

THIRTIES (1931-1940) A-C
All reviews by Michael J. Weldon

ALI BABA GOES TO TOWN (37) D David Butler, S Harry Tugend, Jack Yellen, P Lawrence Schwarz

Aloysius (Eddie Cantor), a homeless movie fan hired as a Hollywood extra, imagines that he's in ancient Baghdad and is mistaken for the son of Ali Baba. Much of the topical humor of this big budget major Fox musical fantasy is about the Depression, Roosevelt and the New Deal. Roland Young is the Sultan and Virginia Field is his Princess daughter. The Sultana (Louise Hovick aka Gypsy Rose Lee) plots with her brother Prince Musah (Douglass Dumbrille) and Ishak (John Carradine, all in black with a strange top hat). Parts are fun and funny, and being a Cantor movie, it includes a blackface scene. All of a sudden he "blacks up" and sings "Swing Is Here To Stay" backed by African tribesmen musicians who speak with nonsense Cab Calloway lyrics. The (large) Peters Sisters also sing and dance and Jeni Le Gon dances. The other black characters are slaves. Cantor also appears in drag. Also with Tony Martin, The Raymond Scott Quintet (they had a hit that year called "Dinner Music For A Pack Of Hungry Cannibals"), Warren Hymer and Stanley Fields as tramps, and Lee J. Cobb! There's a big Hollywood premiere ending with footage of major Fox stars and Aloysius (Cantor) watching Eddie Cantor sing. Carradine also plays a lawyer on the film set and himself, escorting Lang and Hovick to the premiere. The long fantasy section was originally tinted sepia. During the filming of a magic flying carpet scene two prop men died. An ALI BABA clip is in DAY OF THE LOCUST (75).

BEST MAN WINS (35) D Erle C. Kenton, S Ethel Hill, Bruce Manning

Nick (Jack Holt), the chief diver of a salvage boat, saves the life of diver friend Tobu (star Edmond Lowe from CHANDU THE MAGICIAN), whose arm has to be amputated. Nick becomes a police Sergeant and the bitter Tobu accepts dangerous illegal diving work to avoid standing in depression era bread lines. They both love an English teacher (Florence Rice, later in MIRACLES FOR SALE). Tobu's new boss is the pipe smoking astrology expert smuggler Dr. Boehm (Bela Lugosi). When the cops arrive on his boat, Boehm feeds hot jewels to his fish in a tank. Tobu plays underwater "golf" with a skull and closeups of the faces of divers in peril are unsettling. Kenton had also directed Lugosi in ISLAND OF LOST SOULS (33). Forrester Harvey (from TARZAN and THE INVISIBLE MAN) is Tobu's assistant. This Columbia feature was released the same year as THE RAVEN, THE MARK OF THE VAMPIRE and 3 other Lugosi roles, all for different studios.

BEYOND THE CARIBBEAN (Sinister, 32) P/D/act Andre Roosevelt, D Ewing Scott, S Ethel Lablanche, Paul Franklin, P/star Capt. E. Erskine Loch

(MANHUNT IN THE CARIBBEAN) Andre Roosevelt (the balding cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt) uses his yacht to rescue Captain Benson (Loch, who narrates) and Rita (Carol Jeffries), the daughter of a missing fortune hunter. They had been stranded by a laughing black servant. In one weird scene, an underwater native with a hidden air hose stabs divers to death. Black crew members (always called boys) are seen drinking and gambling. Eventually we see (staged) footage of the "voodoo ceremonies" of (black) Penetentes. Rituals of several cultures are mixed as a man is whipped while dragging a giant cross, a skull head priestess is carried and followers scream and writhe in trances. The travel and animal (wild cat, bear, sloth) footage is from Roosevelt's actual expeditions. The dialog scenes are amateur and badly dubbed, but were also filmed on scenic locations (in Panama and "Central America"). The print of the 56 min. feature (from The Intercontinent Film Corp.) is very good. Teddy Roosevelt turned America into a colonial power and coined the term "race suicide" when encouraging WASPS to have more babies. His son Kermit made even more exploitive roadshow documentaries like GOONA GOONA (32).

THE BIG BROADCAST (32) D Frank Tuttle, S George Marlon Jr.

