

# TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE?

## THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK (United Artists)

Tear up your French history books, your copies of Dumas, and some of your cherished illusions! They'll not be needed these ten months. Hollywood has not only discovered the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask, but also that Louis XIII. was a strong and noble king, that his son, Louis XIV., "Le Roi Soleil," was a vicious weakling and was deposed at an early age by his most excellent twin brother, and that Louise de la Vallière (whom up till now we had always regarded as rather a nice girl) was nothing but a blonde cutie with a Brooklyn accent. The more we see of Hollywood's method of treating the past, the more we think it might be applied to the present. Let's pretend that things are not what they are.

But does it matter much, after all, whether Hollywood commits assault and battery on historic fact so long as it can give us a rousing cloak-and-sword romance such as this? For myself, I am always willing to barter a whole line of French kings and a handful of dry dates for the clang and flash of rapiers and a gallant ride with the King's Musketeers down the highways of old France. I have no objection to Maria Theresa being Joan Bennett in a brunette wig so long as she can inspire d'Artagnan. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to such daring deeds, and make love so sweetly in a moonlit garden. I know that not even such a swordsman as the great d'Artagnan himself could ever really have held off twelve opponents all at once; but I like watching Hollywood make him do it. And although historians remains baffled by the mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask, Hollywood's theory (shared with Dumas) is as good as any—and better than some — and Louis Hayward is as good an actor as anyone I can think of off-hand for the role of that most intriguing personage. And this film is as enjoyable a piece of swashbuckling fiction as most.

## THE HOUSE OF FEAR

(Universal)

Don't be misled by the title, for Director Joe May is no Mary Shelley. The house of fear is a theatre, its Frankenstein well hidden; so well that you will be more concerned with the mystery than with the horror, which fails to horrify. There are two corpses, but the studio has played the unsporting trick of keeping all the clues miles away from the crime, so that the film relies for its interest neither on the queer nor the queasy, neither on mystery nor on horror, but on incidents built up around suggestions of both. Once reduced to this class, "The House of Fear" can be said to come reasonably well up to expectations, for the incidents are handled in a sufficiently workmanlike way.

The leading man in a play collapses on the first night. His body disappears. In the guise of a "prodooer" a detective revives the play a year later. Ghosts appear, lives are threatened, and the new leading man also takes a premature curtain. Nobody minds about him; but the heroine (Irene Harvey) and her beloved are on the spot, and William Gargan, as the detective, has to do something about it. He does.

This is an average good picture.

## I STOLE A MILLION

(Universal)

Too often Hollywood's idea of a social document turns out to be a lot of "blah," but sometimes the attempt comes off; this is the case with "I Stole a Million," which is one of the best pictures of its type I have seen in many moons. The story is an uncomplicated, easily-moving one about the life and death of a man who tried to "go straight." This sort of thing has been done before, heaven knows, dozens of times. But, generally, not so convincingly.

George Raft gives a really good study of a taxi-driver who makes one mistake and then finds it running after him like a snowball, gathering weight every moment. Claire Trevor, as his wife, gives a satisfying, restrained performance, and her acting with Raft in one or two scenes strikes just the right note of pathos. Raft is good because he is not ostentatiously tough; neither is he "goody-goody"; he's just an ordinary man in a terrible dilemma, and you've got to feel sorry for him.

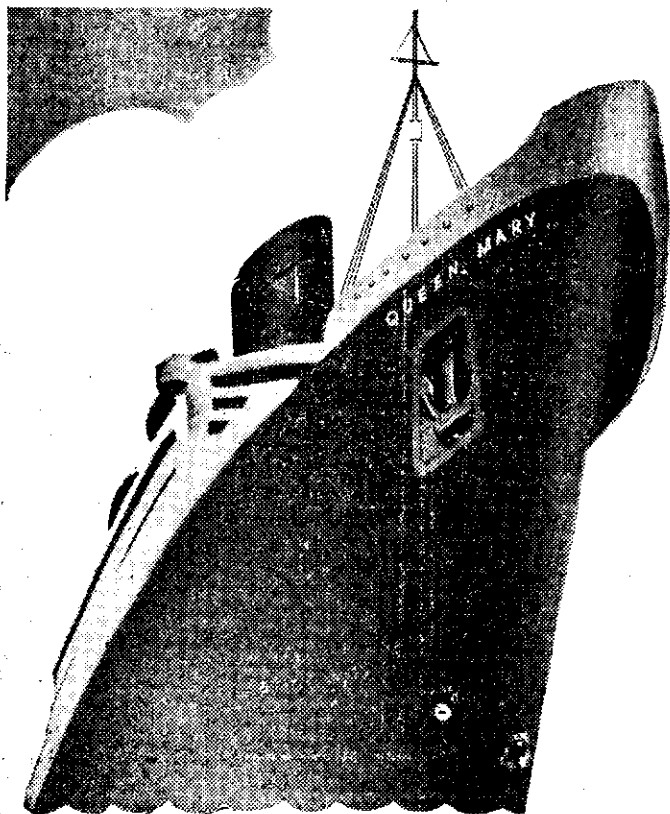
Victor Jory, Henry Armetta, and Dick Foran have unspectacular parts which they play well.

Best scenes: George, Claire and their child in a moon-lit orchard; and the sunny hillside and the little house where the story ends.

If you want some real realism instead of the usual dose of false heroics, see this picture.

—G.M.

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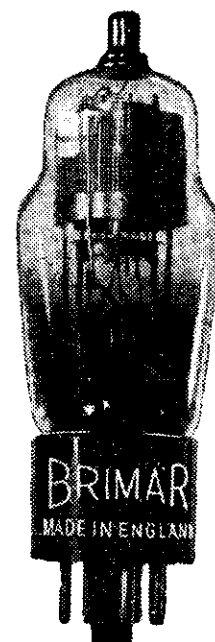
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