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Film Reviews by G.M.

## SPEAKING CANDIDLY

### THE WEB

(Universal-International)



IF we are going to have to keep on suffering a spate of films preoccupied with violence, murder, and other forms of nastiness and morbidity—and it seems there is little chance of escape at present—then *The Web* is as good a model for this type of thriller as any you are likely to find. It is neat and clever and tightly-woven; actual physical brutality is reduced just about to a minimum; and there are, so far as I could see, no loose ends to the closely-spun plot of sinister intrigue which gradually envelops the hero.

This hero is an engaging newcomer (at least to me) named Edmund O'Brien; he's tough in the modern manner of screen heroes, not too squeamish as a poor young lawyer taken on as body-guard to a shady Wall Street financier, but capable of suffering some pangs of conscience when his job requires him to shoot, in apparent self-defence, the financier's ex-partner who has just got out of a jail. Prompted by his conscience, and by the suspicions of a police detective (William Bendix) he makes further inquiries which suggest that it wasn't self-defence at all—but if it wasn't he is in a very embarrassing situation indeed, because in that case there has been a murder and he has committed it.

It then becomes clear that a web of fancy double-crossing has been very expertly spun around the distressed young lawyer. But just when, with the rather unwilling aid of the capitalist's secretary (Ella Raines), he shows signs of being able to break loose from it, some extra strands are thrown about him: there is a second murder and once again the hero is neatly framed inside it. This time, however, the spidery capitalist has been a little too clever.

*The Web* not only has the advantage of a plot that seems more sensible and more logical than the average, but it also has the advantage of some of the ingredients that count most in good thriller-making—crisp, imaginative, but not too fanciful direction by Michael Gordon, sharp photography, a bracket of high-grade performances, and the sort of smart, rapid-fire dialogue which almost nobody in real life would be capable of uttering on the spur of the moment, but which is always amusing to hear. So long as one can accept the proposition that a Wall Street wolf as suave and villainous as Vincent Price makes him could possibly exist, not to mention a secretary-heroine like Ella Raines, a hero like Edmund O'Brien, and a policeman like William Bendix, then *The Web* hangs together as a pretty competent and exciting movie.

### DISHONOURER LADY

(United Artists)



"MY dear, I am not only a doctor. I am also a psychiatrist," says Morris Carnovsky within the first few minutes of this film to Hedy LaMarr, who has just tried to kill herself in a motor accident. So at once we know where we are, with another farago of psychological nonsense on our

hands, another set of inhibitions and neurpses to be cured, another dire case of schizophrenia, paranoia, amnesia, or alcoholism to worry us—and probably bore us stiff—through the next six or seven thousand feet. In this case, though the film is too polite to mention it quite so bluntly, what ails the heroine is nymphomania. This, our psychiatrist assures us and her, is a "neurotic malady of the times," like alcoholism. Plainly distressed by the diagnosis, Miss LaMarr decides to give up her expensive job with a fashion magazine and a whole string of loosely-moralled admirers (including the steely-grey-haired diamond king, John Loder), in order to take up painting in a quiet boarding-house and "get busy growing herself a new soul." While thus engaged she meets a handsome, husky fellow-boarder with obviously impeccable morals (Dennis O'Keefe): he is a young doctor with a research fellowship who is busy studying "the Effect of Anti-Reticular Serum on Cell Tissues." He says he got the idea for this research—which, if successful, will benefit all mankind—from the Russians during the war—a highly indiscreet admission which would seem to bring the whole picture within the scope of the current investigation of Hollywood by the un-American Activities Committee of Congress. If it does, Miss LaMarr herself may be implicated, since she helps the young doctor by drawing blood-cells with which to illustrate his thesis.

Meanwhile, however, True Love has been born beside the microscope, and Miss LaMarr is more immediately implicated in a tussle between her Dark Past and her Promising Future. One of her ex-boy friends is murdered in circumstances which point several fingers of guilt at her. However, psychiatry is equal to the situation; and an audience which, I was interested to notice, consisted almost entirely of middle-aged women and young girls, doubtless went home comforted and elevated.

In the course of the story, somebody blithely refers to Miss LaMarr as "glamour puss." This may seem an uncomplimentary way to dismiss a very beautiful woman who tries hard to be an actress—but a true word may be spoken in jest on the screen as easily as anywhere else.

### Cold Corpse

THERE is no blinking the fact that the craze for crime fiction in Britain has reached gigantic, ridiculous proportions. The thing has become as habitual, and as mindless, as cigarette-smoking. There are those who regard it as pernicious, a waste of time for the consumer and a sad diversion of talent for the producer. Their contention is that the taste of readers is being steadily corrupted by this sensational, machine-made fiction, this diet of cold corpse and mixed pickles, and last, in catering for this taste, in supplying this voracious demand, many writers of talent are tempted away from what should be their proper business—the production, or the attempt to produce, enduring literature.—Gerald Bullett in a BBC talk on *Holiday Reading*.