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Speaking Candidly by G.M.

HORROR WEEK

It is possibly only by a miracle that your film critic is not a mental and physical wreck. That applies also to the Little Man. But as far as he at least is concerned, you can spare your sympathy. It was his bright idea that, in the interests of social science, we should heroically expose ourselves to the full effects of one of those Horror Weeks which the film trade periodically arranges for a section of its customers. We did the thing properly: not content with going to one shocker programme, we went to two, both in the same evening. Even reading the advertisements was bad enough for timid types like ourselves—"FIENDS TO THE LEFT OF YOU. . . PHANTOMS TO THE RIGHT OF YOU. . . BLOOD AND THUNDER. . . THE SCREEN'S MOST GHASTLY SHRIEK AND SHUDDER SHOW. . . CORPSES CARVED! GRAVES ROBBED! THE DEAD DESPOILED! In keeping with this theatre's policy of frankness we warn you this is a programme of the Wild Shocker type. . . Even those who think they can take it should bring an escort, for the nights are dark, the atmosphere eerie, and the shadows ominous. . . Leave your false teeth at home and bring an aspirin."

Fearing the worst but still resolved to suffer if need be in the cause, we set forth, our false teeth safely at home in a tumbler on the mantelpiece, our pockets bulging with aspirin, our hearts in the pits of our respective stomachs, and with a certain feeling of grudging admiration for those who could use even such a gruesome occasion as this to sell two seats instead of one (that reference to escorts). After sitting through *The Beast with Five Fingers* at a five o'clock session in one theatre ("It crawls like a Spider; it kills like a Cobra"), we tottered straight on to the eight o'clock session at another and saw *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf-Man* ("Lycanthropy in all its Terror! Fiend of Fury battles Night-Born Killer"), followed immediately by *The Body Snatcher* ("Unthinkable Realities! Unbelievable Facts Exposed! Foul Fingers Crimson with

Dead Men's Blood!"). By the time the evening was over we should—if the advertisements were wholly reliable—have been left without a drop of cold sweat in our bodies, the blood in our veins should have been congealed solid, every hair on our heads should have been standing up like wire ("My dear, I simply can't do a thing with it!"); our eyes should have been popping out, our spinal columns should have been reduced to jelly, and we should have been shaking like aspens every time a tramcar passed. Possibly only our iron constitutions saved us: either that or our sense of humour. But it would have been interesting if we could have extended our research into the effects of horror films to take in the case-histories of some of those lads obviously not yet in their teens, or only just, who—regardless of the Censor's injunction that the films were all recommended for adults and *Unsuitable for Children*—made up a fair proportion of the audience.

THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS

(Warner Bros.)



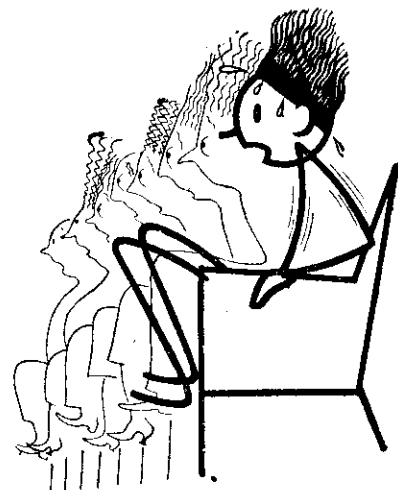
BEING, in spite of the flip-pant tone of the above (but those remarks about children are serious), rather a connoisseur of horror, I went to see this film with a certain pleasurable anticipation, for I remembered the title as belonging to one of the best items in a fairly recent American collection of unpleasant tales. There doesn't seem to be much of the original left now except the title and the sufficiently horrible central idea about a dead man's hand which is imbued with life of its own and which, severed from the corpse, continues to scuttle like a crab about the house, tap at windows, play the piano, hide behind the books in the library, and throttle people it doesn't like. In the film the hand belongs to a once-great pianist living in eccentric retirement in Italy; and in order to pad the story out to feature length, provide "love interest," dramatic cross-purposes, and so on, the pianist is surrounded by a houseful of unlikely characters. After his death these people snarl at each other over the terms of the will, while the dead hand plays havoc with their nerves. It is not likely to have any such very serious effects on members of the audience, unless they are young and/or susceptible, especially as the adroit beastie is ultimately revealed as nothing more than the hallucination of a madman (Peter Lorre). However, the failure of the film to raise anything except an isolated patch of goose-pimples does not lie with the cameramen: their trick photography makes the hand seem diabolically intelligent as well as mobile.

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF-MAN

(Universal)



THIS just isn't worth taking seriously—and I was glad to notice that the audience didn't. From the initial appearance of the Wolf-Man in a Welsh graveyard to the finale in which the "Titans of Terror clash in mortal combat" (vide advts.), they



greeted this insult to the intelligence with the good-natured contempt which it deserves. They laughed instead of shuddering whenever Lon Chaney turned into a wolf before their very eyes and sliced a few jugulars; they hooted with joy when Frankenstein's Monster (just a hulk of his former self) turned up among the ruins and greeted Wolfie like a long-lost brother; and they were properly derisive about the scientific goings-on in the cellar. But what really warmed my heart was the reaction of some members of the audience to the sight of the heroine in a revealing night-dress; they saluted her in a way which suggested that they must themselves be changing into wolves before our very ears.

On the other hand, it was distressing to me to encounter in a film of this type such once-famous and talented players as Lionel Atwill, Iona Massey and, especially, that grand old artist, Maria Ouspenskaya. Surely they have deserved better of Hollywood than to be superannuated among the Shades, the Spooks, and the Monsters in this lowest category of cinema entertainment. What a fate for an actress like Maria Ouspenskaya! I am not so concerned, however, about Lon Chaney, the everlasting Wolf-Man, though even he once gave promise (in *Of Mice and Men*) of being a good actor and not just a nightmare. Like the character he portrays, Lon Chaney seems condemned by his father's name to play the monster for evermore, but probably manages to make a good enough living out of sprouting whiskers and tusks whenever the moon is full.

THE BODY SNATCHER

(RKO-Radio)



LET me be honest; it was not only a clinical interest in horror films and their audiences which took me to this programme and made me endure the meeting of Frankie and Wolfie ("Dr. Frankenstein's Monster, I presume"). It was also the prospect of seeing another of those brilliant essays in the macabre produced by Val Lewton and his associates. This is as good as anything they have given us; and I am sure it is not simply the contrast with the two films that preceded it which prompts my enthusiasm. *The Body Snatcher* is not only a first-rate thriller; it is also good cinema—and that audience whose reaction to the earlier film I have just described paid it the tribute of recognising immediately its superior quality and settling down to quiet and sustained appreciation.

The Body Snatcher has been developed from the short story by Robert