I love this musical comedy almost as much as Paramount's INTERNATIONAL HOUSE (33) with some of the same stars. Both have top rate music and comedy plus pre-code Depression era elements and some cartoonish eye popping anarchy. Radio crooner Bing Crosby (as himself) is so popular that women riot when they see him. But after his rich fiancé Mona (Sharon Lynn) "gives him the air," he and a Texas oil man (Stuart Erwin), who also lost his girl, try to end it all with gas fumes. They hallucinate while the song "Here Lies Love" (a #11 hit) is performed by Arthur Tracy (seen as an accordion playing ghost), Vincent Lopez And His Orch., then Bing himself. The (uncredited) Fleischer Brothers worked on this amazing sequence. Eventually a comic love triangle centers on blonde secretary Anita (Leila Hyams from ISLAND OF LOST SOULS). Cab Calloway does the unbelievable #4 hit drug song "Kickin' The Gong Around," and during a hot instrumental, a clarinet bends, the microphone jumps and the camera tilts. The Mills Brothers do "Tiger Rag," a #1 hit I grew up loving on Cleveland TV commercials for Giant Tiger stores. The Boswell Sisters from New Orleans play telephone operators who sing about the plot and do "Crazy People" which should have been a hit. Crosby does some impressive scat singing and other songs are by Kate Smith, high tenor Donald Novic and Lopez's comic drummer. Burns And Allen (in their first feature) are also in top form. George plays the manager of NYC station WADX and Gracie is the receptionist who goes on about reincarnation, baseball at Sing Sing and various relatives. Irwin breaks and warps countless 78s from a record shop and Hyams is discretely naked in a shower. It's been on AMC.

THE BLACK CAMEL (31) D Hamilton MacFadden, S Barry Connors, P William Fox
 Headline making movie star Shelah Fanye (Dorothy Revier) is in Honolulu starring in a movie. Her friend Julie (Sally Eilers) arranges for her to meet with the famous fortune teller Tarneverro (Bela Lugosi). He wears a turban and uses a glowing crystal ball for a seance. While Charlie Chan (Warner Oland) is investigating a three year old case, the star is stabbed to death. It's fun to see Bela (the same year as DRACULA) acting almost as a crime solving partner to Chan. Of course, he's also a suspect, along with the victim's French ambassador former husband, her jilted suitor and a bohemian artist. This was the only Chan film shot on location. An actual tourist hotel and beaches were used and there are too brief looks at Hawaiian surfers and singers. Chan has dinner with his large family and Kashimo (Otto Yamaoka), his idiotic comic relief assistant, is called a Jap and a monkey. I wonder if the planners of Pearl Harbor saw this! The cast of the 67 min. rarity includes Dwight (Renfield) Frye as the butler, Violet Dunn as the maid, Robert Young forgettable as a romantic interest, Mary Gordon (later known as Sherlock Holmes' housekeeper), and the director as a director. The plot is loosely based on the unsolved '22 murder of actor William Desmond Taylor. The Fox Chan series started with BEHIND THAT CURTAIN in 29 (PV #26) with E. L. Park, and CHARLIE CHAN CARRIES ON (31) with Oland, also directed by MacFadden.

BLACK MOON (34) D Roy William Neill, S Clements Ripley, Wells Root

It's amazing that this voodoo movie hasn't received more (any?) attention. Juanita (Dorothy Burgess) lives with her rich husband Stephen Lane (Jack Holt) in Manhattan, but can't wait to get back to the French Caribbean island of San Christopher where she was born. The atmosphere there is almost like in ISLAND OF LOST SOULS, but with blacks instead of beast men. Her plantation owner Uncle Raymond (Arnold Korff) warns Lang that "We are five whites and around us are 2000 blacks!" and threatens to whip any that get out of line. They kill anyone that threatens to take Juanita away again including the overseer (knife in back), wireless radio operator (hanging) and a nurse (lava pit). Slow menacing drumming is heard non stop. Lunch (Clarence Muse), from Georgia, who calls the locals "monkey chasers," shows Lang a big ceremony in the woods where Juanita dances wildly. The natives eventually attack and overrun the main house and Juanita prepares to sacrifice her own little girl (Cora Sue Collins) while frenzied

natives dance. Fay Wray (who never looked better) is Gail the secretary who loves Lang and reluctantly came along. Mme. Sul-te-wan is Ruva, who raised Juanita and Laurence Criner is Kala the priest. The Columbia release runs 68 mins. TCM had planned to show this but never did. Ripley also wrote the Bette Davis plantation movie JEZEBEL (38). Neil's next was THE BLACK ROOM (35) starring Karloff.

