ARCHIVE NIGHT PROGRAM: As stressed last week, tonight’s films are rather new to qualify as archival, but since their interest is largely academic, it was thought best to present them under that heading. Both are more-ambitious-than-usual films made by directors who did their best work in more minor capacities, and have the narrative similarity of being war-oriented stories told in restricted quarters, one being a trap limited to a hotel, the other to a mountain cave. Both are rarely shown, and Florey and Ulmer admirers may be glad of the opportunity to knock off two elusive titles in one fall show.

HOTEL IMMORAL (Paramount 1936, rel. 1939) Directed by Robert Florey; Screenplay by Gilbert Gabriel and Robert Theoren from a 1917 Hungarian play by Lajos Biró; Camera, William Neill; Musical Score, Richard Hageman; Song “There’s Something Magic Saying Mitcevo” by Victor Herbert Hollander and Ralph Freed. 78 mins. NY premiere, Loew’s Criterion, May ’39. With Isa Miranda (Anna Marshak); J. William (Louis Stephen Howes); Reginald Owen (Gen. Valdenko); Gene Lockhart (Zia); J. Carroll Naish (Kuregin); Curt Bois (Anton); Henry Vidal (Sultanov); Albert Dekker (Sergeant); Ernest Vehres (Ivan); Robert Middlemass (General von Schwartzberg); Spencer Charters (Vilsoff); Bedil Rosing, Betty Compson, Wolfgang Zilenz, Bert Roach, Agostino Borgato, Paul Druron (members of travelling acting troupe); Egon Brecher (Fogranz); Robert Frazier (Austrian courier); William Bakewell (cdet); Ferdinand Schumann-Helm (courier); Gustav von Seyffertitz (priest); Harry Holman (Burgomaster); Stanley Andrews (Colonel Paloff); Robert Kortman (Austrian sergent); Russell Hicks, Stanley Elsytone, Harry Woods (Austrian officers); Ferdinand Numler (Russian colonel); and Robert C. Davis, Virginia Dabney, George MacQuarrie, Lee Rogers, Harry Tenbrook, Ethel Laylaw, George MacQuarrie, Sheila D’Arcy, Judith King, Laura Walters (nurses); The Don Gossack Chorus.

This long delayed remake of the late silent Pola Negri film of the same title has a curiously complicated history. It first went into production in early 1936 as Invitation to Happiness with Dietrich and Charles Boyer co-starring. Then Lubitsch took over production, and the title was changed to I Loved a Soldier. Production was halted after a short period, and it then reappeared on Paramount’s schedule as Hotel—Immoral with Margaret Sullivan replacing Dietrich. Henry Hathaway was the director all this time. Sullivan broke her arm, Dietrich could not be persuaded to patch up differences with Hathaway, and the film was abandoned. This version, appearing in 1939 to cash in on the topicality of the war in Europe—convenient; it was still set in World War One, so questions of taking sides and retaining neutrality did not arise—apparently used none of the existing footage at all (surprisingly, since Paramount was notorious for its use of stock footage even in big productions) and was made from scratch. It served to introduce Italian star Isa Miranda to American audiences, although after one more Paramount film, Adventure in Diamonds, she returned home. Billy Wilder’s Five Graves to Cairo was a remake, updated to World War Two, while the post-war British Hotel Sahara, while hardly a remake, was certainly a comedy spoof.

Florey was always better with smaller material that he could expand, and with plots into which he had some input. With a script that had been fused over for years, and a property that Paramount wanted to salvage (and one handed to him at the last minute) there wasn’t much he could do with this one except add scenic background and that he does with a vengeance, taking extreme care over photographic composition, close-ups and lighting. The funeral scene near the beginning recalls the original Frankenstein (with which Florey had been involved) and other scenes have similar echoes of it. Most of the top talent that existed in Paramount’s supporting and bit player rosters. It’s an extremely successful film to watch, though it offers Florey less opportunities than usual. It’s also more complicated than the original film, the whole subplot involving Isa Miranda’s search for the man responsible for her sister’s death results in an extra reel of plot-padding at the beginning to build up the Miranda role, and was absent from the original—and subsequent versions. A modest success in the U.S., the film was quite a hit in Europe, and in fact was Paramount’s most successful release in France in 1939—despite being the year of Midnight, Union Pacific and other bigger Paramount films.

--- TEN MINUTE INSERTION ---

THE CAVERN (20th Century Fox, 1965) Produced and Directed by Edgar G. Ulmer; Screenplay by Michael Pertwee and Jack Davis; Camera, Gabor Forgay; Music, Carlo Rustichelli; an Italian—British—US co-production filmed in Italy; NY premiere—none; released on a double bill with Doris Day’s Do Not Disturb as a Christmas program with a running time of 83 minutes; our print tonight is of the full version, app. 94 mins.

With: Jack Soo (The American private); Brian Aherne (British General); Larry Hagman (American captain); Peter Fonda (Canadian flier); Rosanna Schiaffino (Italian girl); Hans von Borsody (German soldier); Nino Castelnuovo.

Too little space is left (appropriately, for such a claustrophobic subject) to deal at length with Edgar Ulmer’s last film, except to say that it is an honorable and typically swan song, making much more out of a limited subject and budget than one would expect. A little unduly, like most international co-productions, certainly overlong (though if we were cut to its U.S. release length we’d all be complaining!), it has a curious cast, a good role for Brian Aherne, and is a sleeper print (doubtless due to under-use). It does leave unsolved the question of how a goat can live for so long on a constant diet of milk and ultimately meat, but it may have been a goat that shared Ulmer’s PRC years with his. Expect little and you may be pleasantly surprised—though one wonders why Fox thought this a good film to release as a Christmas attraction! PROGRAM ENDS APP. 10:25.—no discussion period. ——— William K. Everson