michio Ito, Wade Boteler, Guy Usher, Henry Brandon, Egan Andrew, Robert Middlemass, Rollo Lloyd, John May, Eddie Marr, Richard Talmadge (stunt double for Fonda); Arthur Aylesworth; Harvey Clark, Adia Kutznetsoff.
Paramount had a lot of top action directors under contract in the thirties - DeMille, Hathaway, Wellman, Vidor, Lloyd. They had Walsh too, but he was inexplicably wasted on musicals and comedies. Each year they'd come out with a big one - "Beau Geste", "The Texas Rangers", "Souls at Sea" - and often more than one. Too often however, something intangible would go awry, a film intended as a road show special would be cut down to a standard "A", or promised scope and location shooting would be scrapped on at the last minute. To a degree, vastly entertaining though it is -- and well deserving of the big-screen revival that it has been denied for years -- "Spawn of the North" falls into this category. Planned and publicised as a major epic-to-be for several years, it was finally shot largely in the studio, with location work limited to Big Bear Lake, although interpolated documentary footage of Alaskan salmon fishing sometimes gave a creditable illusion of location work. Neither as big or as actionful as expected, it nevertheless delivered enough size and action to keep customers happy, and its blockbuster status certainly took up the slack. (Initially Cary Grant, Randolph Scott and Carole Lombard were planned as the stars). Although ostensibly based on a novel, the film's plot is actually a pretty careful reworking of "The Virginian", with salmon poachers substituting for rustlers, and Fonda, Raft and Tamiroff repeating for Cooper, Arlen and Huston from the 1929 film. The Lamour character is a welcome addition however. Trivia note for the one or two voyeurs we may have in our audience: Lamour, in her readable but totally inaccurate autobiography, claims that Henry Hathaway dreamed up the idea of having her go bra-less in a sweater, and that he constantly reminded her that they did it first, beating Lara Turner (in "They Won't Forget") to the punch by making an unmade bed in the murder scene to have even more reminiscences of this anecdote, which is full of holes since the Turner film was on the screen (in 1937) well before "Spawn" started filming.

--over--
Although the film's Alaska was largely created by doubling local scenery and using a plethora of back projected process work - something Paramount was famous (or notorious) for, the final illusion was good and doubtless helped win the film's Academy Award for special and sound effects.

Apart from its "Virginian" ancestry, "Spawn of the North" shows relationship to the Western in many ways. Alaska was - and was so referred to - a modern new frontier, and most of the characters who inhabited were transferred bodily from the Western, not least the crusty (and usually drunken) newspaper editor, usually Henry Hull in Westerns, and here much more entertainingly, John Barrymore. And the prim Easterner, always doomed to defeat in the Western (unless she stays on as a schoolmarm) is here played by Louise Platt in a kind of unofficial dry run for her next year's stint in "Stagecoach". Only Slicker the Seal is an original with no ties to the West!

"Spawn of the North" received generally excellent reviews in 1938, most critics commenting on the hardships overcome and the remarkable achievement in putting Alaskan life on the screen. These qualities don't seem especially apparent today, but 1938 was a pretty barren year for Hollywood, and in comparison with most films of that year, "Spawn" was pretty strong meat. It also sustained Hathaway's reputation as a top action director, being sandwiched in between his two Gary Cooper films, "Soul at Sea" and "The Real Glory". It was remade in 1954 as a routine 78 minute melodrama, "Alaska Seas" starring Robert Ryan, Brian Keith and Jan Sterling.

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Program ends approx. 10:40.
No discussion period tonight.

Summer schedule

The Summer bulletins have been available in the lobby since last week, and give fuller details of the Summer series than we have room for here. However, for the record, a quick listing of our Summer shows which are on Wednesdays.

INTERNS CAN'T TAKE MONEY (1937, dir: Alfred Santell) Barbara Stanwyck, Joel McCrea.

2. June 13: Two silents with Stuart Oderman at the piano
PAID TO LOVE (1927, dir: Howard Hawks) George O'Brien, William Powell
THE GREATEST QUESTION (1920, dir: D.W. Griffith) Lillian Gish, Bobby Harron

UPPERWORLD (1934, dir: Roy Del Ruth) Warren William, Mary Astor, Ginger Rogers

SUPERNATURAL (1933, dir: Victor Halperin) Carole Lombard, Randolph Scott

COUNSELOR AT LAW (1933, dir: William Wyler) John Barrymore, Bebe Daniels

THE HOUSEMASTER (1938, dir: Herbert Brenon) Otto Kruger, Phillips Holmes

(Note: I will be on hand for the first two and the last of these programs, which will have introductions and discussion sessions. Programs 3, 4, 5 will start promptly without introductions. Program notes will be available at each screening).