BORNEO (Foothill, 37) P/D/star Martin and Osa Johnson

Americans Martin and Osa Johnson return in an aquaplane to the scene of CANNIBALS OF THE SOUTH SEAS (12), their first feature. The footage of flying snakes, "tree climbing" fish, weird owls, 100's of monkeys (including ones with "Jimmy Durante" noses), and various types of people is excellent. The narration is split between Lowell Thomas (hyper serious) and Lew Lehr (comic German/Jewish). The music is also a mixture of dramatic and comic. We learn that members of a former headhunter tribe are "the laziest people on earth" who spend time cockfighting, gambling, - and probably - headhunting! Osa jokes with the natives about - head hunting! The music is said to be "Barbarian. Primitive. Harsh!" Many scenes are obviously staged, with locals as unpaid actors. Comic adult native "boys" get drunk and high and one flees from a visiting Chinese dentist. It ends with a "devil beast" orangutan which had been "terrorizing" a village until the brave wise Johnson arrived to take charge of its capture. The "monster" was to be sent to an "anthropoid paradise" (a zoo). When 20th Century Fox released this 75 min. feature audiences around the world "learned" more from it than from any teacher or book. It was the last of many similar hits by the show off globe trotting couple (Martin died in a plane crash before it was released.) Thomas, who also narrated the big hit AFRICA SPEAKS (30) and many others, had his own radio and TV shows and founded the Cinerama company. Think of "documentaries" like this while watching any of today's reality based TV shows. We're still living during the age of mass (dis) information.

BROADMINDED (Scorched Earth, 31) DMervyn LeRoy, SBert Kalmar, Harry Ruby

The pun title lets you know that this fun pre code First National comedy deals with the pursuit of women. The extremely bizarre opening takes place at a NYC high society party where all the wealthy adult guests dress and act like babies. Ossie (star Joe E. Brown) is an extremely drunk infant. The next day he's ordered by his rich uncle (Holmes Herbert) to be the guardian of his playboy cousin Jack (William Collier Jr.). The pair motor west in an American Austin convertible and check into the (actual) Huntington Hotel in Pasadena. Ossie manages to insult and infuriate Pancho (Bela Lugosi) several times bringing the proud South American to the boiling point. Pancho calls Ossie a "fresh punk!" Jack falls for Connie (Ona Munson), but her proper Aunt Polly (Grayce Hampton) strongly disapproves and Ossie makes time with Connie's cute blonde friend Penny (Marjorie White). Meanwhile, Ossie convinces tall blonde actress Gertie (Thelma Todd) to impersonate Jack's angry fiancé Mabel (Margaret Livingston), not knowing that Gertie is Pancho's woman - and that Mabel is on the way. It all happens in just 65 mins. Also with an Indian, a Chinese gardener and a midget. The print is excellent. Kalmar and Ruby also wrote DUCK SOUP (33). This was released the same year as WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS (PV #31) and THE BLACK CAMEL (PV #35), both also with Lugosi and White. Todd, also in MONKEY BUSINESS (31), died mysteriously in '35 when she was only 30.

CHLOE (Sinister, 34) D Marshall Neilan, P J. O. Trop

(LOVE IS CALLING YOU) This "forgotten horror" was inspired by Eva Taylor's song "Chloe - Song Of The Swamp" (also a hit by Paul Whiteman). Chloe (20s star Olive Borden) is a confused, mixed race young woman being raised in the swamp by angry "old voodoo negress" Mandy (Georgette Harvey) who talks (in rhyme) to animals, smokes a pipe, has an evil laugh and declares "the Devil's gonna walk on a white man's grave!" The faithful, light skinned, lovesick Jim wrestles a gator in

the swamp (obviously a swimming pool) to save Chloe, but she falls for the Yankee Wade (Reed Howes from THE TERROR), who is running the local Turpentine distillery for the rich, mint julep sipping Colonel. Once you see the surprise plot twists coming, you realize that this whole twisted movie is about fear of black people. All the workers hate whites and are ready to use voodoo for revenge. Mandy (whose husband had been lynched) has Chloe tied up (next to skulls) for a ceremony and plans to cut her heart out! Fans of roots music will enjoy the washboard and guitar instrumental band, probably the The Shreveport House Wreckers who recorded for Victor. By the director of BLACK WATERS (29) and the producer of Hopalong Cassidy movies. Note: "Chloe - Song Of The Swamp" also inspired a Daffy Duck cartoon (in 42), a Spike Jones parody (in 45) and a Louie Armstrong remake (53).

CITY OF LOST MEN (SW, 35) D Henry Revier, S Perley Poore Sheehan, Eddie Graneman, Leon D'Usseau P Sherman S. Krelberg (THE LOST CITY) Zolok (William "Stage" Boyd, who died after filming) is causing worldwide floods from his secret Central African headquarters. Handsome engineer hero Bruce (Kane Richmond) tries to stop him and free the captive Dr. Manyus (Josef Swickard from OLD SAN FRANCISCO). Bruce and muscular Zolok henchman Appollon (Jerry Frank) both want the doctor's blonde daughter Natacha (Claudia Dell). The main point though is that Zolok turns natives into giant killer zombies. The awkward grunting, strutting, body oiled, Afro haired giants (Sam Baker and Everett Brown) carry screaming natives, who are put in a "brain destroyer" helmet, then the enlarging machine as Zolok orders "Arise, you are my slave!" William Bletcher is hunchback dwarf assistant Gorzo. George Hayes (later beloved by kids everywhere as western sidekick Gabby) deals with Arab slavers and has natives torture Manyus. Zolok uses remote TV and impressive electrical gadgets (built by Kenneth Strickfadden of FRANKENSTEIN fame). This was filmed at the Mack Sennett studios, using the cinematographer from KING KONG and the set maker from FLASH GORDON. Revier had directed silent Tarzan movies. The original serial version from Principal (formed by Sol Lesser, later producer of Tarzan movies) is available from Sinister. In the serial a jungle queen falls for the hero and the villain also turns a black native white (!) There was also a novelization in '35 and a 40's comic book. This feature version was released in '38 and later played on local TV stations. The print has sound problems. Note: See MURDER BY THE CLOCK for more on star Boyd.

CRACKED NUTS (31) D Edward Cline, S Al Boasberg Wendell (Bert Wheeler) loves Betty (Dorothy Lee), but her rich proper Aunt Minnie (Edna May Oliver) calls him a shrimp, a germ, a ninny, a worm and an amphibian (to name a few insults) and tries to keep him away. Meanwhile, Zander (Robert Woolsey) gambles and wins the crown of the Kingdom of Eldorania. General Bogardus (Stanley Fields) is behind the plot to kill off kings (13 in one year so far) and keep their fortunes. Wendell, who has inherited money, is conned by an Eldorianian representative named Boris (Boris Karloff in formal attire) on a cruise ship to go to his country and become king. The two new rival kings do a funny doubletalk "what's right" routine that's similar to "Who's On First" by Abbott and Costello (who didn't become popular until many years later). Betty and Minnie (who owns property there) also arrive and Wendell and Betty sing and dance to "Dance And The World Dances With You." Ben (Ben Turpin without his mustache) is a nearsighted pilot who drops bombs on everything. Also with Leni Stengal as Carlotta who wants to be queen, Frank Lackteen as an assassin, Frank Thornton, Roscoe Ates, and an Amos N Andy reference. Fields, who resembles Noah Beery, and was the captain in ISLAND OF LOST SOULS (33), was aka Walter Agnew (Nixon's VP was a cousin!). Boasberg also co-wrote FREAKS (32). This fun

RKO release was two years before DUCK SOUP, a now more famous comedy set in a mythical kingdom, and has nothing to do with the later CRACKED NUTS (PV #25), also directed by Cline, who also made W. C. Fields and Olson and Johnson movies.

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